

THE  
LABOUR QUESTION

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AN ABRIDGMENT OF  
THE CONDITION OF LABOUR  
BY  
HENRY GEORGE.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The Condition of Labour”—of which “The Labour Question” is an Abridgment—was written by Henry George, and was first published in September, 1891.

The Abridgment was originally prepared by the late Harry Llewellyn Davies, for many years a prominent worker in the English Land Values League. To him it was a labour of love, and the Booklet met with a glad reception by his co-workers in the Movement. First published in 1907, it has gone into many editions.

Harry Llewellyn Davies passed away in 1923, and the English League has honoured him by the publication of a Memorial Edition of “The Labour Question.”

That edition formed the basis for the compilation of this Booklet; but the chapters have been altered in some ways, and much additional matter from the complete work has been introduced, so that this publication is in many respects different from the English issue. On the whole, it contains the equivalent of more than ten pages of new matter; so that, while giving due credit to the work of Harry Llewellyn Davies, we could not rightly publish this edition as his Abridgment.

Compiled to supply the demand for a cheap pamphlet embodying the principles of “The Condition of Labour,” it should be pointed out that the Abridgment does not cover all the field of George’s masterly arguments. Readers of this Booklet are, therefore, advised to procure and read the complete work.

This edition of the Abridgment consists of 6650 copies. It is published by the Henry George Foundation, Australia, for circulation by the Henry George Leagues throughout the Commonwealth.

P. J. MARKHAM

Melbourne,  
December, 1932.

# The LABOUR QUESTION

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## First Principles.

This world is the creation of God!

The men brought into it for the brief period of their earthly lives are the equal creatures of His bounty, the equal subjects of His provident care.

By his constitution man is beset by physical wants on the satisfaction of which depends not only the maintenance of his physical life, but also the development of his intellectual and spiritual life.

God has made the satisfaction of these wants dependent on man's own exertions, laying on him the injunction and giving him the power to labour—a power that of itself raises him far above the brute, since we may reverently say that it enables him to become, as it were, a helper in the creative work.

God has not put on man the task of making bricks without straw. With the need for labour and the power to labour He has also given to man the material for labour. This material is land!

Man, physically, can live only on and from land, and can use elements such as air, sunshine, and water, only by the use of land.

Being the equal creatures of the Creator, equally entitled under His providence to live their lives and satisfy their needs, men are equally entitled to the use of land, and any adjustment that denies this equal right to the use of land is morally wrong.

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### The Right of Property.

Being created individuals, with individual wants and powers, men are individually entitled (subject of course to the moral obligations that arise from such relations as that of the family) to the use of their own powers and the enjoyment of the results.

There thus arises, anterior to human law, and deriving its validity from the law of God, a right of private ownership in things produced by labour—a right that the possessor may transfer, but of which to deprive him without his will is theft.

This right of property, originating in the right of the individual to himself, is the only full and complete right of property. It attaches to things produced by labour, but cannot attach to things created by God.

Thus, if a man take a fish from the ocean, he acquires a right of property in that fish, which exclusive right he may transfer by sale or gift. But he cannot obtain a similar right of property in the ocean, so that he may sell it or give it or forbid others to use it.

Or, if he set up a windmill, he acquires a right of property in the things such use of wind enables him to produce. But he cannot claim a right of property in the wind itself, so that he may sell it or forbid others to use it.

Or, if he cultivate grain, he acquires a right of property in the grain his labour brings forth. But he cannot obtain a similar right of property in the sun which ripened it or the soil on which it grew.

### What the Term "Land" Involves.

For these things are of the continuing gifts of God to all generations of men, which all may use, but none may claim as his alone.

To attach to things created by God the same right of private ownership that justly attaches to things produced by labour is to impair and deny the true rights of property. For a man who out of the proceeds of his labour is obliged to pay another man for the use of ocean or air or sunshine or soil—all of which are involved in the single term "land"—is in this deprived of his rightful property, and thus robbed.

### Private Possession and Private Ownership.

While the right of ownership that justly attaches to things produced by labour cannot attach to land, there may attach to land a right of possession.

God has not granted the earth to mankind in general in the sense that all without distinction can deal with it as they please; and regulations necessary for its best use may be fixed by human laws. But such regulations must conform to the moral law—must secure to all equal participation in the advantages of God's general bounty.

The principle is the same as where a father leaves property equally to a number of children. Some of the things thus left may be incapable of common use or of specific division. Such things may properly be assigned to some of the children, but only under condition that the equality of benefit among them all be preserved.

In the rudest social state, while industry consists in hunting, fishing, and gathering the spontaneous fruits of the earth, private possession of land is not necessary. But as men begin to cultivate the ground and expend their labour in permanent works, private possession of the land on which labour is thus expended is needed to secure the right of property in the products of labour. For who would sow if not assured of the exclusive possession needed to enable him to reap? Who would attach costly works to the soil without such exclusive possession of the soil as would enable him to secure the benefit?

### Limited and Unlimited Rights.

This right of private possession in things created by God is, however, very different from the right of private ownership in things produced by labour. The one is limited, the other unlimited, save in cases when the dictate of self-preservation may terminate all other rights. The purpose of the one, the exclusive possession of land, is merely to secure the other, the exclusive ownership of the products of labour; and it can never rightfully be carried so far as to impair or deny this. While anyone may hold exclusive possession of land so far as it does not interfere with the equal rights of others, he can rightfully hold it no further.

### Right of the Child.

Thus Cain and Abel, were there only two men on earth, might by agreement divide the earth between them. Under this compact each might claim exclusive right to his share as against the other. But neither could rightfully continue such claim against the next child born. For since no one comes into the world without God's permission, his presence attests his equal right to the use of God's bounty. For them to refuse him any use of the earth which they had divided between them would therefore be for them to commit murder. And for them to refuse him any use of the earth, unless by labouring for them or by giving them part of the products of his labour he bought it of them, would be for them to commit theft.

### Application of First Principles.

God's laws do not change! Though their applications may alter with altering conditions, the same principles of right and wrong that hold when men are few and industry is rude also hold amid teeming populations and complex industries.

In our cities of millions and countries of scores of millions, in a civilisation where the division of labour has gone so far that large numbers are hardly conscious that they are land users, it still remains true that man can live only on land; and that land is God's bounty to all, of which no one can be deprived without being murdered, and for which no one can be compelled to pay another without being robbed. And even in this state of society, where the elaboration of industry and the increase of permanent improvements have made the need for private possession of land widespread, there is no difficulty in conforming individual possession with the equal right to land.

### Land Values.

As soon as any piece of land will yield a larger return than is had by similar labour on other land a value attaches to it, which is shown when it is sold or rented.

This value—the value of the land itself, irrespective of the value of any improvements in or on it—always indicates the precise value of the benefit to which all are entitled in its use, as distinguished from the improvement value which, as producer or successor of a producer, belongs to the possessor in individual right.

To combine the advantages of private possession with the justice of common ownership it is only necessary, therefore, to take for common uses what value attaches to land irrespective of any exertion of labour on it. The principle is the same as in the case referred to, where a father leaves equally to his children things not susceptible of specific division or common use. In that case such things would be sold or rented and the value equally applied.

#### Our Proposal.

It is on this common sense principle that we, who believe in equal natural rights, would have the community act.

We do not propose to assert equal rights to land by keeping land common, letting any one use any part of it at any time. We do not propose the task, impossible in the present state of society, of dividing land in equal shares; still less the ever impossible task of keeping it so divided.

We propose leaving land in the private possession of individuals—with full liberty on their part to transfer or bequeath it—simply to take for public uses the Annual Value of the Land itself, irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it. And, since this would provide amply for the need of Public Revenue, we would accompany this Collection of Land Values with the repeal of all taxes now levied on the products and processes of industry—which taxes, since they take from the earnings of labour, we hold to be infringements of the right of property.

This we propose, not as a cunning device of human ingenuity, but as a conforming of human regulations to the will of God!

#### Harmony of God's Law.

God cannot impose on His creatures laws that clash!

If it be His command to men that they should not steal—that they should respect the right of property which each one has in the fruits of his labour; and if He be also the Father of all men, Who has intended all to have equal opportunities for sharing in His common bounty; then, in any possible stage of human civilisation, however elaborate, there must be some way in which the exclusive right to the products of industry may be reconciled with the equal right to land.

### Individual and Communal Rights Secured.

It cannot be, as is said by some, that, in order to secure the equal participation of men in the opportunities of life and labour, we must ignore the right of private property. Nor yet can it be, as others seem to argue, that, to secure the right of private property, we must ignore the equality of right in the opportunities of life and labour.

To say the one thing or the other is equally to deny the harmony of God's laws. But the private possession of land, subject to the payment to the community of the value of any special advantage thus given to the individual, satisfies both laws—securing to all equal participation in the bounties of the Creator, and to each the full ownership of the products of his labour.

Nor do we hesitate to say that this way of securing the equal right to the bounty of the Creator, and the exclusive right to the products of labour, is the way intended by God for raising Public Revenue.

