

Society on the Morrow of Revolution [Apr, 1890]

Freedom Press, Anonymous

April, 1890

Translated from the French of JEHAN LE VAGRE.

IV. -THE PUBLIC SERVICES.

THOSE who advocate a system of division of products in the future society argue that on the morrow of the Revolution there will not be enough to meet the unlimited wants of all. We believe this to be a mistake. Even to-day, when waste is everywhere to be seen, and when through the sordid calculations of shameless speculators uncultivated land abounds, production so much exceeds consumption that the unemployed are ever increasing their numbers. What then will it be in a society where no one will have any reason for monopolizing because everyone will be sure of having his wants satisfied everyday; in a society where every arm will be productive, where all those who compose the army, the bureaucracy, as well as that innumerable crowd of domestic servants, having no other work to do to-day but to satisfy the caprices of our exploiters, where, in short, all those who to-day consume without doing any useful work in society, will be productive workers: moreover, when all those lands would be given over to agriculture which are now allowed to lie fallow by their over-fed proprietors, as well as all those lands, still more extensive, which are now abandoned because the harvest would not be sufficient to cover the expense necessary to put them in a productive state and also to give the owner a usurious interest but which in the future society would cost but little to put into cultivation, since the indispensable material would be in the hands of the workers, when we should be able by means of the steam-engine to ransack the earth unceasingly and take from it those nourishing essences that are given to the soil in the form of the manure which chemistry is able to produce to-day. Without estimating the future we can, therefore, very well think and even assert that production will be able quite well to answer all the requirements of consumption.

The fact has been specially insisted upon that there are some products such for instance as silk and similar articles, which it will not be possible to make so quickly as to satisfy all requirements. It appears to us to be a strange idea of the Revolution to imagine that workers who have become so intelligent as to understand the origin and study the causes of their misery and to apply the remedy, could possibly be so stupid as to fight among themselves if there was not some authority to divide among them a piece of silk, a basket of truffles or any other article which is often sought for only on account of its rarity. This objection is so stupid that we do not think it worth

replying to; we prefer to believe for the sake of humanity that the workers having obtained the satisfaction of their urgent material and intellectual wants, for which they have fought, will be sensible enough to arrange amicably among themselves as to the division of the products which cannot be put at the disposition of all. If necessary the more intelligent will know how to abandon their share to those who are not wise enough to patiently await their turn.

We should have liked to have gone more fully into the question of what the Collectivists call public services, but we feel compelled to limit ourselves to a few brief remarks. In passing, let us say that the Collectivists have invented this term "public services", merely for tactical purposes. They include under this denomination all the services such as the Post Office, Telegraph Department, Railways, etc., which as they say are not actually productive, inasmuch as they do not give any product which may be stored away in the warehouses, and say that it will be necessary to deduct the salary of those who perform these services from the produce of the other associations, which would simply be to establish a tax under another name. By making this distinction among the workers they doubtless hope to pass through their commissions of statistics and all the officialdom which they desire to create in the new society, thus confounding these parasitical officials with the workers we have mentioned, whose activity, although it is not bestowed upon the creation of objects of consumption is none the less one of the forces necessary to society.

But the motive is too apparent. Is not everything that contributes to the well-being and progress of society by that very fact a public service, and whether any one is employed in the production of grain, or no matter what other commodity, or in its transport to the place where it is needed, an equal service is rendered to society. But the commissions, sinecures and official employments of the Collectivists would only be a bad service to society of which we should have to rid ourselves as speedily as possible.

It has also been said that for works of general utility embracing one or several particular districts, it will be necessary to appoint delegates to arrange matters, even if only temporarily said for the single purpose for which they would be appointed. This also is a mistake. In fact as we have tried to explain the individual interests would be founded upon the general interests and, therefore the relations between the groups would only be affected by general matters that each group would be very well able to consider at its particular point, and which would all tend to secure the same result. Moreover all these distinctions of village, township, country, etc., would disappear or at most would only be geographical expressions. If then we take for example the making of a road, a canal or a railway line, we see no necessity to send delegations to organize these works. We will suppose that the idea of this work arises spontaneously in the brain of a single individual. The first thing he would have to do would be to make his idea known among his neighbors, to seek for those who desire to adopt it and to assist him in his enterprise, to find a Borne engineer, if he was not one himself like the plans, decide on the places where the canal, road or railway ought to pass, coiled the excavators or other workers necessary to the undertaking. Then when he had obtained the necessary nucleus for his operations, when the matter had been discussed and considered, when the plans were ripened, the details decided and the division of the work satisfactorily arranged, the undertaking would be commenced and the work would be carried out as can easily be seen, without any authority or delegation whatever and by the simple initiative of the individuals.

To-day we see all sorts of associations springing up. Railways, canals, bridges, commerce, industry; all are the prey of strong societies formed for the purpose of exploiting such or such a specialty of human industry. On a smaller scale we find little societies formed for the purpose of

procuring material advantages for their members or for the satisfaction of some pleasure. Such are the cooperative societies, the choral and instrumental groups, and the bodies organized for scientific perigrinations or simple walking clubs. Now, incomplete as they may be, these associations respond in a great measure to the wants of their members. What then will it be like in the society of the future where individual initiative will have elbow room and will no longer be shackled by the question of money, where affinities will be free to seek each other and dispositions to harmonize without difficulty. Nothing will prevent individuals; from grouping according to their tastes, aptitudes and temperaments so as to produce or consume whatever they may please. Posts, railways, educational institutions, etc., will enter into the social Organization on just the same footing as shoes and copper kettles. A division of work will, have to be established in this order of ideas as in the other; that is all. As nobody would be shackled by material difficulties, by considerations of economy, everybody would accustom themselves to go to the group which best responded to their wishes, so that the group which rendered most service would have the greatest chance of developing itself. As man is a complex being agitated by a thousand different sentiments, actuated by various wants, the groups formed would be very numerous, and it is exactly their diversity that would assure the satisfactory, working of all the services necessary to the well-being of the individual, and that would lead us to the end we all dream of-HARMONY.

And let no one cry out at this that it is utopian and improbable, referring us to the actual organizations for proof of their criticism. It is necessary to remember that the situation will no longer be the same that it is to-day. To-day all the associations are authoritarian and individualist; among the members, if the body is a large one, there are distinctions of offices or of salaries, often of both at the same time. But in spite of all these causes of disunion, unity is generally maintained for a good length of time, dissension only arises when there is one who is more greedy than the others and who tries to over-reach his fellow-members or seeks to profit by the position which he holds in the body to dominate over his comrades. Then distrust commences to creep in among them, quarrels ensue and finally there is a complete break up of the body. But let us bear in mind that in the society to which we look forward there will be no special profits to be obtained from any enterprise, that all individuals will be placed upon a footing of the most perfect equality and will be free to withdraw from an association whenever they wish, having no money invested, and that the economic situation will be the same for all; and-we again repeat it-let us above all not forget that to establish such a society the workers will have to be intelligent enough to destroy the present society which keeps them in subjection.

[Though agreeing in the main with Le Vagre's conception of the general outlines of the future society, we do not necessarily endorse every one of his opinions in detail. -Ed.]

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 4, No. 41, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on May 2, 2020.
Freedom Press, London

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