

QUESTION TIME

The habit, encouraged and cultivated by Socialists, of requesting persons in the audience to question their speakers on any phase of the subject before them, is in a general way a good one. To some the whole Socialist conception is a new one, others may have a partial or distorted idea of the subject, and a question well put and answered is generally of service and interest to more than the questioner. But like all good rules, the question habit is liable to abuse, and may so be made to serve narrow and factional ends that have little or no interest for the audience.

The latter happened last Sunday night after Com. Kingsley's address in the Grand Theatre. At question time two persons, who both claimed to have been lecturing on the street during the evening, were lying in wait to heckle the speaker on a subject that has been the burden of their talk for some time past, and has been clearly and emphatically answered from the Socialist platform more than once. One of these, a callow youth from the east end of London, asked the speaker "if labor could be emancipated without an economic organization of the workers?" following up with some inapt and irrelevant remarks. The other, a persistent butter-in on many previous occasions, came forward eagerly, covering the same ground as the first but with more words, illustrating the subject with specific instances of the potency of industrial unionism made manifest in the flesh of society.

No allusion had been made by the speaker to this specific subject nor to the organization represented by the questioners; only by inference vague could the questions be made to apply to the subject.

But they got answered—and in the masculine gender—by Com. Kingsley. This was some compensation to the meeting. That the working class is rigidly and automatically organized by the character and necessities of industry itself, and that no arbitrary and theoretical disposition of themselves on paper or parchment can swerve it one hair's-breadth so long as capitalist control lasts; these were made plain to those seeking a regional solution of the subject and open-minded enough to accept it.

The attitude of both sides on this point have been well defined long ago, and no good can accrue from forcing it repeatedly on the attention of audiences assembled for other purposes. We would suggest that the advocates of the new unionism, instead of obtruding themselves as speakers and organizers on platforms they do not hire, should rent a hall and convene an audience of their own and there discuss the folly of "putting your Socialist ballot in a capitalist ballot box" and other subjects, vital to them, but of secondary consequence, at most, to the meetings convened by the Socialist Party in this city.