

A Happy New Year

Freedom Press (London)

January, 1890

Within the past few days this wish has been uttered by thousands and thousands of people to one another; sometimes sincerely, sometimes carelessly, sometimes sarcastically. We also would join in the time-honored genial custom, and offer to our readers in every part of the globe, and not to them alone, but to all mankind, a happy new year. We have just grounds we think for doing so, for notwithstanding the terrible misery which surrounds us on every band, notwithstanding the vast number of fellow creatures to whom the word happiness is without meaning, the past year has witnessed great movement among the workers, and has been full of promise for the future. In the most pessimistic quarters, recent events have given birth to new hope. It seems as though the Sun of Truth and Liberty is at length making its appearance on the horizon, the long night of ignorance and suffering is over, and the Creatures Of darkness are slinking away with the gloom. The day is not yet, however; there is still much to be done, much to endure, before the reign of liberty, equality and fraternity, can really be said to have commenced. The workers are many, but they are not enough; the thought is luminous, but still its light is not sufficiently strong; the masses begin to move, but their motion is as yet but slow. We must renew our efforts, redouble our numbers, intensify the clearness of our ideas, if we would quickly terminate the struggle between the workers and the idlers.

The past year has been fruitful in strikes. It is evident that the practical worker is losing his faith in the program of the political visionaries who think to transform society by Act of Parliament. It is evident that the strike is a workers' weapon which has a great part, to play in the Social Revolution which is so close upon us. As time goes on this weapon will of course be modified and improved as the workers find it desirable, It will become more revolutionary, its imperfections will be remedied, means will be found to stop the supply of blacklegs, the boycott and the force of public opinion will be brought to bear upon the exploiter with far greater force than has yet happened, the interference of the government in support of the capitalists will be rendered impossible, and the strike will become a struggle, conducted on something like equal terms between the monopolist and the wage, workers. The day of isolated strikes appears to be over. For the future the workers' revolts will be conducted on the federal principle. Not merely a small group of workers employed in one factory or one mine, but the body of the workers belonging to a trade, assisted by kindred trades, and often by their fellow-workers in other countries, will

revolt against the exploiter. These federations will consist of free groups of free men forming a voluntary combination for a common purpose imbued with the solidarity which is ever and ever increasing its bold upon the toilers. No bond beyond the bond of brotherhood is necessary. The strikers make but small demands to-day, but this is due to the fact that they do not feel sufficiently strong to do more. As they are groping their way forward, as they get to understand better the injustices of which they are the victims, as solidarity grows and their weapons become more perfect, the workers demands will grow also until the claim which to-day consists of a trifling increase of wages, and a slight reduction in the hours of work will to-morrow be a demand that the capitalist shall relinquish his position of superiority as well as his exorbitant share of the produce, and that the shareholder shall share in the work if he would share in the results. The workers will submit their own ideas as to profit-sharing schemes then. They will demand a cooperative equalitarian sharing of the profits, and the capitalists will be too seared to advocate the sweater's trick which they call profit-sharing to-day.

The greatest obstacle to successful strikes is doubtless the blackleg. The blackleg is an unemployed man. He is the danger and the safety of the capitalist. Without him strikes must necessarily be successful; with him the capitalist is always in fear of riots and revolution. The blackleg might be a hero, he might with his fellow unemployed destroy the evil system which crushes out men's manhood to-day; but instead he sells himself to the enemy. Yet he is more to be pitied than blamed. He is ignorant and hungry. He is driven into a corner. He reflects probably that the strikers have never thought of him and his misery, why should he think of them? The offer is tempting. Food, shelter, and comparative comfort on the one hand. On the other, perhaps, the prospect of a severe winter, certainly of continued want. When the gas workers went out in the middle of last month, more than twice the number of men needed to fill their places came and offered themselves to the exploiter. Some of them were ready to work a week for nothing, did not want any railway fare, and pleaded piteously to be set on. They dreaded the prospect of want they had before them far more than the hatred and contempt of their fellows. Their misery had caused them to lose all feeling of solidarity with others. They could only think of themselves and theirs.

