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EDITORIAL

KNIPPERDOLINGS WITH GUILE.

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IN a long article on the subject of the ownership of the Socialist press, the Volkszeitung Corporation utters itself through the columns of its English organ, *The Worker*, of the 14th of this month, against the Manifesto of the New Jersey Unity Conference. The American Movement must be sincerely thankful for the article. The defense of an error ever exposes more of its vulnerable points and thereby tends to help confute it. Private ownership of the American Socialist press is a serious error, which the Manifesto of the Unity Conference proves to be “a perpetual threat to the party’s welfare, being a perpetual threat to that fulness of information and that civilized right of free speech without which no organization can weather the revolutionary storm.” The article contains three main points. These resolve themselves into an argument against “Tyranny!” and imply a plea for “Freedom!” The dynamite of the reasoning that Socialism applies to capitalism blows up all the “points” in the Volkszeitung Corporation’s argument.

The approaching party of the united Socialists, which is throwing its unmistakable shadow before it, is warned by the Volkszeitung Corporation against the terroristic consequences that would inevitably result from the “centralization” proposed by the New Jersey Manifesto. In condensed form, the argument is this: “With the best of intentions” and “quite honestly,” the “party officers,” “without a doubt that they are acting for the good of the cause,” will suppress “statements of fact and opinion” opposed “to what seems to them to be the correct view”; the result would be that dissenters would be placed before a trilemma, if the word may be allowed—they would either have “to keep silence,” or “be content with the inadequate presentation of their views allowed by the party press,” or, third, “go to the capitalist press, there being no independent Socialist papers,” for the presentation of their views—all of which “some millions of millions to one,” the

public is told, would befall.—On the desk on which we are writing lies a yellow-covered 32-page pamphlet issued against Socialism, and recently sent to this office. Its author is the Jesuit Father, William Poland of St. Louis. The exquisite affectation of fairness practiced by the Volkszeitung Corporation argument forcibly reminds one of the exquisite affectation of fairness noticeable in the Jesuit Father's onslaught on Socialism. The method of reasoning, which the thick layer of seeming candor and fairness is meant to conceal, is also strikingly identical in both. That method of reasoning is this:—raise the bugaboo of future tyranny in order to leave people a prey to present and actual tyranny. The Jesuit Father aims at frightening people with the bugaboo of Socialist tyranny, so that people may acquiesce in the actual tyranny of capitalism as freedom; the Volkszeitung Corporation seeks to frighten its party members with the bugaboo of party-ownership tyranny, so they may acquiesce in the actual tyranny that private ownership subjects them to, and so they may be induced to consider their present status one of free press and free speech. All capitalist arguments, regarding the tyranny that would result from the Socialist State, proceed upon the suppression of one fact and the denial of another—the fact suppressed is that the insecurity of a living being removed, removed also is the occasion for the wrongful acts that insecurity drives man to; the fact denied is that capitalism is a form of slavery. The Volkszeitung Corporation argument closely follows that system. It suppresses a vital fact, and seeks to blur over a glaring one. The fact it suppresses is that the national officers consist, with the exception of the National Secretary and National Editor, of National Committeemen, each elected by his own State, and that—even if this were not guarantee enough against the contingency of a majority of these, “with the best of intentions,” “quite honestly” and “without a doubt that they are acting for the good of the cause,” suppressing or misrepresenting the views of a minority—THERE IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION OF THE IMPERATIVE MANDATE OR REFERENDUM, WHICH RESERVES TO ANY TANGIBLE MINORITY ITS SOVEREIGN RIGHT TO BE HEARD. The staunchest ship makes bilge water. Nothing human is perfect: even the celestial mechanism is not. Here and there wrong may befall in the structurally best planned organization; such a thing is conceivable even in the Socialist Republic. What, however, the facts render

indisputable is that the “trilemma,” before which the Volkszeitung Corporation manoeuvres the dissenters, is a pure figment of its brain, resting on the suppressed fact of the referendum. What “millions of millions to one” will regularly happen is precisely the opposite of that dire “trilemma”—as precisely the opposite as the status of the citizen in the Socialist Republic must be the opposite of the dire picture of dependence and enslavement which the Jesuit Father Poland fabricates.