### State Revenue and the Moral Law.

It is truly said—a salutary truth too often forgotten—“Man is older than the State, and holds the right of providing for the life of his body prior to the formation of any State.” It is also true that the State is in the divinely appointed order. For He who foresaw all things, and provided for all things, foresaw and provided that, with the increase of population and the development of industry, the organisation of human society into States or Governments would become both expedient and necessary.

No sooner does the State arise than it needs revenue. This need for revenue is small at first, while population is sparse, industry rude, and the functions of the State few and simple. But with growth of population and advance of civilisation the functions of the State increase, and larger and larger revenues are needed.

Now, the raising of Public Revenue must accord with the moral law. Hence:—

It must not take from individuals what rightfully belongs to individuals.

It must not give some an advantage over others, as by increasing the prices of what some have to sell and others must buy.



It must not lead men into temptation, by requiring trivial oaths, by making it profitable to lie, to swear falsely, to bribe or to take bribes.

It must not confuse the distinctions of right and wrong, and weaken the sanctions of Religion and the State, by creating crimes and punishing men for doing what morally they have an undoubted right to do.

It must not repress industry nor check commerce. It must not punish thrift. It must offer no impediment to the largest production and the fairest division of wealth.

#### Taxes Violate the Moral Law.

Consider the taxes on the processes and products of industry by which Public Revenue is collected:—The monstrous Customs Duties that hamper intercourse between so-called Christian States; the taxes on occupations, on earnings, on investments; on the building of houses; on the cultivation of fields; on industry and thrift in all forms.

Can these be the ways that God has intended that Governments should raise the means they need? Have any of them the characteristics indispensable in any plan we can deem a right one?

All these taxes violate the moral law. They take by force what belongs to the individual; they give to the unscrupulous an advantage over the scrupulous; their effect is, nay they are largely intended, to increase the price of what some have to sell and others must buy; they corrupt government; they make oaths a mockery; they shackle commerce; they fine industry and thrift; they lessen the wealth that men might enjoy, and enrich some by impoverishing others.

#### Christianity and Protection.

What most strikingly shows how opposed to Christianity is the existing system of raising Public Revenue is its influence on thought.

Christianity teaches us that all men are brethren; that their true interests are harmonious, not antagonistic. It gives us, as the golden rule of life, that we should do to others as we would have others do to us. But, out of the system of taxing the products and processes of labour, and out of its effects in increasing the price of what some have to sell and others must buy, has grown the theory of

“Protection,” which denies this gospel, which holds Christ ignorant of political economy, and proclaims laws for the nation utterly at variance with His teaching.

This theory sanctifies national hatreds; it inculcates a universal war of hostile tariffs; it teaches peoples that their prosperity lies in imposing on the productions of other peoples restrictions they do not wish imposed on their own; and, instead of the Christian doctrine of man’s brotherhood, it makes injury of foreigners a civic virtue.

#### **A Revenue That Conforms to Moral Law.**

Can anything more clearly show that to tax the products and processes of industry is not the way God intended Public Revenue to be raised.

But to consider what we propose—the raising of Public Revenue by collecting the Annual Value of Land irrespective of improvements—is to see that in all respects this does conform to the moral law.

Keep in mind that the value of land does not come from any exertion of labour or investment of capital on or in it—the values produced in this way being values of improvement which we would exempt.

#### **Land Values Belong to the Community.**

The value of land irrespective of improvements is the value that attaches to land by reason of increasing population and social progress. This value always goes to the owner as owner, and does not go to the user; for, if the user be a different person from the owner, he must always pay the owner for it in rent; while if the user be also the owner, it is as owner, not as user, that he receives it, and by renting the land he can, as owner, continue to receive it after he ceases to be a user.

#### **The Product to the Producer.**

Thus, to take the Annual Value of Land irrespective of improvements cannot lessen the rewards of industry, nor in any way take from the individual what belongs to the individual. It can only take the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community, and which therefore belongs to the community as a whole.

To take land values for the State, abolishing all taxes on the products of labour, would leave to the labourer the full produce of labour; to the individual all that rightfully

belongs to the individual. It would impose no burden on industry, no check on commerce, no punishment on thrift; it would secure the largest production and the fairest distribution of wealth, by leaving men free to produce and to exchange as they please, without any artificial enhancement of prices; and by taking for public purposes a value that cannot be carried off, that cannot be hidden, that of all values is most easily ascertained and most certainly and cheaply collected, it would enormously lessen the number of officials, dispense with oaths, and do away with temptations to bribery and evasion.

#### How Land Values Grow.

That God has intended the value of the land to serve for Public Revenue is shown by the order and degree in which land values increase with the growth of the State.

In that primitive condition ere the need for the State arises there are no land values. The products of labour have value, but in the sparsity of population no value as yet attaches to land itself. But as increasing density of population and increasing elaboration of industry necessitate the organisation of the State, with its need for revenue, value begins to attach to land. As population still increases and industry grows more elaborate, so the need for Public Revenue increases; and at the same time, and from the same causes, land values increase. The connection is invariable.

The value of things produced by labour tends to decline with social development, since the larger scale of production and the improvement of processes tend steadily to reduce their cost. But the value of land on which population centres goes up and up.

#### Land Values in Great Cities.

Take Rome, or Paris, or London, or New York, or Melbourne. Consider the enormous value of land in such cities as compared with the value of land in sparsely settled parts of the same countries. To what is this due? Is it not due to the density and activity of the populations of those cities—to the very causes that require great public expenditure for streets, drains, public buildings, and all the many things needed for the health, convenience, and safety of such great cities? See how with the growth of such cities

the one thing that steadily increases in value is land; how the opening of roads, the building of railways, the making of any public improvement, adds to the value of land.

#### Wise and Beneficent Provision.

Is it not clear that here is a natural law—that is to say, a tendency willed by the Creator? Can it mean anything else than that He who ordained the State, with its needs, has, in the values which attach to land, provided the means to meet those needs?

That it does mean this and nothing else is confirmed if we look deeper still, and inquire not merely as to the intent, but as to the purpose of the intent. If we do so we may see in this natural law, by which land values increase with the growth of society, not only such a perfectly adapted provision for the needs of society as gratifies our intellectual perceptions, by showing us the wisdom of the Creator, but a purpose with regard to the individual that gratifies our moral perceptions by opening to us a glimpse of His beneficence.

#### Natural Revenue Makes for Social Equality.

Consider: Here is a natural law by which as society advances the one thing that increases in value is land—a natural law by virtue of which all growth of population, all advance of the arts, all general improvements of whatever kind, add to a fund that both the commands of justice and the dictates of expediency prompt us to take for the common uses of society.

Now, since increase in the fund available for the common uses of society is increase in the gain that goes equally to each member of society, is it not clear that this law—by which land values increase with social advance while the values of the products of labour do not increase—tends, with the advance of civilisation, to make the share that goes equally to each member of society more and more important as compared with what goes to him from his individual earnings, and thus to make the advance of civilisation lessen relatively the differences that in a ruder social state must exist between the strong and the weak, the fortunate and the unfortunate? Does it not show the purpose of the Creator to be that the advance of man in civilisation should be an advance, not merely to larger

powers, but to a greater and greater equality, instead of what we by our ignoring of His intent are making it—an advance towards a more and more monstrous inequality?

#### Alternatives Make for Injustice.

That the value attaching to land with social growth is intended for social needs is shown by the final proof. For refusal to take for public purposes the increasing values that attach to land with social growth is to necessitate the getting of public revenues by taxes that lessen production, distort distribution, and corrupt society.

It is to leave some to take what justly belongs to all; it is to forego the only means by which it is possible in an advanced civilisation to combine the security of possession that is necessary to improvement with equality of natural opportunity—the most important of all natural rights.

It is thus at the basis of all social life to set up an unjust inequality between man and man, compelling some to pay others for the privilege of living, for the chance of working, for the advantages of civilisation, for the gifts of God.

#### Land Speculation and Industrial Depression.

It is even more than this. The very robbery that the masses of men thus suffer gives rise in advancing communities to a new robbery. For the value that with the increase of population and social advance attaches to land being suffered to go to individuals who have secured ownership of the land, it prompts to a forestalling of and speculation in land wherever there is any prospect of advancing population or of coming improvement, thus producing an artificial scarcity of the natural element of life and labour, and a strangulation of production that shows itself in recurring spasms of industrial depression as disastrous to the world as destructive wars.

#### Evil Upon Evil.

It is this that is driving men from the old countries to the new countries, only to bring there the same curses.

It is this that causes our material advance not merely to fail to improve the condition of the mere worker, but to make the condition of large classes positively worse.

It is this that, in our richest Christian countries, is giving us a large population whose lives are harder, more hopeless, more degraded than those of the veriest savages.

It is this that leads so many men to think that God is a bungler, and is constantly bringing people into the world for whom He has not made provision.

#### The Simple Rule of Right.

The poverty amid wealth and the seething discontent foreboding civil strife that characterise our civilisation of to-day are the inevitable results of our rejection of God's beneficence, of our ignoring of His intent. Were we to follow His clear, simple rule of right—leaving scrupulously to the individual all that individual labour produces, and taking for the community the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community—not merely could evil modes of raising Public Revenue be dispensed with, but all men would be placed on an equal level of opportunity with regard to the bounty of their Creator, on an equal level of opportunity to exert their labour and to enjoy its fruits.

