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What Freedom Means

Lucy E. Parsons

October 8, 1905

The change from the present method of obtaining one's living is inevitable, because it has become a necessity. We now live under the pay system, in which if you can't pay you can't have. Everything has a price set upon it; earth, air, light and water, all have their price. And he who hasn't worked, let him starve. Love, honor, fame, ambition, all the noblest and holiest aspirations and sentiments of humanity are bought and sold. Everything is upon the market for sale; all is merchandise and commerce. Land, the prime necessity of existence, is held for a price, and the homeless millions perish because they cannot pay for it. Food, raiment and shelter exist in super-abundance, but are withheld for the price.

The productive and distributive forces of nature, united with the power and ingenuity of man are reserved for a price. And humanity perishes from disease, crime and ignorance because of its enforced, artificial poverty. The mental, moral, intellectual and physical qualities are dwarfed, stunted and crushed to maintain the price. This is slavery, the enslavement of man to his own powers: Can it continue? The change is inevitable because necessary. Free access to all the productive and distributive forces will alone free the minds and bodies of men.

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There are certain things that are priceless. Among these are life, liberty and happiness, and these are the things which the society of the future, the free society, will guarantee to all for the return of a few hours labor per day.

When labor is no longer for sale, society will produce free men and women, who will think free, act free, and be free. Crime and criminals will flee from such a society, because the incentive for crime will be gone.