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EDITORIAL

## Cleveland Beating a Retreat

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**T**he starting point of all modern free-trade agitation is the cry of “Down with Trusts and Monopolies.” There was a time when free trade agitators used only economic arguments; they did not then know enough to use demagoguery; they had too much confidence in the “soundness” of their reasoning. But times have changed. The truth of the proverb that the proof of the pudding lies in the eating will sink even through the wool and the heavy skull of the cock-sure free-trader. The poverty of the working class in free trade countries has become so well known, that it has offset all free-trade arguments based on the equally well known poverty of the working class in protective countries. This fact bowled off the field of discussion the labored economic arguments that it was sought to recommend free-trade by. Free-traders were thus forced to resort to demagoguery.

To the unthinking nothing sounds more plausible than that monopolies are “grinding the people down,” nor does anything seem more feasible to the unreflecting than that monopolies can be smashed. It is upon these two popular errors that free-trade leans for success. Its argument now amounts to this: “Protection fosters, if it is not the basis of, monopolies and trusts; remove the tariff and the trust fails.” This in a nut-shell was the language held by Mr. Cleveland at one time. His admirers gave him credit for firmness and bravery. Do they still?

Mr. Cleveland’s valedictory, his last message to Congress, is a very much watered war cry upon the Trusts. His condemnation of them is weak, and what is more, his estimate of the power of the Federal Government to curb the Trusts is tantamount to throwing up the sponge. So long as the country had political honors to offer Mr. Cleveland he posed as a gladiator in some respect or other. Now that he is at the end of his tether, his ardor has cooled off. He lets others do the fighting if they care.

But what about his former companions in arms, those who have not yet emptied the cup of political distinction, and who need free trade to thrive by? Abandoned by their

chief, they are growing more fiercely demagogic; their tirades against the Trust are becoming more virulent.

Meantime, the Socialists look upon the conflict between the “Trusters” and the “Anti-Trusters” with the same contempt for their intellect, or their integrity, or both, that they looked down upon the gold capitalists and the silver mine owners.

In so far as the Trust represents the concentration of productive forces, it is a means towards civilization; the more concentrated productive forces are the more fruitful is the labor of man; and an abundance of wealth gotten without arduous toil is the groundwork of civilized society. To destroy the Trust is to hamper civilization.

In so far, however, as the Trust is owned privately, and is used for private gain, it is a curse: it pauperizes and enslaves the masses to an idle class.

The mischief done by the knife in the hands of a highwayman lies not in the knife, but in the use to which it is put. Wrenched from the criminal who wields it, and placed in the hands of the worker, it is an instrument that adds to men’s happiness.

The solution of the Trust question lies in its transfer from private to public property. Cleveland retreats before the problem; the militant free-traders recoil before the solution of the question with a patriotic horror equal to that of the trust owners themselves—a horror as fully patriotic as that with which the organized class of Spanish brigands recoils before the idea of giving Cuba her freedom.

Socialism demands the nationalization of the Trust.

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

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