
Labor Organizations and the Labor Press

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We write entirely independent of partisan influence. We propose to discuss the election of last November upon propositions, which, if not new, have not been brought into deserved prominence, in fact, have not been alluded to at all, as factors in the recent struggle.

It does not matter to the *Magazine* which of the two great parties of the country, considered as an aggregation of men, succeed. We are not interested, as to whether A or B goes to the legislature or to Congress — nor are we tied to the fortunes of any nominee for President. Parties are of no consequence to workingmen, except as they advocate principles and policies which antagonize class legislation, and seek to do justice to all.

Hitherto the workingmen, by party leaders, have been regarded as a class of citizens in the keeping of bosses, to be brought into line and voted as they might decide.

The employer has regarded them as largely subject to his will — an unthinking herd, of little intelligence, who were deflected right or left, as he might choose. He had but to indicate his pleasure, and his employees obeyed without question or protest. The employer was supposed to know everything; the employee nothing, or so little as to exert no influence at all in deciding his vote.

In these regards the country has been awakened to a sweeping change of program and it is eminently worth while to inquire what causes have been at work to produce the new order of things.

We shall state them briefly and they are signs of the times of wonderful import.

In the first place, labor organizations are in the nature of schools. Every member of a labor organization is more or less a student of economic questions. He no longer accepts the dictum of the em-

ployer. He studies and thinks for himself. He grasps facts, he analyzes statistics, he notes investments and dividends; he estimates the constant increase of watered stocks and marks well how interested parties mix fiction and facts for the purpose of reducing wages — and in the lodge and assembly rooms discusses economic questions with earnestness and with an intelligent appreciation of cause and effect, which rivets attention and secures conviction.

This constitutes a new era in politics, a new departure in campaigns. There is not a labor organization in the country, that has not put into operation mind forces hitherto dormant. It will no longer do to count upon the votes of workingmen based upon party fealty — partisan prejudice or the pride of partisan victory. Something more rational is now demanded. The boss can no longer cajole nor intimidate. Workingmen will no longer blindly follow a banner nor a transparency. Symbols must hereafter relate to something practical.

Workingmen see that money erects the palatial residences and surrounds their owners with luxury. The fact does not create envy in the minds of workingmen. They do not want to pull down the palace nor destroy the carpets, furniture, mirrors, and paintings, but knowing these riches are secured from their surplus earnings, they are resolving that they will have comfortable homes instead of shanties or dens; they are resolving that their homes shall be supplied with the necessities and comforts of life. They are resolving that they will have so much of the wealth they create as to furnish an abundance of good food and good clothes; at any rate, they are resolving that their votes and influence shall no longer be secured for their impoverishment and degradation, and in these regards, the workingmen of the country are rapidly solidifying and in so far as their votes can change the aspect of affairs, they will cast them with a purpose to better their condition.

In proof of this, it is worthy of note that labor organizations are taking a profound interest in state and national legislation and are appointing committees to look after certain measures, to urge or to prevent their adoption. What are these measures? The list is too extended to introduce here were it in our power to name them all.

Take for instance, the employment of Pinkerton thugs by corporations. A blacker crime was never perpetrated in any civilized land. It is too monstrous for contemplation, and yet, the corporation of which Chauncey M. Depew is President, employs Pinkerton murderers, abandoned wretches scarcely fit to be sent to hell, to overawe

workingmen because they dare protest against outrages which no workingman can submit to, and retain a grain of independence or self-respect.

All over this broad land, workingmen should see to it that the employment of these thugs should be made a felony and the matter should be brought to the attention of every legislature in the country.

The co-employee iniquity, which has not one trait of justice in it, an infamy which makes law a farce and judicial decisions worse than jugglery, can lie knocked in the head and killed only by express statute.¹ It is an imported infamy — an antiquated monstrosity, the spawn of the divine right to rule curse which through all the ages has made the workingman the victim of oppression, symbolized by prisons, dungeons, rack and thumbscrew, and yet this devilish deformity of justice, hideous as a living skeleton, stalks into all the courts and chatters its decisions against the rights of workingmen.