Then, without drastic restrictive measures, the forestalling of land would cease. For then the possession of land would mean only security for the permanence of its use, and there would be no object for anyone to get land or to keep land except for use; nor would his possession of better land than others had confer any unjust advantage on him, or unjust deprivation on them, since the equivalent of the advantage would be taken by the State for the benefit of all.

#### Dr. Nulty's Striking Pronouncement.

The Right Reverend Dr. Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, Ireland, who sees all this very clearly, has made striking testimony to the design of Divine Providence that the Rent of Land should be taken for the community. In a Pastoral Letter addressed to the clergy and laity of his diocese, April 2, 1881, he says:

"This great social fact is of incalculable importance; and, on the strictest principles of justice, it is not clouded even by a shadow of uncertainty or doubt. There is, moreover, a charm and a peculiar beauty in the clearness with which it reveals the wisdom and the benevolence of the designs of Providence in the admirable provision He has made for the wants and the necessities of that state of social existence in which the very instincts of nature tell us we are to spend our lives. A vast public property, a great national fund, has been placed under the dominion and at the disposal of

the nation to supply itself abundantly with resources necessary to liquidate the expenses of its government and the administration of its laws."

"One of the most interesting peculiarities of this property is that its value is constantly progressive and increasing in a direct ratio to the growth of the population, and the very causes that increase and multiply the demands made on it increase proportionately its ability to meet them."

He says further:

"Any settlement of the land of a country that would exclude the humblest man in that country from his share of the common inheritance would be not only an injustice and a wrong to that man, but, moreover, would be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator."

#### A Beautiful Economic Law.

There is, indeed, as Bishop Nulty says, a peculiar beauty in the clearness with which the wisdom and benevolence of Providence are revealed in the provision made for the common needs of society in what economists call the Law of Rent. Of all the evidence that natural religion gives, it is this that most clearly shows the existence of a beneficent God!

In this beautiful provision for social needs we see that God has intended civilisation; that all our discoveries and inventions do not, and cannot, outrun His forethought; and that steam, electricity, and labour-saving appliances only make the great moral laws clearer and more important.

#### The Communal Fund of Land Values.

In the growth of this great fund, increasing with social advance—a fund that accrues from the growth of the community, and belongs, therefore, to the community—we see, not only that there is no need for the taxes that lessen wealth, that engender corruption, and promote inequality, but, that to take this fund for the purpose for which it was intended, would secure to all the equal enjoyment of God's bounty—the abundant opportunity to satisfy their wants—and provide amply for every legitimate need of the State.

We see that God in His dealings with men has not been a bungler or a niggard; that He has not brought too many men into the world; that He has not neglected abundantly to supply them; that He has not intended that bitter com-

petition of the masses for a mere animal existence and that monstrous aggregation of wealth which characterise our civilisation; but, that these evils, which lead so many to say there is no God, or yet more impiously to say that they are of God's ordering, are due to our denial of His moral law.

#### The Golden Rule.

We see that the law of justice, the law of the Golden Rule, is not a mere counsel of perfection, but indeed the law of social life. We see that, if we were only to observe it, there would be work for all, leisure for all, abundance for all; and that civilisation would tend to give to the poorest not only necessities, but all reasonable comforts and luxuries.

We see that Christ was not a mere dreamer when He told men that if they would seek the kingdom of God and its right doing they might no more worry about material things than do the lilies of the field about their raiment; but that He was only declaring what political economy in the light of modern discovery shows to be a sober truth.

#### Fallacious and Evil Methods.

There are many who, feeling bitterly the monstrous wrongs of the present distribution of wealth, are animated only by a blind hatred of the rich and a fierce desire to destroy existing social adjustments. This class is indeed only less dangerous than those who proclaim that no social improvement is needed or is possible.

#### Socialism.

The Socialists, as I understand them, and as the term has come to apply to anything like a definite theory, do not seek the abolition of all private property. Those who do this are properly called Communists.

The Socialists seek the assumption by the State of capital (in which they vaguely and erroneously include land), or, more properly speaking, of large capitals, and State management and direction of at least the larger operations of industry. In this way they hope to abolish interest, which they regard as a wrong and an evil; to do away with the gains of exchangers, speculators, contractors, and middlemen, which they regard as waste; to do away with the wage system and secure general co-operation; and to prevent competition, which they deem the fundamental cause of the impoverishment of labour. The more moderate of



them, without going so far, go in the same direction, and seek some remedy or palliation of the worst forms of poverty by Government regulation.

The essential character of Socialism is that it looks to the extension of the functions of the State for the remedy of social evils; that it would substitute regulation and direction for competition, and control by organised society for the free play of individual desire and effort.

#### The Vice of Socialism.

The vice of Socialism in all its degrees is its want of radicalism, of going to the root.

Its advocates generally teach the preposterous and degrading doctrine that slavery was the first condition of labour. It assumes that the tendency of wages to a minimum is the natural law, and seeks to abolish wages; it assumes that the natural result of competition is to grind down workers, and seeks to abolish competition by restrictions, prohibitions, and extensions of governing power. Thus, mistaking effects for causes, and childishly blaming the stone for hitting it, it wastes strength in striving for remedies that when not worse are futile.

#### Some Phases of Socialism.

Associated though it is in many places with democratic aspiration, yet its essence is the same delusion to which the Children of Israel yielded when, against the protest of their prophet, they insisted on a king; the delusion that has everywhere corrupted democracies and enthroned tyrants—that power over the people can be used for the benefit of the people; that there may be devised machinery that through human agencies will secure for the management of individual affairs more wisdom and more virtue than the people themselves possess. This superficiality and this tendency may be seen in all the phases of Socialism.

Though not usually classed as Socialists, both the Trade Unionists and the Protectionists have the same essential character.

Take, for instance, Protectionism. The Protectionists seek by governmental prohibitions or taxes on imports to regulate the industry and control the exchanges of their country, so, as they imagine, to diversify home industries and prevent the competition of people of other countries.

### Protectionism—an Ally of Socialism.

What support Protectionism has, beyond the mere selfish desire of sellers to compel buyers to pay them more than their goods are worth, springs from such superficial ideas as that production, not consumption, is the end of effort; that money is more valuable than money's worth, and to sell more profitable than to buy; and, above all, from a desire to limit competition, springing from an unanalysing recognition of the phenomena that necessarily follow when men who have the need to labour are deprived by monopoly of access to the natural and indispensable element of all labour.

Its methods involve the idea that Governments can more wisely direct the expenditure of labour and the investment of capital than can labourers and capitalists, and that the men who control Governments will use this power for the general good and not in their own interests. They tend to multiply officials, restrict liberty, invent crimes. They promote perjury, fraud, and corruption. And they would, were the theory carried to its logical conclusion, destroy civilisation and reduce mankind to savagery.

### Trades Unionism—Another Ally.

Take Trades Unionism. The Trade Unionists seek the increase of wages, the reduction of working hours, and the general improvement in the condition of wage-workers by organising them into guilds or associations which shall fix the rates at which they will sell their labour, shall deal as one body with employers in case of dispute, shall use on occasion their necessary weapon, the strike, and shall accumulate funds for such purposes and for the purpose of assisting members when on strike, or (sometimes) when out of employment.

While within narrow lines Trades Unionism promotes the idea of the mutuality of interests, and often helps to raise courage and further political education, and while it has enabled limited bodies of working-men to improve somewhat their condition, and gain, as it were, breathing space, yet it takes no note of the general causes that determine the conditions of labour, and strives for the elevation of only a small part of the great body by means that cannot help the rest.

### A Caste System.

Aiming at the restriction of competition—the limitation of the right to labour—its methods are like those of an army, which even in a righteous cause are subversive of liberty and liable to abuse, while its weapon, the strike, is destructive in its nature both to combatants and non-combatants, being a form of passive war. To apply the principle of Trades Unionism to all industry, as some dream of doing, would be to enthrall men in a caste system.

Or take even such moderate measures as the limitation of working hours and of the labour of women and children. They are superficial in looking no further than to the eagerness of men and women and little children to work unduly, and in proposing forcibly to restrain overwork while utterly ignoring its cause, the sting of poverty that forces human beings to it. And the methods by which these restraints must be enforced, multiply officials, interfere with personal liberty, tend to corruption, and are liable to abuse.

### Thorough-going Socialism.

As for thorough-going Socialism—which is the more to be honoured as having the courage of its convictions—it would carry these vices to full expression. Jumping to conclusions without effort to discover causes, it fails to see that oppression does not come from the nature of capital, but from the wrong that robs labour by divorcing it from land, and that creates a fictitious capital that is really capitalised monopoly.

It fails to see that it would be impossible for capital to oppress labour were labour free to the natural material of production; that the wage system itself springs from mutual convenience, being a form of co-operation in which one of the parties prefers a certain to a contingent result; and that what it calls the "iron law of wages" is not the natural law of wages, but only the law of wages in that unnatural condition in which men are made helpless by being deprived of the materials for life and work.

