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Work and Organisation

Freedom Press, Anonymous

November, 1888

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

(A Paper read by Dr. Merlino at the October Freedom Discussion Meeting.)

WE now enter upon the crucial point of all socialistic systems—the Organization of Labor—the great problem with which we shall be confronted at the breakdown of the capitalistic system. We will first take a general view of what the future organization of labor may be.

If we allow a central government, or any authority whatever, to exist and regulate our affairs, we have no natural but an artificial system of production and distribution enforced, a system which will be held by the men who profit by it, as consented to by all members of society, irrevocable at least for a time, and vesting rights in themselves. These rights they will be by and by prone to defend even by force, under color of assuring the "stability of society" (another name for law and order) against changes demanded by the very class who will be made to support the whole weight of the system, of which the requirements of the central government or administration will form not the lesser part.

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But how can we bind our future, when we have no definite idea of what our situation, our wants, our feelings will be? We should sell our birth-right blindly. One thing only is certain ; and that is, that this government or administration would be an enormous and therefore also a very powerful one. Progress can never thrive under such a nightmare; it can but plow its way once more through revolution. We must therefore strive for the right to pacific and untrammelled progress-for the right to find the best social system. This is a most precious right-a right which was said to have been acquired long since as political freedom, but which has been really enfeebled and suppressed under the ever growing tyranny of the parliamentary system. In the development of society, the free-handed policy is a sheer necessity. No young man beginning his career would pledge his future life to the will and direction of any individual or body of men, however wise they were reputed, and yet it is proposed that society, as it emerges from the next revolution, should elect a body of politicians and let them act as her representatives, then fold her arms in blind confidence. Surely we must dismiss any such idea as hopeless and reactionary.

Of course the usual objection will here be made. It will be urged how, failing the wisdom of a central government, the workers can organize labor for themselves? who will be their guides in the immense and complex task they will have to accomplish? These will be the guides-*reason and a common interest*. People will begin to exercise their reason and to trust in it far more than they have hitherto done. They will learn the arts of life, of labor, as well as hygiene. A man must know how to preserve and further his health, and he must be the sole director of his own labor. Those two principles are in close correlation. Is it credible that alimentation, the most important function of animal life, should be secured in excess for the idle few and the workers be denied? Here is a man idle in luxury, useless to himself and to society, and yet this man eats perhaps six times a day, and his food is the most luxurious and

the most delicate. Here is a workman slowly starving on insufficient diet. But by a cruel paradox the workman must give in work what he has not got in nutrition. No wonder then that there is always a deficit in his animal budget. We see children half famished, growing up weak men; then, the weaker they are, the harder is the work. These are the irrationalities of the present system, causing an enormous waste of forces in the shape of premature death, inefficient labor, diseases and crime. Now if we were the rational animals we boast to be, we should not permit this to go on to our hurt. We should understand the necessity of adjusting food to work-of feeding everybody according to his needs-that is, according to the labor he contribute; to society, because the more a man works the more he requires food, and even the different quality of the work differentiates the qualities of nourishment required. This point is so important that we must dwell on it a little longer. Do we realize the harm done to workmen by insufficient nourishment? We know both from experience and from theory that insufficiency or badness of food have just the same effects as absolute inanition ; the process although slower is the same, and the result is the same when the organism has been reduced to the same conditions. The only difference consists in the intensity and duration of the phenomena preceding death; for death occurs when the body has lost four-tenths of its original weight.

On the other side we know equally well the evils of food in immoderate quantities. Over-feeding is a kind of drunkenness, which inspires with egoism and causes them to lose the sentiment of riot find justice, and even of humanity, only to satisfy their greedy appetite for material enjoyments, in which they grow insatiable. We also know the effect of work on the quantity and even the quality of the food required. Diminution of food may be sustained without great evil in a state of relative rest, as in prison, and is compensated then by the diminution in the expenses of the organism. But the quantity of food becomes a highly important question for men who lead a very active life

and are called to execute hard work. Thus in the Crimean war the English soldiers who in time of peace received 16 ounces of bread or 12 of biscuit and 6 of meat, were served with double rations beside rice, sugar, coffee and spirits. The very few cases of illness in the American army during the War of Secession and the unusually large number of recoveries from wounds were attributed to the excellent food supplied. The influence of diet on the capacity for work is illustrated by a comparison of the quantity of work done by French and English workmen in 1841, a railway from Paris to Rouen. The French workman executed but two-thirds of the work of Englishmen. It was surmised that this difference was caused from the more substantial food of the Englishmen, and the justice of this theory was proved. When the French workman were treated to an equal *régime* they carried out an equal quantity of work (Longet, 'Traité de Physiologie,' Paris 1861, tom. 1, p. 897).

