

The Echo.

LABOR DAY, SEPT. 1st, 1890.

THE CENTRAL TRADES AND LABOR COUNCIL.

From a small beginning the Central Trades and Labor Council has developed into a recognized power in civic affairs, as well as in local and Dominion politics. The idea of amalgamating the various labor organizations into a central body first originated with some members of Dominion Assembly, K. of L., in the winter of 1884, and although their efforts at that time proved futile the scheme commended itself to a majority of the various organizations. Held in abeyance for some time, the principle of central organization was not abandoned, and the first step towards that end was taken conjointly by Ville Marie and Dominion Assemblies, when, on response to a call from them, a public meeting was held in the Mechanics' Hall in February of the following year to consider the Statute Labor Tax.

This tax, however useful and necessary at one period of the city's history, was deemed to have outlived its time. Its continuance in the civic statute book was held to be unconstitutional, as well as an outrage, as its non-payment was used as a means of depriving a large number of hard-working, intelligent citizens of their votes in municipal elections. Petitions were drawn up, numerous signed, and presented to the City Council asking for its repeal, but without effect. Some of the aldermen of the Council thought it "too presumptuous" in the working-class element to interfere with the laws governing the civic franchise. But the men who initiated the crusade against the iniquitous act were made of sterner stuff than their opponents imagined, and, despite of repeated rebuffs, the agitation was continued. Ultimately a test case was brought before the courts, which, after the proverbial law's delay, was ultimately decided in favor of the appellants and the Statute Labor Tax became a thing of the past. Although the initiative was taken by the K. of L., the burthen of the agitation was borne by the Central Trades and Labor Council, and to that body belongs the credit of the successful finish of the fight against a tax levied solely upon a class.

In November, 1885, another attempt at central organization was made. This time it emanated from Ville Marie Assembly and came in the form of a resolution offered by Mr. Urbain Lafontaine, printer, a well-known and highly respected member of Jacques Cartier Typographical Union. The resolution was to the effect that a committee be formed with instructions to issue an appeal to the various labor organizations asking them to assist in forming a central body, composed of delegates from the different societies, in order to protect their mutual interests and to exercise a strict supervision over legislative measures affecting workingmen. Accordingly, invitations were sent to the various organized bodies, and such was the hearty response given that, on the 12th of January, 1886, after a few preliminary meetings by the delegates chosen, the Central Trades and Labor Council was formed. The first president of the newly formed Council was Mr. Louis Guyon, of La Concord Assembly, K. of L., now the efficient Factory Inspector. Mr. Joseph Corbeil, of the Bricklayers' Union, was elected vice-president, and Mr. L. N. Genereux, of Montreal Typographical Union, No. 176, was chosen secretary. Succeding presidents have been Messrs. Joseph Corbeil and U. Lafontaine. The present incumbent of the presidential chair is



MR. JOSEPH BELAND, M.P.P.

Mr. Beland is a bricklayer by trade and has long identified himself with labor reform. On the increased representation being given to Montreal by Hon. Mr. Mercier, the Council determined to run its president, Mr. Beland, for St. Mary's ward in the labor interest, and his candidature met with a gratifying reception from all classes of politicians, the result being that he was elected over a very influential candidate by a majority of 87 votes.

Besides taking part in the adoption of other needed reforms, the Council were instrumental in securing important amendments to the obnoxious laws relating to the seizure of household furniture and personal effects, and just now they are engaged in an endeavor to solve the Water Tax question. From the energy the Council have hitherto displayed in their action with regard to other reforms, it is safe to predict that the City Council will be forced to abandon their dilatory, do-nothing policy, and effect a radical change by constituting a more equitable basis of taxation and easier system of collection. To strengthen the hands of the Council in their efforts to lessen the burdens under which the working classes labor it is, first of all, imperative that every workingman should belong to an organization and, secondly, to see that his organization is represented in the Trades and Labor Council.

THE WATER RATES.

