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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Democracy and Food Riots, 1917.

Democracy and food riots

February 23, 1917

If one were to read this in a German newspaper, one could perhaps understand. If one were to read it in a newspaper of any belligerent nation one could perhaps understand. The nations are at war. Blockades and submarines have interfered with the importation of foodstuffs. Money is scarce. Hence privation and starvation. But when one reads it in a ~~new~~ newspaper of the richest city in the ~~world~~ richest country enjoying the richest period of prosperity, one is appalled. We have heard distant rumblings of food riots in Germany and Austrian and Russian towns but we had to wait until this last week for the real surprise of the war - food riots in the city of New York.

I. Of course we ~~know~~ realize that this condition is abnormal and very temporary. We know its causes - speculation and greater consumption, failure of crops. That these riots are really not serious, that normal conditions will be restored but these sad affairs cast a strong light upon two startling ~~and~~ shortcomings of our democracy.

II. Inequality of distribution. Beastly wealth and beastly poverty. The extremes which threaten society. During normal times vast hosts live on the verge of starvation. During times of depression, vast hordes are literally starving. During prosperity wages are higher but prices are raised out of proportion. I read where the dollar this year has the purchasing power of 14 cents two years ago. Prosperity benefits the wealthy out of proportion to the working man. The more prosperity the greater the gap between capital and labor. For capital has opportunity to accumulate. Labor must spend to meet high cost of living. Now we hold that this is inconsistent with democracy. Democracy means not only

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political equality of opportunity but also economic equality of opportunity and that to starve under a democracy is no more glorious than under a monarchy. Profit sharing schemes or government regulation for industry today is vast and impersonal and government must supply the medium-personal between worker and impersonal corporation.

III. But by far the greatest weakness is the inefficiency of democracy in handling difficult problems. Its cumbersomeness and lack of vision. It must wait for riots to set it working. Now riots are productive of evils greater than their immediate evils. They teach men to disregard laws, to depend on force, to make reason subject to passion. Where there are riots democracy has failed for that was also the failure of monarchy. It did not respond readily to popular needs. It was not a barometer registering the people's will. Hence democracy supplanted it. But democracy fails too when it is not sensitive to popular movements. The tragedy of democracy has been that it waits for a catastrophe to act: in fact that has been the tragedy of human nature. It has to be goaded by experience instead of being urged by thoughtfulness. Fire, disease, (pure water) especially war. So in democracy. All our legislation has ~~XX~~ been curative, remedial, not preventive, anticipating. In medicine the new tendency is to emphasize prevention, rather than cure. In social science too. We should not wait for delinquents but ~~XX~~ prevent them from becoming delinquent, not wait for wrecks but prevent them by charting the sea of life for them and by piloting them safely through. In our political life too the future work must lie in the directing, anticipating legislation. Now the present condition will result in legislation. National food control, embargo and laws against speculation. Why did we have to wait for riots? *(Hebrew see p. 2 of mss)*

We must study the fundamental social organization, of distribu-

tion, of social control. That's efficiency. We must not bungle into truth but find it. Our commissions are a joke. They are created in times of stress, of popular clamor and work under difficulties in an atmosphere charged with passion and their findings are duly noted and buried formally in that vast burial ground - the Congressional Record. If a little of that pork appropriated for the would be set aside for commissions on investigations a good deal of suffering etc. would be prevented. We need social ~~preparation~~ preparedness, industrial preparedness. Safeguarding health and the standard of living of citizens.



If one were to read this in a German newspaper one could perhaps understand. If one were to read it in a newspaper of any belligerent nation one could perhaps understand. The nations are at war. Blockades & submarines have interfered with the transportation of food stuffs. Money is scarce. Hence privation & starvation. But when one reads it in a newspaper of the richest city in the richest country enjoying its richest period of prosperity one is appalled. We have heard distant rumblings of food riots in German & Russian towns but we had to wait until this last week for the real outburst of the war - food riots in the city of N.Y. ^{of course not greater we know to occur in Germany & Russia}

I of course we realize that this condition is ~~abnormal~~ ^{very} temporary. That these riots are really not serious. That normal conditions will be restored but these sad affairs cast a strong light upon two startling things coming to our democracy.

II. Inequality of distribution. Wealth & poverty. The extremes which threaten society. These blinding times of depression, vast hordes live in want & starvation. During prosperity wages are higher but prices are ^{raised} out of proportion. I read where the dollar this year has the purchasing value of 14 cents ^{too} ~~last~~ years ago. Prosperity benefits the wealthy not in proportion to the working man. The more one has the greater the gap bet. capital & labor. For capital has power to accumulate. Labor must spend to meet its C. & L. Now we hold that this is inconsistent with democ. We mean not only pol. ~~steps~~ equality of power but also econ. equal. of power. And that to stand under a democ. is no more for us than under a monarchy. Profit-sharing scheme in fact regula. in industry to day is vast & impersonal & it must supply the medium-personal bet. worker & impersonal corporation.

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I. Read. Best one misinterpret these riots. They are not the work of agitators. They are the hunger cry of famished women & children who, at best, live on the verge of starvation. A people madly turned Tantalus Prosperity has betrayed them. Dollar has 14c. purchasing power.

II. Causes: 4. Failure of Crops: - ~~Greater consumption due to war~~ Greater Exports, Congestion of Railroads & Criminal manipulations. All but first could have been avoided. 1. Embargo. 2. Se. Operation 3. Legislation & Boycott - want of all. Supply & demand. "Any one who corners the food ~~near~~ supply of a nation & holds out for money is a scoundrel."

III. But 2 Things impire Ees upon us.

A. Inequality of Distribution of Wealth.

1. Contrast. Beastly wealth & beastly poverty. March of 5 C's. Trust pays \$25,000 for pictures.
2. Prosperity widens gap bet. rich & poor. & betrays poor for it accustoms him to higher standard of living.
3. Monarchy must watch for economic inade. Else it is worse than monarchy. The gov't must intervene bet. impersonal corporations & working men. It must safeguard his standard of living. Industrial preparedness.

B. Failure of Memo. to anticipate needs of people.

1. Riots. Their dangers.
2. Memor. must be barometer of people's will.
3. Anticipatory Legislation vs. Curative.
4. Tragedy of Memo. & Human Nature. Must wait for misfortunes. Fire, Epidemic, War.
5. Medicine & Social Sc. prevention & remedial only.
6. Need for vision & Constructive Social programs. Commissions failure of. Port.

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only way to change economic ^{conditions} ~~expressions~~ which are ^{ultimately} the expressions of the life of a people, is to change their life first. to set up and propagate a new standard of values to create a new spiritual atmosphere or environment to train the youth differently: to inculcate social ideals ~~not~~ in place of selfish interests in them. in a word - to make men truly sincerely completely religious! When men are truly religious ~~new~~ economic reforms are bound to come; when men are truly religious ~~they~~

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and in the terms, I include
the ~~the~~ passion for the pre-
servation of the highest social
values - they will not tolerate
poverty nor dependence
wealth! When men love
God with all their heart
and with all their soul and
with all their might they
will love their fellow men
with all their heart, their
soul and their might.

Reform movements therefore
in order to be effective
in life, must be thoroughly re-
ligious. They must be based
upon the innate ideals of
life, upon the spiritual
cravings of men. This is