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EDITORIAL

THE COURT TO THE RESCUE.

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EVEN the most casual observer must be struck by the joy that the leading railroad organs manifest at the four “anti-Trust decisions” handed down by the Supreme Court of the United States last week. On their face these decisions are a blow at the chicane practices of corporations, railroad companies among them. The directors’ practice of dodging the law by the now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t juggle of one minute declaring that their acts are not their own but the corporation’s, and the next minute refusing to answer questions on the ground that they would incriminate themselves, is put an end to. The decisions decree that books, papers, contracts, etc., are all to be produced upon demand. This, it would seem, is a hard blow. Why not groans instead of the applause that has greeted the decisions by the railroad press in particular? Is it that a new soul has entered that press? Not at all. The secret is not far to look for.

Six months ago such decisions would not have been forthcoming. They are forthcoming now. Why? Because of the push and dash manifested in Congress by the upholders of the railroad rate bill. That bill, more than once analyzed in these columns, would be ineffective if passed; nevertheless, for one thing, it would be deeply annoying to the railroads, for another, the debates upon it are laying bare matters that the whole capitalist class instinctively has great fear of being publicly known. It is at such a juncture that the Court comes in with its decisions. Nor are the railroad papers over-cautious in letting out of the bag the real purpose of the decisions. These papers now ring the changes of the “utter superfluosness of further legislation on the subject.” They are writing editorials upon editorials to prove that the “Common Law already amply safeguards the rights of the people,” and that “the Courts have full power to enforce” such rights; they are harping upon the point that what is wanted is, not more laws, but the enforcement of the laws now in existence. In other words, the purpose of the decisions is to block further discussion on the rate bill. Hence the decisions are but a manoeuvre of the Courts to come to the aid of the railroads.

Laws have been passed in many a State under one title and aiming at exactly the opposite. In this State, for instance, an “Anti Trust Law” was passed the only and express purpose of which was to give Trusts an opportunity to set up business in the State. The four recent Court decisions are of that nature. Their purpose is to call off the rate bill war dogs, that are pressing uncomfortably hard upon the heels of the railroad corporations.

It may be argued that, while the four decisions may be meant to accomplish the purposes just mentioned, yet they establish a principle, which, in other respects, can do the Corporations no good. Based upon these any Federal administration may institute proceedings that would unearth malodorous corporation secrets. The corporations are, accordingly placed wholly at the mercy of the Federal administration. That is true. This line of argument does not, however, overthrow the previous one; what it does is to point out another set of people to whose rescue the Court decisions come—the “fat friars” of Corporations.

It can not have escaped notice that many a corporation is hoggishly ungrateful. Many a corporation acts towards the government in the way of stingy masters who are niggardly towards their lackeys. Such conduct operates harmfully upon the more generous (long-headed) corporations. A decision that acquires the force of law and whereby all corporations are made to feel that if they are not wise, voluntarily, they will be made wise, involuntarily, promotes the safety of corporationdom at large, and it promotes the comforts of the head butlers, the President and staff, of the capitalist class. With such a decision hanging over their heads, any corporation will deem it advisable to allow the “fat to be fried” out of it, or to quietly yield a goodly quantity of its fat, lest the Federal Government set the machinery of the Courts in operation against it. The work of the Cortelyous will be greatly simplified, while the Alexanders will cease to run any risks.

No wonder the railroad papers are jubilant. The Supreme Court of the United States has made a gallant dash to the rescue of corporationdom.

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