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EDITORIAL

FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

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The latent goodness in the human heart is shown at this season when thousands of people, buffeted, spurned, wronged, and abused by the world, make an attempt to be merry, and to give a message and a greeting of good cheer to their fellow men. The merriment that one must attempt, and the cheery greeting that is mechanically given, cannot be said to indicate a heart that overflows with bubbling joy, or a spirit that is exuberant with lightness. It is a merriment under difficulties, and it is a spirit of good fellowship that comes under the most adverse circumstances. Yet this spirit exists, it flourishes for one day only in a class that has too little reason to rejoice, and to which causes of sorrow are its every day life.

The major portion of the people must literally wring a holiday out of its trials and its wrongs. To some the day of rest, if they get it, will be an affliction, because as a day of idleness it means that there will be no pay, and no pay means an added intensity to their want. Those who work in the mines, the cotton mills, the steel works, and the different factories have before them a long, hard winter. They have behind them years of bitter toil that have served to sap their energies, shatter their frames, and render them incapable of enjoying the rest and quiet that are necessary to true happiness. The uncertainty of everything about them brings, even into their holidays, the haunting fear of coming trouble. It renders them uneasy because they know that, though they may strive to hide the true state of affairs from themselves to-day, to-morrow they must return to the rack, or they must continue their weary pilgrimage in search for work.

The "charitably minded" will attempt to lighten the woes of those who are out of work, of those who have been violently torn from the sources of livelihood, by giving them free dinners. The number of poor who will be fed to-day is not an indication of the goodness of man, but it is an arraignment of the capitalist system, a protest against that system, and a menace to the human race. It is well to assist the fallen,

but it is dangerous, it is criminal to throw them to the ground so that you can assist them. More charity is shown in pointing out the right way for society than there is in feeding millions of men who are kept in servitude.

The arrangements that were made for the wholesale feeding of the poor gives the lie direct to the claim that we are either a civilized or a prosperous nation. If so many mouths must be fed at the expense of others, and if thousands and hundreds of thousands will get but the meagre dinner to which they are accustomed from day to day, then prosperity is distributed so unevenly, and such a large proportion of the people are cut out of it, that it is better to abolish the whole thing and substitute a little justice.

The Salvation Army will be the feeder in chief, and for many months it has waged a relentless campaign for contributions. If it were half as successful in rescuing souls as it is in rescuing pennies, heaven would be overcrowded. Its position as a social scavenger excuses many of its questionable actions, just as the work of the buzzard is an excuse for its uncleanness.

At least ninety thousand people in Greater New York alone depend wholly on charity for their dinner to-day. There are ten times that number who will go on short rations because they do not wish to accept the degradation of charity. Christmas is jolly enough, a day that brings kindness enough, but you must be able to pay for it. While happiness cannot be bought on the open market, there are many things which, unless they are bought, will cause misery. The position of the working class, now more than ever before, is one in which suffering must result. Gloss over the matter as the apologists can, there still remains the fact that this charity is the outcome of a most deplorable condition.

The great organization on which they pride themselves, the strenuous measures undertaken to "bring a little brightness" into the lives of the poor, the unprecedented efforts to handle a large number of diners, and the work done to give thousands and thousands of dollars worth away are the result, not of good-heartedness, but of sheer necessity. If these people are capable of feeding themselves, why make all this effort in their behalf? If they are not capable of feeding themselves, who is responsible for this lamentable condition of affairs? There was a time here when it would have been an insult to a man to offer him his Christmas dinner. He was capable of providing all that he needed. He is no longer. He must depend on what charity doles out to him. He is made a suppliant for Christmas cheer. He is no longer capable of providing for himself, and must

depend on what is given him.

The race has not deteriorated. Men are just as anxious now to be self-sustaining as they ever were. The trouble is that they are not allowed to be. That army of unemployed or underpaid men who dine at the public expense to-day is necessary to capitalism. It is one of the methods whereby capitalism can beat down the working class, and hold it in restraint. Those men can be pitted against the men who have jobs, and such a conflict can have but one result. The working class as a whole will be the sufferer.

There is not a wage-worker in the world who can truthfully say that he may not be a candidate for a public dinner at the next Christmas. The list is growing proportionately larger. The number to be fed increases. The victims of capitalism are so plentiful that a helping hand cannot be held out to all, but some are assisted so that the wheel may not grind too finely. Charity is an insult. Charity is a degradation. But charity is also a weapon in the hands of the capitalist, and it is one that he uses with dire effect.

Such a "merry" Christmas cannot come unless there is some great and terrible wrong. Such a state of affairs works the ruin of all who take part in it. Its increase betokens disaster. Its continuance breeds crime. A merry Christmas should be a Christmas that finds all men capable of producing their own merriment, instead of having it ladled out to them to a chorus of self-praise and congratulation on the part of the givers.

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