It fails to see that what it mistakes for the evils of competition are really the evils of restricted competition—are due to a one-sided competition to which men are forced when deprived of land; while its methods, the organisation

of men into industrial armies, the direction and control of all production and exchange by governmental or semi-governmental bureaus, would, if carried to full expression, mean Egyptian despotism.

#### The Anarchists.

At the opposite extreme are the Anarchists, a term which, though frequently applied to mere violent destructionists, refers also to those who, seeing the many evils of too much government, regard government in itself as evil, and believe that in the absence of coercive power the mutual interests of men would secure voluntarily what co-operation is needed. The philosophical Anarchists of whom I speak are few in number. It is with Socialism in its various phases that we have to do battle.

#### Enforced and Voluntary Communism.

Those for whom I would speak, believing that the rights of true property are sacred, would regard forcible Communism as robbery that would bring destruction. But we would not deny that voluntary Communism might be the highest possible state, nor that it is possible for mankind to attain it, since among the early Christians and among the Religious Orders we have examples of Communistic Societies on a small scale.

Knowing these things, we cannot take it on ourselves to say that a social condition may not be possible in which an all-embracing love shall have taken the place of all other motives. But we see that Communism is only possible where there exists a general and intense religious faith, and we see that such a state can be reached only through a state of justice. For before a man can be a saint he must first be an honest man.

#### Social and Individual Natures of Man.

From both Anarchists and Socialists we fundamentally differ. We regard them as erring in opposite directions—the one in ignoring the social nature of man, the other in ignoring his individual nature. While we see that man is primarily an individual, and that nothing but evil has come or can come from the interference by the State with things that belong to individual action, we also see that he is a social being, and that the State is requisite to social advance, having an indispensable place in the natural order.

Looking on the bodily organism as the analogue of the social organism, the Anarchists seem to us like men who would try to get along without heads, and the Socialists like men who would try to rule the wonderfully complex and delicate internal relations of their frames by conscious will.

#### Difference as to Remedies.

We differ from the Socialists in our diagnosis of the evil, and we differ from them as to remedies.

We have no fear of capital, regarding it as the natural handmaiden of labour; we look on interest in itself as natural and just; we would set no limit to accumulation; we see no evil in competition, but deem unrestricted competition to be as necessary to the health of the industrial and social organism as the free circulation of the blood is to the health of the bodily organism—to be the agency whereby the fullest co-operation is to be secured.

We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community, the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual; and, treating necessary monopolies as functions of the State, abolish all restrictions and prohibitions save those required for public health, safety, morals, and convenience.

#### Government, Regulation versus Natural Law.

The fundamental difference is in this: Socialism in all its phases looks on the evils of our civilisation as springing from the inadequacy or inharmony of natural relations, which must be artificially organised or improved. In its idea there devolves on the State the necessity of organising the industrial relations of men, the construction, as it were, of a great machine whose complicated parts shall properly work together under the direction of human intelligence.

This is the reason why Socialism tends towards Atheism. Failing to see the order and symmetry of natural law, it fails to recognise God!

We, on the other hand, see in the social and industrial relations of men not a machine which requires construction, but an organism which needs only to be suffered to grow.

We see in the natural social and industrial laws such harmony as we see in the adjustments of the human body, and which as far transcends the power of man's intelli-

gence to order and direct as it is beyond man's intelligence to order and direct the vital movements of his frame.

#### Do Justice and Give Freedom.

We see in these social and industrial laws so close a relation to the moral law as must spring from the same Authorship, and that proves the moral law to be the sure guide of man where his intelligence would wander and go astray. This is the reason why our beliefs tend towards, nay, are indeed the only beliefs consistent with a recognition of the Supreme Law which men must follow if they would secure prosperity and avoid destruction.

This is the reason why to us Political Economy only serves to show the depths of wisdom in the simple truths which common people heard gladly from the lips of the Carpenter of Nazareth!

Thus, to us, all that is needed to remedy the evils of our time is to do justice and give freedom.

#### The Only Possible Remedy.

It is because that in what we propose—the securing to all men of equal natural opportunities for the exercise of their powers and the removal of all legal restriction on the legitimate exercise of those powers—we see the conformation of human law to the moral law, that we hold with confidence not merely that this is a sufficient remedy for the present condition of labour, but that it is the only possible remedy!

#### Labour's Storehouse and Workshop.

Nor is there any other. The organisation of man is such, his relations to the world in which he is placed are such—that is to say, the immutable laws of God are such—that it is beyond the power of human ingenuity to devise any way by which the evils born of the injustice that robs men of their birthright can be removed otherwise than by opening to all the bounty that God has provided for all!

Since man can live only on land and from land—since land is the reservoir of matter and force from which man's body itself is taken, and on which he must draw for all that he can produce—does it not irresistibly follow that to give the land in ownership to some men and to deny to others all right to it is to divide mankind into the rich and the poor, the privileged and the helpless?

### The Iron Law of Wages.

Does it not follow that those who have no rights to the use of land can live only by selling their labour to those who own the land?

Does it not follow that what the Socialists call "the iron law of wages," what the political economists term "the tendency of wages to a minimum," must take from the landless mass of mere labourers—who of themselves have no power to use their labour—the benefits of any advance or improvement that does not alter this unjust division of land.

Having no power to employ themselves, they must, either as labour-sellers or land-renters, compete with one another for permission to labour; and this competition with one another of men shut out from God's inexhaustible storehouse, must ultimately force wages to their lowest point, the point at which life can just be maintained.

#### Land Monopoly Makes Labour Helpless.

This is not to say that all wages must fall to this point, but that the wages of that necessarily largest stratum of labourers who have only ordinary knowledge, skill, and aptitude, must so fall. The wages of special classes, who are fenced off from the pressure of competition by peculiar knowledge, skill, or other causes, may remain above that ordinary level.

Thus, where the ability to read and write is rare its possession enables a man to obtain higher wages than the ordinary labourer. But as the diffusion of education makes the ability to read and write general, this advantage is lost. So, when a vocation requires special training or skill, or is made difficult of access by artificial restrictions, the checking of competition tends to keep wages in it at a higher level. But as the progress of invention dispenses with peculiar skill, or artificial restrictions are broken down, these higher wages sink to the ordinary level. And so, it is only so long as they are special that such qualities as industry, prudence, and thrift can enable the ordinary labourer to maintain a condition above that which gives a mere living. Where they become general, the law of competition must eventually reduce the earnings or savings of such qualities to the general level.

**Labour-saving Improvements.**

Land being necessary to life and labour, where private property in land has divided society into a landowning class and a landless class, there is no possible invention or improvement, whether it be industrial, social, or moral, which, so long as it does not affect the ownership of land, can prevent poverty or relieve the general conditions of mere labourers.

For, whether the effect of any invention or improvement be to increase what labour can produce or to decrease what is required to support the labourer, it can, so soon as it becomes general, result only in increasing the income of the owners of land, without benefiting the mere labourers.

**Where Has the Benefit Gone?**

How true this is we may see in the facts of to-day. In our own time invention and discovery have enormously increased the productive power of labour, and at the same time greatly reduced the cost of many things necessary to the support of the labourer.

Have not the benefits of these improvements mainly gone to the owners of land—enormously increased land values?

I say mainly, for some part of the benefit has gone to the cost of monstrous standing armies and warlike preparations; to the payment of interest on great public debts; and, largely disguised as interest on fictitious capital, to the owners of monopolies other than that of land.

**The Paradox.**

But, were standing armies and all their incidents abolished, were all monopolies other than that of land done away with, were Governments to become models of economy, were the profits of speculators, of middlemen, of all sorts of exchangers saved—the result would not differ from that which has followed the increase of productive power.

Is it not true that if there were proposed to-day, what all Christian men ought to pray for, the complete disbandment of all the armies of Europe, the greatest fears would be aroused for the consequences of throwing on the labour market so many unemployed labourers?

The explanation of this and of similar paradoxes that in our time perplex on every side may easily be seen.



### Disinherited from the Earth.

The effect of all inventions and improvements that increase productive power, that save waste and economise effort, is to lessen the labour required for a given result, and thus to save labour, so that we speak of them as labour-saving inventions or improvements.

Now, in a natural state of society, where the rights of all to the use of the earth are acknowledged, labour-saving improvements might go to the very utmost that can be imagined without lessening the demand for men, since in such natural conditions the demand for men lies in their own enjoyment of life and the strong instincts that the Creator has implanted in the human breast.

But, in that unnatural state of society where the masses of men are disinherited of all but the power to labour when opportunity to labour is given them by others, there the demand for them becomes simply the demand for their services by those who hold this opportunity—and man himself becomes a commodity. Hence, although the natural effect of labour-saving improvements is to increase wages, yet in the unnatural condition which private ownership of the land begets, the effect, even of such moral improvements as the disbandment of armies, is, by lessening the commercial demand, to lower wages.

If labour-saving inventions and improvements could be carried to the very abolition of the necessity for labour, what would be the result? Would it not be that landowners could then get all the wealth that the land was capable of producing, and would have no need at all for labourers, who must then either starve or live as pensioners on the bounty of the landowners?

