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EDITORIAL

DE QUINCEY CORROBORATED.

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THE *Electrical World* of last December 29th quotes approvingly passages from an address delivered in the course of the previous week before the Unity Club of Montclair, N.J., by A.H. Grant on the “failure of socialistic methods in city government.”

Mr. Grant argues that, “IN SPITE OF THE DENIAL OF THOROUGH-GOING SOCIALISTS, the ownership and operation by cities of traction, telephone, gas, electric light and water works IS SOCIALISTIC, IN THAT IT SUBSTITUTES COLLECTIVISM for private enterprise.” Proceeding from these premises, the gentleman then demonstrates the numberless and unquestioned, as they are unquestionable, evils of such ownership and operation, whereupon he reaches the conclusion, obviously implied, that Socialism must be rejected. De Quincey, writing in the early part of last century, neatly overthrew the pretensions of the economists to the privilege of a priesthood, whose occult science was inaccessible to the masses, by observing that nine-tenths of their reasoning needed no economic knowledge to handle, but could be triturated by anyone possessed of elemental knowledge in logic. Had Mr. Grant lived in time to be embraced by De Quincey’s genius, the gentleman would have been included in the category of the economists whom a little sound thinking knocks out.

Mr. Grant’s reasoning in condensed form amounts to this: “Socialists deny that municipal ownership is collectivism or Socialism; they are wrong; municipal ownership is collectivism; municipal ownership is bad for these, and these, and these reasons; therefore Socialism is rejectable.” Upon that system of logic the following reasoning would be unshakable: “Prohibitionists deny that drunkenness is prohibitionism; they are wrong; drunkenness is prohibitionism; drunkenness is bad for these, and these, and these reasons; therefore Prohibitionism produces all these bad results and is rejectable.” Or the following reasoning: “Mr. Grant denies that he

is an idiot; he is wrong; he is an idiot; idiocy is bad for these, and these, and these reasons; therefore Mr. Grant should be put into a lunatic asylum.” The defective reasoning in these two illustrations is obvious. The same defective reasoning taints Mr. Grant’s reasoning. The defect, one common to what Marx has well called the vulgarity of bourgeois reasoning lies in taking for granted the very thing at issue, and expending energy upon proving what is not denied. Socialism does not deny, on the contrary it has led the way in proving, the evil results of “municipal ownership.” What Socialism does deny is that “municipal ownership” is collectivism. Instead of piling unnecessary proof upon proof of the mischief of “municipal ownership,” Mr. Grant, his object being to discredit Socialism or collectivism, should have proved, not merely asserted, as he does, that “municipal ownership” is collectivism.

Municipal ownership is not collectivism. So far from its being collectivism it implies a denial of fundamental principles of collectivism. Municipal ownership is a phase of capitalism. The external form seems Socialistic; the internal essence is thorough paced capitalism. Municipalism and capitalist private ownership have this vital point in common—they both rest upon class rule, the rule of a property-holding class over a property-less class that is bought in the labor-market like any other chattel. Collectivism rejects the class system of society; collectivism overthrows the system by destroying its foundation. Where the class system exists the ruling class is intent on profits only, which means plunder of the working class, and cheating all around; where collectivism is in force production for use and not for sale is the norm; “profits” vanish; cheating is no more.

Where economic opportunities are unequal, class rule reigns; where class rule reigns, the ruling class owns government; where the ruling class runs government, it (the ruling class), and not the collectivity, owns whatever the government owns. Municipal ownership means, under capitalism, ownership, concentrated ownership, by the capitalist class. He who piles up proof of the worthlessness of “municipal ownership” simply helps the Socialist to prove the utter worthlessness of capitalism, the fact that it is a system sooner ended than mended.

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