The agitation for a reform of the system on which the water rates are collected in Montreal is one that surprises people, chiefly because it was not started long ago. For years, under the head of water rates, the people have been paying into the city treasury a sum much greater than was necessary to meet the expense of administration and interest on first cost of the water works. It is not an excuse for this state of affairs to state that the money thus collected was spent for the benefit of the people in other directions, and that it is immaterial whether, in collecting a certain amount, the city calls for it under the head of water rates or general taxation. This has been recognized in the City Hall, when, in estimating the sum chargeable against the water rates, the interest on that part of the city's debt held to represent the first cost of the water works has been put at a higher figure than is paid on the general civic indebtedness. In the treasury department there is no distinction between the receipts from water rates and those from real estate and business assessments. All are lumped together, and out of the total so much as is required to maintain and extend the water service is appropriated for the committee having it in charge. No attempt—no pretence at an attempt—is made to keep the accounts separate. The water rates are simply used to meet the current wants of the treasury, whatever they may be. In face of such facts those liable to pay water rates have a right to demand that they shall receive their share of the benefit that the city generally has derived from the reduction in the rate of interest on its bonds. The difference between six per cent. and three or three-and-a-half per cent. on that portion of the debt presumably represented by the water service, if the consumer were given the benefit, would make a difference in the water bills that many a poor man would appreciate. Besides this item of interest, there is also the generally admitted fact that more is collected as water rates than is expended in keeping up the service. Just what the difference amounts to cannot be said except by those well acquainted with the management of the city's finances. Be it great or small, however, the consumer should get the benefit of it. It should be the duty of the City Council to revise the whole water rates question on these lines, and it should be the duty of the labor organizations to insist on this being done. The workingman's interest in this is just the same as that of all other citizens, even the most wealthy; but the workingman has the strength of organization that other citizens do not possess, and so can make his voice heard and respected, where others are unheeded. It may be that, when the reform is made, the total amount the workingman will have to pay to the city treasury would not be reduced. Taxes have a way of finding their way down to the workingman's level, however they are levied. But he will then know, and all the citizens will know, that under the head of water rates he is only paying for water, and that all he has to give up for other municipal services is properly set down. This will be in itself an incentive to economy, and if it lets the people see that Montreal is not in truth a city of such low taxation as is sometimes said, the result will not hurt any one. What we want is that a stop shall be put to the collection of money for general purposes under the head of water rates, and that the water rates shall be the water rates and nothing more.

"Le Repos du Travailleur."

We cordially recommend to the notice of our readers "Le Repos du Travailleur," a souvenir of Labor Day, published by Mr. G. O. Corriveau. This is a sixteen page paper, and contains a large number of very interesting articles on the labor question. The first page is illustrated with the portraits

of the principal French-Canadian labor leaders and the portrait of Mr. L. O. David, the president of St. Jean Baptiste Society. The price per number is only five cents, and we hope that our confrere and friend, Mr. Corriveau, will receive from the working people all the encouragement he deserves.

