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EDITORIAL

WANING INDIVIDUALITY.

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ARE we, as a race, becoming de-individualized? The question is prominently forcing itself to the fore. Not only are our drab and commonplace clothes in striking contrast to the color and distinction in vogue in other times, but as the preparation of food follows garment-making out of the home into the field of collective industry, we may expect to see a corresponding transformation in dietary matters. Already to a large extent we eat not what we wish, but what is on the bill-of-fare. It is however, mostly in our daily work, at bench, machine or desk, that we are being pressed into one mold like a block of cigars.

The story is told of a young fellow who went to work in a great railroad office. He was going to learn the business. At the end of two years he recounted his experiences something like this: "I was set to work filing yellow papers—bills of lading I think they called them. After a year and a half I was promoted to blue papers. If I stay here long enough maybe they'll put me on green. Learn the business? A fellow could live and die in these offices and never know what a locomotive looked like." The young fellow was industrious, he was honest, he was faithful. And just because he "did with all his heart that which his hand found to do," he was kept at it. His experience is typical of the clean-minded young proletarian of to-day. It is the course of industry—unfortunately followed in organization by the reactionary A.F. of L.—to subdivide and subdivide processes, beating them out, as it were, with a flail, and then to set and keep one worker at each of the thin fibers of a process thus obtained. Thus one may all his life do nothing but drive nails in shoe-heels; another turn out one special style of screw for a huge printing press; a third grind a certain curve on spectacle lenses. In these days it is dangerous to do one thing too well; it means condemnation to that thing forever. Evidently this all leads to greater speed, quantity and cheapness in

production; but it has another side, recently characterized by the British Woman's Labor League as the "increased tendency to make use of boy and girl labor in monotonous and uneducative work"; and, as has been shown, the effects of this system are not limited to the young among the workers.

With labor of this sort occupying 10 or 12 hours out of every 24, individuality for the worker is impossible. Even his opportunity for education through work—which under proper conditions would be most valuable—is negated. A writer in the *Outlook* a short time ago, describing the production of motion play films, told how many of the actors must "depend upon instruction at rehearsal to learn how their movements and expressions are to help interpret a story they may never know." Motion play actors are not the only victims. Go into any large machine or instrument plant. Ask the workmen what the instrument they are turning out is for, how it works, what the principle of it is. With the exception of a few foremen, they do not know. What is more, the boss does not want them to know. As one employer put it, "The more my men know about my business, the more dangerous they are to me. I must make them feel that I am indispensable to them, that they need me to coordinate their labors." Thus the subdivided system of production serves a two-fold purpose. It multiplies output, and simultaneously multiplies the exploitee's artificially-engendered dependence upon his exploiter.

Socialist society, by shortening the work-day and by introducing rotation of duties, will find a way to conserve the benefits of economy, arising from subdivided production, while at the same time destroying its harmful effect. But under modern labor processes as dictated by private ownership of the tool, the worker has become not even a cog in a vast machine, he is only the axle grease between the cogs. Call that individuality?

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