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EDITORIAL

THE CANTEEN.

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The adoption by the Senate of the House “Canteen clause” in the Army bill, settles the point that the canteen will be abolished. This issue of a protracted discussion has much in it worthy of attention.

The “canteen” was a legalized rum-shop. It resulted from Army regulations, that provided for the sale of liquor within Federal encampments. The prohibition element raised the hue and cry against this. All the stock arguments of prohibitionism were used, and these were accentuated with shrieks of horror at the idea of the Government itself becoming the sponsor for such traffic.

It is not our purpose, nor is that the point here involved, to discuss the pathology and therapeutic, much less the economic tenets of prohibition. On the contrary, for our present purpose, all that prohibitionism claims on these subjects is, for the sake of argument, taken for granted. Granting, accordingly, all that theoretic prohibition maintains, the net result of its victory is a defeat of its own purpose.

It has been shown that, at present, with the canteen still in force, the Army regulations accomplish two beneficent results: first, they secure pure stuff and exercise a check on the soldiers: secondly, they keep away flocks of saloons, that would immediately set up shop just beyond the encampments, and that, run for the profit exclusively, would superinduce indulgence and retail impure matter. In view of these undeniable facts, the man of sense, with whom a theory is not a manifestation of hysterics, would have left the canteen alone; he would center his activity upon the evil itself, in such a way as not to promote it. Not so with the prohibitionist. By his conduct, the only result of which is to expose and drive the soldiers to a freer indulgence in what he calls “poison,” the Prohibitionist strikes an attitude that should serve as a warning against unballasted theorizing, against the DOGMA. A test of the principle that animates a movement is its capacity to promote the unity of its upholders, its capacity to check their rushing into acts that are suicidal to their principle itself, by ever keeping their feet firmly planted upon

facts. That prohibitionism is an “incompetent” in the political-social life of the country stands proven by its “canteen” attitude. In the politico-social life of the nation prohibitionism now stands self-convicted of being what alchemy is to chemistry.

But this is not all that the “canteen” issue brings out. The Congress that bowed to the demand for the abolition of the canteen bowed down to what it knew was but an unthinking outcry; it bowed down to what it knew would work harm and not good. In other words, Congress acted against its better judgment, in deference to noise. No less important a warning is such intellectual and moral cowardice than the warning against the blinding effect of deviation to a dogma presented by the prohibitionist attitude.

The times call for men of unflinching conviction and clear heads. The feature of such times as these is the absence of just such an element among the ruling class. The disgraceful companion pictures presented by Congress and the Prohibitionists in this canteen affair but reflect the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the class against whom the Socialist Labor Party is drilling and marshaling the brain and brawn of the Nation.

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