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## “THE HELL OF STEYR.”

*(From an Austrian Correspondent.)*

The name of Steyr is unfamiliar in England. Steyr is an Austrian town in which motor-cars are manufactured, Detroit on a smaller scale, and it is significant that the appearance of an article in the Detroit Free Press on the conditions of the workers in the American auto-industry should have almost coincided with the publication in a Vienna paper of a report under the above heading from their correspondent in the Austrian city of motor-cars. The workers of Steyr, like those of Detroit, are a law-abiding, industrious, hard-working lot, but under capitalism these virtues do not guarantee either sustenance or security to the workers. As one of our speakers, now dead, used to put it to his audiences when analysing the effects of the capitalist system: “It comes to this,” he used to say, “the better you are and the harder you work, the worse it is for you in the end.” Steyr as well as Detroit have proved the truth of this assertion. The workers there have attained an extraordinary degree of efficiency in motor-car making with the result that within a relatively short time all the markets were glutted and work had to be suspended. Under capitalism, increased efficiency has the consequence that while the companies have amassed huge fortunes for themselves, the workers’ lot has gone from bad to worse until it has, on the masters’ own showing, become a veritable hell!

The Vienna newspaper, “Sonn-und Montagszeitung,” in its issue for January 4th has a long report from its representative who made a special visit to Steyr. The newspaper writes:—

“One has been quite accustomed to the daily desperate calls for help coming now from this, now from the other working class quarter, but the signal of alarm,

‘A City Dying of Starvation,’ makes one look up. It comes from the second largest city of Upper Austria. The Mayor of Steyr at the last meeting informed the city council that of the 22,000 inhabitants about 11,000 are without any income whatever, that 90 per cent. of all the children are underfed and that a large proportion of the population are simply compelled to go begging. The correspondent says that one must have been in Steyr to realise what is concealed behind these figures. 11,000 tragedies in one small city which has become a city of beggars. You are accosted at every street corner by swarms of children—tiny, pale creatures in thin rags and torn shoes who surround the passing stranger with outstretched hands, wailing and imploring. They enter the shops begging for money or something to eat. And there are also young people and old women. In the Municipal poor house there are 328 aged people who now have to go out into the streets too, once a week, to supplement their scant rations by begging. And so do the inmates of other municipal institutions. Friday is the principal day set down for general begging and thousands of people go begging on that day in Steyr.

### **BEDS WITHOUT BEDDING.**

“The greater part of the unemployed, and those who are no longer in receipt of the dole, do not live in houses, but in wooden barracks. The conditions there are described as simply appalling. Twelve persons were found to live in one room with three beds without bedding, which had all been sold long ago. All sleep on straw, the wife and the husband

and 10 children. They eke out their existence between the four wet walls, the inevitable clothes line drawn across the room with wet clothing. The big boys and girls sleep side by side and next to the parents, with two little children in one bed, without bedding. They sleep as long as possible in order to suppress the pangs of hunger, many also have no shoes. On New Year's night a woman was confined in a room of the barracks in the presence of her four other children. In another barracks a woman with two children tried to take her 'life'; she had been dismissed from the works two days previously and was not entitled to the dole, so she took prussic acid. Other families live in what were formerly stables. A canal with stagnant water runs outside and the barracks are infested with rats and mice.

#### DOGS FOR DINNER.

"Here and there in the barracks the correspondent saw remnants of what used to be toys, but the children, he says, do not play. They are hungry and cold. Also they have lost their favourite playmates—the dogs. Formerly there were hundreds, but they have nearly all disappeared within a year, in Steyr. Nobody will openly say what has become of them, but everybody knows that in this city of starvation the dogs have been killed and eaten.

#### CHILDREN CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

"The Municipality, a bankrupt municipality, has the care of 1,100 children who have lost their father or whose parents are divorced. 'The state of health of the population is simply alarming,' said Dr. Pimiskern. 'In a year I have treated 5,000 patients free of charge. Consumption plays havoc in the town. The children are nearly all ill; at least 90 per cent. are underfed; at school examinations I find only skeletons. No flesh, no blood, only skin and bones, and when asked, it is invariably the same answer: nothing to eat. I treat many children who have not seen any meat for months. A boy in the first class did not know what meat looks like, he had never eaten any.'

"It goes without saying that under such conditions a normal school service has become impossible. The dilapidated

school rooms serve as mere places in which to keep warm. Half of the children cannot attend for lack of shoes, others have only torn ones and insufficient clothes.

"The Works now employ only 1,700 people, whereas more than 15,000 are dependent on work there. Another 300 were about to be dismissed. 'With the dole,' the correspondent says, they will be 'alright' for a time. They are envied by those who are no longer in receipt of any benefit and only get 42 groschen (4½d.) per day poor relief—42 groschen!

