

CHAPTER VI.

THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOR.

A TRADE-UNION, as defined by Sidney Webb, is “ a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment.” It is a fraternal, defensive organization, which seeks to make the best possible terms with employers, and to educate and provide for its members. It is not, as a few seem to think, a league of strikers whose endeavor is to drive business out of the country.

Labor organizations date back, in tradition, if not history, to at least 700 years before Christ, when Numa Pompilius allowed the Roman workers to organize. C. Osborne Ward says: “ The era covered by the ancient trade-unions is that celebrated as the ‘ Golden Age.’ It was the era of social and intellectual prosperity.” In summing up the history and influence of labor unions, Mr. Ward says: “ The greater the organization of the working classes for mutual protection and resistance, the higher is the standard of enlightenment in the countries they inhabit.”

In our own country, labor organizations are comparatively young, as the necessity for them did not exist until about sixty or seventy years ago; but I believe they have played a great part in the up-building of this nation.

THE GOOD ACCOMPLISHED BY LABOR ORGANIZATIONS.

They have done much to free little children from the sweat-shops and factories, to relieve underpaid men and women, to

shorten the hours of labor, and to ennoble the working classes with the feeling of solidarity and brotherhood. By means of lectures and labor papers and free discussions, they have educated the workers in matters of industry and good citizenship. They have almost invariably thrown their weight on the side of arbitration, and resorted to strikes only when conciliatory measures failed. The reading-rooms which they have provided for their members have kept thousands of men from lounging on the streets and in saloons.

Without the aid of unions, the working people never could have accomplished the reforms in the factory system, or maintained a high rate of wages as well as they have done in spite of the pressure of the unemployed.

It has been owing to the independent character of organized labor that we have secured the little that we have in the way of helpful legislation for the wronged peoples. I wish I might say that it had been through the help of the churches, but this is not true. "The sinners are with us; it is the saints that are against us," bitterly cried Lord Shaftsbury when he was engaged in the struggle to protect the children of England through factory legislation in Parliament, and so it may be said to-day in this country that progressive legislation to protect children from the factories and sweatshops and to protect life and even property, has been secured by the solidarity of labor organizations.

A few years ago the motormen in the street-car service were standing exposed to the rigors of the wintry winds of our streets on the front end of street cars. The profit-gatherers, the owners and managers, insisted that "no practicable vestibule could be devised or made," that "a man could not safely run an electric car while looking through glass," and as a result of their neglect to provide vestibules, no one knows how many children were orphaned and wives made widows by the lives that were sacrificed through pneumonia and other lung disorders caused by those wintry days. But the labor unions appeared on the scene, the

legislators passed a law requiring the men to be protected by a vestibule, and, although for a time it was sought to evade this law by a flimsy subterfuge, the reform was finally accomplished.

The Typographical Union No. 6, of New York city, is this year making its second experiment in cultivating land for the benefit of its unemployed members. It leased 166 acres of land near Bound Brook, N. J., last April, and put fifty of its unemployed members in charge of it. Up to the present time the experiment has proved highly successful. Potatoes, corn, beans, cabbages and tomatoes are being raised, and what is far better, fifty men are taken off the streets and placed where they can earn a living. In this way the contractor and profit-maker are eliminated, and the "men with the hoe" receive directly what they produce. I believe that this kind of activity can be widely extended, with the result of a considerable alleviation of distress. Then, too, organizations of carpenters, bricklayers and plasterers might profitably join in employing their out-of-work members in erecting their own meeting-halls. The Lasters' Union of Lynn, Mass., built and owns to-day the finest labor hall in New England.

Those who would understand the objects and spirit of labor organizations should take notice of the nature of the mottoes which the unions have adopted. The motto which was adopted by the Knights of Labor was: "An injury to one is the concern of all." The favorite motto of all socialistic bodies of workingmen is the famous saying of Karl Marx: "Workingmen of the world, unite." It is an appeal for international brotherhood — a plea for the reign of peace instead of prejudice. The motto of the seamen's union is, "The Brotherhood of the Sea." In every case they urge toward comradeship and helpfulness. The teaching of the trade-union is the only ethical training that thousands of workers receive. Their union becomes their church, and by acts of practical fellowship their moral nature is made stronger.

INJUSTICE OF THE WAGE SYSTEM.

Trade-unionists speak frequently of "a fair day's wage." This, of course, is a legitimate demand, but it does not cover the ground. A day's wage will never be "fair" so long as an employer subtracts profit from it. Wages should be raised up to a level with earnings.

The wage system is a method of extortion whereby the articles produced by the workers are taken away for a small fraction of their value.

There is no more justification for the payment of dividends when men in the industry get but a dollar a day for ten hours' work, than there is for the highwayman who takes money from the pocket of the victim whom he has sandbagged into insensibility.

There is no good reason why any business should be on the sweat-shop level. When poor sewing-machine women make pants for nineteen cents a dozen they are as much robbed by society as if their houses were burglarized by the police.

A man cannot be an American citizen, and live as a citizen should in this rich country, on a dollar a day. An employer has no right to compel his workers to live like dogs.

