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EDITORIAL

“HAS THE NON-UNIONIST A RIGHT TO WORK HOW, WHEN AND WHERE HE PLEASES?”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IF ever there was an illustration of Carlyle’s size-up of writers, who, “given a square inch of Castile soap, produce a bucketful of soap-suds,” the illustration is furnished by Mr. Frank K. Foster in this month’s *Federationist*,¹ in the leading article, headed by the above question. The article covers ten long columns—and? And the square inch of the question’s Castile soap is turned into a mass of soap-sud bubbles. In the midst of the whole mass of bubbling phrases, there is not an argument! Hold! There is one, and what a skull-crushing boomerang of an argument! It is this:

“If there is a sound principle in democracy, in government by majority, if a majority of a craft decide that it is for their interest to refuse to work under certain conditions, why does not the presumption hold good that the majority is right there as elsewhere?”

Mr. Foster knocks himself down. His own argument determines the question against him, and in favor of the non-union man working how, when, and where he pleases. Few, very few, are the trades that are organized into any one trades union. The overwhelming majority of organizations comprise but a small fraction, certainly less than even one-half of their respective trades. If the democratic RULE OF THE MAJORITY is to be invoked, it does not, accordingly, lie in the mouth of the unions of the Frank K. Fosters to invoke it. They are an obvious minority, the non-unionists the overwhelming majority. But this is not all. Even if the Frank K. Foster unions comprised a majority of their respective trades, the DEMOCRATIC rule of the majority could not be invoked by THEM. It is essential to democracy that

¹ [*American Federationist*, official journal of the American Federation of Labor.—R.B.]

ALL concerned shall be given an opportunity to express themselves upon a subject on which the majority's opinion is to bind all. Where any portion, even if it be a minority, is barred from such opportunity, it is presumptuous arrogance to demand, and intolerable tyranny to enforce obedience. The Frank K. Foster style of unionism comes under this head. It bars large shoals of the members of a trade from a voice in its concerns: in many instances it bars them deliberately, and with malice prepence, by the Chinese Walls of high dues that it raises so as to keep members out; and in all instances it inferentially bars them out by clinging to an economic principle, that throws ever larger shoals of workingmen out of work and renders the existence of all precarious, the capitalist system, and by backing up the monstrous system with their ballots,—all of which inevitably tends to keep the vast majority of the members of a trade outside of the Frank K. Foster or pure and simple unions.

The invocation of the “democratic rule of the majority” by the Frank K. Foster collection of labor lieutenants of capitalism like the invocation of Scripture by the devil—an act of stupidity, an act of insinuating mendacity, and, fortunately also, a self-destructive act.

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