

THE PEOPLE.

VOL. I, NO. 25.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1891.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

WHAT WE WANT.

The *Record and Guide*, organ of the real estate gamblers, enters the lists against the Social Movement with an argument for which it cannot be too much thanked. It quotes some figures from the recent Massachusetts report of the Bureau of Labor, where \$893.32 are given as the average wages received by labor, and \$379 as the average share realized by the stockholders on their investments, and it concludes that "it is hard to see by what process of equal division the average earnings of work-people is to be much increased."

Accepting these figures as correct—a thing that can be done only for the sake of argument, seeing that Chief Wadlin has proved himself an apt disciple of his predecessor Carroll D. Wright in the manipulation of figures in favor of the stockholders—and granting therefore that the average wealth actually produced in Massachusetts is only slightly over \$300 a year, the fact only goes to sustain one of the gravest charges brought against the capitalist system of production, to wit: that it keeps the actual wealth of the community far below the quantity warranted by existing productive forces in society.

In a community where the total wealth producible can average only about \$1 a day for every inhabitant, it were folly to expect each to enjoy \$10 worth of wealth a day. In the community, however, where the productivity of labor is such that everyone could be supplied with at least \$10 worth of wealth a day, yet, that notwithstanding, only \$1 worth a day is actually produced, in such a community the system under which production is carried on must be radically defective and the demand {for its} overthrow must become imperative. That is exactly the case with Massachusetts in particular, the United States and the world at large in general.

Keeping to Massachusetts, the most common sight from the railroad trains through the State are the posters over her abandoned farm lands, informing the passer-by that they are to be had for a song. Acre upon acre of soil that can be productive of food stretch there idle before the eyes. In her

cities, machinery lies piled upon machinery, and raw material upon raw material in patient expectation to be quickened into life by the hand of labor, yet waiting in vain. Last not least, according to the lowest estimate, the quantity of enforced idleness in the State is equal to an army of 200,000 working people idle the whole year round. Nor is this all. Large numbers of those who cannot be exactly ranked among the idle are found to rush to non-productive pursuits: they become lawyers, foot-men, coach-men, domestics generally, policemen, detectives, advertisement puffers, strolling agents, watchmen, spotters and what not, and together with the wholly idle, coupon-punching classes, increase the number of the useless portion of the population. Thus labor and capital—the land, all other instruments of production and willing hands—are plentiful in Massachusetts, yet to a great extent remain idle, non-productive, the same as though they were not.

What is true of Massachusetts is equally true of all the other States in the Union. The possibilities of the land, the wealth producible here, is fabulous, yet that actually produced is paltry in comparison.

The Social or Labor Movement demands no impossibilities. Differently from its adversaries, it has planted itself upon facts, and informed itself before it opened its mouth. The facts above enumerated are indisputable. In view of them it asks, why, seeing the quantity of wealth producible is so prodigious, yet does the wealth actually produced lag behind; what is it that palsies the possibilities of plenty and reduces them to the level of a dearth, if not of famine?

The answer is self-evident: the private ownership of those necessary means of production—land and capital—and their use for profit instead of for the benefit of the people. Where these are held under private control, large areas of a country are necessarily withheld from productive use, and millions of active arms are necessarily deprived of all opportunity to exercise their skill. The less produced, up to a certain point, the greater the demand and consequently the larger the profits for the private owner. Private ownership of natural and social elements of production is the Old Man of the Sea that weighs production down, and reduces the average of enjoyable wealth. It is the cause of “average” national pauperism in the midst of conditions that could insure a national plenty.

Your defence is your indictment, sapient *Guide and Record*; it is not a

division, but increased production that the Social Movement wants; and, to reach that, it demands the abolition of the private and the establishment of the collective ownership of the means of production; their ownership by Uncle Sam—the people—as they own and operate to-day their Post-Office, their army and navy, and, in cities, their fire department, their waterworks, and in not a few instances their gas and electric plants.

The People, Vol. I, No. 25. Sunday, September 20, 1891

[Transcribed by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded February 2002]