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The Unemployed in Australia

Freedom Press

October, 1890

(From our Victorian Correspondent)

The unemployed, to the number of about 5,000, have been holding their periodical agitation in Melbourne. Anarchists, of course, have taken the opportunity to address them; but the movement is in the hands of Suite Socialist agitators, who do not conceal the fact that they are trying to get into Parliament. Nothing much has been gained by appealing to the Government. The Salvation Army established a labor bureau and gave food to those who stood in need of it, and the Government officially recognized them as the medium of communication for the unemployed, the officers of the State being instructed to make inquiries as to openings for labor in their districts and furnish the Army with detailed information. The men protested against being forced to reply through a religious organization, and those who were constrained to accept charity objected to be called upon to rise and say grace before eating. The agitation was resumed with increased vehemence, and threats of violence became so numerous that the Government took fright, and ordered as many police as possible from the country districts to be sent to Melbourne. The question of the unemployed was debated several times in both Houses of Parliament, the

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members of the Upper House making a collection of about 440 pounds during the discussion there, and forwarding the amount to the Salvation Army. The members of the Assembly, several of whom are avowed State Socialists, rejected the proposal to make a collection, as savoring of pauperism (whilst *thousands* of persons were openly depending on charity), but chattered a lot about Socialism, which was generally taken to be the subject under discussion, the Minister of Customs being almost alone in denouncing the speakers at the unemployed meetings as a pack of atheistical, blasphemistical, nihilistical men who went to the wharf every Sunday to declaim against all religion, morality, virtue, government, law and order, and as a sediment of society. Subsequently the Government adopted the remarkable policy of issuing gratuitous licenses to contractors, enabling them to appropriate and remove the timber on a certain belt of country about to be submerged by irrigation works, professedly in order to induce capitalists desirous of obtaining cheap timber to offer employment to a number of men in deforesting the area. The agitators claim, and indeed it is generally admitted, that but for the proposals of violence the little temporary relief that has been given would have been far less, and that fear has been the means of exhorting concessions.