### Natural Bounty Monopolised.

So long as private property in land continues—so long as some men are treated as owners of the earth, and other men live on it only by their sufferance—human wisdom can devise no means by which the evils of our present condition may be avoided.

Could even the wisdom of God do so? How could He? Should He infuse new vigour into the sunlight, new virtue into the air, new fertility into the soil, would not all this new bounty go to the owners of the land?

Should He open the minds of men to the possibilities of new substances, new adjustments, new powers, would this do any more to relieve poverty than steam, electricity and all the numberless discoveries and inventions of our time have done?

Or, if He were to send down from the heavens above or cause to gush up from the subterranean depths, food, clothing—all the things that satisfy man's material desires—to whom under our laws would all these belong? Would not this increase and extension of His bounty merely enable the privileged class more riotously to roll in wealth, and bring the disinherited class to more widespread pauperism?

#### World-Wide Common Cause.

The evil condition of labour is manifest in all countries! The misery and wretchedness are alike felt in countries of different religions and of none; in Monarchies and Republics; where industry is simple and where it is elaborate; and amid all varieties of industrial customs and relations. And, there is one world-wide common cause!

This common cause is clear when we consider that, since labour must find its workshop and reservoir in land, the Labour Question is but another name for the Land Question! And see how fully adequate is this cause!

#### Root of the Evil.

The most important of all the material relations of man is his relation to the planet he inhabits, and hence, the "impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator," which, as Bishop Nulty says, is involved in private property in land, must produce evil wherever it exists. And, further, as by virtue of the law, "unto whom much is given, from him much is required," the very progress of civilisation makes the evils produced by private property in land more widespread and intense.

What is producing throughout the civilised world the present condition of things is not this and that local error or minor mistake. It is nothing less than the progress of civilisation itself; nothing less than the intellectual advance and the material growth in which our century has been so pre-eminent, acting in a state of society based on private property in land.

It is nothing less than the new gifts that in our time have been showered on man, being turned into scourges by man's "impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator."

#### Blessings Turned Into Curses.

The discoveries of science, the gains of invention, have given to us in this wonderful century more than has been given to men in any time before, and, in a degree so rapidly accelerating as to suggest geometrical progression, are placing in our hands new material powers.

But with the benefit comes the obligation. In a civilisation beginning to pulse with steam and electricity, where the sun paints pictures and the phonograph stores speech, it will not do to be merely as just as were our fathers. Intellectual advance and material advance require corresponding moral advance. Knowledge and power are neither good nor evil. They are not ends but means—evolving forces that if not controlled in orderly relations must take disorderly and destructive forms.

The increasing perplexity, the growing discontent, mean nothing less than that forces of destruction swifter and more terrible than those that have shattered every preceding civilisation are already menacing ours; that if it does not quickly rise to a higher moral level; if it does not become in deed as in word a Christian civilisation—on the wall of its splendour must flame the doom of Babylon: "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting!"

#### Some So-called Remedies.

I have already referred generally to the defects that attach to all Socialistic remedies for the evil condition of labour. I will now, specifically, but briefly, refer to some proposals which have a wide and strong appeal:—

That the State should step in to prevent overwork; to restrict the employment of women and children; to secure sanitary conditions in workshops; to regulate wages; to encourage settlement, and the acquisition of land by working-men; and the formation of working-men's associations.

The tendency and spirit of these remedial suggestions lean unmistakably to Socialism — extremely moderate Socialism it is true, yet Socialism still. And how little may in this way be accomplished!

### Mere Palliatives.

A strong, absolute ruler might hope by such regulations to alleviate the conditions of chattel slaves. But the tendency of our times is towards democracy, and democratic States are necessarily weaker in paternalism, while, in the industrial slavery growing out of private ownership of land that prevails in Christendom to-day, it is not the master who forces the slave to labour, but the slave who urges the master to let him labour.

Thus, the greatest difficulty in enforcing such regulations comes from those whom they are intended to benefit. It is not, for instance, the masters who make it difficult to enforce restrictions on child labour in factories, but the mothers, who, prompted by poverty, misrepresent the ages of their children even to the masters and teach the children to misrepresent.

### Factory Laws.

While in large factories and mines regulations as to hours, ages, etc., though subject to evasion and offering opportunities for extortion and corruption, may be to some extent enforced, how can they have any effect in those far wider branches of industry where the labourer works for himself or for small employers?

All such remedies are of the nature of the remedy for overcrowding that is generally prescribed with them—the restriction under penalty of the number who may occupy a room and the demolition of insanitary buildings. Since these measures have no tendency to increase house accommodation, nor to augment ability to pay for it, the overcrowding that is forced back in some places goes on in other places, and to a worse degree.

### Economic Pressure.

All such remedies begin at the wrong end. They are like putting on brake and bit to hold in quietness horses that are being lashed into frenzy; like trying to stop a locomotive by holding its wheels, instead of shutting off steam.

Men do not overwork themselves because they like it; it is not in the nature of the mother's heart to send children to work when they ought to be at play; not of choice will labourers work in dangerous and insanitary conditions.

These things, like overcrowding, come from the sting of poverty. And so long as the poverty of which they are an expression is left untouched, such restrictions can have only partial and evanescent results. The cause remaining, repression in one place can only bring out its effects in other places, and the task assigned to the State is as hopeless as to ask it to lower the level of the ocean by balling out the sea.

#### State Regulation of Wages Impossible.

Nor can the State cure poverty by regulating wages. It is as much beyond the power of the State to regulate wages as it is to regulate the rates of interest. Usury laws have been tried again and again, but the only effect they have ever had has been to increase what the poorer borrowers must pay, and for the same reasons that all attempts to lower by regulation the price of goods have always resulted merely in increasing their price.

The general rate of wages is fixed by the ease or difficulty with which labour can obtain access to land, ranging from the full earnings of labour, where land is free, to the least on which labourers can live and reproduce, where land is fully monopolised.

#### Wages and the Land Question.

Thus, where it has been comparatively easy for labourers to get land, as in the United States and in Australasia, wages have been higher than in Europe, and it has been impossible to get European labourers to work there for wages that they would gladly accept at home; while now, as monopolisation goes on under the influence of private property in land, wages tend to fall, and the social conditions of Europe to appear.

Thus, under the partial yet substantial recognition of common rights to land, the many attempts of the British Parliaments to reduce wages by regulation failed utterly. And so, when the institution of private property in land had done its work in England, all attempts of Parliament to raise wages proved unavailing.

At the beginning of this century it was even attempted to increase the earnings of labourers by grants in aid of wages. But the only result was to lower commensurately what wages employers paid.

**Where State Regulation Leads.**

The State could only maintain wages above the tendency of the market (for, as I have shown, labour deprived of land becomes a commodity) by offering employment to all who wish it; or by lending its sanction to strikes and supporting them with its funds.

Thus it is that the thorough-going Socialists who want the State to take all industry into its hands are much more logical than those timid Socialists who propose that the State should regulate private industry—but only a little.

**Peasant Proprietorship no Salvation.**

The same hopelessness attends the suggestion that working people should be encouraged by the State in obtaining a share of the land. It is proposed that, as is now being attempted in Ireland, the State shall buy out large land owners in favour of small ones, establishing what is known as peasant proprietors.

Supposing that this can be done, even to a considerable extent, what will be accomplished save to substitute a larger privileged class for a smaller privileged class? What will be done for the still larger class that must remain—the labourers of the agricultural districts, the workmen of the towns, the proletarians of the cities?

Is it not true, as Professor De Laveleye says, that in such countries as Belgium, where peasant proprietary exists, the tenants (for there still exist tenants) are rackrented with a mercilessness unknown in Ireland? Is it not true that in such countries as Belgium the condition of the mere labourer is worse than it is in Great Britain, where large ownerships obtain? And if the State attempts to buy up land for peasant proprietors, will not the effect be, what is seen to-day in Ireland, to increase the market value of land and thus make it more difficult for those not so favoured, and for those who will come after, to get land?

**Subsidised Industries Unjustifiable.**

How, moreover, is it possible to justify State aid to one man to buy a bit of land without also insisting on State aid to another man to buy a donkey, to another to buy a shop, to another to buy the tools and materials of a trade—State aid, in short, to everybody who may be able to make good use of it or thinks that he could?

### Coercion by the State.

And is not this Communism—not the Communism of the early Religious Orders, but Communism that uses the coercive power of the State to take rightful property by force from those who have to give to those who have not?

For the State has no purse of Fortunatus; the State cannot repeat the miracle of the loaves and fishes; and, whether it gives or lends money, or gives or lends credit, it cannot give to those who have not without taking from those who have.

### Small Holdings Futile.

Aside from all this, any scheme of dividing up land while maintaining private property in land is futile. Small holdings cannot co-exist with the treatment of land as private property where civilisation is materially advancing and wealth augments.

