

EDITORIAL

THE LAWRENCE STRIKE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WM. L. BROWER'S letter, published in this issue,¹ tho' seemingly upon a different subject, supplements the reports in the bourgeois press to the effect that "although practically a unit in protesting that there is no warrant in business conditions for an advance in wages at this time among the textile operatives, the decision to raise wages was arrived at promptly by the New England mill owners, *making the best of a situation forced upon them as a direct result of the Lawrence strike.*"

The Lawrence sentiment, reported in Brower's letter, regarding the organization that conducted the strike, coupled with the reasons that the New England mill owners admit forced them to improve the conditions of their employes, jointly cast a timely and warning flash-light, thrown in a certain direction.

Mill owners do not like raises of wages. They have a positive antipathy for the thing. When, for any reason, they have hitherto raised wages, they ever managed, somehow, to attribute the fact of their own benevolent labor-loving instincts; and they ever managed the contortion successfully with the aid of their labor-lieutenants in the A.F. of L., whose interests, as against the workers, are one with the mill owners. If the mill owners will strain every nerve to avoid the appearance of having yielded to a "demand," let alone a strike of their own A.F. of L. employes, whom they can generally keep "contented" through the agency of their lieutenants, how is to be explained the mill owners' present readiness to announce that the present raises in wages which they have granted "was forced upon them as a direct result of the Lawrence strike"? Is not such a declaration calculated to render sympathetic to the A.F. of L. employes the organization whose officers conducted the very

¹ [To be appended—R.B.]

strike which admittedly forced the mill owners to tap the fountain of their labor-loving benevolence? Is there no risk of these employes pulling up stakes, and their stampeding out of the A.F. of L. and into that other organization and, their appetites for a larger slice of the fruit of their own toil being whetted, thereupon demanding another slice? In short, is the admission, that the Lawrence strike forced the New England mill owners outside of Lawrence to raise wages, not a provocative for a “break” in profits?

No.

Before the strike of the unskilled mill hands in Lawrence became the “Lawrence Strike”—the magnificent manifestation that, on the whole, it did become—that had happened which caused a barrier to be raised between it and the masses of the textile workers.

The preliminaries of the Strike were—to use the words used by Haywood himself at his March 7 meeting in Paterson—“a few windows broken, a few warps torn from the looms, and a little machinery broken,” in other words, violence and “sabotage” and “direct action,” in short, Anarchy.

These acts were committed by probably not more than 300 men—the only organized element of the twenty thousand unskilled mill hands whom the reduction in wages affected—upon whom the Anarchist James P. Thompson had wrought some time ago, and had organized into his Chicago, or Anarchist, so-called “I.W.W.” Misguided by the man’s teachings and infuriated by the Company’s outrage of reducing their wages, these few mill hands started to break windows, to tear warps from looms and to break machinery.

The Company could have wished for nothing better. It gave the Company in hand a plausible pretext to call for military protection. The militia took possession, the horrible consequences of which are still fresh on all minds. When Joseph J. Ettor, William D. Haywood, and Thompson of the Anarchist, or Chicago, “I.W.W.” reached Lawrence; when they took charge of their own little organization; when (Anarchic outbreaks having ceased) the bulk of the unskilled mill hands joined the organization of Ettor, Haywood and Thompson, the mischief that had been done could no longer be undone. Despite the methods of the Socialist I.W.W.—the I.W.W. with the headquarters at Detroit, which had already been exemplarily conducting

the Silk Weavers' Strike in Paterson, N.J.,—became the methods under which and on the whole the Lawrence Strike was subsequently conducted, the stigma of Anarchy remained indelible. Nor could it but remain so. The Ettors, Haywoods and Thompsons narrow-mindedly persisted in identifying themselves with the Chicago Anarchist headquarters.

Negligible is the number of workingmen in the land who approve, or can be filled with the sociologic bad whiskey of Anarchy. Even those who have no vote, by reason of sex or other wise, can only in relatively small numbers be deceived by the specious argument: "Since you have no vote, what other weapons can you use but those of Anarchy?" The overwhelming majority of the country's Working Class are children of their Century; they are abreast of their time; they know that important services can be performed upon the field of political action even by those who can not climax their political activity with their ballot. An Anarchist organization of Labor can not flourish in the land; it can attract but relatively few; it can not keep those whom it ropes in.—The New England mill owners know better than to fear that their A.F. of L. employes will take to the Anarchist I.W.W.

If, then, there is no fear that A.F. of L. textile operatives will take to the Anarchist I.W.W., what induced the New England mill owners at all to raise wages, especially when they are "practically a unit in protesting that there is no warrant in business conditions for an advance in wages at this time"? The answer should be obvious to all who understand the mission of the Gompers-Golden Civic-Federationized and Militia-of-Christized concern.

The raised wages of the New England textile operatives are meant, not for a barrier between the A.F. of L. and the Anarchist. I.W.W.: the Anarchy in that body is a high enough barrier. The raised wages are meant for a fence to keep the New England A.F. of L. textile operatives corralled in the A.F. of L. sheep pen, for future clippings. Their eyes filled with the limbs of the Anarchist I.W.W., Haywood leading, the New England mill owners know of no other organization in the land that radiates Labor emancipatory sentiment; leastwise do they know of the Socialist I.W.W. All they seek to accomplish is to keep their A.F. of L. employes from scattering out of the fold.

It matters not that the New England mill owners are reckoning without their

host. What does matter is the lamentable fact that the Anarchy of the Chicago I.W.W. has virtually squandered the superb opportunity that the Lawrence Strike otherwise offered; it actually canceled the I.W.W. spirit that the Strike breathed—as demonstrated by the conduct of the New England mill owners.

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