Now we may apply the same reasoning to another important problem of social organization, that of house room. Here also science supplies us with necessary data. We are told by physiologists that the volume of oxygen absorbed by the lungs is five percent, or the twentieth part of the volume of the air drawn in by respiration (Milne Edwards; 'Physiologie,' tom. 2, p. 510). Assuming that the average respirations per minute are 18, and that with each breath 20 cubic inches of air are changed, 15 cubic feet of oxygen are consumed in the 24 hours, which represents 300 cubic feet of pure air. This is a minimum quantity, not allowing for any augmentation in the intensity of the respiratory processes, which may take place from different causes. To meet the requirements of the system it has been found necessary in hospitals, prisons, etc., to allow at least 800 cubic feet of air for each person, unless the situation is such that the air is changed with unusual frequency. For, beside the actual loss of oxygen in the air exhaled, constant emanations from both the pulmonary and cutaneous surfaces are taking place, which must be removed. In some institutions as much as 2500 cubic

will slide in a new groove. The man will be there, not the master or the serf, not the coercing or the coerced man, but the free and intelligent human being.

But who will undertake the organization of labor? Will it be a government concern or the concern of the workmen themselves freely associated? Here we come back to the point from which we started. Will people go on without any knowledge of practical hygiene and let their daily life be settled by a council of doctors very little acquainted with the temperaments and needs of their numberless patients, or wait until they become ill, and then put themselves in the hands of those specialists, whose appearance at the death-bed of the sick man foreshadows that of death itself? In this case they will follow the advice of our Democratic friends and work for a Democratic Constitution and Parliament. If, however, they begin to understand that no man can take care of us so well as we can care for ourselves, that the best medicine and also the best protection for every wise man is found in following the advice of the Greek philosopher, "Know thyself," and, we may add, "Act for thyself," then they will no longer look for salvation in authority, but will trust to reason and to individual initiative, living a free life, whilst fraternizing together in a common brotherhood.

According to statistics, over a considerable surface. Wheat gives as an average 18 hectoliters per hectare; which is a very low proportion, easily surpassed, on even 'the worst land by good deep tilling and manuring.

Good cultivation gives easily 40 hectoliters a hectare. Even 60 and, 70 hectoliters have been obtained, and this is not the highest figure possible. Now the minimum figure of 18 hectoliters, the actual average of French agriculture, is only surpassed in 31 departments. It is not even reached in 56 departments. This Mr. Toubeau holds to be because the soil does not receive sufficient care; that the number of hands employed to work it is not large enough; and that manure is scarce: 10 millions out of these 20 millions of hectares must really be considered as uncultivated.

In short, 27 millions of hectares, or more than half the soil of France, is according to the calculation of Mr. Toubeau, unredeemed. He then goes on to explain the causes: how the owner is interested in the unproductiveness of the soil; how he says to the peasant, "I shall keep the soil, not in order to cultivate it, but only that you may not cultivate it, lest you become your own master and cease to be my slave"; and so forth.

But here we must stop, Enough has been said to show the necessity for a great revolution in agriculture, compared too which even our political revolution, that is, our revolt against government and class rule, will fall into insignificance, Equal changes will be introduced in the breeding of cattle and in other agricultural work, and by-and-by in all industries. Industry indeed will become an appendage of agriculture, whilst now it is just the reverse; and not only the soil will be utilized, but water and every power in nature will be utilized ten-fold. Production will be redistributed and localized; it will answer to local needs and no more serve the greed of capitalists and speculators for their own enrichment. We shall no more hear of rings and syndicates in copper, salt, coffee, wheat, coal, and what not. The new world (because it will be, as Owen foresaw, a new world)

feet of air are allowed to each person (Longet, I 'Traité de Physiologie,' tom. 1, p. 526). We have here some data for deciding the size of our future houses, workshops, recreation grounds, music-halls, and so on. For all these we must have; and care will be taken that nothing which may contribute to the well-being of the workers shall be missing.

