

Letters From The People

Drones Becoming Unsupportable

Greenville, Tex., Dec. 11.—To the Editor of The Independent: The benefits of our increased productive capacity, not absorbed by the capitalists, are swallowed up by an economic system that puts a premium upon uneconomic occupations. The drones are now nearing the point of insupportability. Every decade marks the growth of these conditions, the more precarious struggle for existence and the concentration of wealth. First the very increase of population has increased the value of land many times. In 1850 there was the same land constituting the United States and territories as today. The unpeopled territory of the Mississippi valley and beyond, almost wholly valueless then, has since mounted upward into billions of material wealth. It is only necessary to understand that a farm, then worth less than \$1,000 could easily be worth \$10,000 today, to realize that if the land is passing into fewer and fewer hands relative to population, that wealth is concentrating, and a middle class is of necessity disappearing. No one denies that land is thus concentrating. Now the middle class of one age to retain its economic status as such in another, must grow in wealth relatively to the general progress, else as a class it is disappearing. Disappearing is the condition of the middle class today, because it no longer holds its relative position. The proletariat, because it cannot go lower, is increasing in numbers, with an existence growing more and more precarious. The facts in confirmation are found in a fourfold increase of wealth over population. In other words if, in 1850 when the average wealth of \$308 per inhabitant, or \$1,540 per family, placed one in the middle class it would require four times this, or \$6,160 today, for a family to maintain its economic status and remain in this class. The trouble with Mr. Gordon and his authority is that they measure the economic class divisions by the hard and fast lines of 30, 40 and 50 years ago without consideration of the general advance of the country's wealth. There is only one class that can be thus measured, and that is the proletariat. He is and has always been at the bottom and cannot go lower. His existence only becomes more precarious as Engels says: "When it gets worse he disappears and no longer figures in the statistical reports."

Keeping in mind always that the capacity of the worker is today sixfold greater than fifty years ago and the benefits that should accrue to society as a result, is it not passing strange that a system destroying this beneficence is defended, under which calamity and panic sweep the land as a result of "overproduction?" Mr. Maxwell has passed through one of these industrial cataclysms, and in his own words, "they were fearful days. Scores of workmen," he continues, "could not obtain positions. I was one of them. I lived through them just as others did. But I know capitalists who lost all and were making their way through the hard times just as I was, earning small salaries." And yet what was the cause of "these hard times in the nineties?" "Overproduction," was the universal cry. Factories closed because there was no demand for their products. Staple articles made a new low price level, because consumers—the toilers—had not the wherewith to buy at any price. All this is in accord with the fact that the product of the toiler is so greatly in excess of his compensation that he is no longer able to buy it, and, as a result, great industrial upheavels overturn the top-heavy industrial superstructure. Sheriff's sales and the foreclosure of mortgages sweep the country. A new adjustment of property takes place, and the small capitalist and home-owner find themselves poorer. Under the sifting-out process a greater and greater number fall to the rank of the proletariat. While this is going on at the bottom, at the top a greater concentration of material wealth has taken place. Then industry resumes itself under the same principle only to repeat its folly. This is what took place in the nineties.

Mr. Maxwell objects to the idea that a sixfold increased productive capacity is responsible for this result. He makes the astonishing statement that the field of production being usurped by the machine is counteracted by "the new oc-

cupations afforded." Is it possible invention has been for the purpose of "affording new occupations," that people so love work that they invent methods to work just for the fun of it? I thought invention meant the elimination of labor. I replaced the stage coach and the wagon freighter because these crude methods could no longer compete. I thought the loom supplanted the hand weaver, and precipitated a mob for its destruction, not because it made more work for the weavers, but because it put them out of business. But it seems I have lived to this day to learn that I am wrong. Mr. H. B. Maxwell of Chicago is my teacher. But if this is what is the matter with us—if invention has made so many new occupations that we have to fight like hyenas for them—I am in favor of going back to when we didn't have so much to do, and still lived.

The adoption of every new machine, of course, has been on the grounds of its economy in the elimination of labor, and new occupations, in the sense of more occupations in proportion to service, is simply proposterous. But our whole industrial system has come to be honey-combed with uneconomic occupations,—that is to say occupations wholly unnecessary under a sane system of industry that would eliminate wasted energy and the wastes of indirection. Take one occupation alone—the commercial travellers.

Here is an intelligent and energetic class of men of the greatest efficiency whose occupation, removed from the schemes and intrigues necessary to the competitive system, would seem to indicate that the people are so absolutely incapable of knowing their wants that it takes this army of drummers constantly in the field to urge them of their necessities.

Census bulletin No. 150 gives the total product of our manufactories at \$13,062,883,769. Many manufacturers estimate the costs of disposing of their products, including advertising, at 5 per cent. At this rate the more than thirteen billion dollar product yields the enormous sum of more than \$650,000,000. But the finished product of many establishments become the raw material of others. The finished product of the respective establishment must be disposed of through commercial salesmen to establishments that use it as raw material entering into their finished products. Five per cent of this must be added to the above, which makes a grand total of nearly \$875,000,000 as the sum annually wasted in advertising and on an army of 93,000 drummers.

