

Notes [Sep, 1888]

Freedom Press (London)

September, 1888

Daily open-air meetings of the unemployed in the middle of summer are an ominous comment on the recommendations just issued by the Committee of the House of Lords appointed to inquire into exceptional distress. With the heartless insolence of men in whom power and luxury have dried up all human sympathy, the Most Noble follow in the steps of Rehoboam's youthful counselors and warn the administrators of that miserable travesty of social justice and brotherly love, the Poor Law, that they have erred on the side of sentimental leniency. Chastise the crime of poverty not with whips but with scorpions. Restrict out-door relief. Do away with labor yards. Do not meddle with relief works. Give no support to schemes for the succor of the unemployed. Make your casual wards still more like prisons. Such are the principal suggestions to local authorities offered by the men who have never known what it is to do a stroke of necessary work, or to want a meal, or to sicken with anxiety as they tramp day after day from one insolent employer to another in the vain search for a job, or to return weary and despairing to a fireless hearth and starving children.

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From the bottom of our hearts we thank you my lords, that so plainly you show the workers that they have no justice, no mercy to expect from you and your fellow property holders. Deliverance must come to every class, as to every individual, from within. It is you and such as you who are accentuating this universal teaching of experience for the working class throughout the world. Perhaps the anniversary of 1789 may do something to show you how far they have learned the lesson.

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The courtly brutality of the Lords Temporal is worthily supplemented by the hypocritical cynicism of the Lords Spiritual. "The Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, held at Lambeth Palace," have just favored the world with their views upon Socialism and the social crisis. "Excessive inequality in the distribution of this world's goods; vast accumulation and desperate poverty side by side, these suggest many anxious considerations to any thoughtful person," so deign to pronounce the Right Reverend Fathers in God in their "encyclical letter." But apparently their lordships' anxiety is for the propertied rather than the poverty-stricken class. For the workers they have but the well-worn gospel of "thrift and self-restraint." For the wealthy they

speaking many comfortable words of suggestive and conscience-easing compromise. Cooperation, peasant proprietorship, state saving bank, boards of arbitration, sanitary acts, and such mild palliatives may safely be supported by a Christian man without endangering his soul. "The state may EVEN encourage a wider distribution of property by the abolition of entail," or slightly vary the incidence of taxation. Whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil.

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Meanwhile let the Socialists look to it. Though "Christianity sets forth no theory of the distribution of the instruments or products of labor," and the Church has the "deepest sympathy" with "the improvement of the material and moral condition of the poor," and though the right Reverend Prelates fully admit that "serving the poor and weak without special fee or reward, is the ideal set before us by our Divine Master," yet they, our spiritual guides, would most earnestly dissuade social reformers from any rash attempts to inconvenience them that are rich in this world; for "spoliation and injustice in any form is abhorrent alike to the sentiment and belief" of the Church. But what of the spoliation and injustice committed day by day when the workers are denied the right to work or robbed of the produce of their labor by the monopolists of land and capital? The Bishops say not. Of one thing only they are confident; the Church can never ally herself with Anarchists, or any Socialists who "consider private property a usurpation and wrong to the community," or, in fact, entertain any objection to the civil and religious order as now established. With the remainder "the clergy may enter into friendly relations, trying to understand their aims and methods"!

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For us Communist-Anarchists the Anglican prelates have one word of bitterest reproach before they dismiss us for ever into the outer darkness where are "Atheists," and persons who "advocate loose doctrines as to family ties." "Anarchists seek to realize their aims, as far as they have any, by undisguised murder and robbery"; but this is not the worst. Later in the report it appears that we, undisguised robbers and murderers, have not only, like the Christians, an ideal, but also the unpardonable folly to believe that it means something attainable, and the audacity to strive towards it. Whereas the bishops "hold that there is no surer cause of failure in practical affairs, than the effort to act on an ideal which has not yet been realized" (*sic*). One wonders in what condition of prehistoric barbarism humanity would have been plunged to day had every man shared the skeptical materialism of these churchmen.

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 2, No. 24, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on April 14, 2020.

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