
Labor Representatives in Legislative Bodies

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As often as elections occur in the United States for members of legislative bodies — city, county, state, or national — there is a demand to have a representative of Labor on the ticket, and the cry goes us, “Let Labor be represented.”

This demand is right in all regards. It means far more than appears on the surface. To understand the full measure of its significance requires patient study.

In 1880, according to the census reports, there were 12,830,000 voters. We will assume that during the ten years from 1880 to 1890 the voting population increased 25 percent, giving a total population of 16,037,500 in 1890. In 1880 estimates were made as follows, relating to the division of the 12,830,000 voters:

Engaged in manufacturing and mining	1,833,442
Engaged in transportation	484,500
Engaged in personal service	1,859,223
Engaged in agriculture (laborers)	3,323,876
Otherwise engaged	5,328,959

Total	12,830,000

Adding 25 percent to each of the foregoing items, we have results as follows for 1890:

Engaged in manufacturing and mining	2,291,802
Engaged in transportation	605,625
Engaged in personal service	2,324,029
Engaged in agriculture (laborers)	4,154,845
Otherwise engaged	6,661,199

Total	16,037,500

Without official data, we assume to give only reasonable approximations, and those who feel inclined are invited to revise our figures and, if it be practical, to more sharply define the number who vote, and work for wages in all of the industries of the United States.

But of what avail is this large preponderance of labor votes? Practically it has amounted to nothing in the past, and is of little importance even now. The question arises, why this inauspicious outlook for labor in legislative assemblies? A number of replies are at once suggested. If, as we have shown, in 1890 the voting population of this country reached 16,037,500, and those who are not classes as wage workers numbered 6,661,199, then, in that case the labor vote amounted to 9,376,301 — or 2,714,801 more than the vote of those not recognized as laborers. Notwithstanding such astounding facts, labor is always and eternally at the bottom, never at the top, in political affairs. True, occasionally, at long intervals, a labor candidate gets into some “Common Council,” but seldom if ever as a straight-out labor candidate. The same *may* be true of legislatures and Congress, but as a general proposition the labor candidate has to be *endorsed* first by organized labor, as an inducement for one or the other of the *old* parties to nominate him, and thus, when he finally takes his seat in the deliberative body, he ceases to be a “labor member,” and becomes something else, a *Democrat* or a *Republican* member; to announce himself as a “labor representative” he would have about as much influence on the body as a cipher on the left hand side of a decimal point.

We have said that in 1890 there were 9,376,301 labor voters in the country. did these voters act together anywhere in the country? Certainly not. Why? Because of the 9,376,301, 3 million were practically *scabs*, with no more independence and self-respect than so many prairie dogs. They are Chinese, Italians, Huns,¹ Poles, and that degenerate riff-raff (which a large percentage of Americans) who submit in this country as in the lands that gave them birth, to degradation without protest — accept it as their normal condition. They are in alliance with such millionaire monstrosities as the Corbins and Carnegies — who, though they have positions, are the result of well ar-

¹ Ethnic slur for Hungarians, probably a catch all phrase for multiple Slavic nationalities from rural regions that were part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which included part or all of today's Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine in addition to Austria and the Czech Republic.

ranged methods of villainy, are yet, when weighed in the scales of eternal justice, a thousand times more dangerous than the leper hosts they control. This leaves 6,376,301 laborers who may be supposed to believe in the dignity of labor and are honestly contending for fair wages. Of these 6,376,301 — we put it largely when we say that 3 million of them are identified with labor organizations and that 3,376,301 stand aloof from labor organizations and practically oppose such organizations — these men, as well as the scabs, give their influence to employers who oppose labor organizations, not always outspoken in their hostility, but either passively or actively exhibit their opposition.

Now, then, how stands the account? There are, we assume:

Laborers who have votes	9,376,301
Scabs	3,000,000
Those who stand aloof from labor orgs.	3,376,301
Organized laborers	3,000,000

Total	9,376,301

It will be observed that of the entire 9,376,301 there are, after all, only 3 million who under any circumstances could be relied on to elect labor candidates to legislatures and to Congress, and these patriotic workingmen, members of labor organizations, are opposed by 6,376,301 laborers, 3 million of whom are scabs and 3,376,301 are non-union men, who with a determination and bitterness, more or less pronounced, fight the advance of labor in every honorable direction. As a general proposition they are ignorant and debased. Their intellectual qualities — we speak of the *mass* — are so low as to cast doubt upon the success of the whole labor movement. Ignorance may be organized, but it will not remain organized; the base born are forever retiring to swell the numbers of scabs and that class of non-union men whom we estimate at 3,376,301 voters.

Still, with a cheerfulness born of faith we point to the 3 million organized laborers and say: Here is a body of men who will stand firm, who have the ability to name candidates for legislatures and for Congress — a splendid body of men, true to union principles and would love to see men wearing the badge of labor in legislative halls. How does this *pan out* in practical politics, in electing men to legisla-

tures and to Congress, who get there because they are representatives of labor?

It was bad enough to say there are 3 million scabs who vote; bad enough to say these 3,376,301 non-union laborers who in their opposition to organized labor are scarcely superior to scabs; now comes the humiliating confession that the 3 million voters who belong to labor organizations split up into fragments. They are divided and they are conquered. Point to results and read the humiliating verdict: there is no unity, no cohesiveness, and as a result labor representatives in legislatures and in Congress wear the tag of some old party. Those who are so inclined may write their views upon the reasons why labor does not unite at elections, and the more they study the subject the more humiliating the facts will appear.

There are a hundred centers of population in the country which are centers of great industrial enterprises, where, if organized labor would name the candidate for Congress and all union laborers would vote for him, no opposition could defeat them. But, as has been said, union laborers cannot be induced to vote for such a candidate. As a result, after much talk of no more consequence than the idle wind, the old order is resumed, and labor takes its place at the bottom, and entrusts its interests to men who, as between capital and labor, are found openly or covertly as the enemies of measures designed to promote the welfare of labor, and therefore the welfare of the nation.

Manifestly the time when laboring men will appear in legislatures and in Congress without some old party tag attached to them is remote. Can the situation be changed? How?

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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