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FIRST EDITORIAL

“Rosy Cheeked” Sweatees.

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The following advertisement from a large retail store, that appears in one of the New York dailies under flaming headlines and in double columns, tells a significant tale. Here it is:

“Thousands of women who await this sale with intense expectancy have had their brightest anticipations realized. This display is by far the most charming collection we have ever succeeded in gathering. Table after table heaped full of the daintiest exquisites, nothing but the prettiest and choicest. The qualities are sumptuous. Not odds and ends, but the pink of perfection—dreams of loveliness.

“Women wise in such things will thank the good fortune that has brought them such elegancies so low, and all the garments are fresh and pure and clean, FREE FROM THE CONTAGION OF TENEMENTS AND SWEAT SHOPS; MADE AMONG THE HEALTHFUL HILLS OF NEW ENGLAND BY THE NIMBLE FINGERS OF ROSY-CHEEKED MAIDENS.”

People who are so shaped that they try to remove evils by plasters instead of by their eradication have long been working for the abolition of the sweat shops in every manner conceivable except the right one. The sweat shop is one of the logical results of capitalism. Like certain diseases, it falls first upon the weak. The victims of the sweat shops were originally found only in the congested districts of congested cities. The special features of the sweat shop are two: first, the contract system, whereby a capitalist gets some one to contract to deliver certain amounts of goods at a given price; and second, the grinding down of the operatives by the contractors, who, in order to make as much as possible out of their contracts squeeze their operatives. The inhumanity of this process became so apparent that it evoked an outcry against it. Then “philanthropy” stepped forward and gushed; politicians availed themselves of the sentiment and ranted; labor fakirs and shyster lawyers exploited the sentiment; and so it went on for a long while. The evil, cropped at the top, continued to flourish, drawing its life from the roots that it was allowed to preserve. The city sweat shop went on unabated.

Presently, the conditions that breed the sweat-shop victim began to manifest themselves elsewhere, in the rural districts and small villages. What with the decline of the farmer, whereby his children were forced into the factory, and the subsequent development of machinery whereby these young folks were thrown out of work, the New England country towns began to produce a material that at all points was equal to the best fodder of the city sweat shops. Then a light dawned up in the “charitable” brain of the capitalist. The city sweat shop is too much “in evidence”; the light of day beats too glaringly upon it; moreover, the public began to be affected by the reports of the infectious diseases bred in the sweat shop and spread by the garments made there. The rise in country towns of the human material that could be sweated the same as its kindred in the city caused a change of flank. The result is now seen in the advertisement above quoted.

The New England country towns are now gradually becoming enlarged sweat shops; New England young folks, pinched by want, as any one can ascertain by a walk thorough such towns, but being hidden away from the cities, can be referred to as “rosy-cheeked maidens”; and the fiction of their health and contentment can be made a subject for advertisements to recommend the goods by; and the sweating system can receive and does receive new increment.

In the meantime, the thoughtful will wonder and ask how long can rosy cheeks, assuming they are still rosy, preserve their blush at sweat-shop rates of wages; and the still more thoughtful will realize that the only way to abolish the sweating system is to abolish its dame—CAPITALISM.

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