

# Leeds and London

Freedom Press (London)

August, 1890

The use of the strike as an offensive and defensive weapon against Capitalism has been illustrated during the past few weeks by noteworthy revolts of workers in Leeds and London. In the former city -the men have gained what they desired; in the latter they have supplied the capitalist newspapers with some sensational news by which to catch the pence of the multitude, whilst they have practically lost their cause and allowed a number of the most energetic among them to lose their employment. The reason of this difference of fortune which has befallen the gas workers of Leeds and the postmen and policemen of London is not far to seek. In the Yorkshire town the men were determined and united. Following up the tactics of the Irish peasants when, evicted from the tenancy of a farm, they made it quite clear to the blacklegs that it would be a very risky thing for anyone to take their jobs away from them, and, being backed up by the public opinion of the district and by the practical help of thousands of fellow workmen, they succeeded in convincing their employers that their claims were just, compelled them to buy off the blacklegs, with whom long-term agreements had been made, and were reinstated in triumph. In London, on the other hand, the conflict was forced on by the authorities, and the men had not made up their minds that they all, ought to stick together. As regards the police, a little firm action on the part of their masters cowed them into submission, and they allowed the boldest of their number to be sacrificed. Perhaps the same thing is to some extent true about the postmen, although it would appear that the chief cause of their defeat lay in placing too much trust in their officials. A comrade who spoke to a number of North London postmen at the time of the collapse of the movement, informs us that he found them very bitter against their leaders, and declaring that if they had been efficiently led they would have scored a victory. However this may be, it should be a lesson to them not to rely upon leaders, but to act for themselves in the future. If it is necessary for them to have secretaries, treasurers, and suchlike officials, let them be kept to the clerical duties to which they are appointed, and not be looked upon as the leaders of a strike movement. For the movement to have been successful, it should have been led by men coming forward spontaneously from the ranks of the postmen themselves at the critical juncture in the various offices, and acting at once, together with their fellows, without waiting for orders from an executive, without giving time to their opponent to carry out his plans for defeating them.

It is to be noted with regard to these strikes in Leeds and London that they are all expressions of discontent on the part of employees of Government. In London it was the National Govern-

ment which was -affected, in Leeds the Municipality. Those who advocate the nationalizing of everything -- Bellamyites, State Socialists, Social Democrats can hardly be pleased with the latest developments of these first experiments in the State Management of Industry. The workers in the Post Office, at any rate, am decidedly worse off than the greater part of those employed by private capitalists. Their hours am very long, their pay is scanty, and their liberty of association is practically nil After this it does not make the mouth of the average working man water when he is told that all industry is to be managed by the State, and that be is to become a Government servant. Mr. Sydney Webb and other Fabians and Social Democrats have told us how very social-istic we am -at present-that is to say, how very many y of the workers are already employees of the Government. Perhaps these gentlemen will go on another tack after these recent strikes. Of course there are Social Democrats who honestly believe in a good time coming when the State will be master of everything and everybody, and the Government will no longer be composed of place-hunters with high salaries but will consist of men and women whose income or whose measure of enjoyment will be no higher than that of the humblest laborer in the land. But such men do not know the history of the working-class movement in this country; they do not recognize how dangerous it is even for the best of men to pass through the slime of political trickery, and they do not see that they are advocating the maintenance of a cumbrous and costly machinery for carrying on the business of human society which cannot possibly exist when the workers are free and equal Moreover, they are delaying the Social Revolution by preaching patience to the oppressed, and are playing into the hands of the reactionaries, who would do with their Social Democracy what Constantine did with the Christian religion-take all the virtue out of it by taking it under their protection. The craze for nationalization may become still more pronounced than it is at present. Before the Social Revolution takes place it is possible that the railways and other industrial concerns in this country-perhaps even the land-may become the property of the State, but the worker will still be exploited for the benefit of the idler. His condition will be scarcely changed-perhaps made worse. He will be as much superior to the wage-slave of today as the Government parcels postman is to the private carrier of Messrs. Carter Patterson, and no more. Instead of having for master a private individual making a profit of, say, 5,000 a year, he will have over him a Government official, with the title of "Director of Railways," or something of that sort, who will draw a salary of about the same amount. Evidently, fellow-workers, these strikes ought to convince you that the solution of the social problem does not consist in our all becoming servants of the State.

There is another point to be considered about these strikes, and indeed about all strikes, a point which can never be too often dwelt upon -the influence of the unemployed. But for the unemployed strikes would almost always be successful. It is the army of reserve labor which is the chief strength of the capitalist, the mainstay of his existence. And this is what the mass of the workers do not realize until they think of fighting against the exploiter. Then they see clearly enough the phantom of misery rise up by the side of their enemy and protect him against their onslaught. If the postmen and policemen, and other workers who feel that they are not treated quite justly by their exploiters, would just begin to study the meaning of that grand word, Solidarity, and, seek out for themselves a solution of the unemployed problem which is always threatening those who are employed, a great stride would be made towards a better condition of society. We who are Anarchists and Communists have found this out. We realize it, and we seek to emancipate humanity in solving that problem, for we know that it is the key to the future. It is natural enough, no doubt, in the time of struggle to turn upon these unemployed men and

denounce them as blacklegs; scabs, rats, etc., but what have you who dispense these epithets so freely done to help them, your brothers, in their troubles? Whilst we fully recognize that the conduct of the blackleg is cowardly and indefensible, we do not hesitate to declare that the conduct of those who do not attempt to destroy the present evil system of society is at least as bad. The starving, miserable, workless wretch who thinks only of himself and eagerly rushes forward to take the bread out of the mouth of the striking workers, has quite as much justification for reproaching the worker who disregards his wants. Fellow workers, employed and unemployed, you who should be brothers in arms fighting against your common enemy, and who would then be irresistible, we beg of you to look outside the narrow boundary of your own requirements, give your thought and attention to the solution of this great social question which means so much to you, throw in your lot with those who are seeking for liberty, equality and fraternity, and in so doing you will do your share towards realizing a condition of Society for yourselves and your children such as in your times of selfishness you have never dreamed of.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Freedom Press (London)  
Leeds and London  
August, 1890

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 4, No. 45, online source RevoltLib.com,  
retrieved on April 12, 2020.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**