"366 persons are daily given a meal in the canteen of the Steyr Works. A thousand present themselves every day, but there are only 366 soups, the daily portion, consisting of cabbage and a piece of bread; sometimes they get a piece of meat. The correspondent describes how he watched an old worker eating but half of the contents of his basin, food that would barely have sufficed a child. When asked, he replied that the other half was to be taken home. 'How many are there at home?' asked the correspondent. 'Wife and three children,' was the answer, and he pressed the basin closer to himself and sought to get away; others barred him the way, begging of him, begging of the beggar!

"This is what the tourist guide book says about the picturesquely situated city of Steyr: 'A lovely place on the meeting place of the River Steyr with the River Enns, with 22,000 inhabitants, tall chimneys and a Gothic church,' to which the correspondent added: 'with 11,000 beggars, with 15,000 starving, with 18,000 persons destitute, tall chimneys that have not smoked for years, chimneys of idle factories. The industrial city of Steyr has become the hell of Steyr, an Austrian 'devil's island' of decent, honest men, ready and willing to work.'

The paper added, of course, the usual appeal to its readers for help, though it confessed at the same time that charity is no solution. The editor did not give a remedy, but there are, of course, numerous political parties and crowds of professional politicians, chiefly coming from the so-called "intellectuals," always ready with "remedies" and "reforms," with "demands" and programmes supposed to cope with economic ills, and generally pre-

tending to represent the interests of the workers. Every one of these remedies has been found to be a fraud, a farce and a delusion, while some of them have turned out to be worse than the disease.

#### SOCIALISM THE ONLY REMEDY.

There is ONE remedy for all the evils of working class existence, and ONE only—it is the solution which the science of Marx and Engels made plain, but which it does not pay the "leaders of labour" to propagate. For that task the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its companion parties in other countries have been established. We insist that these evils are all part and parcel of, and inseparable from, the present social order—capitalism—a system of society in which the means of wealth production are owned and controlled by a small section, on whom the mass of the people are dependent. These evils will persist and grow unless and until the working class, organised in the Socialist Parties, make an end to private ownership, so that no individual will be dependent on another private individual for his material subsistence. Under Socialism, such absurdities as poverty in the midst of plenty, which is the outstanding feature of capitalism, will be unthinkable, because society will produce all human comforts and conveniences for USE only and not for profit. The product of men's hands will then cease to play tricks with them, and the further improvement of machinery, which spells wreck and ruin to the workers to-day, will then only increase the real well-being of all. We insist that no proposition can be sound and worthy of working-class support that respects the present social order and does not aim at the destruction of a system that deprives millions of people of a chance of earning a living, that humiliates and degrades, and drives thousands to despair and suicide. Any proposition that does not establish equal right for all to the means of life, deserves nothing but the contempt of the workers.

The workers of Steyr and of Vienna have had an object-lesson which should open their eyes. Putting their trust in leaders—who are the curse of working-class organisations—they elected a majority of Social-Democrats to the two city councils, with the result that after 12 years of such administration Steyr is now "a city dying of starvation," while Vienna—a city of under

2 million inhabitants—has the dreary record figure of over 120,000 unemployed, over 3,000 suicides in the past year, and more beggars than ever before.

Workers of the world! It is high time to bestir yourselves! Rid yourselves of your illusions and of your leaders! Join our ranks and so leave your mark to posterity as men and women of whom they will be able to say that you assisted in the great task of ridding the Earth from the fangs of the monster incubus of capital!

FRANK.

### THE ENORMOUS UNEMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE.

For many years the advocates of birth control as a cure-all for social and economic problems have pointed to France as a proof of their claim that unemployment and poverty can be abolished by the limitation of the number of births. In THE SOCIALIST STANDARD for August, 1930, we examined this claim and showed that the theory is unsound. We pointed out that France had not solved the problem of working-class poverty, and that unemployment had not been abolished. It was the absence of statistics, not the absence of unemployment, which made the claim appear to have foundation. Unemployment in France was for a time kept relatively low by the demand for workers to rebuild the devastated areas.

We then confidently foretold a big increase in unemployment, and recent reports fully confirm our view. The following appeared in the *Star* (January 9th, 1932):—

The French Ministry of Labour, issuing its weekly unemployment return, estimates that there are 2,500,000 persons wholly or partly unemployed in the country, says the British United Press.

A total of 161,773 persons (130,141 men and 31,632 women) is in receipt of national relief, and 52,628 are receiving municipal relief.

The total of those receiving relief is thus 214,401, as compared with 196,751 last week, and 24,266 in the corresponding period of last year.

According to the French Federation of Trade Unions (see *New Statesman*, January 16th), the number is even larger, being 3,000,000. Most of them are not entitled to relief.

G.

### PAMPHLETS FOR SALE.

Value, Price and Profit  
Causes of Belief in God

Post free.  
.. Marx. 7d.  
.. Lafargue. 4d.