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EDITORIAL

## PAINE; AND NOW.

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**T**HOMAS PAINE, the brilliant author-hero of the American Revolution, whose anniversary is just now being celebrated, left this record of conditions in the colonies:

“Our present numbers,” he says, “are so happily proportioned to our wants that none need be idle.”

By implication, Paine’s words would seem to mean that, seeing to-day we have, at a modest estimate, 2,000,000 unemployed in the land, therefore we are overpopulated to just the extent of those 2,000,000—they are superfluous to the supplying of our wants, hence their idleness.

To arrive at such a conclusion would be to leap in the dark, shutting one’s eyes to the powerful searchlights which modern economics throws upon the subject of unemployment.

Never in the world’s history has there been too much produced. To-day, more than ever, are we near the point where, theoretically, enough can be produced to suffice every want and every wholesome aspiration of all. In no other age were the machinery and the productive organization there to make this true. Yet even to-day that sufficiency is not forthcoming. The population of the earth has not increased so wonderfully over what it was twenty or even thirty centuries ago—it has merely shifted centers. What then must have been the appalling scarcity of commodities in previous ages! The abject millions of ancient Asia, the gyve-bound helot of Athens, the teeming factory and agricultural slave of Rome, the brutified and unlettered peasant of the middle ages—read on their furrowed brow the answer.

As far, then, as for anyone’s being unemployed because his additional labor would have added too much to the already replete general store, that reason would have held good no more in Paine’s day than it will in our own. Something else must

be the cause of unemployment.

That something is the idea of production for PROFIT instead of for USE. Once that steps in, and the hand of the profit-hunting manufacturer twines itself about the throttle of production, the whole lay of the land is changed. With all men producing for use, too much could never be produced—the race's wants would expand with the expanding opportunity for their satisfaction. With men producing for profit, however, "too much" can be, and periodically is, produced.

When the tool of production develops so that each man can no longer own it, and employ himself—when, in other words, many men become dependent upon the will of another man whether they shall work or no, there is laid the basis for unemployment.

When a manufacturer sees no market for his goods, and shuts down, there begins unemployment.

When a manufacturer wants cheaper labor, and knows that the only way to get it is to increase the supply of labor ready and anxious to sell itself to him, there is laid an additional motive on his part for stimulating the degree of unemployment.

These three, and other, causes co-operating, unemployment has to-day grown into a necessary adjunct, a foundation even, of capitalist society. Man's wants are ever present; they are increasing rapidly with the spread of knowledge and enlightenment among the people. But on the one hand these throbbing wants remain unsatisfied, and, on the other hand millions of workers walk the streets begging for a chance to help supply them, purely because the owner of the machine, the producer for profit, says, No.

This is the social contrast existent to-day, non-existent in Paine's time, the absence of which enabled him to write as he did. Sturdy revolutionist that he was, there is no doubt on which side of the present struggle to wipe out that contrast he would range himself and his pen.

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

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