

# The Public

Fourth Year.

CHICAGO, SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1901.

Number 177.

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Entered at the Chicago, Ill., Post-office as second-class matter.

For terms and all other particulars of publication, see last column of last page.

We are entirely free to admit that whoever undertakes to make a thick and thin defense of the steel strikers has a serious job upon his hands. Since the strikers are mere men, they are not infallible. But that is true of all strikers. It is likewise true of employers, which makes it just as difficult a task to defend the steel trust's behavior in this strike, through thick and thin. Yet there are papers, papers that assume the judicial pose, which do defend the trust and attack the strikers with as much partisanship as if they were hired attorneys. One of them is the Nation.

"The steel corporation," says the Nation, "has to seek for no justification except in the fact that war is being waged upon it." Consequently, in one comprehensive remark, the Nation puts aside all bad acts of the trust, saying, "in self-defense, measures are warranted which would be, without provocation, open to severe condemnation." But in fact the steel strikers have not waged war upon the trust. Whether in the future they may do so or not, they have not done so yet. All they have done is to quit working for the trust. Does the Nation mean to say that this constitutes provocation warranting defensive measures on the part of the trust "which would be, without provocation, open to severe condemnation?" It says so, whether it means it or not, for its language is open to no other interpretation. Accordingly it ignores those measures of the trust which, but for the strike, as it intimates, it would severely condemn; and it hurls all its anathemas at the strikers.

They are severely condemned, for instance, for advising some of their subordinate lodges to break a local contract with the trust, as if the trust were itself immaculate on the subject of contracts, and as if there might not be room for questioning the continuing validity of a labor contract transferred.

But the worst thing about the Nation's anathemas is that they are not strictly regardful of the truth. For example, it says that "the swift reply of the steel corporation to the assaults upon its property at McKeesport is an order to dismantle the works." Here is an implication that the trust property at McKeesport was assaulted physically, as by a mob. It is doubtless so understood by every uninformed reader of the Nation. Yet there have not been any such assaults. The trust is dismantling the works from no fear of their destruction, but in retaliation upon the business men of the town for not preventing the employes at McKeesport from joining peaceably in the peaceable strike. The order to dismantle was not a swift reply. It was in execution of a previous threat. Before the McKeesport men had decided to strike, the trust threatened to remove the works if they should decide to do so. This threat was made to excite the local business interests to a high pitch of hostility to the strikers. It was one of those measures, we suppose, which the Nation would severely condemn if the steel workers had not decided to quit working for the trust. But it failed. Nor is the Nation's false statement about the dismantling of the McKeesport works the only one in that connection. It tells of "the wonderful mayor who had announced that he would not protect mill property." The fact is that McKeesport has no such "wonderful mayor."

What the mayor of McKeesport did announce was that he would not prevent the strikers from peaceably accosting nonunion men upon the streets and endeavoring peaceably to persuade them to join the strikers. He did not announce that he would give a free rein to mobs or tolerate breaches of the peace. No question of disorder was involved. The only question was whether the mayor, imitating "government by injunction" judges, should make himself an agent of the trust for the purpose of obstructing strikers in the peaceable exercise of their rights as citizens. The mayor of McKeesport announced that he wouldn't do this, for which the veracious Nation describes him as having refused to protect mill property.

Now, while that policy is about what a bribed paper would adopt, we refuse to believe that the Nation has been bribed. It is influenced evidently by what the socialists call "class consciousness." Realizing that in this steel strike the interests of the "propertied class" clash with those of the "working class," its sympathies and misrepresentation run to the support of the former as naturally as water runs down hill.

The same spirit is exhibited in a more careful Nation editorial, in which it accounts for the strike as an effort to monopolize labor. In this article the Nation surmises that the object of the Amalgamated association was by gradual encroachments to unionize all the mills of the trust. It says:

To unionize a few more mills meant a determination ultimately to unionize all mills.

We think this is true. But it is equally true that the object of the trust was by gradual encroachments to de-unionize all the mills. The Nation itself furnishes evidence to that effect.

In the same article it says of one of the mills at McKeesport, that—  
 there the Amalgamated association had made itself so intolerable to the proprietors that they had fought themselves clear of it, and their mill was publicly recognized at the last signing of the scale, as nonunion.

