

The Monetary Times

Absorbed the INTERCOLONIAL JOURNAL OF COMMERCE, 1869; the TRADE REVIEW, Montreal, 1870; and the JOURNAL OF COMMERCE, Toronto.

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UNEMPLOYMENT AND ITS PROBLEMS.

To be involved in a fight has been the lot of John Burns often. He has known the meaning of a policeman's strong arm upon his shoulder; because the law forbids riots. He has known the joy of being surrounded by an enthusiastic Battersea crowd. Victory in parliamentary elections excites constituencies. He has discovered that the art of sticking to one's convictions leads sometimes to the Cabinet's portals. And he has learned now that the dove of peace does not always flutter at No. 10 Downing Street. John Burns may or may not have realized the onerous burden he shouldered when accepting the presidency of the Local Government Board. To him have come in a long procession the complex problems of the unemployed and the multiplex puzzles of pauperism.

The two are by no means unrelated. In the days of Charles Dickens the workhouse was a land of Bumbledom. Officials became sleek on rate-paid diet. Oliver Twist constantly asked for more. Those were the times of free and easy corruption. Later came a broom. It swept out the wrong and official rigour and red tape were introduced. Since then two features have marked the conduct of the English poor law system. A systematic and almost legitimized form of graft has been carried on. Recent exposers have shown to what extent. And the network of pauperism throughout England has been accepted almost as the inevitable. Many in British workhouses are able to work. They cannot obtain labor. Others will not work even if labor be offered them. These latter and similar tribes are degenerates. Nothing can stop their spread except drastic

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and scientific measures. In this world of sentimentalism such measures would be branded cruel and inhuman.

Outside the doors of the poor law institution shuffles a mighty army of unemployed. It is sometimes difficult here to realize its proportions. During the past five years, the Local Government Board have issued numerous regulations affecting unemployment. Twenty years back, the British Parliament would have scorned these. Necessity has changed contempt into sympathy. From what can be gathered the difference between Premier Asquith and John Burns is both important and unique. The Premier has proposed to do more to satisfy the demands of the Labor party than is the president of the Local Government Board prepared to do.

Here we have a picture of a famous leader putting a damper upon the progressive proposals of a deep-thinking, conservative Premier. One point at issue is the question of relief works. One cannot feed empty stomachs with municipal oratory. Talk of legislation does not shoe the barefooted child. He must be a man of curious conscience who is not unhappy when unemployed. When unemployment means semi-starvation, man's best instincts are lost. The noble flees; the brutal enters. The survival of the fittest law is then acute in modern civilization. The writer has seen two thousand gaunt and hungry London unemployed demanding labor and food. The demand was to the poor law authorities. The times of the French Revolution, when the bread queue was an everyday sight, could scarcely have afforded a more pitiful spectacle than these men—citizens existing in what is thought to be the most luxurious country in the world. To dally with such deputations is dangerous. Immediate relief of some kind not only saves the face of the authorities. It keeps plate glass windows whole. So relief works were inaugurated. That is to say men have made roads, have built this or that, and labored on works which were not always necessary. In some cases they looked like a happy inspiration of the moment. The Premier and John Burns have split opinions at this juncture. The question for answer is, How far shall work, created and paid for by municipal