

Otto von Bismarck, Speech on Labor Reform, 1881

Our present poor laws keep the injured laboring man from starvation. ... I, therefore, assure you that we felt the need of insisting by this law on a treatment of the poor which should be worthy of humanity. ... We are sounding to see how deep the water are, financially, into which we are asking the State and the country to enter. ...

It is immaterial to me whether or not you will call this Socialism. ... Well, gentlemen, this is, of course, the very opposite of true. ... If the government endeavors to treat the injured workmen better in the future, and especially more becomingly, and not to offer to their as yet vigorous brethren the spectacle, as it were, of an old man on the dump heap slowly starving to death, this cannot be called socialistic in the sense in which that murderous band was painted to us the other day. People are playing a cheap game with the shadow on the wall when they call our endeavors socialistic.

If the representative Mr. Bamberger, who took no offense at the word "Christian," wishes to give a name to our endeavors which I could cheerfully accept, let it be: "Practical Christianity" ...

Alms constitute the first step of Christian charity, such as must exist in France, for instance, to a great extent. There are no poor-laws in France, and every poor man has the right to starve to death if charitable people do not prevent him from doing so. Charity is the first duty, and the second is, the assistance given by districts and according to law. A State, however, which is composed very largely of Christians – even if you are horrified at hearing it called a Christian state, - should let itself be permeated with the principles which it confesses, and especially with those which have to do with the help of our neighbors, and the sympathy one feels for the lot which threatens the old and the sick.