

SOCIAL PALLIATIVES.

AUSTRALIAN EXPERIMENTS.

BY MAX HIRSCH.

[This article was forwarded to Mr. R. L. Outhwaite by the writer not long before his lamented death, and is now published for the first time. Subsequently the officials of the New South Wales Miners' Association were sent to gaol for promoting a strike, and a Labour Government was returned to release them and restore the "right to strike." This illuminating statement by Max Hirsch has been justified by subsequent events.]

When a nation arrives at the stage in which the existence of social injustice forces itself upon general recognition and demands a remedy, the courage required to apply the only possible remedy is lacking. The removal of the causes which have produced social injustice is far too radical an undertaking to be adopted at once. Instead recourse is had to palliatives; to measures directed to remove one or the other symptom of the social disease which by its unsightliness is particularly offensive to the increasing susceptibility of the nation. The far-famed social legislation of Australia is mostly of this character. These new countries are experimental stations in social legislation, may in time experiment in radical reforms; but as yet their experiments are mere palliatives. Some no doubt achieve such success as mere palliatives can; others, and the greater number must, in the nature of the case, fail to achieve even their limited objects. Yet even so they are of value to the world, if only as warnings against diverting time and energy into channels that lead nowhere when they are so urgently wanted for those that lead out of bondage.

Judge's Help against Self-Help.

Of the latter kind is the much lauded legislation to secure a fair wage for workers. Two systems having this object in view have been developed in Australia. One is the Wages Board system prevailing as yet only in the State of Victoria, but which it is now proposed to adopt in New South Wales as well. The other, Compulsory Arbitration, originated in New Zealand, but was subsequently adopted, with variations, in Western Australia, New South Wales and, for disputes extending beyond the confines of one State, by the Australian Commonwealth. While these two systems differ in many respects, they have in common one fundamental feature. That is, they both ultimately substitute the verdict of a lawyer-judge for "collective bargaining." The law exacts of employers and employed alike, that they shall not fight each other, but that disputes as to wages and conditions of work shall be decided in Court, on such evidence as may be available and according to such principles as the law—interpreted by the judges—may direct. The Unions are to bury the sword which has served them during nigh a century, the strike, and are to rely upon legal argument to secure improvement of conditions. That the judges are human beings, with all the class bias of other human beings; that their training, moreover, must of necessity give greater weight to such bias in their mind than in that of other men, is disregarded. And this disregard is one of the main causes of the failure of both systems, a failure greater in the case of the Compulsory Arbitration Acts than in that of Wages Boards, precisely because every decision rests with a judge in the former system, while in the latter he acts merely as a Court of Appeal.

Compulsory Arbitration.

Scarcely a day passes without news being published, illustrating the unsatisfactory nature of this attempt to substitute the verdict of a Court, *i.e.*, of judges, for the efforts of Trades Unions to improve the condition of workers. To-day's papers, for instance, dealing with the strike of the Sydney wharf labourers, afford such an illustration. The working rates of wages in this trade were 1s. per hour for day labour and 1s. 6d. per hour for night work, when the Union applied to the Arbitration Court for an award to materially increase them.

The Court, however, while slightly increasing the day wages, *i.e.*, to 1s. 1½d. per hour, reduced the night wages to 1s. 4d. per hour, thus breaking through the long established practice of paying 50 per cent. more for night labour than for day labour. Naturally the men were indignant

and even most of the employers recognised the award as unsatisfactory. Conferences were held between the Union and the employers, and the great body of the latter, the owners of inter-state and of deep-sea steamers, agreed to pay 1s. 8d. per hour for night work, leaving the price of day-work as fixed by the Court. One section of the employers, however, the owners of coastal steamers trading between New South Wales ports, refused the concession on the ground, that as the men had applied to the Court they were bound by the verdict given. As the Union refused to be so bound, the employers engaged non-unionists, and have ever since carried on their business without employing a single unionist. In order to terminate this condition, the Unions, less than a week ago, declared a strike against the companies who pay the higher wages, in the hope that these would bring pressure to bear upon the coastal companies. This has failed; the only employers who have not suffered being those employing non-unionists, and after three days the strike has been declared off, and other means to coerce the coastal companies are to be tried.

On the same day on which this announcement appeared (March 16th) a similarly illustrative fact was reported from New Zealand. The Blackhall miners had gone on strike in spite of a decision of the Arbitration Court, alleging that the employers had broken the award by dismissing men and creating a lock-out. The matter was brought before the Court, both sides promising to accept its award. This award has now been given to the effect that the men's Union is the guilty party and fining it £75. The men now refuse to go to work, which in all probability will subject them to further fines.

The Landlord the Only Winner.

Not all the awards of the Arbitration Court are against the men. In fact, during a long period of advancing prosperity most of the awards of the New Zealand Court have been in the direction of raising wages. But now this has turned out to the disadvantage of the workers. For in order to contest the actions brought by the latter, the employers in every trade had to organise, and this organisation, combined with the policy of Protection, has enabled them to raise prices, not only in the same ratio as the Court raised wages, but to a much greater extent.

A most instructive report on this subject has been made officially by Mr. Edward Tregear, who, as Secretary for Labour, is charged with the administration of the Act. In it he states that the necessities of life and rent have advanced in price by more than the rise in wages amounts to, and that the class "who alone will rise a winner in the end" is "the non-producing landlord of city and suburban property." Very significant admissions these, from one who has been an ardent advocate of the Arbitration Act for years before it was enacted.

For these and other reasons too numerous to mention here, the workers have already lost faith in this kind of legislation. Thus the Sydney Labour Council, early last year, carried a resolution condemnatory of the Act, and the Government of New South Wales has just proposed a Bill to supersede the Arbitration Act by a Wages Board Act,

Wages Boards.