We may see this in the economic tendencies that in ancient times were the main cause that transformed world-conquering Italy from a land of small farms to a land of great estates. We may see it in the fact, that, while two centuries ago the majority of English farmers were owners of the land they tilled, tenancy has been for a long time the all but universal condition of the English farmer. And now the mighty forces of steam and electricity have come to urge concentration. It is in the United States that we may see on the largest scale how their power is operating to turn a nation of landowners into a nation of tenants.

### The Only Way.

The principle is clear and irresistible. Material progress makes land more valuable, and when this increasing value is left to private owners land must pass from the ownership of the poor into the ownership of the rich, just as diamonds so pass when poor men find them.

What the British Government is attempting in Ireland is to build snow houses in the Arabian desert! to grow bananas in Labrador!

There is one way, and only one way, in which working people in our civilisation may be secured a share in the land of their country, and that is the way that we propose—the taking of the profits of land ownership for the community!

### Working-men's Associations.

Working-men's associations may promote fraternity among their members, extend social intercourse, and provide assurance in case of sickness or death—but if they go no further they are powerless to affect wages even among their members.

As to Trade Unions proper, the attitude of many good people is one of warm approbation provided that they do not go too far. For these good people object to strikes; they reprehend societies that do their best to get into their hands the whole field of labour and to force working-men either to join them or to starve; they discountenance the coercing of employers, and seem to think that arbitration might take the place of strikes.

### The Strike and the Boycott.

Yet they express ideas and make assertions that are all that the Trade Unionist would ask, not merely to justify the strike and the boycott, but even the use of violence where only violence would suffice. For they speak of the insufficient wages of workmen as due to the greed of rich employers; they assume the moral right of the workman to obtain employment from others at wages greater than those others are willing freely to give; and they deny the right of anyone to work for such wages as he pleases, in such a way as to give the impression that "blacklegging," i.e., the working for less than "union wages," is a crime.

To men conscious of bitter injustice, to men steeped in poverty, yet mocked by flaunting wealth, such words mean more than I think is realised.

### Coercion by Labour Unions.

When fire shall be cool and ice be warm, when armies shall throw away lead and iron, to try conclusions by the pelting of rose leaves, such labour associations as these good people are thinking of may be possible. But not till then!

For labour associations can do nothing to raise wages but by force. It may be force applied passively, or force applied actively, or force held in reserve, but it must be force. They must coerce or hold the power to coerce employers; they must coerce those among their own members disposed to straggle; they must do their best to get



into their hands the whole field of labour they seek to occupy and to force other working-men either to join them or to starve. Those who speak of Trade Unions bent on raising wages by moral suasion alone are like those who would tell you of tigers that live on oranges.

#### The Closed Door.

The condition of the masses to-day is that of men pressed together in a hall where ingress is open and more are constantly coming, but where the doors for egress are closed. If forbidden to relieve the general pressure by throwing open those doors, whose bars and bolts are private property in land, they can only mitigate the pressure on themselves by forcing back others, and the weakest must be driven to the wall! This is the way of Labour Unions and Trade Guilds. Even the most peaceable societies would in their efforts to find employment for their own members necessarily **displace others**.

#### Philanthropy Helpless.

Even the philanthropy which, recognising the evil of trying to help labour by alms, seeks to help men to help themselves by finding them work, becomes aggressive in the blind and bitter struggle that private property in land entails, and in helping one set of men injures others.

Thus, to minimise the bitter complaints of taking work from others and lessening the wages of others in providing their own beneficiaries with work and wages, benevolent societies are forced to devices akin to the digging of holes and filling them up again.

#### An Instance From America.

Those who know of it, I am sure, honour the princely generosity of Baron Hirsch towards his suffering co-religionists. But, as I write, the daily newspapers contain accounts of an immense meeting held in Cooper Union, New York City, at which a number of Hebrew Trades Unions protested in the strongest manner against the loss of work and reduction of wages that is being effected by Baron Hirsch's generosity in bringing their own countrymen here and teaching them to work.

The resolution unanimously adopted at this great meeting thus concludes: "We now demand of Baron Hirsch himself that he release us from his 'charity' and take back the

millions, which, instead of a blessing, have proved a curse and a source of misery."

Nor does this show that the members of these Hebrew Labour Unions—who are themselves immigrants of the same class as those Baron Hirsch is striving to help—are a whit less generous than other men.

#### Who is the Blackleg?

Labour associations of the nature of Trade Guilds or Unions are necessarily selfish. By the law of their being they must fight for their own hand, regardless of who is hurt; they ignore and must ignore the teaching of Christ that we should do to others as we would have them do to us, which a true political economy shows is the only way to the full emancipation of the masses; they must do their best to starve workmen who do not join them; they must by all means in their power force back the "blackleg"—as the soldier in battle must shoot down his mother's son if in the opposing ranks!

And who is the blackleg? A fellow-creature seeking work—a fellow-creature in all probability more pressed and starved than those who so bitterly denounce him, and often with the hungry, pleading faces of wife and child behind him.

#### Violation of Natural Rights.

In so far as they succeed, what is it that Trade Guilds and Unions do but impose more restrictions on natural rights; create "trusts" in labour; add to privileged classes other somewhat privileged classes; and press the weaker closer to the wall?

I speak without prejudice against Trade Unions, of which for years I was an active member. And in pointing out that their principle is selfish and incapable of large and permanent benefits, and that their methods violate natural rights and work hardship and injustice, I am only saying what by word of mouth I have again and again said to them.

Nor is what I say capable of dispute. Intelligent Trade Unionists know it, and the less intelligent vaguely feel it. And even those of the classes of wealth and leisure who, as if to head off the demand for natural rights, are preaching Trades Unionism to working-men, must needs admit it.

### The Great London Dock Strike.

Some of the results that follow from Trades Unionism are brought to notice in the sequel to the great London dock strike of 1889. They are presaged in a volume called "The Story of the Dockers' Strike" (written by Messrs. Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, with an introduction by Sydney Buxton, M.P.), which advocates Trades Unionism as the solution of the labour question, and of which large numbers were sent to Australia as a sort of official recognition of the generous aid received from there by the strikers.

### The Weaker Pressed to the Wall.

The following passages are taken from the Authors' summing up, on pages 164-5:—

"If the settlement lasts, work at the docks will be more regular, better paid, and carried on under better conditions than ever before. All this will be an unqualified gain to those who get the benefit from it. But another result will undoubtedly be to contract the field of employment and lessen the number of those for whom work can be found. The lower class casual will, in the end, find his position more precarious than ever before, in proportion to the increased regularity of work which the 'fitter' of the labourers will secure. The effect of the organisation of dock labour, as of all classes of labour, will be to squeeze out the residuum. The failures in the industrial race will be no gainers by the change, but will rather find another door closed against them, and this in many cases the last door to employment."

### Be Not Pharisees.

I am far from wishing that any of my readers should join in that pharisaical denunciation of Trade Unions common among those who, while quick to point out the injustice of Trade Unions in denying to others the equal right to work, are themselves supporters of that more primary injustice that denies the equal right to the standing place and natural material necessary to work.

What I wish to point out is that Trades Unionism, while it may be a partial palliative, is not a remedy; that it has not that moral character which could alone justify one in urging it as good in itself.

### Wage-workers who are often Forgotten.

It is often assumed that the labour question is a question between wage-workers and their employers; but working for an employer is not the primary or exclusive occupation of labour. Primarily men work for themselves without the intervention of an employer. And the primary source of wages is in the earnings of labour; the man who works for himself and consumes his own products receiving his wages in the fruits of his labour.

Are not fishermen, boatmen, cab-drivers, pedlars, working farmers—in short, all the many workers who get their wages directly by the sale of their services or products without the medium of an employer—as much labourers as those who work for the specific wages of an employer?

In considering remedies these workers are seldom thought of. Yet in reality the labourers who work for themselves should be first considered, since what men will be willing to accept from employers depends manifestly on what they can get by working for themselves.

### Employers.

It is assumed that all employers are rich men, who might raise wages much higher were they not so grasping. But is it not the fact that the great majority of employers are in reality as much pressed by competition as their workmen—many of them constantly on the verge of failure? Such employers could not possibly raise the wages they pay, however they might wish to, unless all others were compelled to do so.

### Rich and Poor.

It is assumed that there are in the natural order two classes, the rich and the poor, and that labourers naturally belong to the poor. It is true that there are differences in capacity, in diligence, in health and in strength, that may produce differences in fortune. These, however, are not the differences that divide men into rich and poor. The natural differences in powers and aptitudes are certainly not greater than are natural differences in stature. But while it is only by selecting giants and dwarfs that we can find men twice as tall as others, yet in the difference between rich and poor that exists to-day we find some men richer than others by the thousand-fold and the million-fold!

**Tribute Receivers and Tribute Yielders.**

Nowhere do these differences between wealth and poverty coincide with differences in individual powers and aptitudes. The real difference between rich and poor is the difference between those who hold the toll gates and those who pay toll; between tribute receivers and tribute yielders.

To assume that labourers, even ordinary manual labourers, are naturally poor is to ignore the fact that labour is the producer of wealth, and to attribute to the Natural Law of the Creator an injustice that comes from man's impious violation of His benevolent intention.

