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EDITORIAL

## THE USES OF COMPETITION.

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**S**OCIALISM is said to be “against competition.” The statement is defective; so defective that it suggests an erroneous idea. Socialism can with no greater justice be said to be against competition, than doctors can be said to be against navel strings. The navel string has its mission; so long as its mission is unfinished, it is necessary; the doctor cuts it only when its mission is at end. It is so with competition. The only difference is that competition has two distinct, but successive phases—both equally useful.

The first phase of competition sets in with the start of capitalism. It is an inevitable accompaniment of individual production. At first its wastefulness is amply compensated by the good it works—the steady improvement of the means of production. In the measure, however, that its wastefulness increases, competition cures itself. Its wastefulness points the way to concentration. Individual capitalist concerns, in the same industry, draw closer and closer together. “Agreements,” combines and Trusts spring up. This is the first stage of competition. The Socialist can not properly be said to be against this stage of competition. He is not against it because the Socialist does not spend his power upon dead ducks. This first stage of competition is to-day a dead duck. The competition that still exists is a negligible quantity. The staples of production are not to-day produced competitively. The recent debates in Congress, seconded by the investigations of the Interstate Commerce Commission, amply reveal the fact. The large number of “firms” in industry, as in transportation, is but a blind. The swindle has been fully exposed. In transportation, as in production, the large number of “firms” in any one line is meant only to conceal the fact of their being merged, or trustified.

The first stage being past, competition enters upon the second. At this second stage the competition is carried on no longer by concerns in the same industry, it is

carried on by concerns in different lines of industry. The war character of competition becomes manifest at this stage; on the other hand, the war makes manifest what was not manifest before—the intimate way in which one industry dove-tails into the other. Though different, the now concentrated industries mutually need one another, mutually lean upon one another. Each seeks to lean heavy upon the other, while itself seeks to bear the least burden. Arrived at this stage the character of competition is wholly changed. Before, it promoted production; now all that it does—and no slight benefit that is—is to expose the earthen feet of the presumptive and alleged Deity, the Capitalist Class. At this stage competition resolves itself into a wholesale mutual exposure and ventilation of the truth concerning the “virtues” of the owners of the means of production. The astounding revelations, recently made in the capitalist camp, have their explanation only in the fact of the present and modified form of competition—competition at its last throes, along with the capitalist system. Why should the Socialist object to that?

Competition, whether at its first stage or last, has had and is having its uses. It first warmed into being the giant concerns, it now exposes their owners. It first raised the pillars for the Socialist Republic, it now is tearing off the rags that disfigure and cover them—their private ownership. For both processes Socialism has naught but applause.

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