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EDITORIAL

REFORM ON EXHIBITION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

REFORM is always exalted above revolution. It is immediate, practical, a series of steps that achieves through evolution what revolution seeks to accomplish through cataclysm. So runs the argument in its favor. What are the facts? Let us turn to the February *Craftsman*. Therein will be found "Homeless England," an article by Mary Rankin Cranston. Mrs. Cranston is a reformer; so that which she writes, apart from the valuable material presented, is of more than passing interest.

Mrs. Cranston shows that an immense number of the English are homeless. This is due to the private ownership of the land and the congestion of population in cities arising from the necessities of modern capitalism. The reformers, instead of abolishing the private ownership of the land and the system of production for private profit now prevailing, thereby settling the housing problem once for all, have adopted a system of housing reforms, through the medium of private corporations and county councils. Their success in this direction is well epitomized by Mrs. Cranston, in the case of the London County Council. Says she:—

"Altogether, the London County Council has undertaken thirty-four housing enterprises, twelve of them alone comprising three hundred and fifty acres, the houses costing seventeen million dollars, and accommodating seventy thousand five hundred and twenty-two persons."

The reader will take note of the small number of London's millions reached by these housing enterprises. Mrs. Cranston continues:—

"Notwithstanding London's great achievements much yet remains to be done, for it is unfortunately true that the city has failed to accomplish what it set out to do, so far as rehousing the dispossessed is concerned. ***

"There are two reasons for the failure. In the first place, when old

buildings are demolished, lack of house room forces tenants to crowd in with dwellers in other insanitary quarters that fringe the improved area; that is, all who can find a spot there. Of the remainder, some become tramps, some emigrate, some end the struggle for existence by jumping into the river; entire families have been known to apply to the workhouse because no other shelter was open to them; nobody knows what becomes of them all. From the housing standpoint, they are scattered beyond recall. The second reason is, that the new houses rent for a trifle more, and are eagerly taken by those who are able and glad to pay the difference for the modern improvements.”

Here we have a picture of aggravation, rather than remedy. Could the failure of reform be more eloquently portrayed by any opponent?

But Mrs. Cranston has not told all the story. She has not told from whom the millions, that the London County Council sinks in housing enterprises, are borrowed at high rates of interest—from whom else but the very land-owning and capitalist class whose private ownership makes congestion both possible and profitable? Had Mrs. Cranston told all the story, we would have seen still more plainly that reform does not reform. Reform aggravates the evils with which it tinkers. Reform entrenches more firmly the very causes and interests which it professes gradually to uproot and eliminate.

The reformer, however, does not live in vain. As the bad English of the uneducated is an aid to the teaching of “English pure and undefiled,” so are the failures of reform helping in the work of true revolution. They make clear, that the only way to settle the housing problem is to abolish its cause, namely, the private ownership of land and industry. With these done away with, society will not need to congest in large cities, there to deteriorate, physically, mentally and morally, for the profit of a few landlords and capitalists.

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