

The Cause of Unemployment in Britain

DURING the debate in the Commons on the unemployed, Mr. John Burns, M.P., said: The House had a right to know what was being done by his department and by the Government in administering the temporary Act for the spending of the \$1,000,000 that had been granted, and what would be done in spending the additional grant that had been conceded. In his judgment they had during the past three winters one that was worse than the winter which now confronted them. At the same time, in the administration of the fund to meet this state of things they had not been confronted with a single adverse criticism from the Distress Committees or any other responsible authority. There was absolutely no foundation for the assertion that they had acted in any niggardly way.

The causes of unemployment were social, economic, personal and political. They were not created in a year, and they could not be dissipated in a month. (Ministerial cheers.) They were the accumulation of ages, the heritage of past neglect, the burden of ignorance and selfishness, and the result of communities of men disobeying natural as well as economic law, and not one single department would be able at once to remove either the follies of communities, the neglect of ages or the vices and dissipation of individuals. He was to be commiserated by everyone because he was being made responsible for the neglect of other departments. He did not, however, object to be the "Derby dog" of the Government on the unemployed question, but he respectfully suggested that honorable members in criticising his department should remember the origin of the complaint and the disease. For three years the building trades had been depressed, and they had hitherto provided two-thirds of the men registered at the unemployment bureau. The depression in those trades affected from between 3,500,000 and 4,000,000 people. That depression was due not altogether to disappearing industries, but to overbuilding, to seven or eight of the staple trades of the country having been di-

verted from the building trade, to local authorities having been unable to borrow at less than five, six or seven per cent., and to the change in the methods of constructing buildings during the past few years. In September last there were 16 per cent. more laborers at work in the building trades than in September of the previous year, but there were eight to ten per cent. fewer skilled artisans at work in the same trades. In order to give the skilled artisans work the Local Government Board selected loan works.

He claimed that, by expediting loans and work, and speeding up Government contracts, they would compress into the next six months nearer three millions worth of work than two. As an example of how this had been done, he cited the case of Leeds as typical. For the last three years Leeds had been interesting itself very seriously, and, he thought, scientifically, in the task of grappling with the problem of unemployment. Leeds went to the Local Government Board some months ago for a £20,000 loan on public works, the great bulk of which would be used in the slack winter months. It was not work invented for charitable purposes, but for making roads, sewage, drainage and electric improvements. Further, Leeds had collected £20,000 from its citizens, and this money, which was still growing, would be spent on works requiring a Government subvention. Beyond that he believed the corporation of Leeds had taken £10,000 from the profits of their municipal undertakings and given to the Lord Mayor for minor works and the helping of those men, women and children incapable of being employed in relief and loan works. Multiply the case of Leeds a hundred times and they would see that they had been able to bring into play an enormous sum of money which would not otherwise have been spent in the winter months. The Board of Agriculture had acquired 14,000 acres of land for small holdings, and had purchased 13,000 acres for the purpose of afforestation. Further, by speeding up housing schemes, he had pushed forward work which would not be otherwise available this winter.

The Office of Works had given the Central (Unemployed) Body all the facilities it could in the nine or ten Royal parks, where they hoped that some five hundred men would be employed during the winter. The Admiralty, which they were told moved with leaden feet, had given employment to 2,100 men on repairs costing £73,000, and had expedited orders to enable contractors to spend two or three months sooner at least £200,000, and contracts would be given next month equal to two and a half millions sterling, which would come into fruitful workmanship earlier than expected. The War Office had also done its best by not reducing hands, and by enlisting for Special Reserve. The Board of Trade were considering an improved method of securing information which would enable them to arrive at an efficient system of labor exchanges and bureaus linked up so as to be of service in the case of emigration, and affording some means of differentiating between the honest workman and those disinclined to work. Altogether he calculated that something like five millions of money would be made available, or two millions more than the Lancashire Cotton Famine Fund spent in the years 1862-63-64.

