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Editorial Offices:

11, TOTHILL STREET, LONDON, S.W.1.

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Vic. London."

Telephone: Victoria 7525.

THE PRESENT UNEMPLOYMENT

Industrial conditions have gone from bad to worse and during the past few weeks have reached a crisis. The daily Press estimates that the unemployed number between half a million and eight hundred thousand, which means with them and their dependents that several millions of the people are to-day faced with abject poverty and all that this implies. The trade boom has been shown to be a tremendous speculation in a period of increasing prices. All the symptoms of a great industrial depression are upon us. Warehouses are full of goods that cannot find a market save at heavy loss. Factories are working short time. Staffs have been dismissed and wages reduced. The unemployed walk the streets in greater numbers than this country has seen since 1908. Thus, with apparent over-production on the one hand, there is despair and starvation on the other hand for many hundred thousand men and women who could purchase all that the warehouses hold and more, if they were only given the opportunity to produce other things in exchange. What is the cause of such a calamity?

The unemployed are without money, say the Labour Party. Let us give them, therefore, £2 a week each. That will give employment! That will buy off all the over-stocked warehouses! The Labour Party does not explain who will provide the money, nor tell us why the same money does not now provide employment. During this year £60,000,000 have been spent in unemployed donations and to-day the position is worse than ever it was.

The Government hurriedly promote schemes for spending public money on house-building and road-making whereby work will be found for some of the unemployed, the rest to get precarious relief from insurance or other funds. It is a policy to levy taxation on industry more or less shattered already, adding nothing to but rather lessening the wealth available for distribution, and making in the end as much poverty as it alleviates.

Mr. Lloyd George said in the House of Commons on 21st December that there was no room in this country for the million men and women for whom there is less employment than in 1914. They would have to face the problem of emigration within the Empire. This is the shameless pronouncement of the man who has now allied himself with the vested interests he formerly ruthlessly exposed, saying: "Who ordained that a few should have the land of Britain as a perquisite; who made 10,000 people owners of the soil and the rest of us

trespassers in the land of our birth?" Questions like that, Mr. Lloyd George said, were charged with peril for the order of things the Peers represented. They are charged with peril now for the order of things which Mr. Lloyd George and his Government represent, forced at the last moment by the fear of violent disturbance to measure out charity to the unemployed, after endowing the private ownership of the soil by special legislation, by land purchase at full value, by corn subsidies now made permanent, and dealing a vital blow at the trade of the country by pledges of anti-dumping laws for the protection of manufacturers.

It would be wearisome to catalogue all the current explanations of the present distress. "A deep depression has invariably followed upon the apparent prosperity that comes with war," says one Liberal leader-writer—as if there had not been many and repeated depressions preceded by no war. "The men who walk our streets to-day without work are the victims of a failure of statesmanship in the past two years," is the further declaration of the same leader-writer. If depression invariably follows war, how can statesmanship be blamed for the inevitable?

Again it is said: unemployment is due to the fact that goods cannot be sold in sufficient quantities at present prices. Not so. The truth is that manufacturers hesitate to sell at lower prices because they know that they cannot buy further raw materials at correspondingly low prices to continue production without loss. There has been speculation in this and all countries which has had the effect of raising the monopoly value of land. Those who can determine whether raw materials shall be available or not, the owners of land, accustomed to a prolonged period of inflated prices, have a direct economic interest as well as the unrestrained power to limit output in the face of falling prices. They have industry at their mercy. Production is stopped at its source and the necessary effect is widespread unemployment.

Europe is impoverished, it is said; Europe cannot buy our goods; Europe is in rags. These are the phrases bandied about by the intellectually lazy. Natural resources are just as prolific in Europe as ever they were. Industry would flourish to-morrow, if these natural resources were no longer regarded and treated as the property of the few.

The waste in Mesopotamia, the repression and destruction in Ireland, the blockade of trade with Russia, the impoverishment of Europe and the Treaty of Versailles are all brought into this discussion by Radical politicians and others who find in these subjects temptation enough for the most vigorous protest. But every word uttered with respect to Russia, or Ireland, or Mesopotamia, or Versailles, with nothing else said to explain the present distress, is inadequate to the case. Did not Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman remind us in 1905 that there were then 12,000,000 people on the verge of starvation in this country? Was there any Russia or Ireland or Mesopotamia or Versailles then? And if these are the causes of famine and distress, why is it that only certain people suffer? Why is it that in the midst of all this poverty there is yet wealth and luxury in abundance for some? The industrial depression is with us for other reasons. Manifestly

the cause which is responsible for unemployment is the same as that which divides wealth so unequally.

It is all very well to talk about the blockade of Russia, but we know there is a blockade of our own countryside. There are internal causes to-day which are preventing trade between London and Kent, as between Birmingham and Gloucester, or Manchester and Cheshire, or Glasgow and Ayrshire. Hence the unemployment. We venture to say that if the trade with Russia had been resumed earlier the present depression would have come all the sooner; the earlier resumption of that trade would have brought about an earlier break in prices, and it is that break which precipitated the slump. Prices of all goods rose continuously until the consumer could stand the strain no longer. Trace back the goods to the raw material and it will be found that those who hold the raw material are refusing now to part with it at prices corresponding to the prices of manufactured goods now on sale.

In the last analysis it is speculation in land which is the prime cause of the whole trouble. Speculators in land and in the raw materials that come directly from land are not like the holders of perishable stocks. They can hold their "goods" out of use until such time as labour and capital are forced to come to terms and pay the rent and prices unjustly and harshly imposed upon legitimate industry. There was a time when the newspapers we have referred to did deal with the land question as of primary importance. What is the meaning of their silence now in this hour of crisis? Is Russia or Mesopotamia or Ireland or Versailles used as an all-sufficient reason for the view that land monopoly counts no longer in the economic world? The inability or unwillingness of the politicians and publicists from every quarter, Radical, Labour and Tory, even to suggest that men are in poverty because access to the natural field of employment is denied, makes the obligation of our co-workers and friends at this time all the greater. Nothing is wanting to prove to any fair-minded man or to any audience that the withholding of land from use is the cause of unemployment and low wages, and that in this cause the remedy is to be found. A. W. M.

Where there is anything like an equal distribution of wealth—that is to say, where there is general patriotism, virtue, and intelligence—the more democratic the government the better it will be; but where there is gross inequality in the distribution of wealth, the more democratic the government the worse it will be; for, while rotten democracy may not in itself be worse than rotten autocracy, its effects upon national character will be worse. To give the suffrage to tramps, to paupers, to men to whom the chance to labour is a boon, to men who must beg, steal, or starve, is to invoke destruction. To put political power in the hands of men embittered and degraded by poverty is to tie firebrands to foxes and turn them loose amid the standing corn; it is to put out the eyes of a Samson and to twine his arms around the pillars of national life.—Henry George.