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EDITORIAL

## PRESIDENT BAER ANTICIPATED BY ARISTOPHANES.

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“Herbert Spencer in his last book says: “Those who, joining a trade union, surrender their freedom to make engagements on their own terms, and allow themselves to be told by their leaders when to work and when not to work, have no adequate sense of that fundamental right which every man possesses to make the best of himself and to dispose of his abilities in any way he pleases.”—President Baer before the Arbitration Commission, Philadelphia, Feb. 12, 1903.

**M**ORE than two thousand years ago, Grecian wit gave birth to a genius, Aristophanes. He pulled away from the beaten path of teaching humanity through tragedies, and struck out on a new path. The foibles of man, the blunders of false reasoning, the peacock-brains absurdities of vainglory, these he exposed in a series of satires that have remained an inexhaustible source of instruction and mirth to the race. The mirror that he held up to the fools and pedants Aristophanes shaped into comedies. Foremost among these is *The Acharnians*. The hero of the play is an Athenian rustic, Diceapolis. The war between Athens and Sparta had caused him much inconvenience, and not a little loss, until finally he was compelled to leave his home and farm, and take shelter in the city. He panted to return to his cabbages, and onions, and turnips. He panted for peace. But the commonwealth was bent on war. At last he loses all patience. Diceapolis thereupon—in the words of Herbert Spencer, uttered over two thousand years later, and approvingly echoed by President Baer—seizes that “fundamental right which every man possesses to make the best of himself” and decides to “dispose of his abilities in any way he pleased.” How the thing is done and what it comes to transpires from the following passages in the play:

DICEAOPOLIS.—“Where is Amphitheus got to?”

AMPHITHEUS.—“Here am I.”

DICEAOPOLIS.—“There—Take you these eight drachmas on my part,

“And make a separate peace for me with Sparta,

“For me, my wife, and children, and maid servant.”

For more than two thousand years Dicaeopolis has come rolling down the Avenues of Time, a bundle of contradictions, an incarnation of absurdity. He holds property,—a “creature of society”; and yet would he deny society. He profits by the privileges that flow alone from society,—“organization”; and yet would he escape the duties of organization. He entrenches himself behind the constraining safeguards of civilization, a “commonweal”; and yet insists in the bird-freedom of individualism. He insists in breathing at once both the protecting air of social man and the free air of the savage: while retaining citizenship in Athens, yet would he be a city unto himself, free to conclude peace for “himself, his wife, and children, and maid servant.”

Only the savage surrenders no part of his freedom,—and thereby he becomes the abjectest of slaves, impotent before Nature and organized man.

Only the savage fatuously leans on the hollow reed of the “fundamental right of the individual” to dispose of his ability “in any way he pleases,”—and thereby he and his species become ready prey to the elements, and to organized man. The Gate to Freedom is the restraining one of organization, through which the individual frees himself of the shackles of individualism, and develops the superior capabilities of the species. The Trades Union, with its restriction of the individual’s freedom “to dispose of his abilities in any way he pleases,” is an organism that makes for civilization; the Trades Unionist, who strips himself of his individualist freedom “to dispose of his ability in any way he pleases,” attests his development beyond the savage, beyond also the Decaeopolis stage.

For more than two thousand years the human race—that portion that has civilization in its keeping—has been roaring at the figure of Dicaeopolis. And well it might. That indeed he was a type, worth embalming for all time, the “philosophers” and the “captains of industry” of Capitalism—the Spencers and the Baers—bear testimony in this generation.

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