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EDITORIAL

TURNING THE CYCLE.

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TIME was when the “intellectuals” of modern society, not yet become hardened at heart, set themselves to the task of removing poverty by promoting public instruction. Their reasoning was: lack of instruction is the cause of poverty; furnish the people with instruction, and poverty is abolished. The good intention atones for the ignorance of the Question of Poverty that underlies the reasoning.

Of course instruction adds to man’s stature. But instruction is not capital, without which labor, skilled or otherwise, cannot exercise its function. The “intellectuals” only saw a half-truth. From that they drew their conclusion. They failed to recognize the absence of poverty in many cases of conspicuous absence of instruction. That this fact disposed of their theory touching poverty being the result of ignorance, escaped them. “Instruction!” “Schools!”—such were their slogans. And they went to work at it with a will.

But the social leakage they thus tried to stop remained unaffected, of course. Poverty increased; nay, worse; it became conspicuously a fact that instruction, unaccompanied with capital, generally had the effect of intensifying poverty, inasmuch as the instructed propertyless man only brought just so much more fleecings to the capitalist, and that even crime, cultivated crime, was promoted by a schooling that failed to furnish the pupils with the material means with which to carve out wealth. The “Instruction” and “School” theory suffered shipwreck, and along with it suffered shipwreck the last vestige of a purpose on the part of the “intellectuals” of society to remove involuntary poverty. With the shipwreck of that, down also went all just claims on their part to be considered the intellectual guides of society.

It was pardonable a generation or two ago to overlook the rise and economic significance of capital. It is not pardonable to-day. The intellectuals found their “Instruction” and “School” theory faulty. They proved their lack of intellect by not

looking further. Had they done so they would have moved on towards Socialism. They did not, and gave over the whole problem. From that moment they turned sharply around, became the adversaries of instruction for the masses, and have steadily, tho' stealthily only, impeded the growth of the public schools. How far that has gone may be judged from the official returns at the opening of the public schools early this month.

While great haste and zeal is manifested by the capitalist government in rearing armories to accommodate "increasing needs" of the militia in furnishing ever larger and more commodious quarters to the Police, its niggardliness on the point of schools has reached the point that over 18,000 children of the poor could not get school accommodation at the opening of the schools and have had to be put on part-time, and over 2,000 were wholly refused admission! That with the increase of population a larger and ever larger number of children must be provided with school accommodation is a consideration that does not bother the capitalist society. They have no more interest in promoting instruction.

The cycle has been turned. Once the exponents of instruction for the masses, the capitalist class has now become the deliberate manufacturers of mass illiteracy.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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