

Letters From The People

The Independent solicits from its readers brief letters on current topics and practical reforms. Such letters should not contain more than 500 words. There are many subscribers to The Independent who can give in simple language helpful views as to the ways and means of improving social, political and economic conditions in this country. Letters must be typewritten or written legibly in ink and only one side of the paper must be used. The Independent cannot undertake to return manuscripts.—Ed.

Thinks Obenchain Pessimistic

Chicago, Ill., Sept. 18.—To the Editor of The Independent: I read your editorial "The Lot of the Toiler" with much interest, for it touched the right spot in at least one workingman's heart. I was surprised, therefore, when C. E. Obenchain criticised you so severely for writing it. I think that he entirely misconstrues its meaning. I take it that your object was to show that under the present industrial system the workman has compensations which should prevent him from being pessimistic and constantly unhappy.

Mr. Obenchain's criticism that your editorial was pessimistic is unfair. It is he who is pessimistic. He complains because you say that "the lot of the laboring man has slowly but surely improved in the last 200 or 300 years." He thinks this a bit of "cynical humor," and yet industrial progress must be slow. Socialism, of which Mr. Obenchain is such a stout advocate, is founded on the theory of evolution and your critic should know that if we are to have socialism it must be a gradual development such as that which in the last 300 years has evolved the wage-earner from the feudal serf. Socialism could not be made effective at once even by revolution. It is still in the theoretical state and many years would be required to perfect the socialistic organization even if it were practicable. Why, then, should Mr. Obenchain be so angry because you frankly admit that conditions are improving slowly. If socialism improved the lot of the toiler it would be by a slow process. If the workingman is to find no cause for cheer until we have socialism he will be unhappy for many long years. Your editorial made it clear that the workman has reasons for happiness and it was therefore decidedly optimistic, and did not in the least cover up or minimize the hard lot of the workmen—ninety-six per cent of the entire population—who must earn their bread by the sweat of their brows.

You showed that a workman's health, skill, energy, etc. are as good to him as is the capital of the employer, that they take the place of capital and cannot be as easily impaired by hard times. Very unfairly, I think, Mr. Obenchain says "of course it is self-evident that if the workman has nothing he can lose nothing." You proved that the workingman has something of such stable value that it is not as susceptible to hard times as capital. Your critic declares that the capitalist has money to buy bread in hard times and the workingman has not. You were demonstrating that the capitalists by thousands fail in hard times, losing all their money. Where then do they get the money to buy bread? Let us hark back to the hard times in the nineties. I knew scores of workmen who could not obtain positions. I was one of them. I lived through the hard times just as the others did. They were fearful days. But I knew capitalists who had lost their all and they were making their way through the hard times just as I was. And some of those capitalists of other days are workmen now and are earning small salaries because they were and are unskilled.

Mr. Obenchain may say that it is indeed a hard world under the competitive system. Even capitalists are slaves to its cruel laws. But I am not taking issue with him on that point and in your editorial you did not try to conceal the fact that "man was made to mourn." You simply tried to indicate that there were good things in life that many men wilfully overlook. And I am of the opinion that socialists make their chief error in contending that the greatest measure of our unhappiness comes from inequality of wealth. I was taught, and still believe, that most of our misery comes from breaking the laws of God. Lust, intemperance, sloth, pride, envy, hate, de-

sire for revenge and other evil passions produce the greatest amount of unhappiness. No socialist can convince me that these passions would be absent under socialism, and they would do more to disturb the equilibrium of a socialistic state than they do now to disturb our present system.

Now for some of Mr. Obenchain's economics. He declares that "labor today is dispossessed of the power to consume to the extent machinery has usurped production in all lines of industry." That is only a half truth. It loses sight of the fact that demand constantly increases and also that new occupations are supplied by new inventions. Think of the new occupations afforded by such industries as the telephone, telegraph, electric lighting, railway and other new industries. They have increased production but they have also supplied a new demand.

Mr. Obenchain writes: "Labor, receiving a reward of but one-fifth of what with the aid of machinery it produces, can buy back but one-fifth, leaving the other four-fifths as a surplus." Such an argument fails to take into consideration the fact that much wealth is consumed and much is wasted. Is the portion that goes to capital, viz., such wealth as is neither wasted nor consumed, stored up and never used by any save capitalists? To argue thus would be to argue that wealth is never redistributed by vast expenditures, by mischance, failures and the consequent dissolution of large fortunes. Much of that wealth is re-employed to produce new wealth and wears out just as tools wear out.

