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EDITORIAL

THAT MYTHICAL “PUBLIC.”

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THE Yonkers trolley strike—a strike exemplary in its manner of calling, the receiver of the road not having been forewarned and thereby invited to stack his cards to defeat it—is affording the capitalist press, from yellowest up bluest, opportunity once more to introduce to fame that mythical body always so prominently held to the fore whenever a strike is on—the “public.”

“The inconvenience to the traveling public,” “the vast neutral public affected,” “the disinterested but suffering public,” these are some of the choice phrases newspaper columns are just now running over with. There is no such “public.”

Such a “public” could only exist if its members were totally isolated and devoid of concern in the outcome of the conflict. But is there in fact any such isolated fragment of the population? Are the bakers out on strike? Then shoemakers, miners, trolley men, everybody who eats bread but is not either a baker or a bakeshop owner, is called the “public.” Are the shoemakers trying to raise their wages? Then the miners, trolley men and bakers—everyone not a shoemaker or a shoe manufacturer becomes the “public.” Are the miners seeking a shorter work-day? Immediately into the “public” are metamorphosed the shoemakers, trolley men and bakers; all, that is, except miners and mine operators. Finally, is it the trolley men, as in this instance, who call a halt on their employer in order to better their conditions? Presto! Into the “public” are marshalled the bakers, miners and shoemakers—everybody who by chance is neither trolley man nor trolley stockholder. In other words, in each case, the so-called “public” is composed overwhelmingly of workingmen, in slight degree of employers, who are themselves contingents of the army then engaged in the struggle, and as such have a direct, a burning interest in the outcome.

Specious is the attempt to divide society into employed, employers, and a

neutral "public" between them. The division is false. There are no such three classes. There are but two, the employed class and the employing, and every individual must be in either one or the other. The "public" is not a body aloof, and foreign to the interests of the struggle. It is a body composed of representatives of both the warring elements. As to the handful of employers, they know where their class interests lie. They are a unit against the strike. They will slander it, rant against it, print false news against it, and even, if necessary, levy contributions upon themselves to defeat it. No aloofness there. Why then should the workers hold aloof?

As has been seen, every branch of labor may become by turn engaged in a struggle to better its conditions. To speak of "disinterestedness" and "aloofness" under such circumstances is to speak of "disinterestedness" and "aloofness" to one branch of an army while its comrades are under fire. Every battalion of an army is directly concerned in the victory and defeat of every other battalion. The repulse of one is the repulse of all; the advance of one is an advance for all; the duty of each is to stand ready to support by all possible means every effort of all.

Similarly the duty—nay, the very safety—of the workingman while a strike is on, lies in his performing every possible act, in his enduring without grumbling every discomfort, and in his gladly meeting every sacrifice, if need be, to enable his brothers to win. He who allows the cords of working class unison to be snapped within him by talk of the "public" is worse than the fish enticed to its undoing by a tempting bait. He is taken in by a myth pure and simple.

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