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EDITORIAL

## A FENCE-RIDER'S DILEMMA.

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**A** RESIDENT of New York, having forwarded to Congressman Bourke Cockran a clipping from *The People* on the doings of Congress, received from Mr. Cockran an answer in which this passage occurs:

“I should explain that I do not use the word democrat in its conventional but in its broadest sense. I employ the term not to describe a member of a political party, but rather a man who holds it a cardinal principle of government that the State, instead of being allowed to control all production, should be excluded from any interference whatever with individual industry, its functions being confined to protecting each man in the enjoyment of everything that he may produce by a system of laws that leaves him absolutely free to dispose as he pleases of his own labor and of all its fruits.”

We shall not put Mr. Cockran to the strenuous task of hunting up his authority for declaring it to be “a cardinal principle of government” that the State shall be excluded from any interference whatever with individual industry. We prefer to hold Mr. Cockran’s nose to the grindstone of himself. From his seat in Congress, on February 3rd of this very year, the gentleman advanced the following theory (*Congressional Record*, page 2105):

“Our political system has undergone a silent but radical revolution during the last few years, that the greatest powers in the community were no longer exercised in legislative bodies, in the council chambers of cabinets, or in the offices of a chief executive, but in the rooms where a few men direct the administration of great corporations or plan new corporate enterprises. True, there has been no change in the outward structure of our institutions, but the most profound revolutions have been those that affect not the form but the substance of government. All the forms of republican government survived in Rome long after the Republic itself had been replaced by absolute despotism. The atrocities of Caligula and Nero and Domitian, perpetrated under the authority of a republic, show that forms

the most venerable may be preserved to perpetration of oppressions the most atrocious. And so, sir{,} the outward structure of our Government remains wholly unchanged. Not merely does our Constitution survive in form, but all our constitutional formulas are still acknowledged universally and invoked exclusively.

“Constitutionally each man has the right to go where he pleases, to work when he pleases, for whom he pleases, and for what he pleases, but between him and the exercise of these privileges lie formidable powers which the Constitution never contemplated and which government does not control. Practically no man can take one step from his own door to engage in the ordinary competitions of life except on conditions and terms fixed by some corporation operating a transit system, controlled by a few persons—generally by one—with whose selection government has nothing to do, whose orders and regulations, though binding on a whole community, government hardly pretends to regulate. What avails it a citizen that legally, constitutionally, theoretically he can sell his labor for what he pleases when the value of the wages he may earn is fixed absolutely by a few men in whose selection he has no voice, whose course he can not control or even influence? The cost of implements necessary to his calling, of the clothes that cover him, the food he eats, the fuel he burns, the materials used in constructing the house that shelters him, are all determined absolutely and even arbitrarily by some half a dozen men, who are also believed to control the chief highways of commerce throughout the country, and, therefore, the immense capital necessary to their operation. With the vast banking deposits which the control of production and transportation places at their disposal these same men dominate the financial institutions of every great city. And thus they govern not merely the volume of production and the means of transportation by which commodities are exchanged, but also, through control of the banks, they regulate credit, which is the very lifeblood of commerce.

“Compared with these enormous powers exercised in secret by men clothed with no official authority, subject to no public supervision, acknowledging no responsibility, how trivial are the powers exercised by the nominal or constitutional government, whether State or Federal, or both combined.”

The “cardinal principle of government” indicated in the letter is at fisticuffs with the “cardinal principle of government” indicated in the speech. The former “cardinal principle” bids government: “Hands off!” The latter “cardinal principle” bids government: “Hands on!” The former “cardinal principle” is cast in the mold of Immutability. The latter is cast in the mold that recognizes motion, evolution, the rise of new conditions, that create new duties.

We shall leave the Rev., or Hon., or whatever he be, Cockran to extricate

himself from the meshes of his own contradictions. All that the figure he cuts is good for is to serve as a foil to SOCIALIST REASON.

The principle of “government” is the reverse of the principle of “patents.” A RESULT can not be patented; what is patentable is a MEANS. Just the reverse with “government.” Its principle is the attainment of certain RESULTS: the MEANS are left to the changing material conditions. The RESULT that government aims at is the life, liberty and happiness of the people. That is the starting point. That, and that only, is cardinal about government. All else—statutes, constitutions, decisions, etc., etc.—is MEANS; and all such MEANS are incidental, variable, subject to modification, alteration, and even overthrow—according as the changing material conditions may prove the previous MEANS to have become destructive of the cardinal RESULT. Accordingly, when material conditions were such that only an oligarchy of the population considered itself the people, whose life, liberty and happiness it was the aim of Government to provide for, mankind had theocratic monarchies, with the MEANS to suit, of which the Czar’s regime is to-day a vestige. When, later on, material conditions so changed that a larger area of the population considered itself the people, the MEANS that suited the theocratic monarchy went by the board, and non-theocratic, more or less constitutional monarchies stepped in with the necessary modified MEANS. When still later on, in this country, for instance, material conditions had changed so much more that a still broader area of the population considered itself the people, the further result was that still newer MEANS became imperative to obtain the cardinal result; monarchy was swept away; the bourgeois republican MEANS were set up. Finally, to-day, when the evolution of material conditions has radically changed the previous material conditions—how radically Mr. Cockran’s speech unguardedly indicates!—has changed them so radically that now the whole population aspires to the dignity of “the people,” then the old MEANS have in turn become obsolete and harmful. While oratorical and pietistic false reasoning may now, as it did on previous occasions, temporarily bolster up the old and inadequate MEANS, the old and inadequate MEANS are now, in turn, bound to be swept aside by the MEANS which modern conditions demand. The MEANS of capitalist political Government must and will make room for the MEANS of the Socialist, or Industrial Republic.

It appears from a comparison of Mr. Cockran's letters with his speeches that the gentleman has two sets of "cardinal principles": one for oratorical display, another for epistolary "fence-fixing."

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