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EDITORIAL

## A MISSION OF THE TRADES UNION.

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**T**HE discussion, now going on upon the Trades Union, is bringing to the surface one point after another of vital importance to the Socialist Movement. The revelation of these various points is turning the light upon two facts of deep interest—first, that the Trades Union is the point upon which the Socialist Movement must revolve, and, secondly, that the “pure and simple” style of Unionism has wandered into the wilderness, far away from its real mission. While almost all the points that are coming to the surface, whether they proceed from friendly or unfriendly sources, tend to prove the latter fact, there is one not yet touched upon that illustrates stronger than any the degeneration of “pure and simple,” and that at the same time has the merit of aiding in the understanding of events that are casting their shadows before them.

A mission of the Trades Union is to drill the membership of the Working Class in the habit of self-imposed discipline. The mission of capitalism, the Socialist knows, is to so organize the mechanism of production that wealth can be so abundantly produced as to free mankind from want and the fear of want, from the brute’s necessity of a life of arduous toil in the production of the brute’s mere necessities of life. Socialist philosophy has made this clear. American conditions, however,—the conditions possible only on an area of vast dimensions and where capitalism has been able to develop untrammelled and reach its highest economic and political expression—American conditions, accordingly, have revealed a subsidiary mission of capitalism, to wit, the mission of KEEPING ORDER, the while the revolutionary class, the Working Class, is gathering the needed qualities for itself to assume control. This mission of capitalism is one that all previous ruling classes have also had to fulfill towards the class below. With capitalism, however, the mission assumes infinitely graver importance. The Working Class, a property-

less class, and in this respect unique in the succession of revolutionary classes, lacks an element that is a drilling force in itself—property. The defect must be substituted from another source. Thorough education in its own class-interests is valuable, is indispensable, but it is not all-sufficient. The habit of self-enforced discipline is an essential accompaniment to class-consciousness. The latter, without the former, leads to magnificent but fruitless displays of heroism—vide the Paris Commune; the former, without the latter, leads adown to the plane of mercenary bands—vide the cohorts of Imperial Rome of old. Combined, however, the two will blast the rule of capitalism, smite the shackles off the limbs of Labor, and rear the Socialist Republic. That “pure and simpledom” neglects the drilling in class-consciousness, aye, prevents it, has been amply shown. “Pure and simpledom,” however, also interferes with and undermines the habit of self-imposed discipline.

As that division of the Labor or Socialist Movement that will have to give the final and decisive blow to capitalist rule, the Trades Union must necessarily illustrate in its make-up the fullest development of all that is implied in that product of civilized man known as “Organization”—UNITY. In the vocabulary of the bona fide Trades Union, “anarchy” is a term of derision, “autonomy” a burlesque, “fusion” buffoonery, “broadness” a mockery, “tolerance” a trick, and despotism an impossibility. As that division of the Labor or Socialist Movement in which none belongs but the wage-slave, the facilities enjoyed by the Trades Union as an Academy for drilling its membership in the two essentials for the emancipation of their class—discipline and class-consciousness—are matchless. “Pure and simpledom” prevents the latter and lets slip the opportunity for the former. Being partly an organization built by the grace of the employer, often entirely so, the “pure and simple” Union is essentially a compulsory affair. From this circumstance a number of others flow. The most important one of all for the subject under consideration is that the membership in innumerable instances are held to the Union only by the bond of “paying dues.” This being about all that is demanded of them, they either put in an appearance at the meetings only to pay the blackmail and then go away again, or they never come; they are spared even that trouble; an officer goes around where they work and collects the money. As a consequence, the educational powers of the Union are lost. The discussions at its meetings are vapid,

if not harmful,—and as to discipline, it becomes a monstrous caricature, the abjectness of men tyrannized by the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.

How far astray “pure and simpledom” has wandered from the mission to drill in discipline, and to what extent it has poisoned the mind of the Working Class, was three years ago pathetically illustrated by the American Labor Union. This body was struggling to free itself from the trammels of “pure and simple” superstition. Its constituent bodies had attested incipient clear-sightedness by tearing themselves loose from the American Federation of Labor. They had seen glimmerings of the truth that the Labor Movement is essentially a political Movement. They were shaking off the baneful superstition that fetters the workers to political scabbery as a “glorious act of freedom.” In short, the American Labor Union was groping its way out of “pure and simpledom.” What was the reasonable expectation under such circumstances? The expectation under such circumstances was natural that such an economic organization would simultaneously realize its disciplinary mission, and act accordingly. The Trades Union that has matured to the point of deserving the name, manifests its sense of the importance of discipline, not only by its action within, but also by its action without. Its vocabulary will attach the proper contempt to “anarchy,” “autonomy,” “fusion,” “broadness,” “tolerance,” etc.; and doing so it will have nothing but contempt, especially for an organization, that, pretending to be a political party of Socialism, pretending, accordingly, to be no less important a division of the Labor Movement than its vanguard, disregards the essentials for discipline. The American Labor Union did not. So powerful was the mental domination of “pure and simpledom” that the American Labor Union endorsed the so-called Socialist, alias Social Democratic Party—a body, which, being a genuine breath of American Federation of Labor “pure and simpledom,” throws discipline to the dogs as “narrow,” preaches different tenets in different latitudes and longitudes as “autonomy,” fuses with capitalist parties as an evidence of its “tolerance” and tolerates an irresponsible privately owned press as a proof of its “freedom.” The sight was pathetic. Trying to escape “pure and simpledom” by one door, the American Labor Union’s disregard of the disciplinary mission of bona fide Unionism on the field of Labor caused it virtually to tumble back into the same quagmire by another door.

The signs are that this blunder will soon be rectified. So long as the Working Class has not disciplined itself into fitness, so long will the only remaining mission of the Capitalist Class demand the latter's continuance in power. Capitalism has fully fulfilled its economic mission: the country's mechanism of production is ready for Socialism. But the Working Class is not yet ready for the Spirit of the Age to entrust it with the charge of society. The Working Class still is a tumultuous mob. NO REVOLUTIONARY CLASS IS EVER RIPE FOR SUCCESS BEFORE IT HAS ITSELF WELL IN HAND. Until the Working Class of America shall have taken itself in hand, the Capitalist Class has a mission to perform—to KEEP ORDER, and it is doing so with a rod of scorpions.

It is one of the missions of the Trades Union to drill its class into the discipline that civilization demands.

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

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