RAMBLING THOUGHTS ON LABOR

Webster's primary definition of labor is: "Physical toil or bodily exertion, especially when fatiguing, irksome, or unavoidable, in distinction from sportive exercise; hard, muscular effort directed to some useful end, as agriculture, manufactures, and the like; servile toil; exertion." Not much of the dignity or manhood of labor in that, is there? And yet, no doubt, Webster only represented the general feeling with regard to labor at the time he wrote it. There was then but little thought of associating the two, dignity and labor; the latter was looked upon as essentially a painful thing, and the man who labored, no matter in what field, was looked upon as little better than the lower animals, and little wonder that this was so. Long hours of weary toil left him but little time for recreation or leisure for the improvement of his mental faculties, even had the pitiful sum he earned provided him with the means of gratifying more than his mere bodily wants. But, thanks to the exertions of noble, self-devoted men in the ranks of the workingmen, the idea that labor must of necessity be painful has passed away. True it is, there still remains a vast amount of work to be accomplished to altogether free the workingmen from the thralldom which, to a limited but certain extent, still environs him. But let us on Labor Day show our appreciation of those who in the past so manfully, and in spite of almost overwhelming difficulties, strove so far successfully to free labor from the hands which so long had held it down. And in the struggle now going on, and which apparently ever must exist between capital and labor, it will be well for the workingman to know just exactly the ground on which he stands; to know just exactly what he wants, and what he ought to have; and having done this, to make up his mind that what he wants he can have in time. The power is in his own hands; he has but to know his own mind; to throw aside political parties; to be no longer led by the nose by either of the existing parties, but resolve that if he cannot at present have a party for himself, he will make use of Conservative or Liberal as best may serve him, and no longer let the Liberal or Conservative make use of him. Let him first know just what he wants and be himself convinced of the reasonableness of his demands, and he can have them satisfied. I am but repeating in a very feeble way what Walter Besant has so well said in that book of his which everybody should read, but which should be read at least by every workingman, "An Impossible Story." In speaking of the "workingman," I include more than the manual laborer. The great forefather of us all, Adam, the first gentleman on the face of God's earth, was also the first laborer. Thus from the outset the great Creator of the world stamped labor with the hall mark of dignity. True it is, if we are to believe the account of the Fall given in Genesis, labor was imposed upon man, not, as some have supposed, however, as a punishment, but to mark and accentuate the difference between man before the Fall and man after it. But who is there at the present day, except the veriest lout and loafer, the tramp and altogether casawpy, who would dare to assert that labor, within proper limits, is a punishment to man? Labor I take as meaning not merely manual labor, not the labor of the workshop only, but the labor also which is performed by the writer in his study, the merchant in his office, the clergyman in his pulpit, and even the actor on the stage; in fact, all work that tends to the progress of the world and the benefit of mankind, carried on possibly with the primary purpose of earning daily bread, but still with the above result. I know that many of us are inclined to resent the idea of ministers, actors, lawyers and others being regarded as laborers, especially when we think of the first-mentioned leaving their flocks without spiritual nourishment for two months of the year while they themselves roam the earth in search of mental pabulum and a renewal of physical strength for the other ten months of the year. I know that many of us wonder how they can reconcile their annual holiday with the earnest admonitions which they launch from their pulpits on the remaining Sundays of the year, but on Labor Day, at least, we can afford to be charitable and class them with laborers; at all events they are fond of quoting "the laborer is worthy of his hire," "we are all laborers in the vineyard," and so forth. As to actors I am inclined to put them on pretty much the

same plane as the ministers, with this difference that they work a good deal harder and possibly benefit mankind more in the long run than do the ministers. Of course, I am speaking of both professions as a whole and do not single out individual cases as examples of either professions. The lawyer, too, must be included in the catalogue of workingmen; however much we may abhor going to law, there can be no doubt of the fact that the lawyer is a necessity, torn it may be of the stupidity of our law framers or the ambiguity of our language, but a necessity he is, whatever he may be in the future, and that he works hard—those who know the most worthy members of the professions must readily admit. Including them all workers, whether of brain or of muscle, or perhaps of both, the world at large cannot help admitting the enormous debt which it owes labor, and I hold that every man who has in any way whatever contributed to the building of the stupendous monuments of labor which now cover the face of the globe has a right to be proud of his share, however small, if done in a manful way, with heart and soul. But, there can be no affinity between the dignity of labor and scamped work. The man who, professing to be a workingman, will allow a piece of scamped work to pass through his hands, or will so much as wink at such a thing, is the man who will drag the name of labor in the mire, who will cause the finger of scorn to be pointed at labor in the person of the workingman, and finally he is a man whom his fellow-workmen would do well to warn and possibly to shun. A workman who will persist in scamped work must be ostracised; he lowers his own manhood and the dignity of his fellow men. If it be true that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, it is just as true that bad work and much play will make Jack a dull boy, and a mighty poor one too, in the end. It has been the writer's lot to shake by the hand all manners and conditions of men, and he can truly testify that he has felt more pleasure in shaking by the hand a working coal miner, poor in worldly goods, but rich in all that goes to make a man, than he ever felt in shaking hands with an earl or a high church dignitary. Of course it does not follow that an earl or even a clergyman may not be a decent fellow. On the contrary, it must be confessed that the writer has also met many coal miners and workmen of all classes who would have been a disgrace to any class, and who were in their way as despicable as any of those polluted creatures who have shamed many a fair name. But the point was this: that no work, however humble in itself, could detract from the native nobility of that worldly poor miner. He dignified whatever he touched, for like the man of whom most of us have read, "what e'er he did, he did his level best." To sum up these rambling thoughts on labor, the words of the poet may fitly be addressed to every workingman, work he mentally or work he physically:

"To thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

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