Coming to London, which was the storm centre in connection with unemployment, he had heard with surprise the statement that six to seven million people were dependent upon "out of works." If those figures were at all right they would have been reflected in the pauperism of the year. (Hear, hear.) London in 1907 had 24.1 people dependent upon pauper relief; at the same date in 1908 the figure was 24.7; this did not warrant the extravagant statements made. At this moment, in London, out of 31 Boards of Guardians, 15 had a reduction of pauperism as compared with last year.

The hon. member for Woolwich (Mr. Crooks), whose attitude he could understand, had said too often truth had not been taught to the workman. But the average workman who spent five shillings a week on drink (Mr. Keir Hardie—"Not true!") spent money which,

if invested in the proper way, would mean enormous benefits to himself. When he was evicted from that Bench and resumed the chisel and file that shilling a week of the workman, invested in his union for benevolent purposes, would mean much. If the millions of money that had been wasted by working men in good times had been devoted to their own insurance much of the trouble that was now being experienced would not have been experienced. In 1906 and 1907, and he would ask Tariff Reformers to listen to these figures, the River Clyde produced 620,000 tons of the cheapest, fastest and best shipping in the world, twice as much as Germany and as much as the whole of Europe with Japan thrown in, and yet within a month of the American depression striking that river unemployed meetings were being held at which complaints were made against the Secretary for Scotland, that the grant to the Clyde, instead of being £11,000, should have been £18,000; when, in the preceding twelve months four million golden sovereigns had been spent by these self-same Clyde artisans on alcoholic liquor alone. He would be false to his class and to his duty if he were not to tell the workmen that if they were to rely more on their own good selves and not so much on the State and the municipality, it would be better for them and for the country. (Cheers.)

When he was asked what provision was being made for giving work during the coming winter he replied that there were nearly 500 men employed in the Royal parks, and 1,600 in the County Council parks, and arrangements had been made by which this number would be nearly doubled. The London Water Board was going to bring into employment 2,100 navvies six months sooner than would otherwise have been the case, and the County Council hoped to spend half a million of money in carrying on the work which they had power to press forward in various parts of this great city with a view of finding employment for the largest possible body of men. In connection with the provi-

sion of work for old soldiers and reservists, he, in co-operation with the Secretary for War, had adopted a scheme which, if it had been carried out twenty years ago, he believed, would have reduced our casual population of 17,000 to 4,000 or 5,000, and would have eliminated nearly all the old soldiers and reservists from the army of tramps and the casual wards. It was that ex-soldiers and reservists in receipt of pensions or reserve pay should not be compelled to reside in the United Kingdom, but that military workmen should enjoy the same mobility of labor that every other skilled and unskilled artisan enjoyed. They were given permission to emigrate to any British colony, and in the course of two years nearly 10,000 ex-soldiers and reservists had availed themselves of this opportunity.

Mr. Balfour—Does the right hon. gentleman mean to tell us that in the past two years 10,000 reservists have left the country by permission of the War Office?

Mr. Haldane—We have arranged that to the extent of 10,000 we shall allow reservists to go to any colony or British possession that they please, and 6,300 are now availing themselves of that permission.

Mr. Burns could assure the House and the country that if they would but leave this vexed and tangled problem to himself (laughter), he was prepared to worry through the winter. If the House of Commons would only leave it to the eighty-nine Distress Committees and to the Local Government Board to devise means to provide honest men with work he was sure that, when their six months were over, the House would be content to say that the municipalities had responded handsomely to their appeal, and that, as a result of that appeal, not hundreds, but thousands, of men would be provided with honest public work at the current rates of wages, and that the amount of the Government grant as expressing the difference between contract labor and unemployed price would not be so much as was supposed. The House might rely that, if the circumstances warranted it, the whole of the £300,000 should be spent in the interests of necessitous districts.

Russian Prison Atrocities

EVERYONE knows that prison reform in the Czar's dominions is a crying need; but it is seldom that details of official atrocities find their way to the foreign press in these days of rigid censorship. The following facts, however, from a reliable Russian correspondent, have managed to elude official vigilance.