Why does not the deunionization of this mill as distinctly indicate the purpose of the trust ultimately to deunionize all, as a demand for the unionization of some indicates on the part of the strikers "a determination ultimately to unionize all?" Undoubtedly it does.

While the nominal issue in this steel strike is only, as the Nation puts it, "whether three or four mills out of scores should be unionized or not," the real issue is indisputably whether the union shall be recognized in all or in none. The strikers aim to have it recognized in all; the trust aims to disrupt it altogether. According to the Nation, the trust properly decided that if there was to be a fight over this issue "it had better be made at once, before the Malakoff of the defenses had been carried or weakly surrendered." We agree with the Nation that from the trust point of view that was a proper decision. But we cannot see why a decision to make the issue at once and over a trifling difference, if proper for the trust from its standpoint, was not proper also for the strikers from theirs. Was it not as necessary for the Amalgamated association as for the trust to make its fight "before the Malakoff of the defenses had been carried or weakly surrendered"?

One thing of exceptional importance in the Nation's pro-trust editorials, which we have commented upon especially because they are typical of the mental attitude toward the steel strike of the comfortable but nonvenal classes, is their assumption that trades unionism is an "encroaching tyranny over free labor and free capital." That it is an encroaching tyranny is true. But organically it is and always must be too weak to

make its tyranny dangerous. Of all the tyrannies that threaten us, trades unionism is for that reason the least to be feared. The only possibility of danger from it is through federation with trusts, by means of contracts like that which holds the Chicago steel makers in their places at a crisis in unionism, or through a shrewd business agent as in the case of the locomotive engineers and Mr. Arthur, or by means of some petty profit-sharing device like that now proposed by Mr. Morgan. Such a federation would indeed make trades union tyranny dangerous. But the germ of this danger would be not in the unions themselves, but in the trusts with which they form offensive and defensive alliances. But there is another point. Though we do regard trades unionism as an encroaching but weak form of tyranny, we do not regard it as at this time making any encroachments upon "free labor and free capital." There is not now such a thing as free labor or free capital. Neither can be free without industrial opportunity, and opportunities are gone. The Nation's class, through the institutions which the Nation strenuously defends, has monopolized them.

Trades unionism as a mode of defense against industrial oppression made possible by abnormal conditions, is justifiable or not according to its efficiency. Only those persons can reasonably withhold their sympathy from it who prefer to give their sympathy to the oppressor and who lend their influence to the maintenance of the abnormal conditions that make the oppression possible. As a mode of defense, therefore, we heartily sympathize with trades unionism. Though not in our opinion the best method of resisting industrial oppression, it is one method. But as a principle of industrial organization, nothing could be worse than trades unionism unless it were something more potent. The trust is worse, for instance, but only because

the trust is better equipped with weapons of arbitrary power.

Some idea of the absurdity of trades unionism as an industrial principle may be got from the recent experience of the Columbus (O.) Press-Post. Unionism on that paper appears to have been carried to the point of divesting its editor and owner, who is responsible to the public for its editorial policy and business standing, of the management of the paper, and of placing it in the hands of labor organizations which, in these respects, are wholly without responsibility. An industrial system cut upon that pattern would be intolerable. Bad as the present system is, it does on the whole identify management with responsibility. Let us not be understood as ignoring the notion that in an ideal industrial system, trades would be organized and that each trade would govern its own plant and membership. For example, that compositors would absolutely control composing rooms, without other boss than their own chosen foreman, who would really be their servant. Nor do we see any objection to that arrangement, provided the organization owns its own plant and bears the responsibility of management, and provided customers are at liberty to patronize it or to go elsewhere as the interests of their management and responsibilities may dictate. But a dominant industrial system based upon present trades union principles and methods, would be as oppressive as a dominant religious system based upon the military methods of the Salvation Army.

If the reactionary reorganizers of the Democratic party get any comfort out of the action of the Iowa convention, we are sure the element which they delight to denounce as "populist" will congratulate them. Their press was getting itself into a good "ready" to say about the Iowa convention what it has been saying about the Ohio and the Pennsylvania con-