In the rudest stage of the arts it is possible, where justice prevails, for all well men to earn a living. With the labour-saving appliances of our time, it should be possible for all to earn much more. And so, to say that poverty is no disgrace, is to convey an unreasonable implication; since, in a condition of social justice, it would, except where sought from religious motives or imposed by unavoidable misfortune, imply recklessness or laziness.

**The Poor Rich.**

Sympathy often seems to be exclusively directed to the poor, the workers. Ought this to be so? Are not the rich, the idlers, to be pitied also?

Consider how the rich see the meaner side of human nature; how they are surrounded by flatterers and sycophants; how they must constantly be on guard lest they be swindled; how, often, they must suspect an ulterior motive behind kindly deed or friendly word; how, if they try to be generous, they are beset by shameless beggars and scheming impostors!

**Man's Higher Qualities Distorted.**

The worst evil of poverty is not in the want of material things, but in the stunting and distortion of the higher qualities. So, though in another way, the possession of unearned wealth stunts and distorts what is noblest in man.

The evil is not in wealth itself—in its command over material things: it is in the possession of wealth while others are steeped in poverty; in being raised above touch with the life of humanity, from its work and its struggles, its hopes and its fears, and the kind sympathies and generous acts that strengthen faith in man and trust in God!

God's commands cannot be evaded with impunity.' If it be His command that men shall earn their bread by labour, the idle rich must suffer. And they do!

See the utter vacancy of the lives of those who live for pleasure; see the vices bred in a class who, surrounded by poverty, are sated with wealth; see the pessimism that grows among them; see that terrible punishment of ennui, of which the poor know so little that they cannot understand it!

#### The Rich Young Man.

When Christ told the rich young man who sought Him to sell all he had and to give it to the poor, He was not thinking of the poor, but of the young man. And I doubt not that among the rich, and especially among the self-made rich, there are many who, at times at least, feel keenly the folly of their riches and fear for the dangers and temptations to which these expose their children.

But the strength of long habit, the promptings of pride, the excitement of making and holding what has become for them the counters in a game, the family expectations that have assumed the character of rights, and the real difficulty they find in making any good use of their wealth, bind them to their burden, like a weary donkey to his pack, till they stumble on the precipice that bounds this life!

#### The Fear of Want.

Men who are sure of getting food when they shall need it eat only what appetite dictates. But, with the sparse tribes who exist on the verge of the habitable globe, life is either a famine or a feast. Enduring hunger for days, the fear of it prompts them to gorge like anacondas when successful in their quest of game. And so, what gives wealth its curse is what drives men to seek it—what makes it so envied and admired—the fear of want!

#### Rich and Poor are alike Victims.

As the unduly rich are the corollary of the unduly poor, so is the soul-destroying quality of riches but the reflex of the want that embrates and degrades. The real evil lies in the injustice from which unnatural possession and unnatural deprivation both spring.

This injustice can hardly be charged on individuals or classes. The existence of private property in land is a

great social wrong from which society at large suffers, and of which the very rich and the very poor are alike victims, though at the opposite extremes. Seeing this, it seems like a violation of Christian charity to speak of the rich as though they individually were responsible for the sufferings of the poor. Yet many do this while at the same time insisting that land monopoly, the cause of monstrous wealth and degrading poverty, shall not be touched.

#### Equality of Opportunity.

In seeking to restore to all men their equal and natural rights we do not seek the benefit of any class, but of all. For we both know by faith and see by fact that injustice can profit no one and that justice must benefit all.

Nor do we seek any futile and ridiculous equality. We recognise that there must always be differences and inequalities. In so far as these are in conformity with the moral law, in so far as they do not violate the command, "Thou shalt not steal," we are content.

The equality we would bring about is not the equality of fortune, but the equality of natural opportunity; the equality that reason and religion alike proclaim — the equality in usufruct of all His children to the bounty of Our Father who art in Heaven!

In doing this, we would not levy the slightest tax on the possessors of wealth, no matter how rich they might be.

Not only do we deem such taxes a violation of the right of property, but we see that it is impossible for any one to produce wealth for himself without at the same time adding to the wealth of the world.

#### The Right to Life.

To persist in a wrong, to refuse to undo it, is always to become involved in other wrongs!

Those who defend private property in land, and thereby deny the first and most important of all human rights, the equal right to the material substratum of life, are compelled to one of two courses. Either they must, as do those whose gospel is "Devil take the hindmost," deny the equal right to life, and, by some theory like that to which Malthus has given his name, assert that Nature brings into the world more men than there is provision for; or, they must, as do the Socialists, assert as rights what in themselves are wrongs.

### Mistaken Rights.

There are many who deny the equality of right to the material basis of life, and yet, conscious that there is a right to live, they assert the right of labourers to employment and their right to receive from their employers a certain wage.

No such rights exist. No one has a right to demand employment of another, or to demand higher wages than the other is willing to give. There can be no better moral justification for such demands on employers by working-men than there would be for employers demanding that working-men shall be compelled to work for them when they do not want to, and to accept wages lower than they are willing to take.

Any seeming justification springs from a prior wrong—the denial to working-men of their natural rights—and can in the last analysis only rest on that supreme dictate of self-preservation that under extraordinary circumstances makes pardonable what in itself is serious crime.

### Rights in Extremes.

A fugitive slave with the bloodhounds of his pursuers baying at his heels would in true Christian morals be held blameless if he seized the first horse he came across, even though to take it he had to knock down the rider. But this is not to justify horse-stealing as an ordinary means of travelling.

When His disciples were hungry Christ permitted them to pluck corn on the Sabbath day. But He never denied the sanctity of the Sabbath by asserting that it was, under ordinary circumstances, a proper time to gather corn.

He justified David, who when pressed by hunger committed what ordinarily would be sacrilege, by taking from the temple the loaves of proposition. But in this He was far from saying that the robbing of temples was a proper way of getting a living.

### The True Natural Right.

The natural right which each man has is not that of demanding employment or wages from another man, but that of employing himself! That of applying his own labour to the inexhaustible storehouse which the Creator has in the land provided for all men!



Were that storehouse open—as we would open it—the demand for labour would keep pace with the supply, the man who sold labour and the man who bought it would become free exchangers for mutual advantage, and all cause for dispute between workman and employer would be gone.

Then, all being free to employ themselves, the mere opportunity to labour would cease to seem a boon; and since no one would work for another for less, all things considered, than he could earn by working for himself, wages would necessarily rise to their full value, and the relations of workman and employer be regulated by mutual interest and convenience.

This is the only way in which they can be satisfactorily regulated!

#### The Only Just Rate of Wages.

It is often assumed that there is some just rate of wages that employers ought to be willing to pay and that labourers should be content to receive; and it is imagined that if this were secured there would be an end of strife. This rate is thought of as that which will give working-men a frugal living, and perhaps enable them by hard work and strict economy to lay by a little something.

But how can a just rate of wages be fixed without the "higgling of the market," any more than the just price of corn, or pigs, or ships, or paintings can be so fixed? And would not arbitrary regulation in the one case as in the other check that interplay that most effectively promotes the economical adjustment of productive forces?

#### Progress Under Freedom.

Why should buyers of labour, any more than buyers of commodities, be called on to pay higher prices than in a free market they are compelled to pay? Why should the sellers of labour be content with anything less than in a free market they can obtain?

Why should working-men be content with frugal fare when the world is so rich? Why should they be satisfied with a lifetime of toil and stinting when the world is so beautiful? Why should not they also desire to gratify the higher instincts, the finer tastes? Why should they be for ever content to travel in the steerage when others find the cabin more enjoyable?

**Man's Ever-growing Wants.**

Nor will they! The ferment of our time does not arise merely from the fact that working-men find it harder to live on the same scale of comfort. It is also and perhaps still more largely due to the increase of their desires with an improved scale of comfort. This increase of desire must continue. For man is ever unsatisfied!

He is not an ox, of whom it may be said, so much grass, so much grain, so much water, and a little salt, and he will be content. On the contrary, the more he gets the more he craves. When he has enough food, then he wants better food. When he gets a shelter, he wants a more commodious and tasty one.

**Mental and Spiritual Desires.**

When his animal needs are satisfied, then mental and spiritual desires arise.

This restless discontent is of the nature of man—of that nobler nature that separates him from the animals by so immeasurable a gulf, and shows him to be indeed created in the likeness of God!

It is not to be quarrelled with, for it is the motor of all progress. It is this that has raised St. Peter's dome, and on dull, dead canvas made the angelic face of the Madonna to glow! It is this that has weighed suns and analysed stars, and opened page after page of the wonderful works of creative intelligence! It is this that has narrowed the Atlantic to an ocean ferry, and trained the lightning to carry our messages to the remotest lands! It is this that is opening to us possibilities beside which all that our modern civilisation has as yet accomplished seems small! Nor can it be repressed save by degrading and embruting men; by reducing Europe to Asia!

Hence, short of what wages may be earned with all restrictions on labour removed and access to natural opportunities on equal terms secured to all, it is impossible to fix any rate of wages that will be deemed just, or any rate of wages that can prevent working-men striving to get more.