A case which was recently brought to the public notice was that of seventy-three prisoners in the Schlüsselberg Prison, in St. Petersburg. Six of this number were women, who were implicated in the recent plot to assassinate the Czar and his wife and children. The plot was betrayed by one of the Cossacks on guard at the Tsarkoe Selo Palace, who had agreed to join the conspirators, and whose conscience troubled him to such an extent that he confessed the whole conspiracy and then shot himself. His statement led to the arrest of several hundred people, amongst whom were three members of the Douma. They were sent to Schlüsselberg. Seventy-three of them have managed to send an appeal to the Douma to have their grievances looked into. They are packed together in three small cells, chained hand and foot, day and night. Their diet consists of bread and water, and the filth with which they are surrounded has resulted in a malignant fever breaking out. The finishing touch was put to their misfortunes when, in response to the complaints in the Douma, the Director of the Prisons Board went to see them. One of the men, who was too weak to sit up, refused to stand when the official entered the cell. He was whipped until the blood ran from his wounds. His fellow-prisoners protested against this barbarous treatment. "You shall have something better," replied a warder, and ordered the soldiers to beat them with their rifle butts. These facts have leaked out, but there are many more as bad, if not worse, which are hushed up by the officials. Of course, some of the prisoners are released, sooner or later, and it is from their lips that tales of cruelty, neglect, disease, and starvation are heard.

A typical case of which I have just heard is that of one Szymanski, a brass worker of Warsaw. He was a respectable, hard-working man, with a large family, and was spending the evening with some friends when the police entered the house and announced that he was under arrest. He protested that he was ignorant of any charge which could be possibly brought against him, and that he never occupied himself with politics. He was carried off by force to the town hall, where 400 prisoners are put into a space designed for fifty, and was thrown into a cell filled with thieves, vagabonds and bandits of the worst type. There is no need to describe the filth and discomfort of such a cell where fourteen men live, eat, drink, and sleep in a room built for two. Happily, he had a little money in his pocket, and bribed one of the soldiers to give him something palatable to eat. But for the whole of the six weeks he was there, all his efforts to see a higher official or to learn the cause of his arrest were in vain. After his small stock of money ran out the soldiers frequently used

their rifle butts upon him and he soon became a mass of bruises and cuts. At last, after a month and a half, a warder told him he could go.

"But now, perhaps, you will tell me why I was brought here?" queried Szymanski.

"That is no business of yours; so, if you don't want to be shut up for another six weeks, make yourself scarce."

Which he did. He arrived home much to the joy of his wife and family, who thought he had already been taken from Warsaw, having already been told at all the prisons that no man named Szymanski was there.

Some weeks after he was called to the local branch of the "Azov Bank" to make some brass rods. The porter eyed him with interest, and when he was going out, beckoned him aside.

"You look thin and hard up since you were here last," he began. "Has anything happened to you?"

"I've been in prison, and don't know what for," was the answer. "Perhaps you can tell me."

The porter nodded. "Well, you see," he said, "it was like this. The other porter, who lives here, used to keep bombs in an attic under the roof. When some of them exploded, just six weeks ago, the police came and searched my lodge. Amongst other papers they found your telephone number and your name on a slip of paper. If you remember I wrote it down in case we should want to get you for a job. They asked me where you lived and what you were, and when I said I didn't know, they beat me till I remembered. They must have arrested you the same night."

This sort of thing—the police call it a mistake—happens so often that some people will not leave their cards in other people's houses, or their addresses either. It is by following this system that the prisons are crowded with men and women who have never had the remotest conception with politics.

Only the other day an engineer was measuring a pavement in Odessa for new gas pipes. A member of the secret police saw him and, without waiting to ask questions, arrested him. The unlucky man was in prison three days before anybody would listen to him. They then discovered that he was a servant of the municipality and let him go with the curt explanation, "Pomililis—We have made a mistake." They had beaten him well before arriving at this conclusion.

