
The Labor Problem

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Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 5 (May 1894), pp. 470-471.

We are by no means oblivious of the fact that the caption of this article is a somewhat antiquated chestnut — hackneyed to an extent that rarely falls to the lot of any industrial or economic subject within the realm of discussion, but does it follow, therefore, that the labor problem has been discussed to an extent, and so exhaustively that it should be laid aside?

It so happens, that not withstanding a thousand pens and ten thousand tongues have been engaged in solving the labor problem, it still remains unsolved, and if we are to believe only a part of what we hear and see, the conclusion is inevitable that the labor problem, now, as peremptorily as at any time in the past, challenges men of the largest abilities to wrestle with the difficulties it presents.

There are those, insignificant neither in number nor mental grasp, who do not hesitate to affirm that the labor problem involves the perpetuity of the cherished institutions of the American government. It was a saying of the lamented Lincoln, that this government “could not exist half free and half slave,” that slavery or the form of government would have to be abandoned, and now, the assertion is made that this government cannot exist with a contemptible minority of plutocrats, and an overwhelming majority of Proletariats, and the proposition is woven into the warp and woof of the labor problem.

No man, who gives the subject a moment's serious thought, has failed to observe, on the part of the plutocratic class the attitude of employers towards employees. In certain cases, there is a mock solicitude for their welfare, and repetition *ad nauseum* of the old Shakespearean saw, “There is a divinity that shapes our ends,” that is to say, shapes the workingman's ends so that he can be driven into the mud and kept there, and on the other hand, shapes the ends of the rich employer, so that, regardless of winds and tides he is always on top, and booted and spurred, astride of the workingman, rides him whith-

ersoever he will, always claiming that some “divinity” is responsible for conditions as they exist; that it is heaven’s order, and therefore, any resistance only serves to fasten the fetters more securely, sink the workingman deeper in the mire, and lift the employer to higher altitudes of opulence and independence.

It is worthy of remark, that of late it has become popular in certain quarters, to inject into the labor problem about everything politicians wrangle over — such as government ownership of railroads and telegraph lines, the single tax, bimetallism, the initiative and referendum, and so on to the end of the chapter, including the transfer of labor organizations, rank and file, to some one of the political parties. By such a harum scarum policy the real labor problem is practically lost sight of, however notorious the leaders in the scramble may become. To make things if possible, still worse, Bellamyism is often hitched on to the labor problem, and thus vagary and hallucination, arm in arm, may be seen almost any day, blazing the way to some Utopia where only so much labor is required to gather up and stow away the wealth.

We hold that primarily and fundamentally, the labor problem involves *wages* — and that when wages are adjusted upon a basis of justice, the labor problem is practically solved. It was said by the Master in His sermon on the Mount, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹

That is to say, don’t go roaming into the realms of discussion and waste your time and strength, but rather find the one thing needful and go for it with all your might. and when found, grasp and hang on to it. Things of minor importance will come necessarily and inevitably and be added to your stock of valuables. Hence, we infer, that the supreme purpose labor should have in view, is, to secure just wages; and this obtained, all other things that labor needs will be added as certainly as that there is such a law as gravitation.

What are the other things to be added? Preliminary to giving an answer directly, we assume that money has power to secure the other things referred to. Money may not work miracles, but it does work wonders — and these wonders are seen on every hand — and hence, we observe that the man who seeks for money and finds it, adds indefinitely to his possessions — and the more money he secures the greater is the number of things which go to make up the sum total of

¹ *Matthew* chapter 6, verse 33.

his assets. With the rich, it is called "income;" in the case of the workingman, it is called "wages." To those at all critically observant, it will be found that men with the largest incomes have the most of the things which go to embellish homes— and it requires a master of fine writing to describe the luxuries which their incomes command — and it is easy enough to mark the upward grade in surroundings from incomes of \$3,000 to \$3 million.

We have read, time and again, in the preambles of the constitutions of labor organizations, that their purpose was to advance their membership morally, socially and intellectually, all of which is well enough in its way, but which, omitting the supreme demand, wages, is of little consequence in the discussion of the labor problem.

We hold that the fundamental idea of labor organizations should be wages, precisely as with capitalists, the purpose is dividends, and with merchants, profits. Syndicates, trusts and monopolies, pools, also railroad corporations, are not organized for moral, social and intellectual improvement of their members, but to make money, to improve their financial condition, and to this one thing they bend all their energies, and thus it should, in our opinion, be with labor organizations to obtain wages, the higher the better.

We urge the wage method of solving the labor problem because it alone can solve it. Workingmen everywhere, we refer to organized workingmen, demand just wages, their fair share of the wealth they create, and as we approach that point, workingmen become contented. The day a workingman receives what he believes to be just wages, with him the labor problem is solved and it never will be solved until just wages are secured. If this is true, and we challenge denial, why waste time and breath over minor questions? Why clamor for single tax? Why run mad over nationalism, another term for parentalism? Why resolve to go pell mell into some new fangled political party? Why get hoarse over the initiative and referendum? Why not, on the contrary, unify, solidify, and federate to secure honest, fair and just wages? And above all, why should labor writers and speakers be constantly repeating the stale platitude, that "Capital has rights as well as labor?" Capital will take care of its rights. It will never abdicate any right, and, moreover, labor does not seek to wrest from Capital any of its rights. It simply contends that capitalists shall not longer starve and degrade it by methods which have prevailed since history was rescued from fable. Labor is the investment, wages the dividend. With fair wages the labor problem is solved.