

The Public

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EDITORIAL

The Hard Times.

Like a bolt from the blue, must have seemed to our comfortable classes the report of last week that thousands of children in the Chicago public schools are suffering from hunger. No doubt the newspapers that support Mr. Taft, who talks about prosperity as if everybody had it since his intimates have, would gladly have minimized this disclosure; but it was too well authenticated and too awful. So all of them "played it up strong," as the newspaper slang goes. Every Republican newspaper in Chicago published the facts in prominent position and under "screaming" headlines. Yet nothing could be more significant of the continuance of the hard times which began 18 months ago, and came upon us with a crash about a year ago. The fact that these papers published this report so prominently indicates that they could not escape it, for the Republican newspapers of Chicago are not alert to publish disagreeable information just because it happens to be important to their readers. The conditions exist, they are demonstrated, and they are dreadful. And no doubt these conditions among school children in Chicago exist everywhere. No doubt they exist among others also than school children. Beyond further question, we are in the midst of hard times.

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This condition is likely to tell heavily against Mr. Taft's candidacy at the coming election. And

so it ought. His party has demagogically claimed credit for the periods of good times, and charged to its adversary responsibility for the periods of bad times which this country has experienced in the past forty years. Not only has his party persistently and deceitfully done this, but he himself only a few days ago in Kansas quoted cooked statistics to prove that Republicans make good times and Democrats make hard times. It would be only political justice, therefore, were Mr. Taft to go down in a popular avalanche of condemnation because he and his party have been caught with a virulent case of hard times on their hands. The political party that has been living by a lie should die by one.

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In very truth, however, political parties have nothing to do with causing alternations of good and bad times. The Democratic party has never been responsible for hard times, nor has the Republican party been entitled to credit for good times. These alternations are natural results of long established economic institutions. The particular instance of hard times we are now enduring is no more dependent upon Republican or Democratic activities in politics than are drought or wet weather. As was said in these columns nearly a year ago (vol. x, p. 746), and as was perfectly clear at that time except to rule-of-thumb business men and parlor politicians, the hard times which then settled down upon us were world-wide and had come to stay for probably four or five years or longer. This is the seventh period of hard times in our history. Mr. Taft cannot restore good times if elected, and neither can Mr. Bryan. The only thing which in this connection either could do would be to influence the removal of institutional burdens upon industry. But as Mr. Taft's party policy runs toward maintaining such institutions, he would be absolutely barred from going even in the direction of eradicating hard times. Mr. Bryan's policies, on the other hand, especially his free trade policy, do run in the direction of removing the underlying causes of hard times. For that reason and to that extent, Mr. Bryan's election would give a reasonable hope, which Mr. Taft's would not, of bringing on better times and of making them permanent.

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That these hard times are not temporary local conditions, which the result of a Presidential election might cure, is evident from the fact that the condition is found abroad as well as here. Coincident with the harrowing report that

thousands of Chicago school children are starving, are reports from Glasgow of 22,000 men out of work, from Birmingham of 10,000, from Liverpool of 14,000, from Manchester of 8,000, and so on. If we had reports of the unemployed from the Continent, we should find similar conditions there; and if we had reports from all our own industrial centers, a worse condition here would be revealed rather than a better one. There is of course a cause for all this, and it is a deep seated cause. It is not a cause that any one political campaign can cure. These campaigns and elections are encouraging, or the reverse, only as their tendency is in one direction or another—toward the maintenance of privileged classes, which is away from the only cure, or towards the abolition of privilege, which is the only cure. Of the two candidates who may by any possibility be elected, the one whose election would give new hope to the privileged absorbers of other men's work, is Mr. Taft: the one whose election would justify the hope of the unprivileged worker, is Mr. Bryan.

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The Hungry School Children of Chicago.

The disclosure by the Chicago Board of Education of the conditions of want among school children, conditions so extreme that thousands go to school breakfastless and so ill-nourished as to be unfit for study, has highly excited the charitable impulses of the better-to-do. We would not discourage those impulses; charity is necessary for immediate relief. But charity will be somewhat worse than useless if nothing is done to secure permanent exemption from impoverished conditions.

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School children must be nourished in body, that they may be mentally fit to receive the education which the public schools offer. If this is done in anywise at all at public expense, it should be done for all as matter of common right, and not for the destitute as charity, be the charity public or private. Everything necessary to effect the purpose of the public school system should be provided as freely for all the pupils as is the building itself. Not only should text books be free for every pupil, as for more than half a century they have been in New York, but food also should be free. While charity may be tolerated, and even commended when not disgustingly boasted of by the giver, this is with the proviso that it be a method of relief in an emergency, and only so. Perpetual charity is degrading, both to receiver and to giver; and this Chicago excitement