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EDITORIAL

BEBEL AND THE COTTON CRISIS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AUGUST Bebel, in his great book, *Woman Under Socialism*, the English translation of which has been running in the *Sunday and Weekly People*, says:

“Everywhere, it is the social conditions,—the existing method of production and distribution—that brings on privation and misery, not the number of people. A few rich crops in succession lower the prices of food in such manner that a considerable number of our cultivators of the soil are ruined. Instead of the condition of the cultivator being improved, it declines. A large number of farmers to-day look upon a good crop as a misfortune; it lowers prices so that the cost of production is barely covered. And this is called a rational state of things!”

How true this statement is the cotton crisis at present raging in this country affords an opportunity for demonstrating. As is well known, prices for cotton have been high owing to the shortage of crops. This has occasioned widespread disaster to the cotton industry, especially in England, necessitating as it does, wage reductions, curtailment of production and shutdowns. Though cotton prices have been high during the past year, the government crop figures made public last week indicate that they will be even higher next year. This means, of course, that the misfortune now afflicting the cotton industry will be rendered more acute during the coming year. One would naturally think that this condition of affairs would furnish cause for lamentation and deprecation. On the contrary, though, as Bebel infers is the case in poor crops, it is made a cause of congratulation; it is, in fact, pointed to as an indication of one of the conditions of prosperity that will overcome the industrial depression now raging throughout the country!

Bradstreet's for Saturday, Dec. 5th, in an editorial on the reaction against the feeling of industrial pessimism in vogue for the past few months, which it declares

is apparent, points out certain material interests which are so prosperous as to be in a position to offset any depression that may exist. After mentioning the retirement of indebtedness of some commonwealths, the decrease in municipal obligations, and the paying off of farm mortgages in the West, it concludes thusly:

“While in the southern the states the advance in the price of their great products has lifted that whole region from the slough of despond to one of material prosperity. When the present cotton crop has been marketed the south will have more money by over a hundred millions than it had even a year or two ago, and the purchasing capacity of the people will be correspondingly increased.”

As Bebel well showed, a good crop would have been a misfortune, but a poor crop raises the South, i.e., its plantation owners, cotton compressors, brokers, in fewer words, its capitalist class, “FROM THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND TO ONE OF MATERIAL PROSPERITY.” That the cotton and allied industries of the world should be prostrated by the crop shortage, that the loss, in suffering and wages, to those dependent on them should exceed a hundred millions, what of that? Capitalism is production for profit, or capitalist well-being, not for use, or social well-being. “And this,” to quote Bebel, “is called a rational state of things!”

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