Many a wealthy man spends more than a dollar a day on cigars, or theater tickets, or flowers, or wine; and yet we expect a laborer to pay rent and grocery bills and doctor's bills, and clothe and care for a wife and family on the same daily pittance. If the children of these laborers grow up to be ignorant and vicious and criminal, society is to blame. The next generation will not find it easy to deal with the young Goths and Huns and Vandals who are now growing up in the slum alleys.

While wages continue to be paid, and until the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth overthrows the entire wages system, the maintenance of a high rate of payment for labor should be one of the first considerations of a government which

pretends to represent the people. Low wages mean a low standard of living — a low grade of citizens — an inferior type of civilization.

Twenty cents an hour is a low enough wage for almost any man's labor. Poorly paid work is always poorly performed. No man can do his best work for wages that mean a bare existence. He feels like a horse in a tread-mill, toiling day after day without any hope of promotion or prospect of wealth; and what makes his situation still worse, the threat of discharge continually haunts him. The money he receives on Saturday night is all spent before Thursday or Friday, and a single week's loss of work plunges him into debt and confronts him with actual starvation.

GROWTH OF PARASITISM.

A stigma has become attached to honest toil and sweat. Workers have become a separate class, living in a separate part of the city. Their employer is almost as far removed from them as if he lived in the moon. The old ambition of becoming a partner in the firm, which boys used to cherish, seems to-day almost as unreal as a fairy-tale, so separate have the lives of employer and worker become. The former becomes an absolute parasite, living without toil of any kind off the labor of the workers.

To quote from Jean Massart, a Belgian author:

In the factory system the evolution towards parasitism goes its way in open daylight, and under a variety of forms. In proportion as the extension of the market calls for an increase in the scale of production, the more marked becomes the separation of the wage-earners, who are engaged in the actual work of production, from the capitalist master, who retains to himself the task of direction alone. Then comes the moment when those captains of industry delegate their functions to lieutenants, reducing their personal interference in the business to a minimum. One step further and we have the parasitic condition fully achieved; on the one side *work and no prosperity*, on the other side *prosperity and no work*. Then the workers do not even know who the capitalists are, by whom they are exploited, and the exploiters have perhaps never even seen the industrial black-hole or factory of which they are the shareholders.

A WORD ABOUT THE BOYCOTT.

We hear a great deal from the confessedly respectable element of society regarding the wickedness of the strike and the boycott, when they are employed by labor organizations in defense of their principles. The social boycott of those who earn their living by those who live off the earnings of others is a sacred right, a mark of "refinement," a "necessary distinction for the preservation of society," and so on. The blacklisting boycott by railroad dukes and pork-packing marquises and soap-making barons, of toilers who have committed no crime but that of upholding the principles of their unions — a boycott that compels hungry men to tramp wearily from town to town, and state to state, for re-employment — this, of course, is a justifiable protection of the interests of "business." But a boycott levied against the profit-makers who deny men the right to live decently human lives — this is a wicked and pestilent thing which must be suppressed by Krag-Jorgensens, or the jail.

So long as we are separated into warring classes and are inspired by the competitive incentive for individual gain, we shall continue to have just such diverse standards of right and wrong as those I have indicated. A strike is war; a boycott is war. I do not believe that either by class conflict or individual conflict are we to reach the better state to which we all aspire. That goal is to be reached through the growing sense of our common kinship and by our association in collective effort.

Bad as is war, there are distinctions of better and worse to be made regarding it. The same is true of the boycott. A boycott made and carried on in defense of liberty, of humanity, of right conditions of living, has much that may be said in its favor. I wish to quote here from a recent address made by me in Cleveland before the striking railway employees:

When the Apostle Paul visited the Corinthian Church, he found the people in a great uproar over the question of the eating of meat. This great philosopher quickly proposed a solution of the question in these memorable words:

“If the eating of meat cause my brother to offend, I will eat no more meat while the world stands.” Is it not barely possible that there is a conception of patriotism in Cleveland, in Ohio, in these United States, to-day that is saying: “If the running of street cars makes necessary the dehumanizing of my fellow-men, makes necessary the degradation of American citizens to the level of the serfs and below, then I will not ride on the street cars while these conditions remain, while men who operate street cars are forced to be something less than men, less than human.”

I have a right to say that I will not ride on cars where my fellow-men are thus outraged — nay, more, I have a right to ask my brother men that they withhold their patronage and place the seal of their condemnation upon organized wrong of this kind against American citizenship. And is it not probable that we are on the eve of the new time when this new patriotism is to take such deep root in all the people that this principle will be extended not only to the street railway service but to every department of industry where human labor is employed; when, realizing our social responsibility, realizing that we are our brother's keeper, we shall make it our business to see that every American works under conditions that grant him the privilege and right to live a decently human life; and that we will refuse to participate in the enjoyment of the fruits of toil in order to furnish ill-gotten gains for private profit-getters?

