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FIRST EDITORIAL

TWEEDISM OVER AGAIN.

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“They are coming our way!” They are coming, not singly, but in battalions; not from the lower, but from the upper ranks, too; and not in individual, either, but in representative capacity of whole old party-social detachments—Republicans and Democrats, Standard Oil Monopolists and Bankers;—they are coming in a lump!

Time was when the very mention of “collective ownership,” “municipal ownership” and the like, not to say anything of such revolutionary words as “the people’s inheritance,” was decried in chorus by Republican and Democratic party organizations, and was frowned upon with gunpowder-smelling frowns by the capitalists themselves. “Socialism!” they would yell, and grabbing for their money-bags prepare to defend them against the raw-boned intruder. That period is passed, at least it seems so; and now, to all appearances at least, the whole country is homogeneously waltzing toward Socialism.—At least that is the conclusion, which, if not we, some others might draw from the set speeches delivered on Saturday the 24th of last month, by “away uppers” in the ranks of Capitalism, political as well as economic, on the occasion of the breaking of ground for the rapid-transit tunnel, which, after fifty years is to be (or shall we say, “is said will be”?) the property of the city.

Mayor AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, a bright particular star in Tammany, closed his speech with these words:

The people of Greater New York are to be congratulated that, with all her former heavy expenditures, and, at times, somewhat reckless issuance of bonds, she is now, for the first time, able to undertake such an expensive enterprise, which will furnish the first real test of the experiment of municipal ownership of public utilities on such a scale as will be decisive of that principle.

Following him came the Republican Mr. ORR of the Standard Oil Company. He did not wait till the close of his address to refer to the “new departure. “After only a few introductory words he proceeded to say:

If we were to give expression to the thoughts of many of us here to-day, I think we would congratulate each other upon the outlook; that we have at least reached a period in our civic history when we are beginning to appreciate the possibilities of the future, and we would express to one another the hope that hereafter we will reserve to ourselves the control of what is left of our valuable municipal franchises, which, rightfully understood, are the people’s birthright, and destined, in time, to become sources of inestimable benefit as our population continues to increase.

The third and closing speaker, also a luminary in the capitalist firmament, Comptroller COLER, was too much elated by the Socialism in the rapid transit to waste any time whatever before bringing out the point. He launched his speech with this rhapsody:

We celebrate to-day something more than the mere incident of breaking ground for a great public improvement. We celebrate by this ceremony the inauguration of a new and important policy in city government, the policy of municipal ownership and control of great public franchises and utilities. I earnestly hope the memorial tablet to be here placed commemorates not only the commencement of a great and beneficent public enterprise, but marks as surely the end of reckless extravagance in giving valuable privileges to private corporations.

MARX says in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*:

At every time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crises do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes, to enact a new historic scene in such time honored disguise and with such borrowed language. . . . Thus does the beginner, who had acquired a new language, keep on translating it back into his own mother tongue.

The language held by these gentlemen is new; to understand it, one must translate it back into the “mother tongue,” that is to say, compare it with past historic events that it bears a parallel to. The language will then be understood.

It was the dawn of the year 1871,—twenty-nine years ago. The TWEED RING was in possession. Its plundering of the city treasury was at its height. But, as

dawn follows upon the darkest period of night, so also doom frequently lies just ahead of Crime at its zenith. It was so with the TWEED RING. Though in full sway, the Ring scented danger, and began to cast about for friends and popular friendship. Towards 1871, the popular demand for rapid transit in this city had grown to a positive force. The TWEED RING, for reasons too long to explain here, had resisted the demand persistently, forcibly, effectively. Early in 1871, it changed its course. TWEED and his fellow criminals then suddenly appeared as pronounced advocates of rapid transit; they were enthusiastic for the “comforts of the good citizens of New York;” and “ready servants of the will of the people.” All this sudden fervor matured in April ’71 into what may be called the first Rapid-Transit Act of the New York Legislature. The city was to have rapid transit by the grace of the TWEED RING, that is to say, AFTER TWEED RING STYLE. The catastrophe that this “concession” was in part meant to ward off, came within a year. The TWEED RING went down, and its enlarged rapid-transit plans for robbing the public went down with it.

The “mother tongue” of experience translates into language, understandable to-day, the new language that the representatives of the Robber Class are holding now.

However omnipotent Capitalism may seem to be at present, however high the mound may rise of its victims, yet, like the TWEED RING of old, it perceives the swell of “unrest” against it; just as the TWEED RING, it deems it politic to “yield;” and just as the TWEED RING, its yielding is a fraud. Socialism, pushed forward by the uncompromising hosts of the Socialist Labor Party, is permeating the masses; from many quarters the cry is coming, however inarticulate it may yet often be. The note of the approaching storm has caught the ear of the Robber Ruling Class, and, with the stupidity natural to such classes, it now imagines it can quiet the storm with a sham, which may give the Robber Ruling Class increased opportunities for plunder—just as the TWEED RING did.

Sufficiently suggestive it is to hear such “Socialistic” utterances and “revolutionary” phrases uttered by a combination of Tammany-Republican-Standard-Oil set right under the very shadows of the Brooklyn Bridge,—a “public utility,” a “people’s birthright,” once owned by the people, and only recently made a present of to “private corporations,” by whom? By the very administration of Mayor AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK. The translation of the present new language held by these gentlemen into the language of nigh thirty years ago, held by the TWEED RING, thus becomes additionally lucid when read by the light of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Tweedism is repeating itself. And the people are made ready by the S.L.P. to deal with it. Watch its march.

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