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EDITORIAL

ARMIES AND ARMIES.

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LIEUTENANT General Miles, commanding the Army{,} has issued a general order that is being very generally reproduced and praised. The document is as full of holes as a sieve. Moreover its palaver is obviously intended to conceal mischief. In both respects it merits a little attention.

The order enumerates a certain number of “basic principles.” The following are the first:

“Of these principles patriotism is of the first and paramount importance. An absolute and unqualified devotion to the welfare of their country of all in the military service is an indispensable prerequisite that constitutes the soul of an efficient army.”

And then follows this other principle:

“The second principle, discipline, distinguishes thoroughly trained and instructed troops from an irresponsible, unwieldy and disorderly aggregation of men. Respect for and **IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE TO SUPERIOR AUTHORITY ARE ITS ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS.**”

These two principles do not go together in a compulsory body, like the Army over which Lieutenant-General Miles presides. The first principle implies thought, the second commands suppression of thought; the first implies intelligence, the second commands blindness. The two fly in each other’s face.

Is, then, discipline, together and with all the good that is thereby implied, a word of air? Indeed not!

Take, for instance, the Socialist Labor Party. It is an army; at least an army in embryo. And it is drilling that army of emancipation needed to storm and capture the robber-castle of capitalism. Such a body can not be an “unwieldy, irresponsible and disorderly aggregation of men,” each pulling his own way, a law unto himself. To render it a wieldy, responsible and orderly body of men, in short to render it an

army, discipline must prevail in its ranks. And discipline it enforces. Must therefore, the first principle mentioned by Lieutenant-General Miles be an impossibility in the Socialist Labor Party's ranks? Would discipline in its ranks command a suppression of thought, command blindness? No; just the reverse. And therein lies the radical difference between the two, rendering the one an engine of oppression, the other an instrument of liberation.

Lieutenant-General Miles' Army is not a voluntary organization. It is the joint product of physical compulsion and that worst of all compulsion: the compulsion brought on by the whip of want. Even where the term "volunteer" conceals the power to draft, the desperation of finding work and earning pennies for wife and children, that drives men to enlist, deprives the capitalist-ruled Army of all semblance of voluntariness. Discipline in such a body excludes thought; imposes blindness. Discipline, in such a body, has its roots in cattle-hood.

Otherwise in the Army of the S.L.P. None need join who want not. Neither could the Party if it would, nor would it if it could{,} force men into its ranks. It could not because it lacks the power; it would not because it knows that discipline is necessary, and that no discipline is possible in a revolutionary constructive force except such discipline has back of it and for its groundwork that intelligence and thought that brings about oneness of purpose. While the Miles' Army is recruited by force, the S.L.P. Army is recruited by agitation and education.

A contrast of the two bodies contrasts well the social systems each stands for: While the one has dumb driven cattle for its prop, and has to resort to the hypocrisy of Miles' "first principle" to conceal the fact, the other is conspicuously the product of intelligence, drawing exclusively thence the disciplinary order requisite for its mission.

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