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EDITORIAL

DEBS'S OPPORTUNITY.

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AFTER discounting all that is obnoxious in the "Red Special" there remains a sediment that is valuable to the Socialist Movement in America—and that element offers Mr. Debs the opportunity of his life.

True enough, no constructive speech can be made in a rush tour. True enough, Socialism needs a sounder foundation than the methods that attract and hold curious-gaping throngs. True enough, in short, the trajectory of the "Red Special" was characterized throughout by Noise. All this is true; but another thing is true also.

Socialism, 'tis true, is no merchandise: the theory of "advertising" is repulsive to a great historic movement: a great Social Revolution plows its own way by the force of its own soundness and vitality: the advertiser's tricks are foreign to the revolutionary concept. Yet circumstances alter cases, nor does all that looks like "advertising" consist of just "advertising." The plow that furrows the sod precedes and only in that sense "advertises" the sower and the seed. It prepares the ground for both. Given the circumstances of the social sod, so to speak, in America Debs's "Red Special" did the work of a mighty social plow—it prepared the public mind for Socialism: the word has ceased to be the bugaboo used by capitalist schemers: the word SOCIALISM has become a household word.

It has been well said that familiarity with the thought of a crime opens the way for its commission. If such is the psychology with crime, infinitely more so must it be with a regenerative Movement. Debs's "Red Special" familiarized the eyes and ears of the masses from one end of the country to the other, and, as never before, with the word SOCIALISM—the name of the impending great social and regenerative Revolution.

This is a work of no slight value. Shall its value shrink to a minimum, or shall

it be utilized to its full extent and thereby multiplied a thousand-fold? In other words, shall the THING ITSELF—Socialism, the specific goal, together with the necessary means to its attainment—be raised to the prominence that the NAME alone has been raised to by the “Red Special”?

To do this is Debs's great opportunity—and that Debs can do, from the conspicuous advertised elevation he now occupies, by resigning in favor of Preston, the nominee for President of the Socialist Labor Party, whose proxy Gillhaus is on the ballot.

The S.L.P. nomination paid scant attention to the name, and all attention to the essence of Socialism. The nomination of Preston thrust forward the issue around which the real political battles of the future will rage with ever intenser heat, and around which the battle already is pivoted. That issue is the legality of the picket, involving the pregnant question whether the slaying, by a Union's picketman on duty, of an assailant who threatens his life is like the act of a detected burglar who slays the person he attempts to burglarize, or whether such an act is a legitimate exercise of the civic right of self-defense. That issue sums up the principle that, without the revolutionarily constructed Union, the revolutionary ballot is a hollow mailed glove, a mailed glove destitute of the warrior's hand to give it potency. Ever more shady will the line that divides the combatants separate those whose class interests demand impotent Unionism, stripped even of the right of self-defense, and those whose class interests and intelligence demand potent Unionism as the essential accompaniment of the ballot that proclaims the downfall of capitalism.

Preston, on the list of Presidential nominees, alone embodies this issue. He alone embodies the practical means towards Socialism; accordingly, he alone embodies the goal.

The common rocket, as it ascends skyward, draws the admiring gaze towards itself, but, once it has attained its zenith, starts downward again, a stick. The really admirable rocket is that which, after having drawn the public gaze by the brilliancy of its path upward, crowns the brilliant ascent by the far more brilliant shower of stars into which it explodes. Debs's withdrawal in favor of Preston would be an exhibition of the latter nature. Nothing else could, at this psychologic moment, impart to all that Preston stands for that conspicuousness that would mean the

incalculable shortening of the agonizing period of transition from Capitalism to the Industrial or Socialist Republic.

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N.B.—There are those, no doubt, who will read the above lines with the silly leer of the fatuous on their face. The time will come when the leer will make place for regret if the hint was not hearkened.

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

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