So far from it making working-men more contented to improve their condition a little, it is certain to make them more discontented.

**Give Men Justice, not Charity.**

Nor is it asking justice when employers are asked to pay their working-men more than they are compelled to pay—more than they could get others to do the work for. It is asking charity. For the surplus that the employer thus gives is not in reality wages, it is essentially alms.

**Charity Cannot Cure Poverty.**

Among measures suggested for the improvement of the condition of labour much stress is sometimes laid upon charity. But there is nothing practical in such recommendations as a cure for poverty. If it were possible for the giving of alms to abolish poverty, there would be no poverty in Christendom!

Charity is indeed a noble and beautiful virtue, grateful to man and approved by God. But charity must be built on justice. It cannot supersede justice.

What is wrong with the condition of labour is that labour is robbed. And while the continuance of that robbery is sanctioned it is idle to urge charity.

**Primary and Secondary Virtues.**

All that charity can do where injustice exists is here and there to somewhat mollify the effects of injustice. It cannot cure them.

Nor is even what little it can do to mollify the effects of injustice without evil. For what may be called the superimposed, and, in this sense, secondary virtues, work evil where the fundamental or primary virtues are absent.

Thus sobriety is a virtue and diligence is a virtue. But a sober and diligent thief is all the more dangerous. Thus patience is a virtue. But patience under wrong is the condoning of wrong. Thus it is a virtue to seek knowledge and to endeavour to cultivate the mental powers. But the wicked man becomes more capable of evil by reason of his intelligence. Devils we always think of as intelligent.

**Charity Based Upon Injustice Works Evil.**

That pseudo charity that discards and denies justice works evil.

On the one side, it demoralises its recipients, outraging human dignity, and turning into beggars and paupers men who, to become self-supporting, self-respecting citizens, only need the restitution of what God has given them.

### An Anodyne to Conscience.

On the other side, it acts as an anodyne to the consciences of those who are living on the robbery of their fellows, and fosters that moral delusion and spiritual pride that Christ doubtless had in mind when He said it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven! For it leads men steeped in injustice, and using their money and their influence to bolster up injustice, to think that in giving alms they are doing something more than their duty towards man and deserve to be very well thought of by God.

### The Churches and Charity.

Worse perhaps than all else is the way in which the substituting of injunctions to charity for the clear-cut demands of justice opens an easy means for professed teachers of the Christian religion of all branches and communions to placate Mammon while persuading themselves that they are serving God!

Had the English clergy not subordinated the teaching of justice to the teaching of charity—to go no further in illustrating a principle of which the whole history of Christendom from Constantine's time to our own is witness—the Tudor tyranny would never have arisen; had the clergy of France never substituted charity for justice, the monstrous iniquities of the ancient regime would never have brought the horrors of the Great Revolution; and in my own country, had those who should have preached justice not satisfied themselves with preaching kindness, chattel slavery could never have demanded the holocaust of our civil war.

### No Substitute for Justice.

No; as Faith without works is dead, as men cannot give to God His due while denying to their fellows the rights He gave them, so charity, unsupported by justice, can do nothing to solve the problem of the existing condition of labour.

Though the rich were to "bestow all their goods to feed the poor and give their bodies to be burned," poverty would continue while property in land continues!

## What Can the Rich Man Do?

Take the case of the rich man to-day who is honestly desirous of devoting his wealth to the improvement of the condition of labour. What can he do?

Bestow his wealth on those who need it? He may help some who deserve it, but he will not improve general conditions. And against the good he may do will be the danger of doing harm.

Build churches? Under the shadow of churches poverty festers and the vice that is born of it breeds!

Build schools and colleges? Save as it may lead men to see the iniquity of private property in land, increased education can effect nothing for mere labourers, for as education is diffused the wages of education sink!

Establish hospitals? Why, already it seems to labourers that there are too many seeking work, and to save and prolong life is to add to the pressure!

Build model tenements? Unless he cheapens house accommodation he but drives further the class he would benefit, and as he cheapens house accommodation he brings more to seek employment, and cheapens wages!

Institute laboratories, scientific schools, workshops for physical experiments? He but stimulates invention and discovery, the very forces that, acting on a society based on private property in land, are crushing labour as between the upper and the nether millstone!

Promote emigration from places where wages are low to places where they are somewhat higher? If he does, even those whom he at first helps to emigrate will soon turn on him and demand that such emigration shall be stopped as reducing their wages!

Give away what land he may have, or refuse to take rent for it, or let it at lower rents than the market price? He will simply make new landowners or partial landowners; he may make some individuals the richer, but he will do nothing to improve the general condition of labour.

Or, bethinking himself of those public-spirited citizens of classic times who spent great sums in improving their native cities, shall he try to beautify the city of his birth or adoption?

Let him widen and straighten narrow and crooked streets, let him build parks and erect fountains, let him open tramways and bring in railways, or in any way make beautiful and attractive his chosen city, and what will be the result? Must it not be that those who appropriate God's bounty will take his also? Will it not be that the value of land will go up, and that the net result of his benefactions will be an increase of rents and a bounty to landowners?

Why, even the mere announcement that he is going to do such things will start speculation and send up the value of land by leaps and bounds.

What, then, can the rich man do to improve the condition of labour?

He can do nothing at all except to use his strength for the abolition of the great primary wrong that robs men of their birthright.

The justice of God laughs at the attempts of men to substitute anything else for it!

#### The Land Question a Moral Question.

In speaking of measures for improving social conditions, it seems to us that in the teachings of morality is to be found the highest practicality, and that the question, What is wise? may always safely be subordinated to the question, What is right?

But expressed moral truths are deprived of all practical meaning when accompanied by unjust sanctions—as when the American people, while they legalised chattel slavery, were accustomed to read solemnly on every national anniversary the declaration which asserts:—

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

What did this truth mean on the lips of men who asserted that one man was the rightful property of another man who had bought him, who asserted that the slave was robbing the master in running away, and that the man or the woman who helped the fugitive to escape, or even gave him a cup of cold water in Christ's name, was an accessory to theft, on whose head the penalties of the State should be visited?

### The Question of the Hour.

Now, consider the moral aspect of the present condition of labour.

What is "the question of the hour," the question that is filling minds with painful apprehension? Reduced to its lowest expression it is the poverty of men willing to work. And what is the lowest expression of this phrase? It is that they lack bread—for in that one word we most concisely and strongly express all the manifold material satisfactions needed by humanity, the absence of which constitutes poverty.

#### "Give Us This Day."

Now, what is the prayer of Christendom—the universal prayer; the prayer that goes up daily and hourly wherever the name of Christ is honoured; that ascends from the high altar of St. Peter's at Rome, and that is repeated by the youngest child that the poorest Christian mother has taught to lisp a request to her Father in Heaven? It is: "Give us this day our daily bread!" Yet, where this prayer goes up, daily and hourly, men lack bread! Why?

#### Why Men Lack Bread.

Here is the answer, the only true answer!

If men lack bread, it is not that God has not done His part in providing it. If men willing to labour are cursed with poverty, it is not that the storehouse has failed, that the supply He has promised for the daily wants of His children is not here in abundance.

It is, that, "impiously violating the benevolent intentions of their Creator," men have made land private property, and have thus given into the exclusive ownership of the few the provision that a bountiful Father has made for all!

#### We Ask For Enquiry.

In thus setting forth the grounds of our belief in the truth for which we stand, and in pointing out considerations which, unfortunately, are often overlooked—while the views to which we are opposed seem to us erroneous and dangerous, we do not question the sincerity or intelligence of those adopting them. For they are views that have received the sanction of those looked upon as the wise and the learned. But we trust that the considerations herein set forth may induce questioning and discussion.

### Truth Must Prevail.

We ask for consideration of our proposals, and we would seek to promote discussion along the line of greatest importance—the line of morality.

We have no solicitude for the truth, knowing that it is of the nature of truth always to prevail over error where discussion goes on.

And the truth for which we stand has now made such progress in the minds of men that it must be heard; that it can never be stifled; that it must go on conquering and to conquer!

Faster than ever the world is moving!

### The Signal Gun of Emancipation.

Forty years ago slavery seemed stronger in the United States than ever before, and the market price of slaves—both working slaves and breeding slaves—was higher than it had ever been before, for the title of the owner seemed growing more secure. In the shadow of the Hall where the equal rights of man had been solemnly proclaimed, the manacled fugitive was dragged back to bondage, and on what to American tradition was our Marathon of freedom, the slave master boasted that he would yet call the roll of his chattels.

Yet forty years ago, though the Party that was to place Abraham Lincoln in the Presidential chair had not been formed, and nearly a decade was yet to pass ere the signal gun was to ring out, slavery, as we may now see, was doomed!

### A Grand and Mighty Crusade.

To-day a wider, deeper, more beneficent revolution is brooding, not over one country, but over the world!

God's truth impels it, and forces mightier than He has ever before given to man urge it on!

It is no more in the power of vested wrongs to stay it than it is in man's power to stay the sun!

The stars in their courses fight against Sisera; and in the ferment of to-day, to him who hath ears to hear, the doom of industrial slavery is sealed!