



Useful and useless labor

Lucy E. Parsons

1905

Every person who is rendering no good to humanity is useless, no matter how hard he works. Head work and hand work are equally hard and equally useful if rightly applied. All men, rich and poor, are working at something; perhaps one at useful labor, the other at useless labor. Nevertheless they are each and all using their energies at some occupation.

Men work because they cannot hold their physical and mental energies in check without causing themselves pain. But we have made work disagreeable because we have allowed conditions to obtain which force us to continue to work after we are tired, or at something for which we have no taste, take no interest in and have no adaptability for.

For this reason we lose pleasure in work and it becomes irksome to us; for this reason, often what we do is done in a slovenly manner and the community loses thereby. The selfish scheme called “property rights” has superseded human rights and created four times more useless work than is required to produce and distribute all the comforts and luxuries of life.

All these useless workers are either capitalists or the allies of capitalists. In this class of workers whose sole business is to sustain

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the “rights of property” can be classed the lawyers, jailers, police, bankers, insurance companies, agents and nearly all bosses in all branches of industry; add to these those who cannot get work and those in prisons, and we get some conception of the vast hordes that must be supported by those who perform useful labor, and these must devote their entire life’s energies in keeping up the “rights of property,” a thing which they have neither a share nor interest in.

And this condition of affairs makes paupers, suicides, thieves, cut-throats, liars, vagabonds, hypocrites, and unsocial beings generally.

Who, pray, are benefitting by all this waste and confusion? The few, a mere small percentage of the population of the world. All the remainder submit, because they think “it always has been so and it must always be so.” The work of those who have a conception of a true society of the future, must devote all their efforts toward disabusing the people’s minds of the ancient falsehoods. It can be done. Many other hoary lies have passed away, so will this one, too.