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EDITORIAL

WELFARE WORK.

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FREDERICK Engels, in his invaluable work, [*Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science*](#), says of Robert Owen:

“Robert Owen had imbued himself with the principle of the recent materialist pioneers of thought, that the character of man was the product of his innate qualities and of his surroundings, especially during the period of development. Most of the contemporaries of his class saw in the industrial revolution only disorder and chaos, troubled waters good to fish in and whereby to grow rich quickly. He, on the contrary, saw therein the opportunity to apply his favorite maxim, and thereby bring order out of chaos. Already, at Manchester, as superintendent over five hundred workingmen in a factory, he had successfully applied his maxim. From 1800 to 1829 he directed as principal partner the large cotton mill at New Lanark, in Scotland, upon the same principle, only with greater freedom of action, and with a degree of success that earned for him a European name. A population, that gradually grew to 2,500 souls, and which originally consisted mainly of the most mixed and strongly demoralized element, was by him transformed into a perfect model colony, in which drunkenness, police, criminal courts, lawsuits, poorhouses, and the need of charity were things unknown; and all this simply by surrounding the people with conditions fit for human beings, and especially by causing the rising generation to be carefully brought up. He was the inventor of infant schools, and introduced the system there for the first time. With their second year the children were brought to school, and they were so well entertained that it was hard work to get them home. While his competitors worked their operatives from thirteen to fourteen hours, at New Lanark the workday was only ten and-a-half hours long. During a crisis in cotton, that compelled a suspension of work for four months, full wages were paid to the idle operatives. Yet the establishment more than doubled its value, and, to the end, yielded large profits to its proprietors.

“Still, Owen was not satisfied. The life he had afforded his workingmen was, in his eyes, still a long way off from that which became the dignity of man. ‘Those people were my slaves’, he would say. The comparatively favorable circumstances in which they were placed, were yet far from permitting a well rounded and rational development of character and the

intellect, let alone the free play of human activity.”

Engels proceeds to tell how Owen was led to attack the capitalist system and advocate communism, in order to give the working class that which his philanthropic measures had failed to bestow. For this, Owen was ostracized. He, thereupon, allied himself with the working class movement, becoming its most {ardent?} champion and leader.

“All social movements,” says Engels, “that have sprung up in England, all genuine progress made there in the interests of labor, are connected with the name of Owen.”

One cannot read Engels’ review of Owen’s career without feeling that Owen was genuinely solicitous of the welfare of the working class, condemning even that which promoted his own interests, and sacrificing the latter to the complete emancipation of the men, women and children for whom his noble heart throbbed and his splendid brain dared to conceive and execute. How different was Owen’s welfare work, from the modern “welfare work”, which, following the lines first laid down by Owen, while malignantly misrepresenting the great ideals to which he devoted his life, is more intent on capitalist profits and supremacy than working class advancement and deliverance. Compare the sacrifice of wealth involved in Owen’s recognition of the fact that “Those people were my slaves”, with the mercenary motive underlying the statement of Mr. John Patterson, President of the National Cash Register Company, Dayton, O., to wit, “We do welfare work because it is right, AND BECAUSE IT PAYS”. (Caps are ours. See p. 14, February *National Civic Federation Review*). Compare also the whole liberating career of Owen, with the mental and physical enslavement suggested in these words from the pen of W.E.C. Nazro, “‘welfare’ manager”:

“The large industrial plants and enterprises throughout the United States, controlling as they do somewhat the lives of the people, contain, if properly fostered, the seed for one of the greatest educational processes the country has ever known. They reach a vast class of people that the public school and college systems never can. They can be made to implant in the young generations a pure and high perception of American citizenship, American life and American ideals.” (See same page same publication.)

John Draper, in his *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, shows how Chinese homogeneity was secured and the Empire perpetuated, through the organization of the national intellect. Mr. Nazro would secure American uniformity and perpetuate capitalism through the organization of the working class intellect. No doubt, like Mr. Patterson, he advocates this feature of “welfare work” “because it is right, and because IT PAYS.”

Happily for the race this mercenary, paternalistic and pro-capitalist “welfare work” is not exempt from the influences of modern political and economic forces—forces which, tearing aside the veil that hides these imitations of Owenism, create strikes in the “model” factories of the Mr. Pattersons, and cause the workingmen of Essen to humiliate the German Kaiser for his defense of that other noble “welfare” worker, Mr. Krupp, by rolling up an increased vote for the latter’s “defamers”—the Social Democrats. Were it otherwise this reversal of Owen’s principles, as logically developed by him, would be appalling to contemplate. In that event, a few spurious philanthropists would preside over the destinies of myriads of economic slaves, educated to hug their chains while promoting the interests of their masters. The dumb peasantry of Russia would be no longer the type of servitude. Their places would be taken by others more brainy, but more debased because of that fact. This spurious “welfare” work will die; but that of Robert Owen, founder of New Lanark, communist, and friend of the working class, will live on forever. Truth will prevail!

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