

# The Right to Work - for What?

"When the devil is sick the devil a saint would be." We are reminded of the saw by the unco righteousness with which the "right to work" is now being proclaimed by our strike-deviled industrialists.

At a recent session of the Institute of Human Relations at Williamstown, Mass., considerable palaver was spent on this newly found "right." The palaver of the cons was as odious as that of the pros. Those who argued for the right of man to work really were arguing against the right of groups of workers to try to get more wages. While those who took the opposite view maintained that capital was morally bound to provide wages, and did not hesitate to threaten capital with governmental interference if such duty were not properly performed. Not a single argument based on economic principle or sound reasoning was advanced.

"The right to work." The phrase is full of meaning, more than those who mouth it are aware of. Suddenly squeezed between the millstones of monopoly rent and labor's demand for more of what it produces, our industrialists have discovered that man has as much right to work as to be idle. But where were these industrialists in 1932? Perhaps hanging "no help wanted" signs on their doors. Did

pending movement to fight the Florida contract labor law on grounds of its constitutionality should not be encouraged. The law, and any similar one elsewhere, should be wiped off the books.

But it should be understood that this would abolish only the more brutal aspect of peonage. The more insidious kind—from which none of us are free—will remain until we make natural opportunities and forces free to labor by socializing the rent of land and abolishing taxation—the only measures which will really free labor.

—W. L.

See: "Social Problems," pp. 148-160.  
"Teachers Manual (P. & P.)," L.  
VII @ 15

not men have as much right to work in those dreary days as they have now, in these somewhat less dreary days? When has not man a right to work—and, what is more, to retain the product of his labor?

This is not a plea for the philosophy of trade unionism—much less for the destructive methods of Marxian dialectic of workers' organizations. That no strike can succeed without violence, so long as there is an army of unemployed, is conceded by every student of unionism. That thuggery is employed by both sides is known—and it little boots to query "who started it?" That unions cannot raise the general level of wages is obvious. Unionism is merely a defense mechanism employed by workers to get a little more of what they produce—when they have jobs. It is monopolistic in character. It is a monopolistic instrument used by the workers to meet monopoly conditions.

Murder is repulsive to the normal human being. But in the trenches, when it is a case of "your life or mine," murder becomes normal. In an economy where the right to have the product of his labor is denied him the worker resorts to impulses that are foreign to his normal reactions. That is to be expected—though not condoned. The trade union is a product of a world created by monopolists. Destroy monopoly, destroy the interference with the workers' right to work, destroy privilege, and trade unions will disappear. Until men really have the right to work, at all times and under all conditions, industrial strife will plague us.

Perorated the industrialist at Williamstown: "Is there anything in democratic ideals to force one man to provide a job for another man if he decides to shut down his factory?" Knock-out argument, that is. The answer, of course, is that labor can provide its own jobs. When one man produces the things that other men want he is creating exchangeable wealth. This wealth should be his wages; where good land is limited and where the use of capital is necessary, his full contribution to the

creation of that wealth should be his wage. Every man can do this provided he is not denied access to the natural resources. For all wealth is the product of labor and land. Free the earth and the factory need never shut down, for what the factory produces will find an effective market among workers getting the full product of their labor.

But his opponents met the argument with the usual drivel about collective bargaining, governmental interference, arbitration, and what-not. Emotionalism, plus a blind faith in the efficiency of prayerful bargaining, plus the benevolence of the State—these are the ingredients in the hash that so often is called economic thinking.

Yes, man has the right to work—and to work for all he produces. Nothing less. But when so much is taken from him, when so little is left for his sustenance, why should he be satisfied with the conditions of his labor? The right to work—for what?

Would that the industrialist really believed in the right to work. Would that he really understood how this right could be secured permanently. For the true industrialist, the one who employs capital to produce wealth, prospers only when the right to work is secure, and when the product of that work goes to the worker. For wages and profits originate at the very same source—production. And well-paid laborers are the only mass markets.

—F. C.

See: "Progress and Poverty," pp. 467-468; 312-316.  
"Social Problems," pp. 134-136; 34-39.  
"Protection or Free Trade," pp. 305-307.