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Remedial Measures

Freedom Press, Anonymous

February, 1887

When the enemies of Socialism are speaking to Anarchists, they dwell upon the reasonable and humanitarian policy-of Social Democracy, but no sooner are they brought face to face with the proposals of Social Democrats than they declare those proposals preposterous and impracticable the Times for -November 5th.

Well, it is true that there is very little moral difference between charity in money and charity in work, whilst front the economic point of view the former is preferable. Either there is work to be done in the community or there is not. In the first case, capitalists will not fail to lay hand, upon it to make a profit for themselves by supplying the public need. In the second case, the central or local government cannot start superfluous works, or even anticipate work supposed requisite in some more or less distant future, without damaging the interests of the very classes which it seeks to relieve. For this reason, our present system of distribution of wealth (each for himself and the taketh hindmost) determines the standard of requirements in each class of the community according to the position and fortune it has seized upon. There is a certain fixed ratio between desires and wealth, wants and the absence of wealth,

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which cannot be altered without a change in our whole system of distribution. Of course poor men really require better food, better clothes, better lodging, &c. But then' they cannot pay for them, and no laws in the world can make the rich pay for even necessities for the poor. No law can employ -we might say transform-the wealth of capitalists so as to satisfy the need, of working people. The only means to take wealth from those who possess it are exploitation, expropriation, and taxation. Exploitation can be exercised only on those who possess nothing but their energy and labor force. Expropriation means revolution. As for taxation, it falls-direct taxation indirectly, indirect taxation directly-upon the shoulders of the working class, or, what is the same thing, on the cost of necessities. When the price of commodities ceases to allow sufficient profit to capitalists, these patriots usually withdraw their investment from their own land, and thus the source of taxation is dried up.

It follows that if extraordinary relief works be started for the unemployed, the wages and profits connected therewith must be either by reducing the wages of laborers already employed, or by drawing upon the proceeds of future labor.

Note this : wages, as well as profits (surplus value). Every fresh enterprise under our present economic system gives occasion for fresh exploitation of labor; takes from, instead of adding to, the workman's means of subsistence.

The more the workers work, the worse they make their condition as a whole, the wider the gulf between them and the wealthy classes. They only seem to receive wages, in reality they pay tribute to their employers. Therefore to start new works to relieve the working class is like paying a debt bearing no interest by means of a loan upon which interest must be paid.

As an immediate measure of relief for the misery of the people, 'it would be more practical to diminish than increase production. it were possible to put a stop for some time to all the production of a country and prevent any expatriation of capi-

tal, or importation of produce, no doubt the labor market would revive and wages rise. But, as a matter of fact, capital and capitalists are quite ready to abandon their own country and seek more favorable openings elsewhere ; and it is as easy for capitalists to baffle any attempts at lawmaking to prevent this as it is difficult for workmen to escape the thralldom of the laws they are subjected to. Even when the possessors of the means of production cannot remove their property-as in the case of the soil-they can and do give up producing necessities and devote their wealth to the production of luxuries, or, in the case of land, withdraw it from cultivation, and devote it to sporting purposes. Thus their enjoyment is secured at the cost of the misery of the workers.

The same objections apply to a compulsory reduction of the hours of labor. Without reduction of the profits of employers, the condition of the working classes cannot permanently improve, either as regards the amount of wages or the continuity of employment. But if it were possible, either by reduction of hours of labor, or by taxation, or any other governmental expedient, to lower the rate of profit in a country, either prices would go up or capital would emigrate to foreign lands. To prevent the emigration of capital it would be necessary to declare and enforce all the world over common rates of wages, hours of labor, prices of commodities, and taxation : rather a difficult achievement in face of private property, inequality of possessions, and commercial competition.

It is because we realize the utter impossibility of putting a check upon usury under existing social arrangements; it is because we do not feel confident as to the beneficial results of the remedial measures proposed by Social Democrats in this and other countries, that we are Anarchists, and cry to the people, "Put not your trust in any government assistance. Help yourselves." For Anarchism puts Revolution before renovation, whilst Social Democracy puts reform before Revolution-the end before the beginning.

[Note.-Many of our Social-Democratic friends are better than their professed creed, and only put forward remedial measures to entice hesitating quasi-Socialists into the wholesome path of revolution. -EDITOR.]