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EDITORIAL

FATHER GASSONIANA.

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IX.

ANINTH general principle, advanced by Father Thomas I. Gasson in his Boston address, and upon the strength of which he opposes Socialism is that the present social system, of which the Father is an apostle, promotes, cultivates and safeguards individual incentive, meaning, of course, thereby the incentive to useful labor. Father Gasson does not formulate the principle in precisely these words. Yet he indicates the principle with sufficient precision when he stated that “you would take away the great incentive of human energy” if Socialism were to prevail.

Socialism may or may not “take away the great incentive of human energy.” We are not yet at that stage of this discussion to consider that aspect of the issue. It will come in due time. At present we are concerned, as a preliminary, with Father Gasson’s assertions and premises of a general nature.

It is not true that the present social system promotes, cultivates and safeguards individual incentive. The opposite is true.

In the capitalist social system production is undertaken, not for the fun of the thing, but for sale. It is the prospect of sales that moves the capitalist, sales for which there are orders received, or sales for which he expects orders. Has he such orders, or has he expectations of receiving any, the capitalist starts his plant; has he no orders, and no expectations of any, then he shuts down, tight as a clam. What effect has such a state of things upon the incentive of the workingman to exert his human energy? The answer can be illustrated in figures.

Say, the employer is a shoe manufacturer, and employs 100 hands. Say he has, or expects orders for 100,000 pairs of shoes. Finally, say, that the regulation average output per hand is 10 pairs of shoes. Under this supposition we would have the following results:—The 100 hands would be turning out 1,000 pairs of shoes a day, and the 100,000 order would be filled in 100 days. At the expiration of that

period, no further orders coming, or being anticipated, the 100 hands would be “laid off.”

Is it human to expect of these 100 men that they should exert themselves? Suppose they did, what would happen?

If they exert themselves to the extent of producing 15 pairs of shoes a day, the consequence would be that the order would be filled within 67 days, and their jobs ended.

If they exert themselves to the extent of producing 20 pairs of shoes a day, the consequence would be that the order would be filled in 50 days.

If they put on still more steam and turn out 25 pairs of shoes a day, the order would be filled in 40 days.

In other words—the harder the men work all the sooner will they throw themselves out of work.

From this presentation it is evident that the shoemakers in question would be the veriest lunkheads if they exerted themselves to their best. So far from there being any incentive for them to do so, the incentive is all the other way. Not only will they not “put on steam,” they will “let up.” Seeing that the harder they work, all the sooner will they be breadless, they will work as slowly as they can manage, and thus put off the day, certain to come, when, there being no orders, and none in sight, the factory will shut down, and enforced idleness afflict them.

The above illustration condenses in a nutshell the manner of capitalism. Enforced idleness, want and starvation being the reward of exertion to do one’s best, the “great incentive of human energy” is, instead of promoted, disturbed; instead of cultivated, injured; instead of safeguarded, punished.

Is, then, Father Gasson’s theory wholly without foundation? Is there no human energy at all that capitalism incites, promotes, cultivates and safeguards? Yes, there is one—the human energy, which, planted upon the knowledge of the presentation made above, and, perverted by the teachings of capitalist professors, politicians and pulpiteers, concludes that society is hopelessly a jungle where, either you “do” others, or you will be “done” by them, and, consequently, exerts itself to its utmost to earn its spurs among the “doers” and thus escape affiliation with the “done.”

The capitalist social system nips in the bud “the great incentive of human nature” from developing in the right direction, and lashes it in the wrong—a mathematically demonstrable proposition.

What Goethe pithily calls “der Hexen Einmal Eins” (the witches’ multiplication table), wherever else it may “go down{,}” has no standing in Science.

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