

too many. There would be this important difference, all to the advantage of the employers; that, whereas competition among "unorganized" workers would lead to organization, competition among thus "organized" workers could lead to nothing but complete disruption.

Fortunately for the unions, however, the gods have denied the employers any more than foresight enough to see two weeks ahead.

Queer Quatrains.

"My friend," I said, "It is a lovely day."
He turned and eyed me in a bovine way.

"Yes, a good day for work," he answered, then
Once more dug down his shovel in the clay:

I left him and I mused on what he said;
The bright sun shone on me from overhead,

And midst the grass the opening
Spring time flowers
Showed their contrasting colors, blue
and red.

The gaudy butterflies went flitting by,
The woodpeckers were drumming noisily,

And in the stream I heard a splash
that told
The speckled trout was leaping at a
fly.

"Good day for work," indeed, Oh, ox-brained ass,
Far better day to sprawl upon the
grass,

Beneath the shade trees, musing
dreamily,
And watch the golden bumble-bees that
pass.

"Good day for work!" This is a day
to rove
Down by the river side or through the
grove,

Alone, or even better, with your fair;
This is a day for loafing and for love.

Well, I may loaf, but love, alas, I can't,
It doesn't matter how much I may
want

My fairest Mabel, she alas, poor girl,
Is "slinging hash" down in the res-
taurant.

"Good day to work!" Oh, slave most
dull and dense;
Oh idiot, utterly devoid of sense;
You tempt me sorely unto homicide—
The fact that you're on earth is an
offense.

—"HIBERNICUS."

THE MENACE OF STATE INSURANCE

The sensation of the year, after all, is not the coronation, but the Liberal party's bold bid for popular favour, and the cunning attempt to beat the Labour Party at its own treacherous game. We refer of course, to the projected Bill "To provide for insurance against loss of health, and for the prevention and cure of sickness, and for insurance against unemployment, and for purposes incidental thereto."

It is rather an awkward predicament for the Labor Party to be in, to be compelled to assist in their own eclipse, and it is evident that they do so with a very bad grace. Of course, on the principle of making the best of a bad job, they claim that the proposed measure is a lame and halting plagiarism of something that they had up their Ah Shi-like sleeve, and that, such as it is, it is the direct outcome of the pressure they have brought to bear upon the Liberal party.

The utter fraud of this claim is sufficiently shown by the spineless attitude of the former over the Lord's Veto question. How they slunk grovelling to heel like whipped curs, so bereft even of canine spunk that they dared not so much as turn and snarl; how they left it to the Irish Party to force the Government to cast about for fresh subterfuges; how, eventually, to try and cover the fact that they have sold themselves and those they profess to represent, they were forced to plead that they were not rogues but fools, not dishonest but incompetent, that they had not sold their constituents, but had found themselves, greatly to their surprise, unfitted to perform the work they had undertaken to do, nincompoops without the gumption to pull off a political coup that is screaming to be taken; all this is too fresh in our minds to allow us to attach any importance to the claim that the Labour Party have forced the Liberals to take the step they now propose. No, white livers are not so easily flushed with the red blood of courage, or the diseased backbone so soon hardened into a supporting column for muscle and force. The Labour Party cannot even hold itself up. It needs the supporting hand of the Liberals to keep it from falling into the gutter. That supporting hand was lent it in order that it might be a foil against the Conservative party, in order, in short, that manufacturing interests might get a chance to win popular favour as against landed interests and landlordism. And when the Liberals no longer require this straw man they have lifted up, they will lose their hold

upon it, and it will tumble into the mud of the gutter, where it rightly belongs, to be spat upon by those who pass its rotting heap, holding their noses.

No, a body that cannot hold itself up can hardly exert force against that which is holding it up. The Labourites themselves have admitted that they dare not imperil the Liberal Government, because if it should fall it would fall on them, and smash them out of existence.

One of the reasons, as no doubt the Labour Party realise as well as anybody, that the Bill was framed at this juncture was that it served to render the Labour crew even more dependent upon their Liberal masters, insomuch that it shows that it is upon the Liberals that the hankerers after reform must depend to carry out the Labor Party programme, and not upon the so-called champions of the working-class. If the Liberals persist in this line of policy, it must prove fatal to that conglomeration of self-seeking leeches whom Ramsay MacDonald marshals upon the veins of the working-class.

