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EDITORIAL

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

CURIOS things are coming to light in the course of the “justifications,” that exposed Trust and corporation magnates are giving for their violations of law. Mr. James McRae, first vice-president of the Pennsylvania lines west of Pittsburg, blandly admits that “neither sentiment nor unselfish desire to obey the law” was the reason for the Pennsylvania’s crusade against rebates. He explains that it was purely a matter of pecuniary consideration. So long as the Pennsylvania had to compete with the Reading, the Baltimore & Ohio, the Chesapeake & Ohio, and the Norfolk & Western, the road calmly, systematically and with set purpose violated the interstate commerce law, and indulged in the illegal practice of rebating; the moment, however, when the road violated the Anti-Trust law by merging with those lines, that moment the road no longer needed to and consequently discontinued the illegal practice of rebates.

The admission is curious only in the sense that it is at all made; for the rest, the admission can be cause of wonderment only to the visionaries who imagine that “Statute Law” can stifle Economic Law. Where competition is, all the chicaneries of competition will be also—law or no law to the contrary; where railroads compete, the rebate practice is unavoidable. When, however, thanks to the destructive wear and tear of competition, competitors finally make peace, then “mergers,” “monopoly,” “Trusts” follow as inevitably—law or no law, to the contrary; when railroads have reached that stage, the merger can not be escaped.

Thus our generation sees reproduced, upon the prosaic dollars-and-cents field of commercialism, the poetic myth concerning Scylla and Charybdis. According to Homer’s accounts, Scylla was a dreadful sea monster, with six heads, twelve feet and a voice like the yelp of a puppy. She dwelt in a sea-cave, far up the face of a huge cliff, out of which cave she stuck her heads, snatching the seamen out of

passing ships. Not far from that cliff was another lower cliff. Under this second rock dwelt Charybdis, who thrice a day sucked in and thrice a day spouted out the seawater, thereby engulfing both sailors and ship in the whirlpool. The impossibility of safely crossing the straits between the two rocks gave birth to the warning:

“He will go under in Scylla who would seek to escape Charybdis.”

Such a strait does the capitalist social system present to the sailor that would navigate it. Flanked on one side by the Scylla of Competition, on the other by the Charybdis of the Trust, he can escape the one only to be made a toast for the other monster. In such a social strait does the capitalist class keep society, and do the Utopian intellectuals imagine they can “legislate safety.” Out of such a strait, into the open sea, does Socialism urge the people—and necessity will drive them.

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