Shot for Speaking to His Sister

But worse things than this happen. A boy named Adolf Abramowicz was in prison at Bialystock awaiting trial on a charge of plundering a government spirit store. He was put in a cell on the first floor, overlooking the street. His sister used to walk up and down in the street, hoping to be able now and then, to exchange a few words with him. They did this for several evenings, the brother appearing at the window whenever the warders outside the door were dozing. One evening they were talking and did not notice that a soldier was on guard at the corner of the street. The man came up, pushed the girl away, and shouted to the prisoner, "If you don't go away

from the window I'll give you a taste of my rifle." Adolf answered him, "You will not frighten me like that, because I expect I shall be hanged before long, anyway." The soldier fired and the prisoner fell back dead, shot through the brain. The soldier was not even reprimanded.

In Kieff the unhappy prisoners are being put out of the way in another manner. During the month just past 500 have fallen ill of "prison typhoid," and 200 of that number died. The sick are not always separated from the well, because the hospital is overcrowded, and very often patients are not visited by a doctor until they are past all help. Of course, this typhoid is only a result of bad treatment, starvation, and filth. It is quite impossible to keep men and women even comparatively healthy under the conditions which prevail in many Russian prisons. Only five minutes' exercise is allowed daily to the inmates, and this is taken in a close prison yard, surrounded by high walls, where the air is nearly always stifling and the space is crowded with the prisoners and their warders.

The prisoners are submitted to all sorts of petty persecutions. In Charkow prison several inmates were fairly well off, and, by means of bribing the warders, managed to smuggle in tea and spirit lamps on which to boil water. For some time they were allowed to make their tea in peace; then suddenly one of the warders was offended by some of them, and ordered the spirit lamps and tea to be confiscated at once. The governor of the prison was appealed to, but in vain, because he did not care to come and visit the cells, and, therefore, expressed "complete confidence" in his warders. The whole prison responded by organizing a "hunger strike," and refused to eat anything. This became troublesome to the authorities, because the strikers fell ill by the hundred. The prisoners themselves when asked why they "cut off their noses to spite their faces," replied that it was the only form of protest they had, and that they were so miserable that to fall ill sooner or later did not much matter.

It is only fair to record that some humane governors of prisons do all they can to alleviate the sufferings of the unhappy people in their charge. But they complain that they are as much victims of a bad system as the prisoners themselves. They can do nothing to enlarge the overcrowded prisons, and the funds at their disposal are quite inadequate to feed the prisoners properly. As to the beating and other forms of barbarism which prevail, they are powerless to prevent it. A Russian soldier will use the butt end of his rifle as a man in a civilized country uses his tongue—without thinking, and because it is always at hand.

The coroner, whose duty it is to prepare cases for the Public Prosecutor, has to start with the supposition that the people brought before him are guilty. Therefore, all sorts of "persuasive methods" such as thrashing, knouting, and flogging with long india-rubber cords are used to make prisoners confess. Their teeth are knocked out and their faces beaten to a jelly. This procedure is successful, in many cases, and the victims make a clean breast of it, and give the names and addresses of their accomplices.—Scotsman.

A Torpedo Boat Attack

The commander of a battleship or cruiser there is perhaps nothing more nerve racking in modern naval warfare than the sudden, unexpected attack of a torpedo boat or destroyer.

He sees the sharp prow of this little black demon of war headed at the ship he commands, dashing toward him as fast as a railroad train travels, smoke pouring from its funnels in blinding clouds. Standing on the bridge of his ship, which perhaps cost his Government \$4,000,000, and on which may be quartered seven hundred officers and men, he knows that he must sink his tiny adversary before it can get within range to discharge an explosive sufficiently powerful to blow the leviathan out of the water. It is not a time for thought then; it is a time for quick action and sure firing. And it is a time which tries the nerves of gun crews to the utmost.

The following is a description which a midshipman gave a New York Tribune reporter recently of his first "torpedo attack":

"I was making my first practice cruise on the old Atlantic," he said. "She used to be the pride of the navy, but now, of course, is practically an antiquated type of cruiser and would be of no service in actual warfare. We were steaming down the Atlantic coast, keeping about one hundred miles or so out, in squadron formation, when, one evening, the flagstaff signalled to stand by that night for a torpedo boat attack.

