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EDITORIAL

PRIVATELY OWNED PRESS.

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THE re-alignment that is taking place in the Socialist Movement of the land is raising a number of issues that must be settled right, or they will continue to plague the Movement. Of course, these issues all center around the burning Question of Unionism; they nevertheless have their own independent existence. Among these collateral issues, and partaking of the burning feature of the main Question, is the Question of the ownership of the press. So burning is this topic also that many are the letters running into this office, raising this, that and the other point on the matter. The subject merits fuller and more connected treatment than off-hand answers in the Letter-Box will afford.

The press is a necessary of life. Man lives not of bread alone. Information is vital, not to the spiritual part of man only, but to his physical part as well. Indeed, bread depends upon information. Information is as necessary to man as trousers and railroads. What the private ownership of the means that furnish trousers and transportation signifies the Socialist knows, the capitalist knows, and he who is neither Socialist nor capitalist feels, though he is not aware of where the shoe pinches. Though the economic power imparted by the private ownership of the means of producing trousers, transportation, in short, of the material necessities of life, the capitalist class can and does wield a despot's sway. The private ownership of the press is one of the palladiums of capitalism. Seeing that bread and physical wellbeing depend upon information, the privately owned capitalist press is operated by each capitalist concern in such manner as may lead the stream of loaves into its own pockets, and, as a matter of course, they jointly operate it in such manner as may leave the Working Class out in the cold. The general method to this end is called "molding public opinion"; the detailed means in the method are the suppression of information that may injure the interests of the publishing concern,

the publishing of whatever will promote its own interests, the falsification of facts injurious to it, and the affectation of righteous indignation at views and acts that will interfere with the flow of loaves towards it. Needless to go into details to illustrate the egotistic one-sidedness of, for instance, free trade and of protection papers. Each suppresses the truth concerning the other; each is guilty of mutual falsifications; all are mendacious in the claim of “neutrality” or of being animated by patriotic sentiments. To take a broader instance, the fate of the great Lewis H. Morgan’s work on *Ancient Society* will illustrate the point best. Were it not for the Socialist Labor Party press, the book would be out of print to-day. Despite its high scientific value in ethnology, capitalist bibliography seeks to ignore the work, capitalist professors lie about it, capitalist papers know not of it—its inevitably revolutionary trend makes against the flow of loaves into the pockets of capitalism. All this is natural. The Socialist knows the controlling power of material interests. It is upon material interests that Socialism itself plants itself. Proceeding from these basic principles, the S.L.P. holds that the Socialist press must be the property of the Socialist political Movement. It holds that this is a case of “the people owning the railroads, or the railroads owning the people”: either the Movement itself must own its press or the press will own it: if it does not itself take the whiphand as itself the moldER of public opinion, it can not escape becoming the moldEE. It holds, in short, that, to leave the Socialist press in private hands, is for the Movement to put its head into the noose of private interests. This principle, being based upon the facts gathered from experience, is now found confirmed at all points by a mass of recent events in the Movement itself.

It is of no consequence for the point at issue—the ownership of the Party press—whether the new Union, the Industrial Workers of the World, is good, bad, or indifferent. It is of no consequence for the point at issue whether the issues raised and arguments presented by the I.W.W. are sound or otherwise. The fact is the I.W.W. is there, strong enough to be felt, vocal enough to be heard; also the fact is that at least a powerful number of organized and unorganized Socialist or Social Democratic Party men are in full sympathy with the I.W.W., and many more are greedy for information thereon. What, in sight of these facts is the posture of the privately owned press of that party? It is the posture of the privately owned press of

individual capitalist concerns. It has dropped the thin mask of “neutrality” in Trades Union fights, it has stepped forth as a gouger for the A.F. of L. against the I.W.W., obedient to its private interests it has insolently presumed to turn the party, whom it pretends to serve, into a moldee of its own private “public opinion” by means of suppression of information, publication of falsehood and even forgery. The conduct of the Volkszeitung Corporation’s papers, the *Volkszeitung* and *Worker* is typical.