I believe this is the meaning and the lesson of the boycott. Whether the men win or lose in the end, we shall have learned a valuable lesson by their costly sacrifice, and it is a comfort, at least, to know that if these unfortunate men lose their jobs, no job is lost in the aggregate. The present vicious system of industry is always certain to supply a surplus of the proletariat class who have nothing but their hands and their labor to sell. Thank God, the signs of the better day are plentiful and abundant.

NECESSITY OF POLITICAL ACTION.

In my addresses in the campaign in Toledo I always sought to leave men looking forward to something better than the present hard conditions of life. I know how hopeless is the struggle, how little rainbow and sunshine there is in the life of a man who starts off with his dinner bucket in hand and a crick in his back at 5 o'clock in the morning, and I felt the desire to lead that man to look forward to something better and to get him to contribute of his mite to the bringing about that better time.

The ideal towards which the race is struggling, the ideal which poets, prophets and philosophers have seen is the realization of human brotherhood in human affairs. There is but one way in which we may hope for this realization. *The State is the only instrument through which the people may express their love for one another.* In the work of developing this larger idea of liberty, this nobler conception of government, in this reaching out for justice, organized labor has performed an important part, but there is still greater work to be done. The fields are truly white for the harvest and the laborers are few. It is as true to-day as when Robert Burns wrote that

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn,

but we are to see the day when man's love for man, through the institution called government, will bring joy and gladness to millions of hearts.

If the workingmen and masses are in economic slavery, in chains to-day, it is because they so will it; it is because preceding economic slavery there has been party slavery, and in each succeeding election the workingmen of the country have been the dupes of the schemers who sought to serve only their own ends. I believe this is the beginning of the end of government that has been bought and sold and run for revenue; that the days of pretended partisan hatred are past; that workingmen can no longer be rallied with the mere hue and cry of "be a Democrat" or "be a Republican."

Let the platform that commands the votes of the workingmen and reform forces be definite and positive, for those things that we know are essential to liberty, such as equal opportunities for all, the abolition of the contract system, the substitution of the eight-hour day and the recognition of organized labor in all skilled departments; and let us repudiate any platform that does not

include every one of these principles. Expediency is not a substitute for justice, and right is the only antidote for wrong. Let us be strong and patient in this great work of emancipation. Let us nail to our banners, "Principle before party," the slogan to which the hosts of Toledo rallied in the recent election. Take my word for it, the people are eagerly waiting for an opportunity to respond.

THE ULTIMATE OF TRADE-UNIONISM.

The labor question is larger than the trade-union programme. It means more than the raising of wages and shortening of hours. It means more than profit-sharing. Direct legislation and single tax and free silver do not touch the heart of it. It means the establishment of *national copartnership*.

The disgusting and distracting conflicts known as labor troubles will disappear from civilization before the clear daylight of the sun of public ownership. Who ever heard of a strike among the post-office employees? And yet periodically we are disturbed with strikes among the street-railway employees, the lighting companies, the railroad companies, indeed among all manner of employees who are serving an individual. But where the people minister to themselves, as through public ownership, the people know how the people should be treated; consequently we have decent conditions under which men may labor, we have living wages, and we have such a division of the hours of toil that labor becomes a joy instead of a mere drudgery.

Organized labor has done more in the last twenty-five years to teach the people of these United States the purpose of government, the meaning of justice, liberty and brotherhood than any other organization that I know of, but even organized labor is only a necessity of this system of warfare that we are living in. Competition has become so cruel and heartless that it has become a necessity that labor should organize as for war, and yet,

in this particular, labor is ahead of many of our institutions professing to be wholly educational. *Rarely has a labor organization passed a resolution favoring war*; always for peace and generally for public ownership; on the other hand, we have ministers professing to preach the gospel of the lowly Nazarene, preaching against public ownership and telling us that war is a necessity. For my part, I refuse to believe such a libel on the race. I see no more reason for war between nations than between individuals, and I hail with delight the growing sentiment in favor of the reign of the Prince of Peace, and look to the time when the Golden Rule shall be the supreme law of the land. Men do not want to hate one another. Their normal condition is to love each other, and in spite of all the devils in our competitive warfare, in spite of all the devils in hell, this is the glorious future that awaits us in these United States. We have only to be true; we have only to be firm; we have only to be faithful; we have only to believe in men and carry out in our lives the precepts of the lowly Carpenter.

As long as there is an industrious, useful man poor, or a useless idler rich, the labor question is not settled. As long as men are obliged to make poor goods, for sale and not for use, the labor question needs attention. Working people should not be a special class in society. Every one of us should serve our fellows with muscle, or brain, or both. I cannot sum up what I wish to say in words of my own so well as in the following verses by Mrs. Stetson. She says:

Shall you complain, who feed the world?

Who clothe the world?

Who house the world?

Shall you complain who are the world,

Of what the world may do?

As from this hour

You use your power,

The world must follow you!

The world's life hangs on your right hand!
Your strong right hand!
Your skilled right hand!
You hold the whole world in your hand,
See to it what you do!
Or dark or light,
Or wrong or right,
The world is made by you!

Then rise as you never rose before!
Nor hoped before!
Nor dared before!
And show as was never shown before,
The power that lies in you!
Stand all as one!
See justice done!
Believe and dare and do!