
Conditions

by Eugene V. Debs

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The optimist may be satisfied with conditions and the pessimist may lament over what he deems the misfortunes of mankind, and if the pessimist seeks to remedy the affliction, whatever it may be, he is the better man of the two, but if he is content to murmur, bewail, and croak, then the optimist is the more lovable character. There are certain untoward conditions which, being productive of great mental or physical distress, cannot be contemplated with composure, so independent of human agency that they are termed "acts of God." It would be an easy task to catalogue some of them as, for instance, earthquakes, cyclones, the calamities attending overflows of rivers, death dealing thunderbolts, storms at sea, when navies go down, railroad wrecks which neither care nor foresight could prevent, and many other kindred and inscrutable dispensations. In such cases it were folly to complain. There is no remedy. The best that can be done is to consult experience and science for the purpose of reducing results in the line of death and destruction to the minimum.

Men possessed of common sense do not, while contemplating disasters of the kind mentioned, sit down and growl on the one hand, content with the theory that all things are for the worst, nor, on the other hand, fold their hands and smilingly assert that things are ordered for the best. On the contrary, they take a hand in ordering and adjusting affairs to the extent, at least, of confronting nature with appliances designed to modify the disastrous consequences of conditions they did not create, as, for instance, build strong ships to battle with storms at sea, set up lightning rods to catch thunderbolts, build low, one-story houses when living within a seismic territory, and thus we could indefinitely point out how men on the alert, in a measure, at least, may modify results when conditions productive of disaster are beyond their control.

But there are conditions brought about by human agencies, many of which are fruitful of calamities of wider sweep and more direful consequences than those which are credited to a mysterious providence. And it is such conditions that men are required to consider, because by giving them special examination ways and means may be found to change them and create other conditions calculated to promote the welfare of individuals and communities.

In this connection it becomes eminently prudent to inquire regarding the condition of our country. It is blessed beyond the power of hyperbole with food products. Our granaries are full to repletion, and we seek constantly for foreign markets in which to dispose of the surplus. In this we have a condition that even a pessimist must approve and admire, and an optimist may shout with some show of propriety, "I told you so; all things are done for the best." Certainly, it was the order of nature to create the soil, to send the sunshine and the rain, and it was the order of a largely redeemed human nature from savagery to plow, sow, cultivate, and harvest the products. Usually, however, we credit such a condition to Providence, and to such a conclusion we are not disposed to offer objections further than to say, "in creating them, God and man are in alliance."

But while we are indulging in thanksgiving for such boundless stores of food, we are confronted by a condition which silences rejoicings. Multiplied thousands of our people, men, women, and children, are in the grasp of hunger, premonition of famine. What of such a condition? It is purely a condition brought about by human agencies. There is no mysterious Providence in any sense responsible, and hence it becomes possible for human agencies to diminish the sufferings of the people, and these are being employed; but to abate the distress caused by the conditions is not sufficient, the supreme demand being to prevent the recurrence of such national calamities.

In surveying the field of battle, for such it is, where the idle, the impoverished, the ragged, hungry, and homeless, have struggled for life, men, stout-hearted and strong-nerved confess to sensations akin to despair. To relieve the universal distress, to provide for the destitution seen on every hand, appears a work so herculean that only the power of a miracle working God is equal to the task, but as the condition was created by man, man must work out of it or succumb to the indescribable curse, and if experience — and since the new world was discovered it never taught a more terrible lesson for the benefit of workingmen — will not suffice to redeem men from the bondage of

error when by the fiat of their sovereign will it may be done, then the time is at hand to write the epitaph of a government by the people, of the people, and for the people.

Men who discuss remedies for conditions productive of disaster, inquire relative to the cause of the calamity. The President of the United States, after collecting all the facts available by the government, called Congress in extraordinary session to change deplorable conditions. Banks were failing by the hundred, industrial enterprises were closing their doors, money became phenomenally scarce, disaster after disaster followed fast and followed faster, wreck and ruin was seen on all sides, and the President said the condition was owing to "congressional legislation." That was the cause assigned by the chief magistrate of the nation, and the legislation which was selected to bear the anathemas of the nation was the famous and infamous "Sherman bill," which simply provided for the purchase of a certain amount of silver bullion for which the government issued in payment silver certificates which entered into the currency of the country. It was charged that the "Sherman bill" caused undue exportation of gold, and with this the hue and cry began.

The arraignment of Congress upon the charge of being responsible for the calamities under which the country for a year past has suffered, is an indictment of the people, of popular government in all of its branches, since it is the theory of our government that the people are sovereign, and have such laws and such administration of the government as they desire. But this may be said, if the people find themselves betrayed by their representatives they may displace them for others who are not knaves, and in this way so far as legislature is concerned, change conditions or prevent the recurrence of calamitous conditions; but everything depends upon the intelligence courage, and integrity of the people.

In discussing the deplorable condition of business affairs it will be profitable to keep prominently in mind President Cleveland's declaration that the cause is "congressional legislation." We do not doubt the President's averment, hence we affirm that Congress has betrayed the people. The President's indictment includes the two great parties that have for years controlled congressional legislation, and these two great parties, corrupt to the core, are now asking the people to still further trust them. They closed the mills and the factories throughout the great mining regions; they closed the silver mines as if by a decree of Jehovah. They created a condition in finance which paralyzed busi-

ness of every description and filled the land with idleness and all the indescribable woes which idleness inflicts, and now they appeal to the victims of their perfidy and treachery for a new lease of power, that congressional legislation may proceed in the old ruts, and in the old ruts it is proceeding.

Bearing in mind the declaration of the President, charging present conditions upon congressional legislation, men naturally turn to Congress for relief, and are required to contemplate spectacles of wrangling, duplicity, and perfidy which leads to the conclusion that conditions are to be made still more disastrous. Senators are charged with using their information for successful gambling in stocks, and an investigation is to probe the charge to find the depths of congressional rottenness. The great body of the people have lost all confidence in congressional integrity. The hope which animated the nation when Congress assembled, that conditions would be changed for the better, has practically faded out of sight. Business demoralization continues. The army of men forced into idleness is not diminished; the fangs and pangs of hunger are doing their work; tramps multiply. Those who have work are confronted with demands for a reduction in wages; poverty goes down to deeper depths. There are more rags, more riots, but no reform, and still Congress yields only Dead Sea fruit, and the conclusion is forced upon all thinking men that parties as they exist cannot create better conditions and will not supply remedies for the disasters which the President says are the result congressional legislation.

If the ballot is to change conditions, if the ballot is to prevent the recurrence of such conditions as now afflict the country, it is time that workingmen should renounce their bondage to the old parties, to find or found one whose representatives in Congress shall so legislate that no President from this time forthwith and forever shall be required to say that the country is in the grasp of appalling calamities as the result of "congressional legislation." Will workingmen be taught by experience? Will they heed admonitions such as present conditions voice in thunder tones? We shall see.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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