In September of last year, the President and the Secretary-Treasurer of the I.W.W., Sherman and Trautmann were in this city on an organization tour, and held large meetings.—*The Worker* wholly suppressed information thereon, while the *Volkszeitung* sought to injure the second meeting, a meeting of silkworkers, by giving a notice of it in advance with a FALSE ADDRESS.

In December of last year, Debs, the Socialist party’s recent Presidential candidate, delivered five addresses in this city and vicinity to crowded houses on the I.W.W.—*The Worker* suppressed all mention of them.

Not satisfied with seeking to “mold public opinion” by the withholding of information and the misleading of its readers through false addresses, the Corporation went further:

An anonymous circular appeared from A.F. of L. quarters defaming the I.W.W. Capmakers Union.—Without inquiring into the correctness of the charges, the *Volkszeitung* hastened to father them and make them the foundation of an assault upon the I.W.W.

Not yet satisfied with seeking to “mold public opinion” by the publication as true of unverified and anonymous charges, the Corporation went still further:

Both *The Worker* and *Volkszeitung* refused publication to the signed denial by the national organizer of the I.W.W., of the anonymous charges made by the A.F. of L. capmakers; and *The Worker* also refused publication to the SWORN ANSWER which the I.W.W. capmakers published.

Not even yet satisfied with seeking to “mold public opinion” by a hostility and unfairness that bordered on gougerism, the Corporation went still further, turning up in the full gouger’s role for the A.F. of L. even to the point of committing the crime of forgery:

In its summary of the anonymous charges against the I.W.W. capmakers, *The Worker* inserted a clause that was not in the original, and subsequently, letters from its party members criticizing its conduct, are published in mutilated form and materially altered. A publishing concern is not a tube through which everything sent in must appear in its paper. Letters of criticism may be improper. The concern's duty then is to refuse them publication. To publish them, however, over the writer's signature in garbled form is an act of knavery; it is forgery; it is insidious deception. Such knavish acts are not uncommon in the Socialist or Social Democratic party press. Another striking illustration was recently furnished by the Milwaukee *Social Democratic Herald* when a letter, sent by Debs criticizing Berger's conduct in the matter of fusion with capitalist candidates in Milwaukee, was published by that paper in an "expurgated" version.

Further instances are superfluous. The so-called "press of the Social Democratic or Socialist party" is run so as to keep the party in ignorance and to deceive it, and the party is impotent for redress. There is no party authority over that press, to which to appeal. There can be none. The concerns are privately owned. The party may expel these editors and each of the incorporators; but they can, as the Volkszeitung Corporation is now obviously doing, stick out their tongues, and, in the language of Tweed, ask: "What are you going to do about it?" The party circulated the publications of the concern, it thereby made the concern a power, but that power is out of the party's reach. Like cannons that the labor of a city raises upon the dominating heights that surround it, and then leaves in the hands of its overlords, who turn them upon the city and keep it in subjection, the press, as a whole, of the Socialist or Social Democratic party is handled irresponsible to the party, responsible only to the private interests of its owners.

Theory, based upon previous facts, is confirmed by subsequent ones. Whatever thorn there might be, and no doubt is, in a party-owned press, the rose of the party's organ reflecting the party's collective will, its collective wisdom or collective ignorance, and moving strictly obedient to that collective sense repays all possible thorns. Only the other day a batch of editors was removed at one sweep from the central organ of the German Social Democracy. Their policy was not the party's. Had the paper been private property the party would have stood before them

impotent; as it was the party owns the paper, they went by the board and the ship steadied.

If a Socialist Movement does not own its press, that press will own the Movement. Of all grotesque sights imaginable, can there be any more grotesque than that of a Movement that claims to be revolutionist allowing its most potent weapon to be wielded by private interests?

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