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EDITORIAL

Confiscation.

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While Socialist tenets are mainly grounded on material facts that prevail in modern society, much of their force is derived from principles of conduct which, born originally in material facts, have long since lost sight or even recollection of their birth place, and have come down as maxims of general conduct. The present conduct of the railroads that traverse the mining districts of the country furnishes a timely illustration.

In Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Illinois the railroads are confiscating all the coal they can lay hands on. They are doing this by warrant of law. A strike being on, there is danger of scarcity of coal, and this may “interfere with railroad traffic.” Railroad transportation, regular and speedy, has become a social necessity. In the face of such necessity the “sacred rights of property,” together with all that thereby hangs, give way. The principle has become so general and well established that it has crystallized into statute, and by virtue thereof the railroads imply confiscate the coal in sight.

Confiscation is an ugly word. It is hurled at the Socialists by the capitalist class, as a charge intended to crush us. But the events that are crowding under the eyes of this generation will take and are taking care to deprive the charge of its sting. They are bringing home to the people and are furnishing illustrations of the principle that what society needs it has a right to; that the title deed of Right is the established fact of Need.

Upon a broader scale the present conduct of the railroads will soon be enacted. A people, a society, from whose eyes the scales shall have dropped, and that shall have reached as clear an understanding of its Rights as the railroads have, will be seen to proceed upon the principle that its Needs demand its ownership of the nation’s machinery of production, and will, in short order, by virtue of the charter of Need, assert its Rights, thereby asserting a new principle of “vested rights” by taking its own.

The Socialist Congress, elected by the ballot, will restore to society the Capital and Land which it needs to live by, just the same as the railroads are appropriating the coal they need to run.

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