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EDITORIAL

FATHER GASSONIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

XVI.

IN his February 6 Boston address against Socialism, reported in the Boston *Post*, Father Thomas I. Gasson said:

“The Socialism of which I speak is that economic social theory which wishes to place the ownership, production and distribution of all goods in the hands of one body, the State. The great authors of the system of Socialism of which I speak are Karl Marx, Engels and others.”

At another place in his address Father Gasson stated: “I was intending to read citations from several socialistic authors, but unfortunately my eyesight is bad”; and the report in the *Post* adds in parentheses: “Father Gasson had the works of several socialistic authors on the desk.”

It was a fortunate and far from an unfortunate circumstance for Father Gasson that the bad condition of his eyes prevented him to read from the “socialistic authors” whose works he had before him on the desk. Had the Father’s eyesight been good, and had he started to read from those works, he would then and there have become acquainted with Socialism. Acquaintance with Socialism would have informed Father Gasson that “State Ownership, Production and Distribution of All Goods” and “Socialism” go together as nicely as “Father Gassonism” and “Darwinism,” or as Roman Catholic politics and Socialist politics.

It is not because “State Ownership” is a bad, or an undesirable working system of society that “Socialism” is not “State Ownership.” “Socialism” is not “State Ownership” for the simple and sufficient reason that “State Ownership,” as a working system, is a sociologic impossibility. Had Father Gasson taken the pains to post himself on the terminology that he uses, had he, for instance, acquainted himself with Lewis H. Morgan’s *Ancient Society*, Father Gasson would have known what the term “State” means in ethnology, and he would have been saved the blunder of imputing “State Ownership” to “Socialism.” At any rate, neither Marx

nor Engels held any views of the sort imputed to them in the Father's address—far otherwise, and to the contrary.

For instance, in Engels' *Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science*—a work prized and praised by Marx—this passage occurs under the heading: “The State Dies a Natural Death”:

“By urging more and more the conversion of the large, already socialized means of production into State property, it [capitalism] points the path for the accomplishment of this [the Socialist] revolution. The proletariat seizes the machinery of the State and converts the means of production first into State property. But, by so doing, it extinguishes itself as proletariat; by so doing it extinguishes all class distinctions and class contrasts; and along with them, the State as such. The society that existed until then, and that moved in class contrasts, needed the State, i.e., an organization of whatever class happened at the time to be the exploiting one, for the purpose of preserving the external conditions under which it carried on production; in other words, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited class down in that condition of subjection—slavery, bondage or vassalage, or wage-labor—which the corresponding mode of production predicated. The State was the official representative of the whole society; it was the constitution of the latter into a visible body; but it was so only in so far as it was the State of that class which itself, at its time, represented the whole society; in antiquity, the State of slaveholding citizens; in the middle ages, the State of the feudal nobility; in our own days, the State of the capitalist class. By at last becoming actually the representative of the whole social body, the State renders itself superfluous. So soon as there is no longer any social class to be kept down; so soon as, together with class rule and the individual struggle for life, founded in the previous anarchy of production, the conflicts and excesses that issued therefrom have been removed, there is nothing more to be repressed, and the State or Government, as a special power of repression is no longer necessary.”

Shallow thinkers of imperfect information fall into the error of concluding that Socialism is Anarchy. Vastly shallower must that thinker be, and vastly more imperfect his information, who would take Socialism to be State Ownership. Father Gasson stated that the authors of the Socialist system which he meant were “Karl Marx, Engels and others.” Guess it must be “others,” and those others not Socialists.

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

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