It is doubtless quite natural for all who are fighting against the capitalists to look upon the blackleg as an enemy, for such he undoubtedly is. But it is a part of our business as revolutionists to make him a friend. This must be done before the Revolution can be effected. The supply of working men who are ready to take the places vacated by strikers must be stopped. To do this, it is necessary for us to give much more attention to the land question, particularly the agricultural land question, than we have done in the past. Socialists have far too much neglected this important matter, and we owe much to the land nationalizers for the work they have done. It is quite true that land monopoly is a root evil, and that the land question is the bottom question, but it is not Nationalization but Socialization of the Land which is the remedy. The land grabbers must be made to loosen their hold, the workers must turn their eyes towards the land. We must show the agricultural laborer that he ought to cultivate the land for himself in common with his fellows, and not for the benefit of an exploiter, whether he calls himself farmer or landlord. The workers on the I and must be taught to repudiate the iniquitous claim for rent. We must show them how easy it would be to combine together in a cooperative association and produce from the land the necessaries of life, which they could exchange with their fellow workers of the towns for the machinery, clothing, etc., which they might need. The wretched slavery of the rural workers is of the greatest importance to the town worker, for it is that, coupled with the

fact that machinery is displacing labor in the country, which is so largely increasing the army of the unemployed in the towns. To make the agriculturist a free man, to help him to establish himself upon the land, and also to throw the land open to the unemployed now gathered in the towns, is the most pressing work for us to do. Once the monopoly in land is destroyed, the blackleg will disappear, the cut-throat competition between the workers will cease, there will be a rush back to the pure air and the free life of the country, the big cities will melt away, or at any rate become very much smaller than at present, new centers of thought and activity will spring up, life will take new forms, capitalism will fall to pieces through the action of strikes and similar methods, the government will vanish, the Social Revolution will have been accomplished.

There are Socialists who do not see the importance of the land question, because they see that there are already sufficient food-stuffs produced for all if all could only get at them. It is necessary to remember, however, that in order to get this food the workers have to produce something which they can exchange for it, and it is because the present system of society allows many of them no opportunity of doing this, and others no opportunity of exchanging the articles they have produced, that it is a failure. Whereas if the worker had free access to the land he would always be able to produce the absolute necessities of life for himself. He would never enter an industrial group, which did not offer him as great or greater advantages than an agricultural group. The standard of comfort would never fall below the agricultural level. Our French coworkers have especially shown that they recognize the importance of the agricultural land question, and quite an extensive propaganda has been made among the peasants of France. An Agrarian League based upon the principles of Anarchist Communism has been formed, and active groups are at work at Cuers, Peyriac de Mer, Prades, Izy, La Californie, Saint-Victor Lacoste, Servian, La Palisse, Saint-Florent, Rochambeau, Marsillargues, Hem, Breuilles, Bouglon, Casteljaloux, and many other places. It is scarcely necessary to say that the *Ligue Agraire* is a federation of absolutely free groups, without a central committee, statutes or dogmas. We hope to hear shortly of English comrades following this example, and we are sure that whenever the principles of Anarchist Communism are clearly expounded to the workers in the fields they will meet with hearty acceptance.

At the dawn of a new year, and in wishing that before its term is ended, we may make great progress along the revolutionary path, we have thought it useful to briefly give our ideas of the course events are taking, and how best we may serve the Revolution in that course. As we watch the thought-molding events which are now following one another so rapidly, we become more and more convinced that the coming revolution will be, can be nothing else than, an Anarchist Revolution, an extension of liberty. As for those Social Democrats, Land Nationalizers, Radicals and others whose faith in freedom is limited, we are sure that the course of events will force the honest men among them to fight on the Anarchist side. The place-hunters will necessarily go over to the governing class whom they desire to emulate. State Socialism is doubtless growing stronger, but it is not the workers' Social Democracy of a year or two back, it is the Government Socialism of the far seeing members of the middle class, as advocated by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Star*, and other capitalist newspapers, and by politicians belonging to both the Liberal and Conservative parties. These people very clearly see that they would be just as well off as highly salaried officials, in a democratic state of which they would be the rulers, as they are now as private capitalists and members of the middle-class. They would manage the country in just the same way as they now run joint stock companies with a well paid directorate and officials, do-nothing shareholders and ill-paid workers. It is a grand plan--for them--and they may secure

the temporary cooperation of many working class Social Democrats, but they will not succeed. Events are leading in another direction, and if the workers are only true to themselves, if they go on as they have been going during the past few months, our would be national directors will never get an innings.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Freedom Press (London)
A Happy New Year
January, 1890

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 4, No. 38, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on April 12, 2020.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net