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EDITORIAL

IT WON'T HAPPEN.

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“Editor *The People*:

“Under the Socialist régime, will inheritance of property be permitted? And if so, won't it lead sooner or later to a comparatively few individuals possessing most of the wealth of the community? C.S.”

NO, it won't.

In the first place, as to whether inheritance of property will be allowed under Socialism, no one yet knows, and no one cares. The question is just as immaterial now as it would have been, at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, to ask whether the President's term would be four years or six. The main question, Freedom from England, had first to be settled. That done, the minor things, Presidents' terms among them, could be taken up and decided according to the necessity of the times and the wisdom of the legislators, then the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia. The main question to-day is: Freedom from the capitalist class. That question settled, the minor matters, as the inheritance of property, can be met and dealt with by the Constitutional Convention of the Socialist Republic as it sees fit. When that convention meets, it may, conceivably, decree to abolish inheritance; and it may not. To-day there seems to be no clear reason why it should, and the chances are it will not. That is as far as one can say for the present.

But even assuming, then, that the inheritance of property will still continue under Socialism, it will not, can not lead to the possession by a few of the bulk of the community's wealth. And here a distinction must be drawn between property, and property.

To-day anything that a man owns, whether a rocking chair or a silk mill, a silver spoon or a coal mine, is his private property, and he can do with it as he likes. He can sit in the rocking chair or not, or open the silk mill or not, just as he chooses;

he can throw away the silver spoon if the whim seizes him, or blow up the coal mine. No one can interfere with him—they are his property. But the chair and the spoon concern only his individual life and comfort; the mill and the mine affect the life and comfort of the nation. They are part of the nation's wealth producing machinery; they are necessary to the prosperity and civilization of the country and its inhabitants. They, differently from the spoon and chair, affect the life of thousands; yet, the same as the chair and the spoon, one man owns them.

This is what Socialism brands as an iniquity—this possession by one man of the wealth-sources of nations. This sort of private property, private property in the national instruments of production, is what Socialism demands the abolition of—and will see that its demand is carried out. But that does not mean that Socialism would abolish also the man's private ownership of his chair and his teaspoon, the goods which he alone uses, and which confer on him no arbitrary powers over the lives of others. These are not wealth-sources, they are not concerned in production. He can exploit no one by retaining them. Society could have no interest in depriving him of them. Hence he will be allowed to keep them, just as much his private property under Socialism as they were under capitalism. Nay, more, Socialism will multiply an hundred-fold each man's power of acquiring, and his surety of retaining, this sort of private property.

For the same reason that Socialism will not abolish private ownership of household and personal goods, namely, because these are not engines of national production, and confer no exploiting powers, it may well come to pass that Socialism will not abolish inheritance in these things. In the other things, the machinery of production, they being no more subject to private ownership, of course, inheritance of them falls to the ground. And as it is not through one's personal property, but through his ownership of the means of production, that one works himself into "most of the wealth of the community," the inheritance which Socialism may allow can never lead to the situation suggested.

No, it won't happen.

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