It is necessary to realize what, a revolution these requirements will bring in the organization of labor; what an immense amount of work now employed to amuse social parasites, and often really to endanger the lives of millions of men, will be spared; and what comfort will accrue to the workman. How the old order will be changed! Whole towns will be pulled down, there being no more capitalists interested in making 20 percent profit out of the horrible dungeons let for abodes to the poor; no model lodging-house company whose manager says to an unfortunate woman like Annie Chapman, go and *find* the money for your rent or we shall turn you out. No sweaters, no big stores, no landlord monopolists, no merchants, no bankers or financial speculators to raise rents and to make to-day a famine, to-morrow an abundance, in order to gain by difference of prices. We will have nothing of the sort, nothing of the enterprising ability, so much prized by the economists of the capitalistic class; no more of these numberless middle men who work hard at nothing but to enrich themselves. All this will be changed. All the useless toil and turmoil of the present economic system will be converted into good and useful work. Workshops will be no more, like the old prisons, hells on earth. There will be no longer houses for the poor, and palaces, Belgravian squares and dens adjoining; everywhere will be abodes fit for human beings. The beauties of nature will be open to the workman, no longer mewed up in darkness and filth.

But now to the question of production. We can hardly realize the greatness of the changes involved, for we hardly realize the extent to which the cupidity of capitalism, the profit race, the adulteration system and the advertising system pervert the

natural ways and means of production. Production instead of being regulated by the wants of the producers, takes its direction from the interest of a third person, the capitalist, who only cares for profit. The consumer as well as the producer, are at the capitalist's mercy. We, the producers on the one hand, are made to work against our inclinations, in inverse ratio, as it were, to our forces, and under slave-like conditions; on the other hand we are made to consume what is left after the capitalist has satisfied himself, anything rotting in the shops, anything the speculator has found convenient to bring over from some distant place, in exchange for what we have produced ourselves. We are deprived of what our soil could produce. Why? Because it may not be the interest of our all-powerful capitalists that it be produced at all. Our cities, our towns, our public buildings, etc., are made altogether for the benefit of the capitalistic class. Who ever inquires of a workman how he would prefer to live? or where? He is lodged where it pleases his master; far away from the fashionable districts, in the same way as the barbarians are driven far from the territory that civilization invades. The workman is cheaply fed and clothed; but the cheapness is only in name. He has to pay twice over for everything. Usury feeds itself on his very blood, whilst it takes for the upper ten of society the milder form of credit. All this is good in the eyes of the economists, because the principle of "free trade" is safe. The starving man transacts his poor business with the greedy capitalist; and if the nut in struggle with the stone gets broken, the fault lies obviously with the nut.

In fact, existing society is just the reverse of a rational one. You must leave at the door your reason on entering; as in Dante's 'Inferno' souls coming to hell leave hope behind. Every time you attempt to use your reason on existing social facts, you are baffled by the contradictions and anomalies you discover.

One of the most important changes which will be brought about in the organization of labor when we advance through

revolution to a society in accordance with reason, will be that we shall redeem agriculture, the mother of all arts, from the degraded state in which it has fallen. The decadence of agriculture is the most marked feature of the capitalistic reign. Take the following as to France from a writer in the *Revue Socialiste*, June 1888, Mr. Toubeau. The figures he gives us are highly interesting. Whoever opens the volume of the Agricultural Inquiry (*Statistique décennale de 1882*) is struck at the first glance by the immense extent of land withdrawn from cultivation and given up either to entire neglect as fallow ground or only sparsely cultivated. This amounts to no less than three quarters, of all woods and forests, of all meadows, pasture-grounds, and soil formerly cultivated. Of fifty millions of hectares, which if in the hands of cultivators would be covered with rich crops, some eight millions are unreclaimed, though capable of cultivation. Of course without mentioning the really barren parts of the soil, such as rocks, glaciers, the summits of mountains, etc.

To these eight million hectares of uncultivated soil we must make some additions; There are in France 9,455,225 hectares of woods and forests. Of these not less than six millions are little if at all cultivated, full of dead wood, bushes, brambles, destructive animals; without roads, untouched by the labor and industry of man, but exclusively confined to the preservation of game for shooting and hunting. These six millions of hectares could be restored to agriculture without diminishing to any extent the supply of wood; this supply could be even increased, if the remaining three millions and half hectares were better cultivated and were provided with good roads.

In short, the uncultivated or partially cultivated soil amounts to eighteen millions of hectares, more than the third part of France itself.

Now to this enormous figure we must add the soil which gives a quarter of a crop or a half because it is insufficiently manured or worked. This partial neglect of the soil spreads, ac-