"There were, I think, four or five torpedo boats and destroyers with the squadron, and these, acting under orders, had steamed away to the eastward—earlier that day and were, of course, out of sight. The night was an ideal one for the attack. It was pitch dark, and soon the rain began to fall in torrents. After the second dog watch I was loafing around on deck; my watch, the starboard watch, had just been piped down, and I was hoping that we would get orders to 'turn in,' when suddenly the order rang out, 'All hands clear ship for action.'

"Well, that order always has and always will send a thrill through me, especially when I hear it aboard ship at sea. Instantly everybody was on the jump, and we got 'stripped' in almost record time. The cathead watches and the lookouts were then doubled, but orders were given not to use the searchlights. There was an air of expectancy about. We could not tell at what minute the 'enemy' might heave in sight and make a rush for us.

"It was evident that there would be no sleep for either watch until after the attack had been made, and we all wondered how long it would be before 'general quarters' was sounded. 'General quarters' is the bugle call sounded before going into action, ordering every man to his station. We did not have to wonder long, for the call soon rang through the ship. Have you ever heard it? No? Well, you should. It gives you an indefinable sensation, and sends the blood rushing through your veins.

"The gun crews went to their guns on the run, ammunition was hoisted, and we were all ready for the 'enemy.' Hour after hour pass-

ed, and still there was no sight of the foe. My station was at a 5-inch gun, and the crew clustered around the gun port, trying to peer through the darkness of the night. Eight bells struck, and still no sight of the enemy.

"The rain was still coming down, and although it was summer we were soon shivering with the cold. That was a trying four hours from midnight until 4 o'clock. When the latter hour finally rolled around the lookouts were again relieved, and I went below to take my place with the gun crew. When I got below I found that the officers had ordered some hammocks stretched by the guns and had allowed the men to lie on these. They could do nothing until the attack was actually made, but still none of the men was allowed to drop asleep. I tell you, the hammock I stretched out on felt good after those four long, cold, rainy hours on the bridge.

"It was hard work keeping awake, despite the excitement, for I was dead tired. It must have been a little before 5 o'clock when the starboard cathead lookout sang out, 'Sail one point off the port quarter, sir.' 'Stand by your guns,' ordered the gun officers, and the crews sprang to their places, while the officers studied the sea through the portholes with smoked glasses. It proved to be a false alarm. The nervous lookout imagined he saw a destroyer dashing down on him, whereas he saw in reality only a streak of darkness. There was a smothered laugh, and perhaps a few not so well smothered oaths, and the waiting began again. It did not last long this time, for hardly a quarter of an hour later the starboard bridge lookout did make out three destroyers heading dead for us amidships and steaming full speed.

"Hardly had the warning rung out when several electric light signal bulbs glowed for a second. They read: 'At five hundred yards begin firing.' The division officer shouted the order, and the gun captains repeated it. The gun pointers and the sight setters did good work. They had their guns trained on the enemy almost instantly. There was a roar and a flash of flame, which illuminated momentarily the entire side of the ship, as our broadside belched out. Up above we could hear the quick spit of the Maxims and other rapid-fire guns as their crews worked overtime pumping 'lead' at the enemy. 'Fire at will,' shouted the division officer, and each gun as soon as it was on the target was fired, the gun pointers and range setters vying with one another to do the quickest work.

"With smoke rising in dense clouds from their stacks, the destroyers drove at us full speed until well within range, discharged their torpedoes, veered off and dashed away into the darkness from which they came. It was all over. None of the midshipmen knew really whether we had sunk the enemy or they had sunk us, but we all asserted that we had added a few more 'tubs' to Davy Jones' collection, and in this opinion the referees sustained us the next day. They decided that if we had not been firing blanks none of the destroyers would have lived to get close enough to us to discharge a torpedo.

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