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NEW TIMES  
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NEW MEASURES

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# New Times and New Measures



**T**HE great need of to-day is for men and women to look around recognising that they are living in new times, and seeing how far old laws and old methods are of use in changing conditions. It is necessary at times to look backward to get some ideas that will help one for a forward march. We learn lessons from our efforts of the past and the endeavours we have made which open the way to problems confronting us.

There is no doubt that there has been a tremendous change from individual responsibility to social responsibility, and this has affected us on every side. No man to-day is permitted to carry on business or trade which means the employment of his fellow men without submitting to laws and regulations that have had to be passed in the interests of the people as a whole.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of modern times is the principle of evolution or growth, the principle which has brought the world from slime and chaos to the wonderful variety, complexity, and interrelation which exists among all things in the world to-day. And perhaps the first thing it teaches is that all life is a striving to adapt itself to circumstances which are continually changing. That which does not adapt itself, sooner or later dies out; the one who sees which way things are moving and acts accordingly, lives and thrives.

Now the way the world of humanity has moved for a long time is in the direction of a growing intelligence on the one hand, and mutual help and co-operative activity on the other, and in spite of obstacles and set-backs in the shape of wars and dictatorships, one can say without fear of contradiction that the tendency of civilised mankind





is towards a real Social Democracy, an ideal and an international Co-operative Commonwealth.

But we are not so much concerned with the ultimate ideal, we are more concerned with the actual tendencies of things, and to see how far they are reflected in our social thought and activity.

The spirit of democracy has been steadily advancing for hundreds of years. Take the attitude towards "Chattel Slavery." Even wealthy and privileged people took part in the agitation and in spite of the fierceness with which it was contested, leading in America to a terrible war, justice and freedom conquered in the end, and though natives of tropical countries are not yet treated as they should be, there is always a strong public opinion acting which prevents the worst excesses.

Another even more splendid example of the democratic and humanitarian spirit is the attitude towards crime. At the beginning of last century there were no less than 150 crimes in the law books for which the penalty was death. Little children were sent to gaol, and even hanged. In 1817, for instance, two boys of 10 and 13, were sentenced to death, and three years earlier a boy of 14 was hung for stealing. On another occasion, a woman whose husband had been transported for felony committed the same felony in the hope of joining him in exile, but the judge thought it necessary to make an example of her and she was hanged instead. The state of affairs at the time is perhaps most clearly illustrated by a broadsheet which was picked up in the streets, professing to be the dying declaration of a Leeds man, hung for stealing a horse, though by the theft he had saved the lives of his wife and four destitute children: "The laws that condemned me were made by the great, and have no other object than to keep the wealth of the world in their power, and entail on others the keenest poverty and vilest subjection." The prisons of these times were black holes of disease and training schools of the crime that was so abundant. The people who say that the way to abolish crime is to inflict severer punishments should look at the facts. When punishments were the cruellest, crime was most rampant, for the old saying runs, "It's better to be hung for a sheep than a lamb."

One of the greatest preventatives of crime in this country at any rate is undoubtedly education. Since the passing of the Education Acts in 1870, the amount of crime in the country has been reduced fourfold. Prisons have become derelict; the number of criminals under 21 is a minor and diminishing quantity; the number of adult criminals has also decreased remarkably in spite of the way they are being "pampered," according to some people; in fact it is the pampering, that is the care for their physical and mental welfare, which tends to restore their self-respect and to make men of them once more. Our tendency is to treat crime, as we ought to do, as a social disease, and the way to cure disease is by appropriate physical building-up and training for a healthy life. A striking instance of this is the reform of prison conditions.

At one time the poor unfortunates who suffered from mental disease were treated worse than criminals, and one part of their treatment was starvation and torture. It is almost incredible to read of the barbarities that were practised upon them at the beginning of the last century. We are now beginning to treat them with kindness and consideration, though much remains to be done.

So we see that intelligence and humanity are growing, and when one looks at social legislation and municipal administration, one must admit that although much, very much indeed requires to be done, many advances have been made since the people were first allowed to take part in the control of their own affairs.

Let us take an example—Health. Since the Public Health Act was first passed in 1848, and especially since the '90s of the last century when municipalities began to take an active part in the sanitation of our cities, there has been almost a revolutionary change in our standard of Public Health. In the last 50 years, according to the Registrar General, there has been a reduction of no less than half in the death rate of the country. That means, to put it in other words, that the expectation of Life for any citizen is approximately 15 years longer than it was then. We have actually extended the average life of the men and women of the country to this extent. What expense in money can be too great for such a wonderful achievement?