The cunning Liberal Cabinet have gone just about as far as the popular sentiment is likely to follow them. This throws on the Labour Party the onus of asking for that which will be decidedly unpopular—an unfortunate circumstance for them. But they are between the devil and the deep sea. To confess that the Liberals are offering all that they themselves could demand is to confess themselves unnecessary, even from the reformers' point of view, while to ask for more is to run their nose against the wall of popular prejudice, and put it out of joint.

They raise the cry that the widows and orphans have been betrayed; that the Bill ought to have contained some provision for paying a weekly sum to the family of the deceased breadwinner. But here again the Liberals have them on the hop, for it is hardly likely that the workers at large are going to welcome the suggestion, even as coming from the Labour Party, to dock their wages in order to relieve the rates of the "burden" of supporting their families should they die, more especially in view of the fact that any such provision would certainly be of such miserable proportions that they would be better off without it.

The dishing of the Labour Party, however, is not the only reason for the projection of the Bill. Another reason was very clearly set forth by Mr. Lloyd George in his speech introducing the Bill in the House in the following words:

"What is the interest of the employer in this matter? His interest is the efficiency of his workmen, and there is no doubt at all that a great insurance scheme of this kind removes the strain of pressing burden from the shoulders of the working classes, and increases the efficiency of the workmen enormously. The working-men whom I met during the trades-union movement told me that many a time they used to go on working at their business because they dared not give it up, as they could not afford to, and it would have been better for them to have been in the doctor's hands. This procedure generally brings about a very bad breakdown, and not only that, when a man is below par neither the quantity nor the quality of his work is very good. I have taken the trouble to make some inquiry from the German employers as to their experience of insurance from this point of view, and I have got a number of answers which, perhaps, later on the House would be interested in having circulated: Here is one instance out of many. It is the opinion of an employer in the steel industry. He said:

"There can be no doubt that the Insurance Laws, together with the increase of wages, have exercised an enormously beneficial influence upon the health, standard of living, and the efficiency of workers."

Another great employer of Labour says:

"That from the employers' standpoint these laws pay, since the efficiency of the workman is increased."

And now there is this very curious position in Germany that the employers, and the largest employers, are voluntarily offering to increase their contributions to national insurance for increased benefits."

A very illuminating argument, that, and one that the dullest can understand. It explains beyond misunderstanding what interests prompt the framing of such a measure, and why it is that those bitter enemies Tweedledum and Tweedledee, always thirsting for each other's blood, fall on each other's necks in slobbering emotion over the Elysian prospects opened out to the workers for, as the Chancellor elegantly puts it, "the price of two pints of the cheapest beer per week." It also bears out, to the very letter what the Socialist Party has always contended, that reform cannot touch the wage-slave position of the working class, cannot materially benefit the exploited of capitalism, and is invariably made to serve the ruling class in society.

Consider! At present there are a large number of unemployed and sick workers who fall upon the rates. When the Bill becomes law the premiums of those employed will, to a large extent, be made to support these. So far it is a measure to compel the workers to support their unemployed and sick, and, as is admitted, to prevent those out of work or temporarily incapacitated from losing their efficiency. How

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THE MENACE OF STATE INSURANCE

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real a consideration this is to the master class is demonstrated by the case reported in the Press some time back, of a firm who, recommencing operations after a period of inaction, had to feed their men for a week before they were physically capable of starting work.

Now the sick workers will receive ten shillings a week for a few weeks, and medical attendance. From the point of view of maintenance this sum is laughable. But it is not intended to afford maintenance. It is intended to satisfy the landlord and prevent the break-up of the home during temporary sickness—for the wily capitalist understands the value of discipline in the factory, and he knows that when a workman's home has been broken up there is little likelihood of him ever being amenable to discipline again. But the maintenance of the family still devolves upon the wife, who must beg and borrow, and run debts that will take many a month of pinching when work is resumed to clear off.

But the chances are the working days of the man whose illness out-runs thirteen weeks are over. There is nothing to be gained by keeping his home together. However, it is still worth while to offer him five shillings a week to keep off the rates. How many workmen, if they were incapacitated, would be able to draw this weekly dole? How many would find it, even with the greatest care and the most complete submission to privation, sufficient to enable them to remain outside the four walls of the workhouse?

It is not for us to make a great do about the insufficiency of the amounts to be paid, since we maintain that there are economic laws inseparable from the social system, which broadly determine what the return to Labour shall be, and hence, in the long run, it can matter nothing to the workers upon what scale the payment of the benefits is fixed. We know that the scale will never be fixed so high that the whip of hunger which drives the workers into the labour-market is removed, for that would break down the social system completely. And anything less than this, anything, that is, which does not completely overthrow the competitive conditions of the labour-market, will soon be adjusted by those conditions, to the point of greatest advantage to the master class.

