

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Rocks Ahead

Freedom Press, Anonymous

March, 1888

Freedom Press, Anonymous
Rocks Ahead
March, 1888

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 2, No. 18,
online source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on May 1, 2020.
Freedom Press, London

theanarchistlibrary.org

We have already said that, whatever may be our wishes and desires, the present state of Europe will result in revolutions on the Continent, and that these revolutionary disturbances will be echoed in this country. As soon as the trade of the world and the markets of the world are disturbed, the conditions of the workmen of this country will become still more precarious than they are now, and the workers will ask for some fundamental changes in the economical conditions of the community. But, as the ruling classes will be unable to satisfy the needs of the workers, and as they will try, on the contrary, to stifle them by force, or by any other more or less cunning means, changes in the political organization will follow. The circumstances being so bad that long waiting will be impossible, a period of rapid changes--a revolutionary period--will be opened, and it will last for some time; the intensity of the interior struggles depending upon the more or less good sense and willingness to submit to the change that will be displayed on that occasion by the privileged classes.

We have also pointed out that, whatever the character of the revolutionary movements in other countries, they necessarily will result in a general disturbance of the World-trade.

And the consequences of the disturbance will be most severely felt in the country which chiefly lives on its world-trade, that is Britain. It will mean the stoppage of hundreds of manufactures and workshops, and the impossibility of reopening them. Thousands and thousands of workmen will find no employment. Thousands of middlemen, who constitute so great a percentage of the population of this country, will be also deprived of their present means of subsistence. The present want of employment and misery will be increased tenfold, and the question will then arise,

"What to do?"

To this question our answer was plain. The community will be compelled to organize itself so as to--first of all--immediately provide shelter and food for all the thousands who will have none. By the very force of circumstances it will be thus driven into Communism. And our Social-Democrat friends will obviously agree that no central Government--however excellent its intentions -- will be capable of managing through its Governmental organs the immense problems which it will have to do with, viz., modify the present relation between labor and capital; supply shelter and food to the mass of the nation ; reform industry and agriculture in accordance with the new needs, and so on.

The whole of the nation, in each city, village, hamlet, and workshop, must set to the work with a free hand if they are to succeed in the task of re-organization. And thus, the fallacy of Providence in a new shape--that of a revolutionary Government--will have to be cast overboard like so many fallacies and prejudices of old. Unavoidably, the Anarchist system of organization -- free local action and free grouping--will come into play.

Now, if each member of the community consumes as much food as he needs for maintaining his life and rearing his children, the stores of foods which exist in this country will soon be exhausted. And we have already said that it would be child-

ish to rely on the supplies of food, which are now drawn from other countries, in exchange for manufactured goods. Let the slightest economical disturbance occur in Russia, and Russia will export corn no longer. The Russian peasant does not sell a surplus of corn. He is compelled to sell his necessities to pay the heavy taxes, and he suffers from a positive want of food for four, six, or eight months every year. The American farmer who exports corn now, will not always find workmen to work for starvation wages on his field, or the railways which transport the Illinois corn for nearly nothing, because they derive their profits from other sources, e.g., speculation in land ; and the riot of India will starve no longer to enrich the zemindars and the English Government, as soon as he learns that the English Government is no longer the terrible force it was before. The imports of foreign corn will decrease.

The exports of manufactured wares will decrease too. The war between France and China has already been a cause of aggravated misery in Lancashire. The disturbed state of the Chinese market resulted in diminished exports of Indian cotton from India to China, and this resulted in a diminished demand for English cottons in India, so intimately are connected now all nations of the world. But, what when all markets shall be disturbed in the same way ? The demand for manufactured wares will be lessened, and the imports of foreign corn will be reduced. And this is so well understood that there are people who see in this fact, which they foresee, an argument against the possibility of a revolution in England.

In our opinion, it is an argument for its unavoidability. And it gives us also an answer to the question, What to do? Why, manufacture for home consumption, and grow our own food,--such will be the answer dictated by the force of circumstances.

Many of our readers would ask, of course, whether England is able to grow sufficient food for all her population? Under the present system of private appropriation of land by landlords, it is obvious that she cannot. Under any system of appropriation

of land by peasants having no implements to till the land, no cattle, no means of getting manure-in short, under any system of private ownership like the small peasant ownership which we now see in France--she cannot again.

But let us imagine that the land inhabited and rendered habitable by the British nation is proclaimed the property of the British nation as a whole. And immediately organizations will spring up to render it a source of rich crops more than sufficient for providing with plenty ,of food, not only the thirty million inhabitants of these islands, but twice the same amount. Intensity of culture permits 60 bushels to be grown on an acre, instead of the average 28 bushels we barely Succeed in growing now. And, instead of sowing with wheat only 21 million acres, out of our area of 77 millions, we can cover with golden crops four or five times that amount. " The soil is worth what man himself is worth " the French peasants Bay; and if only the half million men who now starve under the sweating system, or do nothing useful for the community, started, under the leadership of intelligent agriculturists, to spend twenty days a year in improving the soil round about the metropolis, the now unproductive fields would quickly become a rich source of all kinds of supplies of food for the community.

The danger is not in the want of food supplies. A few acres are largely sufficient for supporting a family, if only they are properly prepared for the crops and properly cultivated. And what we have to be afraid of is not the want of space for the inhabitants of this country: it is the want of courage in doing away with time-rotten institutions, the want of broader views of the needs of the community, the want of boldness in recognizing that the problem before us is not a mere question of wages, but a problem, of thorough reform of the whole of our economical and political organization.