

EDITORIAL

CHASING PIMPLES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“PUBLIC utilities” has become the short term for a thought put into more numerous words by Henry George, and once much in vogue—“The Government should do all that can be done better by it than by private enterprise.” The Georgian utterance, though longer, is preferable in that it gives a reason for nationalization, besides implying the nature of the thing nationalized. It has, however, happened with this tenet of Henry George’s what happened with many others that proceeded from the same distinguished though untrained, because unequipped, source—excellent, as a broad generalization, nevertheless, seeing that it lacked in scientific construction, the tenet led straight to that most fatal of errors, the failure to perceive that in which things seemingly unlike are essentially the same. The error in this instance promoted what may be termed a pimples-chasing social economic trend of thought.

Railroads are such gigantic economic growths that they were promptly dubbed “Public utilities”; no sooner was the reformer’s mind directed to the railroads than the telegraph and the telephone were taken into the category. But the trouble did not stop there. Could not. Gas has become a necessity. The gas companies can at will turn off light, and often heat in any home, then also the wastefulness and the corrupting consequences of private gas tanks swings this industry also under the category of “Public utilities.” On the same principle, the slaughter-houses, the ice industry, the milk industry, the insurance business, the mining industry have one after the other been lately clamoring at the door of “Public utilities” for admittance. What happened with the railroads, what happened with the telegraph and telephone, what was found to happen with gas—all that is found to happen with

these other private industries recently under the probe of investigations. One and all place the public at the mercy of the private, one and all are wastefully and harmfully conducted, and, as a consequence, one and all are promoters of corruption. In short one and all attest themselves qualified for matriculation in the “Public utilities” camp. Arrived at this point, the “Public utilities” reformer, the horizon of whose mind is not bounded by the superstition of anti-Socialism, must perceive pretty clearly that the door of “Public utilities” might as well be kept open to receive all other industries.

That which the more intelligent reformer can perceive only by dint of a continuously successive chase after the separate pimples of capitalism the Socialist perceives from the start, and at once. Not the circumstance that “Government can do a certain thing better than individuals” is the reason for the national ownership of the railroads. That is a consequence, not the cause. The cause is that a railroad is a contrivance for the promotion of civilization, which contrivance, however, is blighted by the feature of CAPITAL (private ownership) tacked to it. The real cause being perceived, wherever the cause is found—whether in gas or ice, mines or insurance, meat or clothing, etc., etc.,—the nature of the disease is clear. The nature of the disease being clear to the Socialist, he is saved the tribulations that the reformer is fated to undergo.

It makes all the difference between success and failure with a physician whether he correctly or incorrectly diagnoses the appearance of a pimple on the body physical. If he diagnoses the pimple as a “local” affair, whereas it is a manifestation of a constitutional state of things, needing constitutional treatment, then he will be kept chasing individual pimples, new ones rising as fast as old ones are cauterized—very much to the profit of his private pocket, but to the undoing of the distracted patient, distracted both by the disease that afflicts him and the, in a way, even worse infliction of the “treatment.” A constitutional ailment can not {be} treated by keeping the eyes riveted to its separate manifestations; it must be treated constitutionally. The “Public utilities” tenet lacks system, being quackish. The tenet of Socialism, which fathoms cause, systematically tackles the problem by demanding the unconditional surrender of the CAPITALIST CLASS,—not the futile

measure for curing the body social of this, that and the other pimple which breaks out over it as a consequence of the scrofula of capitalism.

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Uploaded June 2009

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