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EDITORIAL

LET MARK TWAIN LOOK OUT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is in Michigan a man called Smith. "He is not the Smith whom you know," Artemus Ward would say, "he is an entirely different Smith." His name in full is William Alden Smith. He is a United States Senator from the State of Michigan; but more so than that, he is, as Artemus Ward would again say: "A most amooosing cuss." As an evidence of his high humoristic powers, Smith the Senator objects to the Aldrich finance bill on the ground that "it would force the United States into government ownership of railroads." Of course, there is nothing funny in this. The high power of humor possessed by Smith the Senator appears in his reason for objecting to the United States government ownership of railroads. His objection is that government ownership of railroads "would give the railroads a voice in the dictation of legislation, and thereby throw the railroads into politics." Never did Mark Twain get off a juicier joke.

Imagine a hyena, with her snout in a carcass, objecting to have the relatives of the deceased trapping hyenas, on the ground that that would throw hyenas into the domestic concern of people. Imagine a burglar, with dark lantern and jimmy in a man's house, objecting to legislation that would clap burglars behind penitentiary bars, on the grounds that such legislation would throw burglars into direct contact with the officers of the law whom they are supposed to eschew. Imagine the ward-heeler Silver-Dollar-Sullivan objecting to the municipality controlling the saloons because that would throw him into politics.—Imagine any of these pictures, and you have the droll picture of railroads objecting to government ownership because that "would throw them into politics."

The railroads are now in politics, up to their eye-brows in politics. They, that is to say, their owners, could not exist twenty-four hours if they were not in politics. It is their activity in politics that furnishes them with the courts and necessary

physical force wherewith to keep the railroad workers at a pittance, sweating the vast dividends in which the owners wallow, and often losing limbs and life in the sweating process. Occasionally, an incautious agent of the railroads blurts out the truth. “If Tom Scott has no more bills for us,” remarked one day an innocent member of the Pennsylvania Legislature, “I move that this Legislature adjourn.” Tom Scott was, at the time, the Pennsylvania Railroad grandee.

It happens with railroads what happens with all capitalist establishments. Their activity in politics is a nasty fact, so nasty that they seek to conceal it, and—acting obedient to that principle that ever causes intriguers to inveigh against those who would put an end to their intrigues, accusing these of “intriguing”—the railroads raise the cry of “No Politics in the Railroads” as the droll means to conceal the fact of their feverish political activity.

The joke is good, as made by Smith the Senator. Mark Twain has a living competitor.

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

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