After developing his argument Mr. Obenchain declares that wealth is constantly accumulating in fewer and fewer hands. This is perfectly true, but it is not because of the process which he has described. It is the inevitable tendency of the profit system, if not controlled by restrictive laws, to concentrate wealth, but the law is not stated broadly by Mr. Obenchain nor by the most radical socialists. Much of the concentration in this country is due to special privileges such as the tariff, rebates and exemptions from just taxation. Wealth is concentrating in this country more rapidly than in most of the European countries because of these special privileges which have built up the trusts. These special privileges can be taken away from them by the law. Some think that regulation by law is the right corrective. Others pin their faith to the state ownership of land and all instruments of production and distribution. Still others contend that regulation by law and a measure of state socialism will do much to remedy present industrial ills. Your paper seems to occupy the ground last named. You favor government ownership of railways, of telegraph and telephone systems and of a parcels post. You favor the municipal ownership of public utilities. You oppose a robber tariff, free passes, rebates and all unjust discriminations and you advocate laws that will remove these injustices and demand public officials who will enforce these laws after they are made. I am with you in this program because I believe it to be right and practical. If socialism is to come and is to prove a universal remedy it must be by a slow process, and I cannot understand why Mr. Obenchain should indulge in such a heated criticism of an editorial that contained so much truth.

H. B. MAXWELL.

Speaks for a People's Money

Olympia, Washington, September 12.—To the Editor of The Independent: As I did not in my last contribution say all I wished to say on the financial system, I will make some additions in this, for I consider the financial question the greatest issue confronting us. Although we need many other reforms, yet if we secure all other reforms and leave the financial system as it is, it would build up an aristocratic class.

The financial system we have was initiated under despotic government. But to my mind it would be too hard to concoct a worse system of robbing the toiling millions, and turning this wealth over to the favored class than we have. Under it the money flows into the coffers of the rich as naturally as water flows down hill. They not only draw interest on virtually all the money in circulation, but also on billions of the people's credit. It amounts to several hundred millions of dollars every year. Then that goes in as capital for the next year, and soon, in this way, the favored classes are piling up their wealth all the time, and the toiling people are being drained out all the time.

Talk about paternalism! I am not opposed to

fatherly care being exercised. But what would be thought of that father, that would have the weak, helpless members of his family toil and drudge for the strong and independent portion. Yet that is the way our government is dealing with its subjects. I claim that there never has been, nor is today a democratic financial system in the world. But if our government will establish the system I gave you in my other contributions; then regulate it at \$50 per capita; and establish postal savings banks at convenient distances all over the country, where all could get money to a limited amount, at two per cent per annum on gilt-edged security there would then be a democratic financial system. If it should be let out in unlimited amounts, the rich would form syndicates and take it all out, and control it as they do now. And the penalty against dishonesty would have to be so severe, that there would be little inducement for thieving.

Of course, this system is hinged on the assumption that money is a mere medium of exchange, that within itself it has no intrinsic value. But if the substance of which the coin is made makes it money, then it is all a fallacy. And the man who argued with me, a short time back, that gold could not be demonetized, and that it was always of the same value in all countries, was correct, thus making gold an infallible standard in finance. But I will not believe this doctrine till some one brings more light to prove it than I have ever yet had.

The people here are not nearly as well informed as to the needed reforms, as they are in Oklahoma. They seem to have more confidence in the efficiency of the old parties. Now if this system I have given is unsound or will not work, let some one say so, and point it out. And then give us something better.

But it will not do to merely say we want an irredeemable government money, for there is too much difference of opinion as to what it takes to make that kind of money. But with the system I have given, we could regulate the circulation to just what is needed. We would then have sound money, for one dollar would be as good as another no matter what it is made of, and it would be honest money, and that is something that we have not often had, for whenever the circulating medium is being inflated, and contracted, the money is not honest; it is a great deal worse when contracted than when inflated. For in inflation all property is increased in value and the debtor pays his debts more easily, but the creditor's property is increased in value, and he does not feel the loss. But then in a contraction, all property shrinks in value. The debtor has to dispose of much more stock and produce to satisfy the same amount of liability. Thus the burden comes on those who are least able to bear it. In this way hundreds of thousands of people were driven to poverty, and financial ruin in the contraction to bring the specie resumption back in the seventies. We have had a money panic and consequently a contraction of the circulating medium on an average of once every ten years ever since I can remember.

A. E. CAMPBELL.

Progress Made in Last Decade

Syracuse, N. Y., September 18.—To the Editor of The Independent: A few years ago I thought that the election of senators by direct vote of the people was a debatable question. At all events, I engaged in a debate at university, taking the side that the present system was satisfactory. The other day I read the speech I made on that occasion and some of the statements in it are highly amusing in the light of history. For example, I declared that the best argument in favor of our present system was the honesty, efficiency and keen sense of honor that had always distinguished United States senators. We had not heard of Mitchell, Depew, Burton and Dietrich in those days, and therefore the argument sounded impressive.

I maintained that it would be as easy to buy political machines as to buy legislatures, ignorant of the fact that political machines exist only when the people do not have direct control of their political affairs. It is, of course, absolutely necessary for the people to have direct primaries if they wish to make the direct election of senators effective. Ten years ago there was little talk of the direct primary, the initiative and referendum or even of the election of senators by direct vote. It is plain, therefore, that we have made substantial progress in the last decade. The direct primary has been tried in many cities and in not a few states. Defects have been found, but they have been corrected. The initiative and referendum seems to be winning its way nobly and I think the election of senators by direct vote will come within the next decade in spite of the railways and trusts. After that we will make up our minds to elect our presidents by direct vote so that we shall not have in the White House any man whose election has been secured by a minority vote.

RICHARD B. CATERON.