

They Were Even As We Are

A Workingman's Program in 1844

By GEORGE HENRY EVANS

As Congress will assemble in a few days, the public mind is naturally directed to the capital; and the Washington letter-writers, most of them miserable hacks who are scribbling merely to pay their board and grog bills while they are intriguing for office, are making all sorts of predictions about what will be done by Congress, and pretending to develop important plans and plots of different clans and cliques, having in view the next Presidency!

A great deal of this disgusting trash, having not even a show of truth or even probability for its foundation, is no doubt written in obedience to orders from the proprietors of newspapers whose staple is excitement, with a perfect indifference whether the excitement be for good or evil, so that it brings pennies into the newspaper till. Other portions of this letter writing trash are concocted with the sole view of advancing the interests of that party, or that particular clique of a party, to which the paper containing it is attached, and upon whose success, perhaps, its existence depends. Among these writers there are no doubt some who desire to contribute to the good of the country; but few of them appear to have that end particularly in view.

This paper was established for a higher object than most of these writers aim at, the object of securing the rights, and consequently the good, of the whole. . . That we have taken this opposite course is owing to our knowledge of a few simple truths, which they appear to be ignorant of, namely, that individual happiness cannot co-exist with surrounding misery; and that the most effectual way in which we can contribute to the good of the whole is to endeavor to secure the equal rights of each. . . .

What will Congress do towards bringing about such a desirable state of things? Will they do anything?

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 This editorial, by one of the most prominent labor leaders of the time, appeared in the "Working Man's Advocate" on November 30, 1844. It shows a remarkable insight into labor's basic economic problem—a problem which remains unsolved a century later. To readers familiar with the editorial policies of modern labor papers, which consist primarily in demanding special privilege for organized labor, this appeal for human rights based on economic principles will be refreshing.

Or will they have the face again to inflict their stale nostrums on the country? What will the President recommend? These are the questions which now occupy the minds of many well-meaning men.

Without venturing to predict what will be done, I will endeavor to show, very briefly, some things that ought to be done.

1. The Public Lands ought to be made free, and all further traffic in them prohibited. This would provide for all who might be thrown out of employment by the other measures necessary to be carried.

2. The expenses of government ought to be reduced to ten millions a year, by abolishing or greatly reducing the Navy (keeping up, however, the fortifications); by entirely abolishing the Army; by reducing about three-fourths the \$9,000 outfits and \$9,000 salaries to foreign ministers; by abolishing the West-Point Nursery; by reducing the salaries of members of Congress and all other officers to what the same talents would acquire in ordinary business, and by a general economical regulation of all the departments that would tend, in connection with the first-named measure, to put an end to office-seeking.

3. A mode of keeping the public money in the hands of Public Officers should be devised, and all use of it for other than government purposes should be prohibited. If the

public money is loaned it is insecure, and, what is worse, it gives the borrower a privilege at the expense of the public.

4. As the reduction of the Army and Navy should be gradual, as temporary measures, the cruel and anti-republican practice of flogging should be abolished; the pay of privates and officers should be more equalized, the pay of officers as well as privates should be stopped when off duty; and officers should in all cases be promoted from the ranks, or elected by the men.

5. The Tariff should be abolished, or a gradual abolition of it should be commenced, but not unless the land provision is made for the workmen engaged in trades fostered by it, and who might be thrown out of employment in consequence. If the land were free, a tariff between one nation and another would be just as absurd as a tariff between one family and another; but free land must precede free trade.

6. If the Tariff should be reduced below the expenses of government, the deficiency should be made up (as whole amount should be when the Tariff is entirely abolished) by a Direct Tax; every man paying in proportion to what he is worth clear of the world. . . . Government is for the protection of property, and why should not property pay the tax? . . .

7. Last, though not least among the measures that I think ought to be carried by the coming Congress, is the adoption of such means as may be in the power of Congress to abolish slavery. I am fully aware that it is just as inconsistent for the northern land monopolist to ask the southern slaveholder to give up his land; for Land Monopoly is the root of all Slavery; but the spirit of the age requires that something should be done towards the suppression both of land selling and body-selling. If Abolitionists have been imprudent; if they have shut their eyes

to the white slavery around them; if they have actually upheld white slavery by monopolizing and trafficking in the soil, that is no reason why their sins should be visited upon the blacks. Congress has power to arrest the Land Traffic, which was the parent of slavery; and if it

has any power to prevent the traffic in human flesh, between States or otherwise, it ought no longer to lie dormant.

If Congress will accomplish the work I have here cut out for them, instead of spending their time and the people's money in wrangling, in-

triguing, splitting hairs, and President-making, they will do more good than all the Congresses since the days of the revolution; and if John Tyler will recommend these measures, he will deserve to rank in history with the Fathers of the Republic.