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FIRST EDITORIAL

HERR RICHTER AS A HUMORIST.

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OUR attention is called to an article by a lady correspondent of the New York *Sun*, published some weeks ago in that paper under the head, "Herr Richter's Satire—The Social Democratic Paradise was Nothing but a Prison, After All."

The article itself has no merit, even as a review of Herr Richter's sarcastic abortion. It is simply a school girl's condensation of the farcical pamphlet written in defense of capitalism by the so-called "Progressive" leader of the retrograde middle class in the German Reichstag. As to the pamphlet, we deem it, indeed, a valuable addition to previous failures in more serious attempts to stem the advancing tide of social reform, including the Pope's Encyclical and Herbert Spencer's latest "Argument for Liberty." When it first appeared in Germany, we translated and published in *THE PEOPLE*, without comments, a typical extract from it, and we trust that a cheap edition of it will soon be issued in the English language, for no boomerang of any sort ever aimed at Socialism was so perfectly calculated to strike Capitalism.

In the "Social Democratic State of the Future" as Richter undertakes to depict it, young men are separated from their sweethearts, husbands from their wives, and children from their parents, while the aged are sent to State infirmaries. In the name of "equality" all must have exactly the same food and in the same quantity, similar lodgings equally uncomfortable, and clothing of the poorest quality. Each is assigned to a certain work, which he must do in a certain place, whether he likes it or not. No account is taken of natural aptitude, or acquired skill, or degree of ability. Men are moved and removed from city to city, from town to country, from country to town, at the command of a mysterious despot, called the State. Under this despotism emigration increases at such a rate that it has to be prohibited. Suicide is resorted to as the only issue from a prison

world, and, finally, war and anarchy prevail.

In other words, nothing will have been changed by the advent of Socialism, except that the heretofore idle and luxurious classes will have either been expelled, or compelled to share in the misery of the poor.

We say that with the above noted exception nothing will have been changed, although this dark picture of “Socialism according to Richter” is even brighter in some of its parts than the present wage-system abomination; for if we see in that picture no luxurious idlers living upon the busy commonwealth, neither do we see willing workers starving in enforced idleness.

Nothing, at any rate, will have been greatly changed, according to Richter, for in this era of “progressive retrogression” that statesmen of the Richter calibre typify so well, not alone military service as in Germany, but domestic service and the factory system everywhere separate young men from their sweethearts, husbands from their wives, and children from their parents, while the aged are sent to the poor house. All the toilers, overworked and underpaid, must equally starve or eat the same coarse food, have narrow lodgings in squalid tenements and wear clothing of the meanest quality. Regardless of aptitude, skill or ability, a man must do such work as he can find and go at his own expense where he can get employment. If his trade is dull in Berlin he must come to New York; if dull in New York he must tramp to Chicago, or to San Francisco. If a machine has thrown him out of his trade he must, perchance, do the work of an unskilled laborer; go from town to country and back from country to town; all at the command of a mysterious despot, called Private Capitalism, which owns the State and uses it to appropriate all the means of life, all public property, all public franchises and all public functions. Under this universal despotism emigration from some countries—Germany for instance—increases at such a rate that their ruling class is alarmed; would prohibit it if prohibition were possible. Disappointed in the country where they have emigrated, slaves of capital in the New World as in the Old, many commit suicide in the land of their blasted hopes. Others, too poor to leave the Fatherland, commit suicide at home. Finally, war and anarchy prevail.

There are a few points, however, by no means unimportant, that Herr Richter has not made quite plain.

If in the “Social Democratic State of the Future” as he depicts it there is to be no idle class and all the toilers are to be fully employed in the production, not of luxuries but of necessaries,—that is, wholesome food in variety and abundance, pleasant dwellings and comfortable garments—why should the people compel themselves and each other, through their own State, to eat what they do not like or any less than they need, to reside in pestilential hovels, and to walk in unsightly rags, just as they are now compelled to do by the capitalist class and its governments?

Does he truly believe that less of the honey will be left for the bees when fewer drones shall have to be fed, or that the fields will cease to blossom when the drones shall no longer own them?

If not, then he plainly assumes that Social Democracy will of itself work out a radical modification in the moral nature, nay, in the very appetites of men. But why should the tendency of this modification be to make themselves and each other uncomfortable when all their aspirations are to greater comfort? Moreover, does not this conflict with his other assumption, that human nature is not modified by economic conditions?

Again, what sort of State is it that Herr Richter, in his middle class statesmanship, would have the Social Democrats inflict upon themselves? Does he naively fancy that a State *a la* Bismarck, or even *a la* Richter, would suit them? He knows nothing of the Socialism which he presumes to ridicule, or he should know, first of all, that the Socialist conception of the “State” is as different from all past conceptions of “Government” as Freedom is from Despotism, Order from Anarchy, and Industrial Administration by the people and for the people from Political Misrule by a class and for a class. When the oppressed masses shall have attained to that degree of intelligence which will make it possible for them to assert their rights and recover their property, they will be wise enough to exercise the first, administer the second, and preserve both intact.

In the meantime, Herr Richter’s fanciful caricature of the coming Socialism and a true picture of the present Capitalism look so much alike that they might be placed side by side for the amusement of those who already know and the enlightenment of those who will soon know.

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