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EDITORIAL

IS GOLD AT THE BOTTOM?

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SPEAKING before the Political Economy Club of the University of Chicago, on the 21st of March, George E. Roberts, superintendent of the United States mint, said:

“Within the next 20 years the world’s gold supply will be more than doubled. The discovery of new gold fields in the Transvaal, Colorado and other places within the last decade, the advancement in the mechanical and metallurgical treatment of low-grade ores, and the more scientific methods of mining have placed the world in a position paralleled only by the periods following the discovery of America.”

For some little time past, statements—casual and deliberate, official and unofficial—have been filtering through the press that pointed to a near-at-hand phenomenal increase of the gold out-put. The discovery of new gold fields figured, on the whole, less conspicuously in the causes of the increase than the improved methods. What with the one and the other, careful scanners of the horizon apprehended evil rather than good in the anticipated gold deluge. Prices, it was justly feared, would be so affected, that gold might cease to be the desirable standard; political commotion would be the result; not unlikely a movement would be set on foot to demonetize gold in favor of silver, and a presidential campaign might be looked forward to in which the language of a McKinley in 1896 would be held by the Bryans, and the language of a Bryan would be held by the McKinleys of that year. While this forecast, sound though it be in economics and its political reflexes, was from the start remote, certain events have occurred and are occurring now, that justify the belief that the recent discoveries of gold fields in Colorado, together with the vastly improved methods of treating lower-grade ore, is of such importance as immediately to reflect itself in social manifestations. The question is

suggested, Are the desperately high-handed proceedings of the Colorado-Idaho Mine Owners' Association, in the endeavor to crash through all barriers of resistance on the part of their employes, an immediate result of the now increased possibilities in gold production? Is gold at the bottom of the desperado conduct of Idaho's and Colorado's officialdom against Moyer, Haywood, Pettibone and St. John?

It is an observation amply substantiated by history that facilities of production have a tendency, not to alleviate the burden of the toiler, but to act as a rod of scorpions upon his back. This is especially the case when the facilities of production, or the remuneration therefor, are, from any cause, materially improved. It is a point that has been repeated again and again by the historians of the country that slavery in America received its impetus from the invention of the cotton gin. Before then, slavery in this country was but an incident. Afterwards it became a unique institution. Slavery among the Romans was cruel enough, but its cruelty was of the nature of the cruelty bred by excessive luxury. Slavery in America was an economic factor, the horrors of which transcend all previous experiences. The breeding of slaves, the deliberately rending of the family ties of the toiler, all for the sake of the cash that was in it,—that was a result of the vastly improved facilities for the exploitation of cotton that the cotton gin ushered in. The rod of iron with which the slave was formerly run, now became a rod of scorpions. A similar experience was observed in Cuba. The days of the real agonies of the slave broke upon him on the island with the discovery of the vast wealth that could be extracted from the sugar cane fields. May not the conduct of the gold mine owners of the West towards the toiler in their mines be intimately connected with the discoveries that render his toil more fruitful?

No more than the slave in Cuba before the Age of the Sugar Plantation, nor the slave in the United States before the Age of the Cotton Gin, was the life of the Colorado gold miner a life of dignified repose before 1894. Remarkable, however, is the circumstance that exactly within the last decade—the exact period during which the Superintendent of the mint states the discoveries of new gold fields were made in Colorado, and improved methods had been adopted—the war, because war it is, was started by the mine owners against the Western Federation of Miners. It is with 1894 that the first outrages were initiated by the mine owners against the

union, and these outrages, waxing in violence in the measure that the intrepid miner offered successful resistance, have during these last three years been rapidly developing until they reached the present acute crisis—conspiracy with the aid of Pinkerton-Thiel skipjacks to murder the officers of the Union.

History repeats itself only where conditions are exactly alike. The quartering of men who resisted the royal prerogatives of the British Crown repeated itself until the day came when conditions had changed so materially that, not the resister of the royal prerogative, but the royal prerogative itself lost its head upon the scaffold. More than one revolt against the British dominion was smothered in these colonies, until the day came when the changed conditions smothered, not the revolt, but the power that was revolted against, and the independent United States was born. Many an attempt to strike the shackles from the slave resulted in the tar-and-feathering of the inspired apostle of freedom, the riding him upon rails, aye, the killing of him, yet the day came when the tar-and-featherers, together with the whole Bourbon-Copperhead pack, was made to bite the dust. And so again now. History has been repeating itself in the matter of added oppression to Labor in the measure that Labor's toil promised quicker and ampler abundance to the exploiter, but the monotony of that prattle is about to change. The earnest of the change lies in the determined front with which the Western Federation of Miners, with Moyer, Haywood, Pettibone, St. John at its head, has bid defiance to the exploiting class—a defiance so successful that the Mine Owners' Association has become outré, has lost its head, and has begun to run amuck.

Whether or not gold is at the bottom of the Idaho-Colorado performance, history is, in this matter, about to adapt itself to the changed conditions, and utter the speech that these conditions dictate.

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

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