

The People.

VOL. VI, NO. 42

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1897

PRICE 3 CENTS

EDITORIAL

“National Prosperity”

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Sir Michael Hicks Beach’s first budget, about ready for publication, is heralded in advance by the British press as “a most encouraging document.” Sir William Harcourt’s last budget, we are notified, “revealed great national prosperity,” but Sir Michael’s will surpass it, and long figures are already being trotted out in proof of the statement.

Alongside of this showing we learn from other documents that one out of every four persons passing in the streets of London dies either in prison, the almshouse, or the insane asylum. In other words, one out of every four is driven by want or the fear of want into crime, dependence upon society, or out of his senses.

Are these statements contradictory? Must one be false if the other be true? No. They are both correct; and thereby hangs the tale.

The terms, “national wealth,” “national prosperity,” and the like, must not be taken literally when uttered by the Hicks Beaches, the Harcourts, or the property-holding classes in general. They meant it to be taken literally, but when driven to the wall they come out with the truth, to wit, the terms are used “technically.” In the technical sense meant by these gentlemen, the masses, i.e., the working class is no part of the nation any more than the dogs, cats, horses or cows of the nation are, and deserve no more and no less attention than these. By the “nation,” accordingly, is meant only that frail minority that lives on the goods it steals from the workers. Coming down to hard pan, when these gentlemen speak of “national” prosperity they have in mind the prosperity of the plundering class. The mystery is thus solved; the seeming contradiction between “national prosperity” and “national misery” is removed. It is clear that for the “nation,” to wit, the capitalist class, to be prosperous, the nation, to wit, the working class, must be at the ragged edge. The more prosperous are the former the nearer must the latter be to the ragged edge.

The songs sung by the capitalist class of all countries upon “national prosperity” has, to trained ears, the twang of a dirge. The louder these songs, all the clearer is it

made to the real nation that an irrepressible social conflict is drawing to a head. That national institution that renders “national prosperity” synonymous with popular degradation, and that can increase only in the measure that it deepens popular misery, digs its own grave.

The capitalist showings of “national prosperity” are the funeral songs of capitalism—the only songs worth listening to from the repertory of this system.

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

Uploaded August 2003