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EDITORIAL

The Class War at San Diego.

For nearly half a year a bitter class war has raged at the city of San Diego in southern California. Its local and immediate merits have been difficult to determine, principally because, as with all such disturbances, there are merits and culpabilities on both sides, and partisanship discolours every fact. With the aid, however, of the impartial report made to Governor Johnson by his special commissioner, Colonel Weinstock,* together with the light to be had from more general information regarding industrial conditions and tendencies, the San Diego disturbance may be seen to be an accidental and temporary localization, somewhat beyond the ordinary as yet in severity, of a war between classes that promises to become rapidly more general in this country as well as elsewhere. The situation is one which unjust industrial conditions naturally produce, and which is as naturally inflamed by provocative conduct in embittered classes with reference to each other.



The San Diego battle in this war of classes, is explained as springing out of an attempt by the local propertied class, through the local authorities, to suppress local freedom of speech. In that explanation there are elements of both truth and error. The city authorities did exclude a geographical area from street speaking. But this they

*See The Public of May 31, 1912, at page 512.

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had a right to do. This it was their duty to do, if street speaking within that area interfered with its uses as a thoroughfare. Probably, though, protection of the thoroughfare was not their reason. The evidence indicates that the exclusion, although it applied to all speaking, was made only for the purpose of preventing speeches by speakers of a certain industrial class; and part of that evidence is the ultimate prevention, in the most lawless fashion, of speaking by this class anywhere in the city. In extenuation it is argued that these speeches were offensive to public decency and designed to provoke rioting, which may very likely be true; but there are laws to punish that kind of public disorder (as there ought to be; hearers as well as speakers have rights), and arbitrary prohibition of speaking is not one of those laws. This point need be followed no further, however, for the withdrawal of a small thoroughfare-area from street speaking—curable in this instance by referendum, by the way, if it was despotic—was not necessarily a prohibition of free speech; and while violations of the restrictive ordinance sufficient to test its validity by due process of law would have been entirely justifiable, there could hardly be any excuse for the persistent defiance of it that is reported from San Diego.



That this defiance was in the nature of war is a fair inference from all the circumstances, and that inference is confirmed by general information regarding "direct action" in behalf of the labor side in the class-struggle. Party socialists treat the class struggle as a war with ballots and through peaceable parliamentary processes; be they wise or not in their purposes, then, they are in their method clearly within their rights as American citizens, and whoever uses force against them, whether with physical weapons or judicial decrees, is himself the kind of "anarchist" he charges them with being. But all who regard the class struggle as a war to be fought with violence, and act accordingly, are not within their rights as American citizens nor as members of American society. Their right, simply as men and women, to declare actual physical war against society, or any class of society, in the United States or elsewhere, may be recognized as a primitive right; but in that case the antithetical primitive right must also be recognized. No one can be patiently heard in one breath to declare physical warfare against the law, and in the next to appeal to the law for protection in their warfare of violence against it. When men declare war they renounce civil rights; "the law speaks too

softly to be heard in the noise of war." There can be no lawless warfare in which only one side does the lawless fighting. If, then, public speech is used to advocate a system of lawless violence, why should the guarantees of free speech be invoked for such speakers? Certainly not for their own sake. Law and order, of which free speech is an essential element, is to be maintained under all circumstances, but not for the sake of its wilful disturbers on either side. It is to be maintained for the sake of social progress and the benefit of the community as a whole.



San Diego affords a significant warning. The outbreak there on the labor side has been of the "direct action" spirit in that element of the working class everywhere, which, feeling acutely the injustice of industrial conditions, is at fever heat for violent revolt. Widely advertised opportunities for work have brought to the Pacific Coast three workers for every possible job. This relative inadequacy of jobs has begun to make prospective fortunes for another class, and the fighting blood of that class rises to fever heat as recklessly at interferences with anticipated plunder as does the blood of the working class under economic pressure. In those circumstances the situation at San Diego is symptomatic of a general industrial condition. Rightly or wrongly, the property class interfered with street speaking. Rightly or wrongly there was resistance. Some of the property class thereupon became the wild beasts for which that class has in all ages been notable whenever privileges of labor-exploitation have been menaced. Consequently outrages have been perpetrated in San Diego in utter defiance of law, many of them in shameless disregard of human decency, yet in the name—save the mark!—of "law and order"; and not only perpetrated, but perpetrated by "good" citizens, applauded by "good" newspapers and commended by "good" business organizations. Lawlessness from such sources does more to bring on social chaos than lawlessness from any other.