This does not necessarily mean that the working class will be worse fed, worse housed, or worse clothed than before. It does not even necessarily mean that they will be as badly fed, housed, and clothed. It does mean, however, that the degree of their exploitation will be increased, and the total bulk of their misery (which is not entirely a matter of food, housing, and clothing) will be added to.

This capitalist Cabinet is in a manner the brain centre of the capitalist class. All the vague hopes and longings of the master class therein take definite shape. Without any deep economic knowledge these men realise that if more is to be got out of the workers more must be put into them—just as if you want to get more power from a steam engine you must put more fuel in the furnace. From this point it becomes an easy, natural, and perhaps unconscious step to raise the idea to an ethic, nor does it follow that any conscious hypocrisy accompanies the process, any more than it accompanied the change of ethical outlook of the savage when economic development made cannibalism "immoral." Our views are so much the product of our economic interests that it is only to be expected that when the capitalist mind becomes impressed with the fact that, before the industrial machinery can be screwed up any further they must make the working class physically able to stand the strain, the raising of the standard of subsistence of the wage-earners will take on the "dim, religious light" of an instruction from heaven. They believe in it as an ethic, and the tears they water it with may be none the less scalding because it happens that, "from the employers' standpoint these laws pay." That is merely a pleasurable incident illustrating the verity that "God blesses those who obey his will," and proving that the raising of the workers' standard of living is God's will. So they pray for guidance and for heart of grace, and for strength and courage to fight the battle of the working class, of course. And perhaps they do it without praying like the good, honest "heathen" lovers of justice they are.

That is the answer to the Labour Party's claim that they have forced the measure into existence, the explanation of the fact that, as they put

it, measures which ten years ago were laughed at are now being introduced by capitalist parties." It is not at all that the Labour Party is the driving force; it is not that the ideas of Socialism are spreading and other compelling or inducing the master class to take action. Those who deny the class struggle, who assert that so far is it from being a fact that the emancipation of the working class itself, that both the working class and the capitalist class will advance together to the regeneration of society—those people may affect to find some substantiation of their assertion in such measures as this. But the true explanation is that the needs of capitalism are ever changing.

Ten years ago capitalism required a large unemployed army, but now, with the greater pressure and the growing tendency to set men to race each other and the clock discharging the slowest, no matter how fast they work, a larger unemployed reserve is necessary. It is necessary because the pace breaks down so many, and there must be many to choose from. It is necessary because the conditions under hustling, bullying gangers—who must bully or face starvation—become so appalling that only an enormous army of workless clamoring at the factory gates can keep those at work in the proper spirit of submission. It is necessary because the fluctuations in industrial activity grow larger and sharper year by year, making it imperative to have a greater reserve of labor to draw upon.

And not only must this unemployed army be greater—it must be kept in higher physical condition. With the development of industry individualism in machinery tends to give way to systems of machinery. As the speed increases the organization develops, and the whole fabric of the factory becomes more closely knitted into a solid whole. Every machine, every worker become more and more an interdependent part of a huge structure. What the structure gains in strength it loses in elasticity. The one part must wait for the other. So just as a chain's weakest link is its strength, a factory's speed becomes that of its slowest unit.

Therefore, when one slow or exhausted wage slave is discharged, a physically better man is wanted to fill his place. Hence something must be done to keep up the physical condition of the unemployed, who, since they are necessary to the master class, must just as necessarily be fit material for their purpose.

The present inadequacy of the amounts to be provided, in the case of both sickness and unemployment, does not affect the argument. It simply means that we may expect the amounts to be increased as the capitalist mind becomes more familiar with the gain in efficiency that results from the expenditure. A certain amount of misgiving always accompanies the first casting of one's bread upon the waters, but when it is seen to be returned sevenfold, the operation is repeated in a free handed manner.

Anyway the labor party have something left to spend their revolutionary (!) ardor upon, and we may expect them to win another "great victory for the working class"—somewhere about the time that industrial development convinces the capitalists that their interests demand a further step in the direction of providing for the unemployed and the sick.

Meanwhile it may be pointed out that this increased efficiency which the capitalist government so candidly confesses to actuate it in proposing this measure, can only be entirely inimical to the workers since it must increase the difference between the amount of wealth they produce and that which they consume, thus visiting upon them, not only the harder labor, but more unemployment as well. This statement is incontrovertible, and when it is realized it exposes the latest sop for the futility it is.—Socialist Standard.

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