But, at this enormous expense, the manufacturer's product is merely contracted for by the wholesalers, from whom to the retail dealer is a duplication, often many times, of the same expense aside from jobber's and other profits, and yet it has not reached the consumer. The further along the line it goes the greater are these expenses and the greater the percentage of profit until finally when the consumer is reached all this cost has mounted up until it is often many times the original or factory cost of the product.

Fully one-third of all labor, under the competitive system, is dissipated in the wastes of indirection; labor that would be turned into productive energy and to the shortening of the labor time of all, under a co-operative industry.

C. E. OBENCHAIN.

Asks Gordon a Few Questions

Verdon, Nebr., Nov. 21.—To the Editor of The Independent: I see in The Independent of November 9, over the signature of F. G. R. Gordon, the statement, "Within a month I have read in three socialist organs a statement (editorials too) in which it is asserted that the wage-workers receive only one-fourth of what they produce. I challenge any socialist reader of The Independent to prove this." I am not a socialist, but will call Mr. Gordon's attention to census bulletin No. 150, Table 2, costs of materials and purchased in raw state \$2,395,958,161. Deduct this from \$13,091,876,790 produced and we have \$10,695,918,629 left. To produce this there was paid to wage-workers \$2,339,923,615 or not quite one dollar.

But this is not what I want to challenge Mr. Gordon. If he means wage-workers where he speaks of the great middle class, he may be right when he declares they are increasing, but if he means that careful, painstaking, industrious class who own a little home free from incum-

brance, I will have to have further evidence.

When I was a boy we used to quote: "A little land well tilled, a little wife well willed, a little house well filled, give me." Of that great middle class, the farmers, they are making no great progress and have not for forty years. If Mr. Gordon will, I would be pleased if he would explain. The last census gives the total wealth of the United States at ninety-four billion dollars, of this twenty billion is in farms, live stock and farming implements. Twelve billions is railroad value. Nine and one-half is factory value and there is probably two and one-half billions of money, making a total of forty-four billions of dollars. In what does the other fifty billions consist. It might throw a little light on this subject by stating that in 1890, the farms of the nation were worth thirteen billion dollars. I have seen the statement that all the real estate was worth thirty-nine billions or three times that amount. In 1900 the farms were worth sixteen billions. If the other real estate was worth thirty-two billions it would not look as though Mr. Gordon was correct if he means by the middle class the small home owner. Just one idea more. In 1860 of the sixteen billions of wealth one-half was in farms, live stock and farm machinery, or there was practically \$255 of farm wealth per capita. In 1900 there was about \$265 per capita of farm wealth. In 1860 there was \$513 per capita of wealth. In 1900, \$1,235 per capita of total wealth. Concluding I have a theory that if you pile up mountains of wealth you must create valleys of poverty. Hoping I am wrong in my premise I am yours for the right.

GEORGE WATKINS.

Some Phases of Money Question

Chippewa Falls, Wis., Dec. 7.—To the Editor of The Independent: It has been a full month since you published my letter, Seeking Light on the Money Question, and it looks as though the gold standard national bank advocates, both democrats and republicans, are somewhat selfish in withholding the light so very much desired. And this, too, notwithstanding the fact that I took very particular pains to send the clipping, from The Independent, to some of my old friends in Nebraska that howled so vociferously during the 1896 campaign for "Gold Standard," "Confidence and Sound Money."

Can it be possible that they consider the money question so definitely settled and fastened upon the people that it will never be rejected? Perhaps when the X-rays of light become sufficiently diffused, there may be an awakening from this Rip Van Winkle, doltish stupor in which the people were hypnotized by the sonorous melody of "Confidence," that makes them passive and dormant while being held up and robbed.

During the first nine months of this year January 1 to October 1, 117 national banks failed and many millions of dollars was lost. Most of this was the savings of small depositors. On the first day of November the large, favored national banks held \$65,726,312 deposited with them by the government without interest, "to help them out!"

In other words \$65,726,312 of the people's money that had been collected out of the people, was deposited in these favorite banks, without interest, to be loaned back to the people, at the bankers' usual interest rates; and at the same time, "the people," are paying millions of dollars interest on the "bonds," upon which the gold standard is virtually based, and upon which these bankers are already getting interest in advance every six months, and issuing their currency (some people call it money) dollar for dollar, equal to the amount of "bonds," and which costs them merely the expense of printing—half of one per cent, to again loan to the people at "best possible rates," and getting compound interest four to sit time or more yearly.

It scarcely seems credible that such a condition as this can exist without a complaint or protest. Those "special privileges" are "fine for the favored ones, but what about the large Jones family, which always pays the freight?"

A national bank note, bears the evidence on its face, that the bank issuing it owes the holder of the note, the amount expressed, and is drawing interest it owes.

And now the manipulators are asking congress to make this money scheme still more elastic for themselves. Already like a pyramid standing on its apex, it looks too top-heavy to stand much more stretching.

JESSE WHITE.

P. S., Dec. 8.—Money 27 per cent in Wall Street; more shorn lambs, more gold standard shekels raked in by the banks and their allied sharks; but never mind, so long as their friend, Secretary Shaw, stands with his hands in the people's money box, ready to hand out \$20,000,000 more to tide over their gambling schemes. That is what the people are taxed for, though many seem too dull to comprehend the fact. J. W.