For the reasons given Wages Boards have not been such a conspicuous failure as the Arbitration Acts. They have undoubtedly raised wages in the sweated trades, mainly employing females. It is, however, doubtful whether the same or even a better result would not have been achieved without them. For their operation has coincided with a period of advancing prosperity, during which female labour has gradually become very scarce. For some years employers have been unable to obtain all the labour required. Every trade depending largely upon female labour is voicing this complaint, and a rise of female wages was therefore inevitable, Wages Boards or no Wages Boards. In other respects, however, the Boards have not been so satisfactory, mainly again because a lawyer-judge is the ultimate arbiter. The following cases will illustrate this phase of the subject.

In the middle of last year the employers of starch factories appealed to the Wages Board for higher wages. The Board being unable to come to a decision, the Chief Secretary referred the matter to the Industrial Court. The undisputed facts were that the wages in this trade were lower in Melbourne than in Sydney or Adelaide, and were disgracefully low in spite of enormous tariff

protection for the manufacturers. During the trial the employers offered an increase of 20 per cent. instead of the 60 per cent. increase demanded by the workers. The Court's decision was that the employers' offer be the award of the Court, on the ground that the employers could not afford to pay more, though the Court admitted the insufficiency of the wages thus decided upon.

Shortly afterwards the Bakers' Wages Board increased the wages of bakers from £2 10s. to £2 14s. per week on the ground that the cost of living had greatly increased, a fact not disputed. The employers appealed to the Industrial Court, which annulled the award of the Wages Board. The men thereupon declared a strike, and within a week every employer decided to pay the wages awarded by the Wages Board and refused by the Court.

Self-Help Prevailing.

The cases cited are only a few out of many. Where the Courts award an increase of wages the workers accept, and where they refuse an increase the workers fall back on their proved remedy, the strike, and defy the Court. As long as the country is increasing in prosperity and only the workers set the law in motion not much harm is done. But such times cannot last for ever. Presently times of depression will come and the employers will take a hand in the game by applying for reduction in wages. Everyone can see what the outcome will be. Reductions which would have been accepted as inevitable if they had been the outcome of free conferences between the two parties, will be violently resisted when imposed by judicial authority. Avoidable strife, deepening the depression and still further lowering wages, and a general weakening of Unionism must be the inevitable result. Australian experience has amply proved that not in this direction can the emancipation of the workers be found.

TO A PIECE OF COAL.

Bread of the furnace! baked in the ages;
Cooled in the hurricane's ancient might;
Bought with terror and death and wages,
Tears and the widow's plight!

Snatched from the gloom with stars unkindled,
Part of the childhood of the sun!
Fragment of all the aeons mingled,
Darkness and light in one!

Saw you the miner's lamp steal past you,
Stirring the sunblood of your veins
Into revolt that thundering cast you,
Free from his pigmy chains!

Heard you the song that left him dying,
Deep where the rainless water flows?
Watched you his lampless spirit flying
Down where the deathwind blows?

Into that under-night he sought you,
Out of the dripping murk of hell,
Out from the grip of death he brought you;
Lord! I would pay him well!

—JAS. BLACKHALL,
in the DAILY NEWS, 14th March.

A PROPOSED POLITICAL ECONOMY CLASS FOR LONDON.

Mr. Harry de Pass writes:—

It seems to me that in London we lack a band of enthusiastic young workers such as is to be found in Glasgow, Manchester, and other towns.

I would like to see 11, Tothill Street, made the headquarters of an army of keen, energetic and well-informed propagandists, and with this object in view I propose to hold a political economy class once a week to study the land question, provided I can obtain sufficient promises of regular attendance.

We have a comfortable room at our disposal and all the books required are available.

Will those who would care to join such a class in order to pursue their studies of political economy and social problems, kindly communicate with me?

HARRY DE PASS.

11, Tothill Street, Westminster

POLITICAL ECONOMY CLASSES.



WILLIAM REID.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING LECTURE DELIVERED BY MR. REID AT LEEDS, HUDDERSFIELD, AND SHEFFIELD.

Thomas Carlyle called Political Economy the dismal science and not without reason. As taught in universities it had sheltered vested interests which every thoughtful man considered ought to be challenged. It was not like other sciences which set out without bias to discover what was true. Those who read the writings of its accredited authorities ought to keep an eye open for the bias of Political Economy as well as for its principles.

Some business men said they had put the so-called science up the chimney and had found it profitable to do so. If business men had little use for the principles of Political Economy as taught in schools, working men had still less interest in them. The professors of Political Economy could lecture working men on their thriftless and intemperate habits, but they could show them no cure for involuntary poverty.

The science was born in sin and shapen in iniquity. There were men who lived at the time of Adam Smith, such men as Thomas Paine, Thomas Spence, Robert Burns and Professor Ogilvie of King's College, Aberdeen, who tried to awaken the people as to the iniquity of our land laws. Such men had all been "snuffed out" by the people in authority. A gentleman in Edinburgh was banished from the country, his only known crime being that he possessed works by Thomas Paine and had attended meetings for the enfranchisement of the people. Burns in a song traced to the same date makes a "cryptic" reference to proud Edward's powers, although this monarch had gone to his account four centuries before then. Thomas Spence was kicked out of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society for an essay he read on the restoration of land a year prior to the publication of the WEALTH OF NATIONS. That was the time referred to by Charles Dickens as the period when timber was growing in northern latitudes that was destined to be used in the building of a guillotine. The first sect who tried to promote a science of Political Economy believed in free land and that taxes should be on land. Two gentlemen who had an opportunity of studying this