

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 150.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1901.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A FARCE OR A TRAGEDY!

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THERE is looming up above the Pittsburg, Pa., horizon a new Labor farce, or a new Labor tragedy. The switchmen asked for an increase of five cents an hour for day and night work. The demand was refused. Thereupon a strike was declared by the Switchmen's Union of North America. Forthwith, one of the stations, the B. & O., appeared in the capitalist panoply of 100 Pinkerton detectives; the union station and approaches were placed under the protection of squads of police, armed with revolvers and billies; and a large consignment of non-union switchmen began to roll converging upon the seat of the trouble.

Is a farce at hand? Is a tragedy at hand?

The wages received by the men were 19 cents an hour for day work, and 20 for night work. The raise demanded, 5 cents for day work, 4 for night work, certainly is a trifle. It is but a trifle in itself; it is a trifle on a trifling wage; it is, above all a trifle, considering the risk to life and limb of the switchmen. But that is not all. Besides being for a trifle, the demand amounts to a trifling with the cause of the working class.

The beginning of this strike reads like a page from ancient history, without the slightest indication of any lesson having been learned from past, recent and similar occurrences.

Again the country is treated to the spectacle of workingmen striking with their bare fists against the politicians' clubs, the Pinkertons' pistols and the potential bayonets of the militia, that these identical workingmen have placed into the hands of these identical policemen, Pinkertons, militiamen; again workingmen are seen striking against the inevitable results of the very capitalist system which they persist in upholding on election day; again workingmen are seen too timid, because fakir-led, to dare demand and assert in manly, deliberate and firm fashion their full rights as workingmen, yet venturesome enough in the prayer for a crumb. Is the issue likely to be, can it be aught other than the stale one of a fizzle, like the recent

Steel Strike, or a tragedy like the switchmen's strike of Buffalo, or the present miners' strike in Kentucky?

The monotony of these farces and tragedies commences to pall; it cries to heavens for redress; but, like all redress, it can come only to those who help themselves. The rank and file of the switchmen, like the rank and file in all other trades, must look nearer home. Their real enemy is not the Company whom they fight against. That Company would not be there to fight, to-day, but for the labor-fakir, the officers of the Union, the labor lieutenant of the companies, in short, the "Organized Scabbery." This scabbery crew must be fired out heels over head. It is they who treasonably lead the rank and file to regularly choose for its field of battle a field swept by the guns of the companies, and where labor must invariably either sillily surrender or tragically capitulate. It is that Organized Scabbery that treacherously leads the rank and file away from the field of battle—the hustings—where the workers' guns—the class-conscious ballot of the Socialist Labor Party—would dominate the situation, and make an end of the power of all "Companies" to live upon the vitals of the workers.

The country wonders whether the Pittsburg switchmen's strike is to be another farce or another tragedy; it also asks itself the question: Is it not about time the rank and file began to clean house and fired the traitors in its camp?

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded July 2006