Rates have gone up, it is true, but so have health and life, and what is money for? We sometimes hear that while people live longer there is a larger number of weak and ailing people, but even this is not true. Where a lot die, those who live are more likely to be weak, and although diseases are more carefully registered than ever before, the incidence of disease is less than ever.

Is this a reason for standing still? Far from it. It is a reason for saying that if the imperfect and partly educated democracy of the past can achieve such results, far more can be achieved by a more intelligent democracy in the future.

Industry and trade are the departments where democracy has not yet had its chance. We have learnt the secret of production on a grand scale, we have harnessed the great forces of nature, mechanics, steam, chemistry, electricity and radio, but we have not yet learned to distribute the wealth we have learned to create. Even here, though, something has been gained. Factory legislation and workmen's compensation, health and unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and housing subsidies have done much to ameliorate the conditions of the workers. The eight-hour day, for which our forefathers fought so strenuously, is generally recognised, and our present Government has now legalised it by adopting the Washington Convention. If we compare this with the condition of the people in 1842, we shall see that in spite of the derision of the unemployment insurance, wrongly called "the dole," that a great advance has been made and a public conscience roused. Colonel Thompson, describes the streets of Bolton, in Lancashire, in 1842, as follows: "Anything like the squalid misery, the slow, mouldering, putrefying death by which the weak and feeble of the working classes are perishing here, it never befel my eyes to behold nor my imagination to conceive. And the creatures seem to have no idea of resisting or even repining. They sit down with oriental submission, as if it was God, and not the capitalist that was laying his hand upon them."

It is inconceivable to-day that people would tolerate little children working 15 hours a day amidst unguarded machinery in dangerous places, or that little boys of six should be sent up chimneys. Yet,

when the public wanted to reform these horrors, the usual plausible objections were put forward by those who had a vested interest in the exploiting of these young bodies.

So this idea of public interference with the so-called rights of individuals stands to-day a great blessing to the many, and teaches that we must not reduce our efforts but must travel still further. Finally the Co-operative Movement, which has grown up with the democratic spirit, is showing that the people can, if they will, manage great industries and enterprises, not in the spirit of private gain, but in that of collective effort for the good of the whole.

The Co-operative Movement has grown till it covers a large area of human activity. It has even gone abroad and so allied itself with the great international movement for international goodwill and peace. In our own country, it allies itself with all those great movements for the health, education and welfare of the democracy. It has associated itself with the movement for industrial betterment. It practised the eight-hour day before law and public opinion made it compulsory. It guaranteed Trade Union rates of wages and led the way for private employers. It had women's suffrage before the State gave women the vote, it helped education when the State held aloof. And naturally, it has found its way into democratic politics and has pledged itself to secure for the workers of brain and hand, the real democracy of this country, equal opportunities of securing all the advantages which the development of science has brought within reach of mankind—the control of the means whereby they work and live.

It is this great Movement, of Trade Unionism, of Co-operative production and distribution, of municipal control of the means for the health and amenities of the citizens of our towns and country districts, and of legislation for the assuring to all of those things necessary to production and social life, it is this great combined movement which is carrying on the evolution of mankind towards the Human Commonwealth which is to be.

The most striking change of modern times has been the growth of political democracy. From the days when a few landowners and



privileged persons monopolised the franchise to the Reform Bill of 1832, the Household Suffrage of 1867, and Extended Franchise of 1884, the almost complete Franchise of 1918, to the final completion of the Women's Franchise in 1928, is an inspiring drama of progress.

In the past women have had to fight for their recognition as citizens, now they come in as equal citizens with men, sharing responsibilities and praise or blame according to the progress made.

It is almost impossible to make further progress without taking our share as Co-operators in the making of laws which govern us, as employers of labour, as producers and retailers and as international traders. Every Co-operative Society is a part of a municipality, and should be taking its part in helping to bring Co-operative principles into the Government of that particular area, and as local government is linked up with national government, the Co-operative Movement has a special interest in the making of laws and regulations.

This is the new condition in which Co-operators find themselves to-day. They can no longer stand aside and watch, but must take an active part in the political machinery of the country. To stand aside means that they are stopping that evolution and growth that are necessary if we are not only to hold our position, but to make an advance which will enable us to finally put an end to the law of competition.

We can no longer be governed by the old ideas and traditions of the years before the war. Co-operators must take their place in the march of real democracy, for the Movement can no longer afford to ignore the battle that is going on all round. They must march right into the enemies' ranks, believing that their armour, which is built up of the humane principle of "Each for All and All for Each," will carry them right through to their final goal of the Brotherhood of Man.



