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Why Creaghe Won't Pay Poor Rates!

John Creaghe

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Comrade Creaghe is doing some more practical propaganda, by refusing to pay poor rates. He has taken the opportunity to explain his views on the subject, in the Sheffield Independent. His letter is so good and interesting that we reprint the whole of it:

To the Editor - I have been summoned to the Town Hall, to show cause why I have not paid and refuse to pay poor rate levied on me. My answer is in the first place that I do not wish to do anything that I ought not to do, and I think it is wrong to continue paying such demands. It is wrong because the whole system is wrong which is supported by these payments, and to pay to support an evil institution, to pay to support anything or any system which is wrong, is plainly immoral. Suppose, for instance, a law was made to support brothels, if such a thing could be done; would not all here cry against it, and advise everyone to resist payment of taxes levied for the purpose? And yet that would not, in my mind, be nearly so immoral as payment to support poor houses.

Why have we poor houses? I may be answered because we have poor- but that is not the real reason, for poor houses have been es-

tablished, not because there are so many poor, but because those people whose selfish interest makes other people poor, fear that these should revindicate their right to live upon the earth, which is the inalienable right of all, and should claim the share that is due to them of the production which results from the labour of the workers. Poor houses have been established because the monopolisers of the means of life, while trying, in the reign of Henry VIII. and the "Good" Queen Bess, to put down vagrancy by hanging beggars by the thousand, found them increasing in such numbers that they began to plunder the rich, and so these rich, for their own sakes, and not at all for the sake of the poor, reluctantly established this prison system, which they call poor relief, and, instead of hanging the poor, shut them up in houses which are practically jails, and most grudgingly gave them food, in order to prevent them taking it by force.

Now, I am totally opposed to any plan or any system which has for its object merely the keeping of the poor alive, instead of doing justice to them; for I know that if justice were done there would be no poor, as there would be not rich either. "Man was not made", as has been said by Oscar Wilde, "to live like a badly fed animal", no, nor even like a well-fed animal, and even if the poor were well treated in workhouses, which they are not, but on the contrary, are treated like criminals or human rubbish, still they would feel the degradation of being shut up and fed in such places. Besides, it is most immoral and degrading to men to accept as a boon, whether from the so-called ratepayer or from the pious charity giver, that which they should demand as a right. As a right they will one day demand all that shall make poverty impossible, and I am one of those whose chief object in life is to induce the poor to make this demand as soon as possible, and, therefore, it is clear that I hate poor-feeding systems of any kind, be they poor-law systems or charity organisations.

The poor, instead of accepting any dole from the hands of their masters, must some day or another fight for their rights, and the

sooner the better. The poor are the people who, when they are allowed to work, produce all the wealth of the community. While they are allowed to work by the class that owns all the means of production they are allowed to live-they are allowed to feed and clothe themselves. But as soon as any of them are feeble through age or sickness their places are taken by others more robust, and the enfeebled ones, who require really more care than before, are cast aside as human rubbish, or walled up in the Workhouse jail. Then, again, when the owners of the products of labour-the masters, the capitalists find that the workers have supplied them with more things than are in demand, they then dismiss them to wander about and starve, though they are as well able to work as before, and most willing to do so, in order to support them- selves and their families.

Shall I pay rates, the only object of which is to make this system bear- able for this is really the object of your Poor-law system; it is nothing more than a safety-valve for the benefit of the rich. But I don't want the system to be made bearable, and I think it most immoral to do anything to make injustice bearable for a time, or to endeavour to prolong it in the interest of a class.

But there is something more worth saying, and it is this, and it will serve to show the injustice of present day society. It is well-known that there would be no need whatever for poor rates, if in the so-called workhouses the inmates were allowed to work. Workhouses could be made self-sup- porting, and a good deal more, if in the rural districts the inmates were put to till the soil, and in other districts were put to other useful employments- yes, and the poor paupers would be much happier. But though people in the newspapers and out of them are always talking as if the more we could produce the better for us all, as it certainly ought to be, yet they soon find out, your shrewd business men do at least, that abundance when only secured with the object of profit for a few is not a desirable thing beyond a certain point. Your profit-mongers have seen that if paupers were allowed to support themselves by their

own labour there would no longer be anything to make out of them by contracts, jobs, and trade swindles, and so that profit may be made quite useless profit except to those who get it-the paupers must be condemned to idleness!

Let me tell you here that it is the same thing all round. If the people of England were allowed to make what they wanted for themselves, and ex- change their products among themselves, there would be no room any longer for the profit-monger-the landlord, the capitalist, and all the greedy harpies that hang on to them, would have to go to work like the rest.

On principle, then, I refuse to pay poor rate, and if the law with its usual brutality says to me you will have to violate your principles, you must do what you believe it wrong to do, for we who represent the law will force you to do so, then all I have to say to the law is, come and take your pound of flesh wherever you can find it. Thanks to the law itself I have been left in that position that I can defy the law.

I had a practice which enabled me to live, but did not permit of my paying rent, but the brutal law sent its minions, and because I could not submit to be robbed, put it out of my power to earn a livelihood.

J. Creaghe