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Vol. III. No. 40

THE TORONTO

Official Organ of the Toronto District Labor Council. Published Weekly in the Interests of the Working Masses.

TORONTO, SEPTEMBER 18, 1933

OUR PHONE NUMBER IS MAIN 1344

PRINTING of all Kinds

First-Class Style

THE Toller Publishing Company Limited 77 Adelaide West.

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CRITICISMS OF TRADES UNIONS. By One Who is in Sympathy with their Efforts to Better Conditions.

For many years now the "Trust" problem has confronted and perplexed the thinking public in all progressive countries and no less perplexing is the accompanying problem of Trades Unionism. The capitalists, who own the tools of production, have been forming combines, and trusts, and syndicates, and unions, among themselves, whereby they seek to eliminate the wastes of competition, to economize production, and to control wages, prices and markets. To neutralize some of the evils which are sure to arise out of such a situation, the laborers, who use the tools of production but do not own them, have also formed combines, labor trusts, syndicates or unions, whereby they, in their turn, seek to eliminate the suffering and cruelty of labor competition, and to control wages or prices in the labor market. The manifold troubles of the present time result largely from a spirit of antagonism which animates these rival and warring classes. Too often the capitalists have used their power to oppress and crush and brutalize their employees. They have ceased to be men, and have become mere "capitalists." Too often the laborers, stung by injustice, have used their power to taunt and terrorize. They, too, have forgotten that they are men. The old customs, where employer and employee worked together at the same occupation, have almost wholly given place to others, where vast distances—in miles, education, social rank and sympathies—separate the two classes. So much the greater, consequently, has been the danger that the cash nexus will be the sole bond of union between them. And, unfortunately, this danger has been realized to an extent which is widespread and deplorable.

As remedies for the continued strife between organized capitalists and organized laborers, various things are proposed, none of them workable without a proper spirit of mutual toleration and good-will. The Socialists propose to have all capital owned by the community, and so wipe out the differences by a fusion of classes. Fostering public spirit is a sufficient stimulus to effort, and providing the movement is made world-wide, there seems to be nothing foolish or impracticable in this plan. Others propose the cultivation of a better feeling by acts of conciliation, by preaching the gospel of brotherhood, by a hundred and one like ways. Doubtless capitalists should accompany their employees to school again and re-learn the old nursery rhyme: "Little deeds of kindness, Little words of love," etc. Putting this in practice is a great solvent for labor difficulties. Still others would have governmental supervision and control of large industries, with more or less of compulsory arbitration. This plan has been already worked with some measure of success, but much depends upon the independence of the government, upon the absence of "corporation control," and the like. But no plan is workable unless it is

based upon and governed by a proper spirit of mutual toleration and good-will. The capitalists are beginning to find out the ill-treatment an neglect of their employees will not pay ultimately, even in dollars and cents, much less in that which is of infinite price. The laborers also are beginning to learn that tyranny, persecution of the "scab" and the decrease of individual efficiency will not ultimately pay, even in wages. While a John Mitchell controls matters, the labor unions may command the respect and support of independent men; but too often they merit only condemnation and pity. They seem far from having yet learned to grant the toleration they demand.

Several aspects of unionism, becoming very prominent nowadays, seem to me to be particularly objectionable. I should like to direct to these, by way of warning, the attention of all unionists and others who are interested in our country's welfare. In the first place, unions very often harbor and shelter incompetent and lazy workmen; and, instead of endeavoring to raise the standard of ability, industry and character among their members, strive to keep the average down to the lowest. It is often claimed that this is only charity, to the naturally inferior workman, a method of shielding him from discrimination. However, that may be, there should and must be some better way of protecting the weaker members. The aim of all education and endeavor is the highest development of personal ability and character, and if the unions letted down instead of leveling up, what degree of support can they expect? If they were to set about educating and strengthening their members, if their membership were in some way limited as to the quality of candidates—and I am pleased to say that this is sometimes true—then employers would have some confidence in dealing with the unions as responsible and intelligent organizations. But when the unions shelter laziness and incompetency, and foist such upon the employing class under pain of strike, they merit only condemnation. I have in mind an employee of a public institution who was a prominent member of a labor union. He was discharged because of incompetency and laziness, and, strange to say, shortly before his dismissal he claimed an increase in wages, an increase that his employers were anxious to give to a willing worker, and withheld from him on account of his laziness. Labor unions also try to curtail production, by shortening hours of labor, by restricting rates of working, etc. In fact, as they shorten hours with the object of giving their members an opportunity to loaf, smoking, card playing, etc., they diminish production and expect a continual increase in wages is absurd. The real wage is not the money, but the money worth in commodities, in food and clothing and so forth. If the average production of the latter is diminished the average wage will surely be diminished also. One who has had some considerable experience employing city tradesmen writes to me: "I sent a non-union plumber into a barber shop (a tenant of ours), to repair some pipes. They, being a union shop, ordered their plumber to go to the place, and he came up to me to ask what he was to do. "The works, tenants of ours, are obliged to employ union printers only, and the owners of the business dare not touch the type or set up any matter with their own hands, not after working hours nor at any other time. . . and I am told that in Chicago, a printing statement is not permitted, when on a job, to pick up a tool; he must have an attendant or waiter, to whom he says, 'Hand me that hammer, that wrench, that oil-can,' etc." For two years I employed a non-union paper-hanger, S— by name, paying him between \$500 and \$1,000 a year. He afterwards joined the union, and I continued to employ him. Two plain workmen who had been let out for want of work by their employer, came to me and begged a job, saying that their families had no groceries in the house and it was Saturday. I gave them a room to paper and the above S— came into the building, ordered them away, would see that they got no more work, and so forth; (to discuss the case). . . But, on account of this man S— having fought the union two years previously, they let the matter go without taking any action. This man was going to boycott me and all our tenants because we employed two men with hungry families."

It is surprising that another man, writing from the same place, should say: "The unions are still showing their marvellous inability to do anything right, and surprising fitness to do all things exactly wrong, and at the exact time when they should be showing their strength and probably exaggerated. But what else could one expect from a man smarting under this petty and galling tyranny? Let the labor union see to it that such things cannot be thrown to them as specimens of their usefulness. I do not suppose that such instances as I have referred to fairly represent the character of the average trades unions and the work of the union. But they show how far the unions do occasionally

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ership forces its way to the front. People who never gave a thought to it, before were made to feel its importance by the shortage of coal during last winter. Statesmen think more about it, and politicians talk more about it. Control of trusts and the abatement of labor difficulties will probably claim chief attention in the next general election in the United States. In Canada governmental control of railways is likely to be the first step in the right direction, provided the railways do not control the government. Subsidy-hunters find the Canadian public more inclined than in the past to advocate the people's paying themselves the subsidies and themselves undertaking the business. All this indicates which way the wind is beginning to blow. Public ownership may do much to relieve us from the tyranny of the capitalist and the tyranny of the labor union. Meanwhile, let the just claims of both classes be sweetened and tempered by toleration and good-will, and let the public demand of both that they assure not those privi-