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EDITORIAL

DESCEND? YES! LET'S DESCEND AND LEARN.

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THE great conflict that has broken out between the United Brewers' Union, on the one hand, and the Unions of the Engineers and Firemen, on the other, is one of those occurrences that a Providence, inscrutable in its designs, periodically causes to flare up so as to illustrate "the ways" of Trades Unionism pure and simple, and thereby shoot rays of light across the path of the militant Socialists.

The facts in a nutshell are these: The Officers of the Brewers' Union demand that the engineers and firemen employed in the breweries, shall belong to the Brewers' Union; the Officers of the Engineers and Firemen say: "Not by a jugful!" The Officers of the Brewers' Union push their point, setting up as a justification for their demand, that, not unless all the employees in a brewery are in the Brewers' Union "could we tie up a brewery"; the Officers of the Engineers and Firemen set up as a counter-justification the principle and cry of "Trade Autonomy." Nobody who has watched pure and simple Unionism will be deceived by the slogan of either side.

On the one side, the history of the brewers, such as it has been written in letters of fire on the records of "Unionism," by the Officers of the Brewers' Union, amply explains what their anxiety to be "able to tie up" means. It does not mean solicitude for the subsidiary trades in establishments where the Brewers are the dominant body: it does not mean a readiness to take up the cudgel in behalf of these subsidiary trades when they are aggrieved. "What," have they more than once declared, "shall we go on strike every time this, that, or the other trade in a brewery has a grievance? We never would be without a strike on our hands!" And this is the attitude of each and every other set of Union Officers in trades that work with subsidiary trades: it is the attitude of the Officers of the International Typographical Union, which demands ruling powers over the "allied trades" and has

again and again sacrificed stereotypers, pressmen, etc.; it is the attitude of the Officers of the United Mine Workers, who have regularly sacrificed the interests of the mule drivers, etc.; it is the attitude of the Officers of the Glassworkers, who again and again have sacrificed the “lehr boys” and other “subsidiary” departments. What, accordingly, the Officers of the Brewers’ Union, together with the Officers of all such other Unions, mean by their anxiety to be “able to tie up” is to be able to subjugate, aye, to sacrifice and to reduce the subsidiary trades to the level of pariahs under the heels of such Union Officers.

No better, on the other side, stands the case, in point of sincerity, with the “Trade Autonomists.” No doubt they want “Autonomy”; but, in so far as they are sincere in wanting that, their sincerity is of a piece with that of their “We-want-to-be-able-to-tie-up” adversaries: these certainly want “to be able to tie up.” Nevertheless, in the one case, as in the other, the insincerity lies in what is implied. Both imply the purpose to benefit their rank and file. Now, nothing is further removed from their real purpose. In fact, these Officers all know better. With only a small fraction of the brewers organized, and the well-known impossibility of organizing the majority, a threat to “tie up” a brewery can never be more than what the record of the Officers of the Brewers’ Union has established, to wit, an opportunity for these Officers to levy blackmail in their own interests on those employers who prefer to pay blackmail rather than be inconvenienced. Similarly with the “Trade Autonomist” Officers. Accordingly, the conflict that has flared up is essentially a conflict between divisions of the Organized Scabbery: One set thinks it has power enough to take into its own hands the business of sharing or trying to share with the employer the spoils of the rank and file; the other set refuses to be crowded out of the business; and both operate their rank and file as food for cannon.

Wherever such ignominious conflicts are waged, and the colors of “Labor” are raised piratically, likes flock to likes, employers and Organized Scabbery—joint pluckers of the Working Class—are seen to coalesce: wherever traitors to a ruled class bob up, the ruling class will ever “play them.” It is, accordingly, no wonder to notice the evidences of an alliance between the Officers of the Brewers’ Union with the bosses in this city, where the former are succeeding in ousting firemen and engineers, and of an alliance between the Officers of Engineers and Firemen with the bosses in Cincinnati, where these Officers have succeeded in causing the lockout

of, it is said, 1,200 brewers.

It may be a descending from the lofty heights of abstract Socialism to dig the scalpel into such ulcers as this conflict. But the thing must be done. Such ulcers are invaluable. They are simply the coming to a head of the festering mass below the surface. They bring fresh and crushing proof of an, at least for a long time to come, ineradicable tendency on the part of the Working Class perceptibly to gather into industrial organizations; they bring fresh and crushing proof that the tendency is so strong that, despite the sad experiences that should warn against, it crystallizes into bodies ruled by Organized Scabbery; it brings fresh and crushing proof that the Political Movement of Labor must dominate the Industrial, if either is to be saved from utter shipwreck in the whirlpool whither the descending level of capitalist methods is suctioning the Class Struggle.

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