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EDITORIAL

LABOR ORGANIZATION, PAST AND PRESENT.

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IN the early days of the labor movement in this country, it was unlawful for workingmen to organize to raise wages. An infamous law, known as the combination law, rendered workingmen who united for economic purposes, liable to fine and imprisonment. The capitalists were not denied the right to combine. They could unite to promote their class interests without committing a violation of the law, and being threatened with the loss of either cash or personal liberty. Stephen Simpson, author of *The Workingman's Manual*, published in Philadelphia, Pa., in 1831, sums up the situation well, when he therein says: "If mechanics combine to raise their wages, the laws punish them as conspirators against the good of society, and the dungeon awaits them as it does the robber. But the laws have made it a just and meritorious act that the capitalists shall combine to strip the man of labor of his earnings, and reduce him to a dry crust and a gourd of water."

Thanks to the undaunted and wisely directed ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL efforts of the pioneers of the labor movement in this country, the legal right to organize is firmly established. Any open attempt to abrogate it is likely to meet with bloody resistance. Upon this legal right are built the modern organizations of labor, who will not surrender their existence without a costly and deadly struggle. Yet, notwithstanding these important and incontestable facts, the legal right of labor to organize is being continually overthrown by the superior might of the capitalist class. It is a well known fact, easy of verification upon inquiry among them, that the employes of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit and the Metropolitan Street Railway systems are not allowed to organize. Every attempt on their part to do so is met with instantaneous dismissal. This same policy is pursued by the Standard Oil

Company and the United States Steel Corporation. Both of these big trusts punish with loss of employment and the blacklist all employes who endeavor to advance working-class organization. They further wage relentless war on unionism wherever it has taken root on the properties controlled by them, as witness, for instance, the present drastic attempts of the United States Steel Corporation to wipe out the last vestige of labor unions among the steel and iron workers in its Ohio and Illinois mills. Only last Friday, "An Employee," in a letter to *The People*, showed that this same policy of union extermination is being pursued in its New York establishment by the Glass Trust. Finally, the "open shop" policy is based, to a great extent, on this power of the capitalists to overthrow the legal right to combine.

After the foregoing recital, it is almost needless to say that, as already indicated, this overthrow of the legal right to organize inflicts upon the modern wage workers as great injustices as did the old combination laws upon their predecessors of the nineteenth century. The old combination laws visited the pioneers of the American Labor Movement with fines and imprisonment. The capitalist power to overthrow the legal right to organize pursues the modern workingmen with unemployment and the blacklist, compelling them, wherever triumphant, through the starvation and persecution thus produced, to submit to greater exploitation and degradation; making of them workingmen with abundant grievances, but no means of redress; in brief, mere wage slaves, who are at the merciless and unscrupulous beck and call of capitalist interests; being often, alas! too often, as in the case of the railway workers, used for the promotion of capitalist politics as well as economics. The sway of the capitalists is more perfect and absolute to-day than it was under the old combination laws.

The power of the capitalist class to abrogate the legal right of labor to organize is derived from the ownership and control of the economic and political institutions of the nation. It owns the land and machinery operated by labor. It dominates the parties and officials placed in power by labor's vote. Labor, on the other hand, is a commodity, bought and sold like other commodities, i.e., according to the law of supply and demand. When Labor is scarce and the demand for it great, Labor's wages and conditions are both good. When Labor is plentiful and the demand slight, its wages are low and its condition bad. It is in such conditions of the Labor Market,

as the latter, created by the capitalist ownership and control of capital and politics, that Labor's legal right to organize is overthrown. It follows, then, that, if Labor would maintain this right, it must take itself out of the category of commodities. This it can only do by abolishing the capitalist ownership and control of the economic and political institutions of the country. To this end Labor must organize, as did the pioneers, in the shop and at the political hustings. With Labor united both economically and politically, the legal right to organize can be maintained through the simultaneous action of the unions and the rigorous enforcement of the laws forbidding corporations to discriminate against organized Labor. With Labor united both economically and politically the legislative measures looking to the abolition of the private ownership of capital can be enacted and put into practical effect.

On, then, with the economic and political organization of Labor!

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