The Volkszeitung Corporation next proceeds to admit with much show of candor that the danger, of opposition views being suppressed by the Editors of its own privately owned papers, is no less than would be with party-owned papers, but, it argues, in the case of the privately-owned press no harm will result to the party or to dissenters, because—mark the BECAUSE—should its Editors “unduly favor one side of a controversy,” then, “what they refuse to print will yet reach their readers through the *Toledo Socialist*, or the *Chicago Socialist*, or the *Social Democratic Herald*, or the *Appeal to Reason*,” whereas “if all these papers were edited under a centralized control, they would no longer check and balance each other.” In other words, opposition views, shut out of one privately-owned paper, would be admitted in others; the membership, being free to change papers, would therefore be free to acquire information.—Even more unmistakably than the line of argument first dissected, does this second line of argument bear the earmarks of what Marx terms “vulgar bourgeois reasoning.” It is the stereotyped argument of capitalism against Socialism and in its own favor that, under Socialism, the worker is “chained to one master, the State,” whereas, under capitalism, the worker is free, free, FREE to change employers, to leave one employer and take another. The Socialist knows that this is false—all the falser because of its seeming truth. Employers, true enough, are DIFFERENT persons, but their conduct towards the workingman is IDENTICAL; their class interests weld them practically into ONE and the SAME body. Employes, true enough, can go through the gymnastics of “changing employers,” but the change is in seeming only; they remain de facto “chained to one master”—the capitalist class; whatever employer they go to is a wage-slave driver, they the wage slaves. Just so with these privately-owned papers; just so with the innocent Socialist Party men who may look for relief from the one to other. The Movement has, on this subject also, the experimental stage behind it.

Great must be the comfort of a New York Socialist Party man, who, anxious to hear about the New Jersey Unity Conference, for instance, and finding that his New York privately-owned press either forges or wholly suppresses the reports of the same, or falsifies and mutilates them, as the New Jersey Unity conferees indignantly attested,—great must be the comfort of such a New York Socialist Party man if, thinking he changes master he turns, for instance, to the *Toledo Socialist* and finds the reports at first garbled—just as in his New York papers—and then wholly excluded on the pretext that the conference is not a national one; or when he turns to any other of those other privately-owned papers and finds the subject as absolutely “killed with silence”! Pleasurable must be the solace to the Socialist Party reader of the *Social Democratic Herald*, *Toledo Socialist*, *Appeal to Reason*, or *Chicago Socialist*, who, desirous of information upon the doings of the I.W.W., and finding none of it in those papers, decides to change master by taking the papers of the Volkszeitung Corporation, only to discover that the information he pants after is there also ignored on the pretext that “the I.W.W. has its own organ wherein to fight its battles,” or is dished up in forged style, as was done in the instance of the capmakers! How exquisite is such a Socialist Party man’s “freedom of choice”! Nor could it be otherwise. The experience that such a Socialist Party man would be making with his several privately-owned papers is the identical experience which, if he is a wage-slave, he regularly makes with his several employers. Though employers may compete and cut one another’s throat, their class interests place them “under the centralized control of capitalist interests”; and so, though the several privately-owned Socialist Party papers may growl at and compete with one another, the identity of their material interests, and of the sources of the same, hold them, as in a vise, “UNDER A CENTRALIZED CONTROL.” With privately-owned Socialist papers that “centralized control” is held by the subsidies they receive from capitalist sources in the shape of advertisements, and from the caricatures of capitalists, the craft Union labor leader grafter, in the shape of hush-money or gouger fees—all of which was recently demonstrated with regard to the Volkszeitung Corporation in the infamous instance of the brewery bosses’ advertisements and its defense and gougerism in behalf of the now absconding Union treasurer Niedermeyer. “Centralized control” exists and must exist in all

organizations. He who claims the contrary is a visionary; if not a visionary then he seeks to deceive. There is a “centralized control” of a privately-owned as well as of a party-owned press. The difference lies in this—the “centralized control” of a party-owned press lies WITHIN, the “centralized control” of a privately-owned press lies WITHOUT the party. As a consequence of the sharply marked difference, in the former case, the party membership has the last, the supreme word; in the latter instance the party stands, or, rather, lies supinely impotent.

Finally, the third point consists in a peroration to the “leitmotif” of a quotation from Kautsky—“In material production collectivism; in intellectual production anarchy.”—Last year a number of S.P. men were expelled by the New York City S.P. for having voted for Hearst. Had those expelled S.P. members quoted the numerous passages that might be quoted from numerous illustrious men—from Sidney down to Kent—in which, warming up for democratic institutions, these apostles of political freedom extolled the “untrammelled ballot in the hand of the citizen,”—had those expelled S.P. members quoted such passages in justification of their voting for Hearst, despite their S.P. membership, and claimed that to discipline them was to “trammel the ballot,” they would have been justly laughed at for idiots. The Sidney-Kent rhapsodies over the “untrammelled ballot in the hand of the citizen” was no wise done violence to by the expulsion of those S.P. men. The ballot remained untrammelled in their hands. They could do with it what they pleased. It had pleased them to join an organization pledged to use the ballot in its own behalf. Their failing to do so violated their freely made pledge; the violation entailed discipline, the discipline of—what? of having their sovereign right of suffrage trammelled? Not at all!—of being expelled and thereby fully restored to the untrammelled disposal of their ballot, untrammelled even by their own pledge freely made to the organization. It would be idiocy to claim that a political organization, which demands of its members that they support its ticket “trammels the ballot.” For obviously the identical reason it is idiocy to set up the principle that, because in the Socialist state, after the accomplishment of the Social Revolution and the establishment of the Socialist Republic, there will be “anarchy in intellectual production,” therefore, a propagandistic organization of Socialism, an organization that is building up its lines under the very fire of capitalism, must also adopt

