
Labor Organizations

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We are not required to offer tabulated statistics to prove that labor organizations have during the past 25 years rapidly multiplied. And, on the other hand, the proof is equally conclusive that the great majority of working men refuse to enroll their names in any of the guilds, unions or brotherhoods designed to improve the condition of men dependent upon their labor for existence. The fact that a majority of working men are not members of labor organizations has often provoked the inquiry, Why do they stand aloof from such organizations? No one, so far as we are informed, attempts to answer the interrogatory. That it is one of supreme importance no man credited with common sense will gainsay. In the line of elucidating what may appear to many as a difficult proposition, we inquire why it is that within the past 25 years, working men, more than ever before in the world's history, have instituted unions designed to promote their welfare? We unhesitatingly assert that during the period named working men have possessed more intelligence in the aggregate than at any previous time known to authentic history. We refer to the United States of America, but the declaration holds good in England, and in some countries on the continent of Europe.

In the United States, where the declaration that "all men are created equal" stands forth as a political fact of powerful and conquering significance, there are special reasons not found in other countries why American working men should organize to protect themselves from injustice at the hands of employers, because here a working man is a sovereign in his own right, with all the privileges and prerogatives that belong to any other man, and because any injustice to him is a blow aimed at the fundamental principles upon which the government rests. But there is another reason why American working men have been actively engaged in organizing during the past 25 years. They have seen on the part of employers a purpose to reduce their

wages to a point totally insufficient to maintain them and their families as should become American citizens. The charge is fully substantiated by the facts, and the alarm has extended from the center to the circumference of the country. On the one side statistics have shown fabulous prosperity and the accumulation of untold wealth, while on the other hand there have been such exhibitions of poverty and wretchedness as to defy exaggeration. The workingmen who produced the wealth have been the victims of continuous calamities, the result of policies as vicious as were ever put in practice in any land.

Working men have believed that by organization, by united action, many of the ills to which they have been subjected could be modified, and in time extirpated. This being an eminently rational and practical view of the subject, the question recurs, Why do so many working men remain outside of labor organizations? There are, we conceive, many reasons, the chief of them all, we assume, being the inability to comprehend the logic of facts, circumstances and conditions — in a word, a lack of intelligence and a disinclination to study those problems which relate to their own welfare, and upon the proper solution of which depends their emancipation from degradation. Such persons constitute the great bulk of that degraded and labor degrading army known as “scabs.” They are men who never had an aspiration above those counterfeit men who crawl on their bellies in the dust and lick the boots of bosses, creatures of the parasitical type, who would rather be a flea in the hair of a rich man’s dog, or a louse in the hair of a king, than one of nature’s noblemen, with the independence and courage of a free man who dare hold up his head and assert his rights. The scab, in practice and purpose, is the enemy of labor organizations. He may not be absolutely beyond the reach of the educating and elevating influence abroad in the world, and as a consequence here and there one of the tribe may be converted, but as a general proposition we should deem it quite as probable that a tree toad could be transformed into an arch angel as that a confirmed scab could be made a loyal, intelligent member of a labor organization.

But fortunately all the workingmen outside of labor organizations are not scabs. Thousands of them are thoughtful men who act upon convictions, and of their ultimate action there need be little anxiety. They are in sympathy with truth and justice, and desire to see labor emancipated from every degrading thralldom. They do not antagonize labor organizations, but in many ways evince their approval. It is to be assumed, and we doubt if any intelligent man will controvert

the proposition, that the educating influences abroad in the country are on the whole advancing the cause of labor organizations. In saying this we are not unmindful of the power of a subsidized press. We do not underestimate the impelling, controlling and directing power of money, and yet facts satisfy us that in spite of every adverse circumstance, labor organizations are moving forward in the direction of ultimate triumph. Labor has a press. It has a literature. It has knowledge. It has not only the wisdom of experience, but it has men capable of solving the most abstruse problems relating to the growth and permanency of organization. Labor organizations have succeeded in getting labor into politics. In saying this we have no reference to partisan squabbles over the loaves and fishes. We refer to that higher plane of politics which relates to the enactment of just laws for the protection of society, in which labor has vital interests. If it is said that little has been accomplished in that direction, we unhesitatingly admit the impeachment, but it must be remembered that working men so far have done but little in that direction to modify or to repeal vicious laws, or to enact laws calculated to improve their condition.

Labor has not federated for this wise purpose to any applaudable extent. Still, much has been done, enough to show workmen that when they decide to federate for their own emancipation, and for the welfare of society, a great victory will be achieved. It is simply required to be patient and to work. Labor organizations have nothing to lose, but everything to gain by having their purposes searchingly investigated. Their aims are few and easily understood. They are totally exempt from deceit — no art of dissimulation is practiced. Labor organizations seek, first to obtain fair wages, and then to maintain fair wages. The wage question is the supreme question. With fair wages obtained and maintained, labor organizations are in a position to inaugurate and carry forward enterprises the benefits of which inure to society as well as to those who are identified with such organizations. We could indefinitely elaborate upon this feature of labor organizations. Having secured fair wages, they are in a position to adopt plans for the benefit of their membership, and be it remembered that these benefits are in proportion to the wages received.

With such data as we have at hand, we assume that since their organization, the brotherhoods of engineers, firemen, brakemen, switchmen, and conductors have paid out a sum of money closely approximating \$5 million as benefits to disabled members and to widows and orphans who, in numerous instances, would have been

absolutely destitute without such aid. In doing this, the brotherhoods named have assumed such burdens as have relieved society, the state, the taxpayers of all responsibility in providing for the welfare of their poor. Widows and orphans have not been required to go from the grave, where husbands and fathers were buried, to a pauper asylum, but the brotherhoods have come to their rescue, and out of the earnings of their membership, too often far below the demands of justice, have rescued them from want and the degradation of mendicancy. And this the brotherhoods have done while contributing their full share to the revenues of the state and to the maintenance of those unfortunates who, failing to become members of labor organizations, are thrown upon the cold charity of the world and compelled to endure hunger and nakedness, or accept such comforts as a "poor house" affords.

We have referred to certain labor organizations because we happen to be more familiar with their operation than with other labor organizations, but if it were possible for us to tabulate the payments made by all the labor organizations of the country for purely benevolent purposes the sum total would be of such magnitude as to excite surprise and admiration. The facts would demonstrate beyond cavil that labor organizations are the staunch friends of society, the promoters of peace, order, and prosperity, and are therefore deserving of encouragement. To antagonize labor organizations is scarcely less than a crime, and those who seek to disrupt them are the enemies of society. The objections urged against labor organizations relate chiefly to their efforts to secure honest pay for honest work, and of their scanty earnings they give back millions to redeem men, women, and children from pauperism. As we have stated, the benefactions of five of these organizations amount to millions taken from their earnings, and it would be interesting to place beside the sum total of the benefactions of labor organizations in the United States the sum total of gifts for charitable purposes made by their enemies. Fortunately for society labor organizations are increasing in number and in power. They are doing good Their purposes are honorable and their high ambition attainable. They are all young in years. Taught in the school of experience, they are displaying capabilities of the highest order. Under the influence of educating forces they will learn to appreciate more fully the strength of unity, and then will come federation. With this obstacles to success will disappear and labor, emancipated from every form of oppression, will receive its just reward.