How long, in the name of eternal justice, is this ghastly remnant of infernalism to prevail in American courts? When will workingmen by the fiat of the ballot, banish it to its native hell? Labor organizations exist, because of a right to exist by virtue of laws that antedate constitutions, statutes or kingly decrees — while corporations and monopolies, trusts and syndicates exist, at least in the United States, only by statutes — statutes which workingmen can, if they so decide, repeal. And still the corporation, with an impudence that defies exaggeration decrees that a man, because he exercises his inalienable right to join a labor organization shall not work.

Governments exercise three supreme prerogatives which touch the individual at vital points. First, government can take the life of the citizen. Second, it can deprive the citizen of liberty. Third, it can take the property of the citizen, confiscate it, and send him forth a pauper to drift or to die. But the victim in every case is awarded a trial; his case is to be determined by a jury of his peers. He can be heard in his own defense. He has the right to appeal, until he reaches the highest tribunal known to the law.

Let us see how the case stands between the corporation and the victim of its hate in this God favored land:

There stands the workingman. What is his condition? Go look at his home. There it is by the way side. There is his wife and little ones

¹ Reference is to a contemporary ruling of the courts which held companies harmless from financial consequences of on-the-job deaths or injuries which were the result of actions of fellow employees.

dependent upon his daily wages. Intelligent and hardworking, he would better his condition, and the condition of those dependent upon him. He joins a labor organization. In doing this he becomes obnoxious to the corporation. He is a marked man. The corporation issues its decree. The workingman is discharged. At one blow everything goes down. Without work, without wages, the home is made as dark and gloomy as a tomb. Unable to pay rent, he is evicted and thrust out upon the highway. Without money, hunger comes with its pangs and fangs. The home is broken up — the father is a tramp. Now every appalling fancy becomes a frightful fact. What becomes of the family? Would you know the details in thousands of instances? Search the records of poorhouses, prisons, and brothels.

What was the workingman's crime? What was the height and depth of his offending? The answer is, he joined a labor organization and the corporation, with more power than the government that created it, decides without a hearing, without a trial, to take from him the means of living, which in thousands of instances is taking life, liberty, and property.

We do not paint the picture too black. We challenge the record, and aver that in the archives of hell there is nothing more infernally repulsive. And such transactions are of daily occurrence, not in Russia, not in Turkey or Persia — not only in autocrat cursed lands, but here in the United States; here where we are told the government is by the people, of the people, and for the people.

We state no hypothetical case, we are not drawing upon our imagination for the facts. There is not a reader of the *Magazine*, not a reader of newspapers, not a man of intelligence in the land who does not know that every day in the round year, men are discharged from work because they are members of some labor organization.

Just here we make the point that workingmen by concert of action can change this state of affairs by their votes. There is nothing impractical in the proposition. Why should the corporation be permitted to boycott the labor organization? Why should the corporation be permitted to inflict the direst penalties upon men for exercising an inalienable right? Why may not the monstrous wrong be eternally exiled by statute? There is no good reason why such a change may not be wrought by the ballots of workingmen. They have the power, and in due time we verily believe they will exercise it.

In surveying such subjects, the labor press of the country looms up and blazes forth like a lighthouse on a rock-bound coast. It is

pointing the way to the harbor. It shows workingmen the way to steer. It is a Bethlehem star leading to redeeming possibilities, a conquering force that partisan politicians have neither weighed nor measured.

The corporation is even more obtuse than the politician. They do not see that class legislation is doomed. Their greed and their arrogance blinds them to coming events. They rely upon their money.

It was Goldsmith who said:

For just experience tells in every soil
That those who think must govern those who toil.²

But it so happens that an era has dawned when those who toil are those who think — those who write and reason, those who grasp and solve problems, and those who lead. The labor press forms a grand torchlight procession. It blazes on the highlands and in the lowlands — in the shops and in the halls of legislation. It is helping on the revolution. It is the *avant courier* of a new dispensation in law and logic. There is one demand and it is being heeded. The labor press of the country, discarding party and creed as under the old regime, is blending its clarion notes and bugle calls, for unity of purpose in the councils of all labor organizations. This accomplished and labor's jubilee follows.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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² Couplet from *The Traveller* (1764), by **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774).