anarchy in its propaganda, that is, must be compelled to admit to membership the private owners of papers, who can preach anarchistically what “Socialism” they please. Such a posture, where sincerely held, is a heels-over-head, cart-before-the-horse posture. There are people of such naivete that the sound of an abstract thought fairly intoxicates them, and renders them delirious. History has many an instance of such. A humorous-tragic one was furnished during the Lutheran Reformation. A set of people, men and women, led by one Knipperdoling, from whom the sect received its name, heard the Lutheran words “the naked truth,” whereupon they stripped and ran about wild as the “Naked Truth.” Is the Volkszeitung Corporation such an inebriate on an abstract idea, on the idea of “Freedom of the Press,” in this instance? Let facts speak. The *American Labor Union Journal* for November, 1904, had an article in which it stated that it was “in receipt of two letters from New York City in which the writers took it to task for publishing an advertisement of literature from the Socialist Labor Party.” The article bore the fitting title: “Modern Heresy-Hunters.” Fain would we give the names of those writers, of those inebriates on the “Freedom of the Press.” Their names, mentioned in this connection, would tell the tale that is told by the name of Harper, who, nine years ago, published in his *Harper’s Weekly* an article slandering Socialists as debauchees, with himself posing as a “pillar of morality,” and within a week after was caught by the Police in a debauch with “Little Egypt” and other prostitutes. But we are not at liberty to give the names of those writers, at least not yet. Nor is it necessary. The article in the *A.L.U. Journal* is quite sufficiently explicit as to the camp from which the letters proceeded.

The strongest explosion under a boulder sometimes leaves a few rocks sticking out. Should there be anything left of the Volkszeitung Corporation’s argument after the dynamite just applied to it, and in order to make certain that the path is made clear of such impediments to the understanding of the important issue—the ownership of the party press—we shall apply one more blast as a finishing touch.

The Volkszeitung Corporation’s argument states that if the “New Jersey Scheme” goes through there will be no independent Socialist papers—meaning by “independent” Socialist papers, papers independent of the party. The statement is insinuated in parentheses. The statement has no foundation in truth. There is not a

line, or a word, in the New Jersey Manifesto to justify the conclusion that the Conference was stupid enough to imagine that the party, which it labored to rear, would have the power, even if it would, to prevent any man, or set of men, from setting up a paper and run it to suit themselves, independent of the party.

The position of a bona fide, enlightened and no-man's-fool political organization of Socialism, on the subject of the ownership of the press, is that so important a weapon as the press, which assumes to speak for it, shall be, from top to bottom, amenable to it alone. Such a party could not, if it would, and it certainly would not, if it could, deprive any one from the right of setting up his own private paper—but the rights of such a paper and of the party must be MUTUAL, not UNILATERAL. The paper is free to be independent of the party, but THE PARTY MUST BE EQUALLY FREE TO BE INDEPENDENT OF THE PAPER. The independence, that a privately-owned paper enjoys of the party, results from the party, as party, having no seat in the paper's council, and no supreme voice over the paper's acts; inversely, no party can be independent of a paper if that paper, through its owners, has a seat in the councils of the party, and wields over the party's acts a voice so supreme that the party is impotent to silence. The Volkszeitung Corporation demands its own independence of the party—a right that no one denies it—, and the simultaneous dependence of the party upon it—an imposition that no enlightened political body of Socialism will tolerate.

The “Freedom” woven on the banner of the apostles of a privately-owned press is of identical web with the “Freedom” displayed on the banner of capitalism—a mask to hide the chains concealed in its folds. Pithily does the New Jersey Manifesto sum up the facts in the case—the privately-owned press is a “perpetual threat to the party's welfare, being A PERPETUAL THREAT TO THAT FULLNESS OF INFORMATION AND THAT CIVILIZED RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH WITHOUT WHICH NO ORGANIZATION CAN WEATHER THE REVOLUTIONARY STORM.”

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