

Revolutionary Melbourne

Freedom Press, Anonymous

June, 1889

The Australian Continent is fifty-eight times the size of England, but population is only one-eighth* of ours. In other words if Australia its was as densely peopled as England it would contain a population as great as that of the entire world at the present time. And we have it on the authority of many scientific men, among whom may be mentioned Alfred Russell Wallace. that England could supply all the wants not only of its present number of inhabitants but of very many more. So that' it is perfectly safe to assume that Australia is a country of almost boundless resources, and any one would imagine that if prosperity existed anywhere it -would be there. But when the emigrant from old Europe gets over there what does he find? Poverty, misery, the unemployed One or two big cities, a number of wealthy men, and a multitude of wage slaves! Capitalism, Landlordism and Government flourish out there just as here at home and the worker is in precisely the same plight. "I was glad to be able to get back," a workman said to the writer a short time ago; and he added, "thousands more would be if they had the money to pay their passage." About a third of the entire people of Australia inhabit the single colony of Victoria, and one half of the Victorians live ill the city of Melbourne. A peculiar and a unique position is that occupied by the chief city of the Southern seas. Nowhere else can a country be found in which half of its people live in the capital. Melbourne is in fact a. Whitechapel, a Bermondsey and it Belgravia, thrown together oil the other side of the planet so as to form a center of civilization. it contains some spacious thoroughfares and some narrow streets, mansions and hovels, alleys, courts and boulevards. It is a triumph of capitalism and a revolutionary center.

A correspondent of our Paris contemporary *La Revolte*, liar, just recently sent some interesting details about revolutionary Melbourne, and we reproduce them for the benefit of English Socialists and Anarchists, and especially for those comrades who have friends to warn against submitting themselves to it bitter experience. Every two or three years since I S77-78 the unemployed question has been brought forward by thousands of workers without employment, money or credit. Generally this has taken place in the winter, 1) but recently it has occurred at other times. The worst period,, of distress were 1878, 1880, and 1886. Everybody in Melbourne is of opinion that this year the distress will be more severe than in 1886 and as bad as in 1877-78. In 1890 it will probably be worse, and in 1892 it is by no means unlikely that a revolution will take place in which the 14 "ultra-radical" party will try to establish a kind of State Socialism. Riots of the unemployed are very likely this year. But the people are still much too ignorant to effect a revolution such as we desire. The women appreciate the situation more than the men. They recog-

nize that the workers are slaves and that the middle-class and especially those who monopolize the land are their irreconcilable enemies. There is, however, a lack of thorough-going revolutionists to show them the way to effect their emancipation. Yet everybody feels that things cannot continue as they are much longer, and Melbourne will it is thought not be the last to march towards Anarchist Communism.

Every day events work actively for the change. The rents are probably the highest in the world. A little wooden house in a back street in the suburbs costs 15s. a week. You may be told that the workers only work eight hours a day. That is true only in the case of the Trade Unionists, and even then the overtime practically destroys the

value of the concession. The non-unionists who are very numerous, work 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16 hours a day and get much lower wages. The shop assistants work from 8 in the morning to 7, 8 or 9 at night and until 11 on Saturdays, for an average wage of £1 1s a week for the men, and 12s. for the women, and 5s. to 10s. for the children. The higher prices of the necessities of life of course make the purchasing power of these sums less than it would be in England. During the past year there has been much speculation in real estate. Land has been bought at £120 the square mile and sold at from £1 to £2 a foot frontage with a depth of 46 yards. Land in the city has realized from £500 to £9600 the foot frontage, and much higher prices are talked of. Several bankruptcies have followed the "land boom," and many more are expected.

Generally the people are very religious: indeed it is said that there are more churches here than in England for an equal population. This somewhat interferes with the study of the social question. Sunday is divided into the Scotch Sunday in the morning, and what would be a continental Sunday in the afternoon if the government did not close up all the shops with the exception of a few restaurants and fruit shops. After two o'clock everybody goes for a walk along the quays, in the parks and gardens, etc. On the Queen's Wharf on Sundays all kinds of propaganda are carried on. This wharf is on the right bank of the Yarra, below the western part of the city proper. A little higher up is the dead house which has become necessary in consequence of the enormous number of suicides. As many as four bodies have been found in the Yarra in a day, and upon them is generally found either a pawn-ticket or a letter referring to the poverty of the self-murderer. The men may forget these things, but the women do not and it is perhaps from the women that we have most to hope. "This comes from misery," they say, "and misery comes from private property." The government has several times been forced to find work for the unemployed for fear of revolt.

There are in Melbourne counterparts of all the advanced English schools of opinion. The National Party consists chiefly of Republicans who desire to establish the lower middle class in the place of the higher middle class, which is called the aristocracy. They desire also the abolition of the second chamber, the reduction of the hours of labor and the nationalization of the land. The Secularists wish for the nationalization of the land, the establishment of national workshops and a republic. The party of "Liberty and Property" want political anarchy without socialism. There are also the State Socialists of the Bismarck school; the Social Democrats; the Individual Anarchists, of whom some are almost Communists and others do not believe in private property in land, but do believe in private property in things; the Christian Socialists and the Anarchist Communists. But beside all these schools of thought there is the enormous body of discontented workers, tired of poverty and hunger and feeling the near approach of a great change of which they know little except that it will improve their position and is likely to come through wars and tumults.

There are two Anarchist papers published in Victoria, the Australian Radical of Hamilton, which is practically an organ of Anarchist-Communism, and Honesty, which is Individualist-Anarchist. In the February number of the latter is an interesting article which gives details of the police persecution of some of our comrades for speaking on Queen's Wharf; the unemployed agitation at Melbourne and the accompanying persecution; and also an account of an anniversary meeting held on the 11th of November in commemoration of the death of our Chicago comrades. At this meeting there were several speakers who met with a good reception from a large crowd. It was well and fairly reported in the daily press and concluded by the people shouting 11 Hurrah for Anarchy!" and singing the Marseillaise.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Freedom Press, Anonymous
Revolutionary Melbourne
June, 1889

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 3, No. 31, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on May 1, 2020.
Freedom Press, London

theanarchistlibrary.org