Unless some of the respectable men are punished for their share in those outrages—worse by far than any with which they charge the labor violence agitators with even intending,—where is the fairness or the wisdom of passing laws or enforcing laws against labor violence? Does not such conduct, if it goes unpunished, tend to prove that labor violence agitators are more or less right in their accusations? This is not, however, the only

lesson of the San Diego affair. It is indeed an admonition to the truly law-abiding citizens of this country to see to it that plutocratic criminals feel "the halter draw" under laws that profess no respect for classes; but it is also an admonition to the "direct action" elements of the labor movement—be they "socialists" or "anarchists," or "syndicalists," or just "labor sluggers,"—that their war policy is calculated to let loose plutocratic dogs of war who, let them once taste blood, will have a raging thirst for it. Greatest of all dangers, though—a danger to the best interests of everyone—is, that out of a general struggle between these two classes, such as the San Diego affair exemplifies on a small scale, hopeless reaction may spring and an interminable period of upper class despotism and industrial exploitation come on.



Wanting the Earth and Getting It.

A feature of California news noted recently by the Sacramento Bee is "the marked and universal activity of the electric power companies." Similar activity may be noted almost anywhere else where there is water power not yet monopolized or power companies not yet consolidated. What the Bee says on the subject with reference to California should be pondered wherever there is an American citizen with enough patriotism in his soul to inspire him to do anything more patriotic than kiss a flag or let off a fire cracker. "This activity of the companies," says the Bee, "together with the location of open power sites and water rights—presumably by agents of these companies—must bring to the realization of the people two important facts: That this great force for industrial development is fast being controlled by large syndicates which will dominate everything as soon as competition can be eliminated on the lines of a secret or open merger, and that electric power has become a necessity in many of the productive occupations. . . . The electricity which is bringing wealth to power corporations comes from the utilization of resources which the people have allowed to be snatched from their ownership and control. It places in the hands of those companies a scepter which may be swayed at any time against public and industrial interests." And when you think of it, there is more than water-power sites and electrical distribution involved. Mineral deposits, railroad rights of way, terminal facilities, building sites, farm sites—all monopolized—and yet we wonder innocently at the growing pressure of industrial problems.

"For He Was a Judge, and a Good Judge, Too!"

Hanford of Seattle* is not the only occupant of the bench in Seattle who fits into that comic opera jingle. Judge Frater is reported to be another. According to the Seattle "P-I" of May 23rd, he instructed 23 men the day before, men "just admitted to citizenship in the American Republic, that when they took the oath of allegiance, and swore to support and defend the law and Constitution of the United States they were not carrying out their oaths if they went out of the court room and began a campaign to change the laws and Constitution of the country." How is that for judge-made law? This astute judge, like Judge Hanford, doesn't appear to regard the amendatory clauses of the Constitution as part of the Constitution. That there may be no lingering doubt of his comical idiocy in that respect, he goes on, according to the "P-I," to explain to those 23 neophytes, thus: "You take a strong oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States; now, if you are going out to try to change it at once, you are not supporting it." Judge Frater or Judge Hanford or some other judicial Constitution-tinker ought to instruct applicants for naturalization—and the rest of mankind—at what point of time in a career of American citizenship the American citizen may Constitutionally avail himself of the Constitutional permission to try to amend the Constitution. Its venerated framers neglected to specify a time limit.



A Municipal Newspaper.

The Los Angeles "Municipal News" is demonstrating the feasibility of "a newspaper owned by the people." This paper is owned by the City of Los Angeles, it is published by the City of Los Angeles, it is edited officially by public servants of the City of Los Angeles, it sells for one cent a copy, and it is not a mere city record but is a genuine city newspaper. Taking for its motto "City business is your business," it keeps the public informed, in interesting journalistic style, of what they need to know and want to know. There is no suppression or discoloration, nor yet any editorial one-sidedness. So far as news is concerned, the facts are presented intelligently and fairly; so far as opinions are concerned, every side of a question is given its hearing, and every local political party has accorded it editorial space for its own authorized editorial writer. The policy of this paper was well illustrated in the issue

*See The Public of May 17, page 460.