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EDITORIAL

SCORE ONE MORE FOR CLASS INSTINCT.

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ONE Major C.C. Townsend, of the Royal Artillery (odd, is it not, that military men are increasingly turned upon the industrial field?) was sent to America on a tour of inquiry into our “industrial success.” The Major gave his inferences in an article in the *Contemporary*. Reporting a “great steel industry not far from New York,” he said:

“Men in this firm are paid by results; and if these results are above the normal the pay rises abnormally. For instance, the usual number of pourings obtainable from a furnace in each run is eleven. By the closest attention to every detail, by incessant and scientific stoking and work of every kind, it is occasionally possible to obtain twelve pourings. The wages earned by the men at the furnace when eleven pourings are obtained are forty dollars; but if twelve pourings are obtained they are eighty dollars. Double pay for one more pouring! And in other branches of work the increase of wages for abnormal out-turn is very nearly as high.”

Apprehensive lest his point may not yet be clear; apprehensive lest the, at first glance, seemingly ruinously large increased wages for extra production might conceal the point, the Major proceeds to quote the President of the concern in explanation of his methods:

“It not only pays us to know that we are getting a larger out-turn for the same supervision and general expenses, but think of the benefit we get from the increased work of all the men who are striving to earn the high bonuses, AND JUST FAILING. They all earn it occasionally, when everything happens to go in their favor, and that encourages them to strive after it always.”

In other words, an exceptional large wage, a bonus, is paid for an out-turn that is so rare as to be next to impossible. Not being wholly impossible, but occasionally possible in the exceptional cases “when everything happens to go in favor of the men,” they are

kept at a high grade of pressure to reach the lure. Occasionally they reach it. On such exceptional occasions the firm virtually suffers a mulct, having to pay the bonus that is out of all proportion to the regular wage. But what of that? This occasional, exceptional, mulct the sharp President gladly pays. He pays it gladly because, thanks to the lure of the men getting it on the exceptional instances, “when everything happens to go their way,” he pockets without pay the CONTINUOUS, UNEXCEPTIONAL increased out-turn of the men in their vain striving to reach the high mark—AND JUST FAILING.

For fiendishness of conception, for perfidy in execution, this sharp practice on labor transcends all that has yet been exposed. It transcends the fraudulency of “profit sharing” by as much as thimble-rigging transcends plain pick-pocketing. Moreover in point of inhumanity, the scheme is double-dyed. Men, driven to pursue the perfidious mirage of this bonus—truly perfidious in that it does, once in a great while, actually materialize—cannot but be total wrecks, with “nothing to show for it,” after a few years of a chase, so contrived, that JUST FAILING is the rule.

Yet not all the fiendishness of the conception, not all the perfidy in the execution, nor yet the double-dyed inhumanity of the scheme is the most amazing part of the revelation. The most amazing part of the revelation, that part withal that is most instructive to the militant in the Socialist movement, is the brazenness of the President of the steel concern in question in glorying in his method, and the shamelessness of the Major of the Royal Artillery in admiring and recommending it for imitation. This is the practical point.

Approach the strumpet on the street who by loud deportment calls attention to herself: remonstrate with her upon the impropriety of her conduct: she will look you open-mouthed in the face: she will take you for a simpleton: that which you complain of is of the essence of her being: it is her living. So with the Capitalist Class. Fiendishness, perfidy, inhumanity—these are its attributes. As with the strumpet, the capitalist is shameless in his depravity: it is of the essence of his being: it is his living.

Vain is all reasoning against class-conscious instincts. The class instincts that make for social felony can be overcome only by the powerful awakening of the class instincts that make for social virtue.

Up, Socialists, and ring clear the note of the class interests of the Working Class!

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