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EDITORIAL

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WE may freely confess that we are disappointed. The year 1892 opened with wonderful prospects of industrial concentration, and we thought it quite safe to predict a movement of unprecedented vigor in that direction. The event, so far, has not fully justified our expectation. True, the anthracite coal combine was a great achievement, and there is every probability that it will be supplemented by a similar fusion of interests in the still broader field of bituminous coal. Again, a number of trusts have been formed in various industries, and a number of those “agreements between gentlemen” have been perfected, which always are of necessity the first steps in the evolution of any branch of capitalism from the competitive to the consolidated stage. Most of these transactions were of sufficient magnitude to have commanded general attention a few years ago, when the aggregating process was a new feature of capitalistic development. Moreover, the trust system, in one form or another, has more than held its own against the hostile legislation of the past and the outcries of frantic middlemen; it has not only baffled the courts but conquered legislatures and obtained legal recognition on the statute books of the Empire State. There is now hardly a straw in its way that may be deemed by its most sanguine opponents a serious obstacle to its progress.

For all that we are not quite satisfied. Gould and Vanderbilt, with their respective cliques, have to all appearances been resting on their oars and the great transcontinental traffic is not consolidated to a sensibly greater extent than it was a year ago. The Richmond Terminal scheme, which contemplated the amalgamation of Southern interests amounting nominally to the enormous sum of six hundred million dollars, is still hanging fire. With the exception of a deal through which the vast iron industries and coal fields of Democratic Tennessee and Alabama have been placed in the mighty

Republican hands of Tom C. Platt, no great advance has been made in the concentration of iron and steel production. The negotiations for an international copper syndicate have failed, owing to the respect verging on disgust which Frenchmen are entertaining for Yankee smartness since their costly experience in a similar enterprise a few years ago. While a large quantity of stocks and bonds formerly held abroad have been returned to American capitalists in payment for the foodstuffs produced by American labor—and this may in itself be deemed an important step in wealth concentration—foreign holdings of American securities, industries and property are still by no means insignificant. In short, with enormous sums of money lying idle in the banks of the East, and enough reserves in those of the West to meet all requirements of trade in the interior, consolidation is moving slowly and conservatively all along the line, the retail trade in particular betraying no symptoms of an effort of concentrated capital to absorb it. And our readers know that we are watching for such symptoms with the utmost anxiety, because of the social value which we attach to any radical change in the economic conditions of the retail trade.

Such is, then, the situation at the surface; sluggish and unfavorable to the development of ideas. Under the surface, however, much more may be going on than we are able to detect. At any rate the year 1892 has not yet run one half of its course. What the remainder of it has in store for the somnolent we shall see.

P.S.—As we go to press a revival of consolidation, national and international, seems to be under way. The Richmond Terminal negotiations are in better shape and an alliance is reported between the European and American copper barons. Minor schemes of the same character are also coming to light.

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