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EDITORIAL

NONSENSE, LIKE HOPE, SPRINGS ETERNAL.

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AND now comes Commissioner of Charities Robert W. Heberd with a “new discovery” to relieve the distress that the industrial and financial crisis is causing to the workers. The discovery is to establish a sort of Labor Colony. He calls it a “State Agricultural Colony.” Commissioner Heberd’s “new discovery” is neither “new” nor is it a “discovery.” In point of age, it is as old as Nonsense; in point of its discovery feature, it is as nonsensical as the oldest whims of man’s untutored inexperience.

For generations gone by, the moment there has been distress, somebody has shouted: “Colony!” The shout has come from the most opposite quarters of the social compass.

It has come from the “philanthropic” quarter—that quarter that Tolstoi so well characterized when he said: “The ruling class will do anything for the working class—except to get off its back.” The “Colony!” shout from that quarter of the social compass always had for its purpose to prevent the too rapid dying off of their labor cattle. Times would mend. When the mending began, the proletarians would be needed to sweat out fresh wealth; if too many had gone to where the capitalist parsons declare the toiler will enjoy the sight of his capitalist tormentors on earth writhing in the frying pans of Satan, then the volume of sweat would not be equal to the aspirations of the philanthropists.

The shout of “Colony!” has also come from the quarter of the “practical reformer.” According to him, the way to get at “the octopus of greedy capital” is to sneak behind his back, and then sandbag him. The “Colony” of the “practical reformer” is a conception according to which society is to be revolutionized behind its back. A silly fellow, Karl Marx by name, argued that the thing could not be done. But Marx was a dolt, thinks the “practical reformer,” and a fellow “unacquainted

with American conditions.” The “Colonies” of the “practical reformer” went up like rockets—and came down like sticks—nobody profiting by them but the officials, except the dupes became wiser, though sadder men.

A third quarter from which the “Colony!” shout has more than once gone up in history is a quarter that lies in between the first two just named. It is the quarter of capitalist government, with its hands temporarily forced by revolutionary visionaries. These “Colonies” also proved disastrous to the workers. The only practical use to which the memory of them has been put is the capitalist use of claiming to PROVE with them that Socialism is a chimera.

There are other quarters from which the “Colony!” shout has gone up—the No. 6 I.T.U. potato-patch—the Michigan Governor’s cabbage patch schemes among the lot; the above are ample samples.

Help the distressed?—by all means! They need it sorely. But to suggest “Colonies”! ’Tis good that Hope should spring eternal in the human breast—but that Nonsense should spring eternal in addled noodles—what good can come of that?

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

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