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EDITORIAL

Impaled on the Horns of the Social Dilemma.

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This week's quotation at the head of this column¹ is taken for other reasons besides its own excellence. It is taken especially because of the light it throws upon last week's elections, particularly in this city, and because of the light these elections throw upon it. It is considered all the more useful, and therefore taken, because it will be found in the last chapter of Marx' *Eighteenth of Brumaire*, that appears in this very issue, and, accordingly, will be found in the full surrounding of the context that adds clearness to it.

That the bourgeoisie, the ruling portion of the capitalist class, has every reason to fear the stupidity of the masses so long as these remain conservative, and their intelligence so soon as they become revolutionary, is the conclusion Marx draws from the pickle in which the French bourgeoisie found itself when the third Napoleon bayoneted them into subjection to his piratical power. The force back of Napoleon was the ignorance of the masses, especially the small farmer class, that constituted the large majority. The policy that the bourgeoisie had followed towards this class kept it in such dense ignorance, the victim of such dense social-economic superstitions, riveting it to the existing order, that, differently from what the bourgeoisie had calculated upon, that mass became a weapon unavailable to bourgeois rule, and available only to the adventurer who used it to plunder the bourgeoisie with; while, on the other hand, had the bourgeoisie pursued a more liberal course towards the small farmer class, had it allowed the budding aspirations of that class to develop instead of crushing them, the developed intelligence of the mass of the French people would have pushed it on to a revolution that would have ended the rule of capitalism. The French bourgeois was impaled on the horns of the social dilemma.

If we look at the election in the Greater New York as typical of the elections elsewhere this year, we find similar conditions here.

¹ "The bourgeoisie has every reason to fear the stupidity of the masses—so long as they remain conservative, and their intelligence—so soon as they become revolutionary."

Municipal “reform,” “self-government,” together with the whole string of similar political slogans, went for nothing. The poverty of the masses increases, as increase it must under the capitalist system. What is the attitude of our bourgeoisie in sight of this phenomenon? Is it to spread intelligence? Just the reverse. It is busy riveting social-economic superstitions upon the masses; straining every nerve to keep the masses in densest ignorance by keeping from them, to the best of the ability of its strumpet press, all information that might enlighten them; and it does so with the end in view of perpetuating its own rule of robbery, with these ignorant masses as the tool—just as the French bourgeoisie. But, just as with the French bourgeoisie, ours is being hoisted by its own petard.

The free coinage of silver at the “ratio of our daddies” was last year the ignorant cry of an ignorant mass, goaded by misery. The success of such a movement means social cataclysm, because it denies the fundamental props of the social system that it would uphold. Last year the Bryan vote was phenomenal enough to cause a chill to run down the spine of our bourgeoisie. The increasingly painful goad of misery has everywhere lowered and in many places wiped out the bourgeois majorities of last year; and here in New York, the trend of things was emphasized by the masses going over to discredited Tammany. Let this ball roll onward on its track, and the stupidity of the masses will repeat in America the scenes of the French “coup d’état.”

Our bourgeoisie realizes this strongly. But what is it to do? The French bourgeoisie instinctively recoiled before the enlightenment of the masses: in 1851, there was not yet that organized, intelligent, and, therefore, revolutionary, movement of Socialism that there is to-day. Now the bourgeoisie everywhere has a pretty distinct conception of the fate in store for its class, and carried in the womb of the organized Socialist movement. The Socialist Labor parties of all capitalist nations speak in no indistinct words. Simultaneous with the victory of Dick Croker, the Tammany Hall plug-ugly, not long since a leader of “dead rabbits,” and whose qualifications for such eminently fit him for the rôle of the American Chief of the American “Society of December 10”—simultaneous therewith comes the news of an increased Socialist vote throughout the land, with evidences, in more than one place, of a speedy Socialist victory.

The position of our American bourgeois is critical. Cultivate further ignorance, and above the horizon loom the Dick Crokers; aid enlightenment, and the falchion of the Socialist proletariat wheezes through the air. Disaster from both sides for the bourgeois.

Let the American bourgeoisie with its Tracys, its Lows, and its stool pigeon Georges squirm. To the Socialist the sight is edifying. Different in our country now from France in 1851, the intelligent and revolutionary movement has ripened so far

that, in the race between Ignorance and Intelligence, that is now being run, Intelligence will outstrip Ignorance. If a crash must come, it will not find the country unprepared as was France in 1851: a body of men, numerous, intelligent, aggressive, determined, is rapidly organizing; already it is a power for good; in but few years, come what come may, that body will be found square across the path of any ignorant mob, and will save civilization.

Socialists, to work! Educate, enlighten, organize!

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

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