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EDITORIAL

“CONSCIENCE.”

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THE Rev. Dr. Thomas R. Slicer, pastor of All Souls' Church, recently delivered an address in Cooper Union of specific economic viciousness. Dr. Slicer roundly denounced “the millionaires who wring the life {out} of the poor” and then, in the usual style of such gentlemen, proceeded forthwith to destroy whatever value there may be in such denunciation by giving an economically false explanation of the “benevolence” of the millionaire freebooters. Dr. Slicer's explanation is that “the millionaires give only to ease their conscience.” The explanation is false, both in psychology and economics. It is false in psychology because the “millionaire's conscience” does not exist. It does not exist because it cannot exist; why it cannot exist is an economic demonstration.

The “millionaire” is a capitalist entity. As such he combines in his person a permanent and a transitory feature of “large production,” of the sort of production that civilization demands.

The permanent feature is the concentration of large productive powers. This feature is permanent because without such concentration production is unequal to the needs of civilized society.

The transitory feature is the private ownership of such concentrated large productive powers. This feature is transitory because future society will not tolerate in private hands that upon which depends the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness of the people. As our political structure is democratic, so must the economic structure be. The Socialist Republic, whose outlines are heaving above the horizon, requires that the machinery of production must belong to the people in common, the same as their machinery of government. It is owing to the combination of this transitory feature with the permanent one in one person that the peculiar thing, the “millionaire” springs up, and his qualities are developed.

The holding of \$1,000 for productive purposes in private hands generates the necessity to protect that \$1,000, and the instinct how to do it. There is but one way. It takes \$4,000 to buttress up that \$1,000; it takes \$16,000 to buttress up that

\$4,000; it takes \$256,000 to buttress up that \$16,000. To make a long tale short, it takes \$4,000,000 to picket the front, rear and flanks of \$1,000,000 of productive wealth held in private hands; \$16,000,000 to do the same for the \$4,000,000—and so on in an endless, and, consequently, self-destructive chain. When the capitalist amasses wealth he does so on the identical principle that a general amasses troops and pickets. From this central manoeuvre flow a number of minor ones—that of “giving” among the rest. Every “gift” is an outpost, to give warning of danger, a barrier to keep danger out should it press, a picket to disarm hostility. That’s what a general is taught to do; that’s what the “millionaire” instinctively does. Andrew Carnegie’s recent “gifts,” especially the proffered one to the United States of \$10,000,000 bonds on his newly launched Steel Trust, and unsalable for 10 years, is the most obvious illustration of the quality of the “gift.” Conscience has no more to do with the transaction than with a dog’s burying of his bone.

To place capitalist gifts on the ground of a self-extorted balm to conscience is to convey a false structural notion of modern society. The act is vicious. It is all the more vicious when, as does Dr. Slicer, the vicious notion is conveyed within the sugar-coating of a just denunciation of the capitalist brigands.

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