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EDITORIAL

“PATRIOTIC NEIGHBORS.”

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PATRIOTISM has been defined as the last refuge of the scamp. Our days are seeing sights that demand an amendment of the definition. Patriotism may also be the straw that the demented drowning man snatches at.

The suburban town of White Plains in this State rejoices in a publication that bears the name of *Patriotic Neighbors*. At its foremost the paper carries this motto or exhortation:

“Patrons of neighborhood stores, show forth your local patriotism, practical Christianity, and enlightened self-interest.”

An appeal to patriotism, even if this be of the local variety, surcharged with “practical Christianity,” and “enlightened self-interest,” screws expectation to a high pitch. But disenchantment follows swiftly. The very front page blazons forth in fat type the following explanation:

“THOUGHT MATERIALS FOR PATRIOTIC AMERICANS.

“The Department Concerns, chain system shops, and mail order houses are gradually killing off the old style local stores in city, town and country.

“Twenty-five department stores in Greater New York have an aggregate of 50,000 employees.

“In olden times it was a lively little store that required four clerks.

“It is said one Chicago mail order house, dealing mainly with farmers and small townsmen, sells \$35,000,000 worth of goods annually.

“A country general store that turns over a \$25,000 stock once a year does a good business.

“Just in proportion as the small merchants of the United States are pushed out of the field, the twelve billion dollars now invested in land and buildings used by village, town and city storekeepers will shrink in earning power while residential property values are certain to go down sympathetically.

“This slump will cut into the incomes of at least 500,000 large and

small capitalists.

“The passing away of the old-fashioned mechanism of retail distribution through neighborhood stores would prove the most crushing calamity that ever befell the American people.”

The old-fashioned stage-coach was wiped away by the chain system of steam railways; the old-fashioned small factory was wiped away by the large factory; the old-fashioned shoemaker was wiped away by the new-fashioned machine-run shoe shop. And so all along the line—just as is happening to the “old-fashioned mechanism of retail distribution” one law underlies the evolution in all these branches. It is the law of concentrated activities. Before this law all effort at resistance is in vain. The small, old-fashioned mechanism is doomed. But what about the human beings engaged in this old-fashioned mechanism? Are they also to be deluged and drowned by the flood? To judge by their intellectual level, as indicated by the above quotations, such is their fate. They seem not to be capable of leaving betimes to the old stranded wreck of small production and distribution, and swing themselves into the Socialist or Co-operative system where they would be share-holders in the National Industries. They are catching at straws—the straw of local “patriotism,” when patriotism has become as broad-based as national, as production;—the straw of “practical Christianity,” as though the term “practical” was at all applicable to a system that hampers the production and distribution of wealth by scattering, instead of concentrating, human energy, when by concentrating human energy the wealth producible would afford affluence to all;—the straw of “enlightened self-interest,” as though it were the part of enlightenment to reject the grand opportunities of the new times, and nail oneself fast to the puny opportunities of old-fashioned times.

The development that *Patriotic Neighbors* is vainly taking up arms against is one big with blessings for the human race. The human race seeks to escape the animal stage of arduous toil for base existence. The concentrated, large, new-fashioned system affords the opportunity. To-day the opportunity is at the stage of transition. Hence it is merely an opportunity, while the race remains with its nose to the grindstone. The truly patriotic and enlightened citizen of this generation is organizing himself to turn the mere opportunity into an actual reality. He is in the

camp of the Socialist Labor Party whose principles are:

"The system of ownership must ever tally with the system of production. Where production is individual the system of ownership under which the tool of production is held will be individual. Such was the case in old-fashioned days. Now, production is collective; many,—all, must co-operate, consequently the tool of production must be common property. Co-operative labor alone is capable of yielding the amount of wealth needed for popular well-being. Popular well being is as absent to-day as it ever was, despite modern co-operative labor. This is due to the circumstance that the tool of production has remained private property, as completely as it was at the time of old-fashioned, individual production. The owners of the tool, the capitalist class, thus can and do crush the nation."

In the work of bringing on a crushing national calamity, *Patriotic Neighbors* is giving unwilling aid. He urges on a calamity who offers senseless opposition.

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