

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 4, NO. 293.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, APRIL 18, 1904.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“‘THE WORKMEN’S PARADISE,’ NEW ZEALAND.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the midst of the great industrial unrest and class antagonism now manifesting itself in this country, the members of the working class are being led to look for relief and emancipation, not at home and within their own ranks, but abroad and through the agency of demagogic middle class politicians and labor leaders. To New Zealand are the workers, in their search for relief and emancipation, bid to look, by the so-called Radical Democrats and allies, the labor misleaders. These assure the workers that there institutions exist, such as can be transplanted to this country, to the great benefit of the workmen, if the Radical Democrats and their friends are only elected to office for the purpose. These assurances overlook the fact that since the United States leads New Zealand in capitalist political and industrial evolution, it is impossible to adopt that country’s less-developed institutions to it. So much is this the case that we already see a desire on the part of Australasian capitalism to adapt this country’s institutions to New Zealand’s development, as far as possible. These assurances are, further, substantially false in what they claim for New Zealand.

For instance, there is at present running in serial form in *The Bricklayer and Mason*, a lecture delivered at the Popular University of Evreux, France, Nov. 23, 1902, by Felicieu Challaye, Professor of Philosophy at the College, entitled “‘The Paradise of Workmen,’ New Zealand,” in which the following statement appears:

“The expression of ‘Paradise of Workmen’ is undoubtedly exaggerated if one means by that a state of perfection—a state so good that a better could not be imagined. One could easily picture a social organization which would be superior to that of New Zealand. It is none the less true that this country is distinguished from all others by this two-fold characteristic: Poverty has entirely disappeared, and each man can, by working, earn a

good living.

“This is not to say, as people sometimes do, that Socialism is realized in New Zealand. The New Zealand State is a workman’s State, it is not a Socialist State. Defined philosophically, a Socialist State is one in which workers no longer toil without power of ownership, and where capitalists no longer possess wealth without having worked for it. It would be a State in which no individual could make other individuals work for his own profit, lending to them the means of production which he possesses by right of birth. It would be a State in which the means of production belong to collective bodies—co-operative groups, communes, nations—the individual would enjoy all the profits of his work, would own exactly in proportion as he worked. New Zealand is not a Socialist State. There are capitalists living on the income of their capital, employers possessing the instruments of production, employes working with these instruments of production. But these workingmen have so forgotten the advantage of the situation that their manner of living is almost analogous to that of the capitalists and employers; so much so, that the class divisions which have never ceased to exist, hardly make their appearance, and New Zealand, without being a Socialistic State, resembles what a Socialistic State would be.”

The March report of the New Zealand Department of Labor, just to hand, and the article on “Conciliation and Arbitration in New Zealand,” in the April issue of *The Bricklayer and Mason*, prove the allegations of this quotation, regarding conditions in New Zealand, to be far from truthful. Does the presence of tramps and unemployed in a community denote the absence of poverty and the prevalence of abundant work, together with a condition in which the manner of working class living “is almost analogous to that of capitalists and employers”? Does the use of the law by capitalists to beat down wages denote the disappearance of class divisions? The report and article referred to above show that tramps and unemployed and the capitalist use of the law are prevalent in New Zealand. Let us quote them to prove the fact.

Under the heading “Labour. The Labour Market,” the New Zealand Department of Labor’s report furnishes the following: From Marton, “There are a number of swaggers about at present, but most of them do not appear to want to work” (P. 187). From Tenui, “No swaggers were seen on the road during the month” (P. 188). From Carterton, “One or two swaggers (old men) have applied for relief” (P. 189). The Standard Dictionary defines swagger as follows: “Swagger, Austral., one who goes about seeking work, carrying his swag of clothes.” Workmen who have

known the swagger declare him to be the counterpart of the California “blanketman,” and the American tramp in general. The above references to him are an official recognition of his existence that no fine-spun statements can overcome.

If these same “Labour Market” reports are investigated in detail the fact is brought home that unemployment and the search for work are permanent social phenomena in New Zealand.

Such remarks as these from Auckland:

“For those seeking town-work the supply is greater than the demand” (P. 185); or these from Eketahuna, “The number of men traveling on the roads have become less” (P. 188); or still these from Ashburton, “The large number of men here last month has scattered over the country, and, no doubt, have found work at harvesting or threshing” (P. 192)—such remarks as these reflect the march of a permanent army of unemployed in constant search for work.

The permanent character of unemployment and the search for work is recognized by the Department of Labor, which treats them as such. Two pages of the report (196–197) are given to closely-printed tabulations on the “Unemployed’ Assisted By the Department of Labour During February, 1904.” The figures given are from the 10 districts of the Department. It is shown, for instance, that in the Auckland district 131 out of 133 carpenters, cooks, blacksmiths, bridge carpenters, engineers, farm hands, miners and laborers applying for work, were compelled to do so because of “slackness in the trade, etc.” As the working class only apply to State institutions as a last resort, when trade union and other resources are exhausted, it is fair to presume that the condition here revealed was quite extensive and severe. All of which goes to show that the working class of New Zealand is far from being without poverty, having abundant work, and living in a manner analogous to that of capitalists and employers.

In the matter of class divisions, the report shows that appeals to the arbitration courts are quite frequent because of the conflict of interest between employer and employe. The article on “Conciliation and Arbitration in New Zealand,” however, furnishes an example from a better source, viz., that of a New Zealand trade unionist advocate of both. Says this article, in part, under the sub-head:

“Mine Owners Who Fooled Themselves”:—

“There is at present a difficulty in New South Wales, in the coal industry. The Court of Arbitration recently heard a case, and gave an award in the Rhonda Collieries. The hewing rate was fixed on a sliding scale, based on the selling rate of the coal. The owners have apparently thought they would ‘get one on the men’ by reducing the selling rate considerably, so that the men could only earn a bare existence. The men naturally objected, and individually refused to work, but the union was not consulted, and the officials of the union endeavored to keep the men at work pending an application to vary the Award without success. The employers instituted proceedings against the union for a breach of the Award, and, as they failed in their case, they have raised Cain over the failure of the act to make the men work.”

It needs no occult insight to note the class divisions in the foregoing. But the climax is reached when the above writer declares that there is a wide-spread movement afoot among the capitalists to overthrow arbitration, and that it will be an issue shortly at a session of the Federal Parliament, which is divided on the question, the capitalist representatives being for overthrow while the labor representatives will oppose it! Truly, “the class divisions which have never ceased to exist, hardly make their appearance” in New Zealand!

The workers of America should not be fooled with yarns about “The Workmen’s Paradise’ New Zealand.” A workman’s paradise is not possible in capitalist society, where labor is bought and sold according to the supply and demand of the labor market. Least of all is a workman’s paradise possible in American capitalist society, whose development is far in advance of New Zealand. A workman’s paradise is only possible under Socialism. It can only be realized where capitalist evolution is outrun, by the working class acting by, for and of itself alone. In no country in the world has capitalist development so nearly reached its end, and in no country of the world, is the working class so powerful, as this. Not to New Zealand, or the Radical Democrats and their “labor” allies, are working men to look for relief and emancipation, but to their own land and themselves. That is the royal, and the only, road to “The Workmen’s Paradise,” i.e., to Socialism.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded May 2007

slpns@slp.org