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LABOR AND THE FUTURE.

Three years ago organized Labor decided, officially, that for the "duration of the war" it would content itself with maintaining the position in Society it then held, and that it would not seek further advantages for itself until what were described as "normal conditions" had again returned. The war had not been many months in progress, however, before organized Labor found itself called upon to abandon that position, and to agree to the setting aside of many of the defensive safeguards that, like barricades, it had built up by several generations of toil and sacrifice to protect itself against its foes. Having—reluctantly and in response to the alternate threats and cajolery of statesmen and "leaders" set aside these safeguards, the workers were not long in discovering that the other things did not remain the same, but rather that changes were taking place in industry which, if unheeded, would tend to make the future struggles for a full and free life much harder than they formerly were. Slowly, but none the less certainly, it is to-day being perceived by increasing numbers of workers, that while they have slept, their position has been undermined and weakened, and it is this as yet dim perception that is mainly responsible for the present stirring of the trade union dry bones, and for what in exalted circles is described as "Industrial Unrest." Tension with regard to the future will not carry the working class very far. The times call for vigorous thought and for real preparation for action. The Trade Union movement at this great crisis—this supreme testing moment of its history—is called upon to determine what its mission, its work, its purpose, as a factor in the struggle for freedom is to be. It stands, indeed, at the cross roads to-day, and upon the choice it makes will depend whether it is or is not to be a real live force, working first for the destruction of capitalism, and secondly for the building up of the New Society.

THE NEW WORLD

Prophets, priests and kings, to say nothing of politicians and editors, daily reiterate pious platitudes about the new order that is to built up on the ashes of the world now so energetically engaged in destroying itself. But beyond feeble hints and

senile suggestions, they are strangely silent as to what form and character of the new world is to be. Since the question is one that has special application for and to the workers, we ourselves, as workers, must both put the question and find the answer.

What kind of a new world is it to be? Is it to be a world in which Labor will be more ruthlessly exploited than ever before, in which life for the mass of the people will be a dull, sordid, colorless round of companionship with poverty and Labor and Capital will fraternise, and Labor, in return for certain small concessions calculated to make life a little more tolerable, will be a willing, acquiescent consentor to being regarded as a class set apart in society and born to produce but never to own or control the means whereby production is made possible? Or is it to be a new world indeed, and one in which the workers, by virtue of the fact that they are workers, will decide for themselves the conditions under which they shall labor and live. The future of the world will be decided in accordance with the will and determination, or the lack of these qualities, shown by the workers of the world in formulating and applying the answer to these questions.

HOW IS ORGANIZED LABOR FACING THE FUTURE

Organized Labor has every reason to look forward to the "outbreak of peace" with misgiving. The end of every modern war has brought a period of crises for the workers—a time in which, owing to the sudden thrusting of large bodies of workers, returned soldiers and displaced producers of war material on the Labor market—the competition for employment has become so keen that the meagre standard of life or existence to which the workers are accustomed has been made even more precarious. It was the fear that history would in this respect again repeat itself, that led those unions to whom application or command—what you will—was made to set aside their rules, etc., to insist that pledges should be given by the Government guaranteeing that pre-war conditions would be reverted to when peace was declared, and later that those should be incorporated in the Munitions Act. Confidence in

Governmental pledges has, however, received many rude shocks of late. Even trade union officials, who a year or so ago were loudly expressing their satisfaction with the "guarantees" they had been able to secure for those they represented, are now busily engaged in suggesting that perhaps it would be as well to have some other sheet anchor, in case the "pledges" slipped a little, and are exhorting their members to perfect their organizations with the object of making them strong enough to resist any attacks. But even if the pledges of the Government and the promises of the employers, that no attempt would be made to exploit the war-time sacrifices of the trade unionists, were made in good faith, and even if an endeavour were to be made to return to pre-war conditions, could it be accomplished? For three years industry has been changing its character with such rapidity that it is quite an accepted commonplace that an Industrial Revolution has been accomplished. Old machinery has been relegated to the scrap-heap, and new machinery to the value of millions of pounds has been installed in new factories equipped with all the latest devices of speedy and efficient wealth production, handling, delivery, etc. Experimentation, often at national expense, and the suspension of some of the patent laws, have placed many new processes in the hands of private employers. The demand for labor in connection with the expansion of armament production has been responsible for the placing of large numbers of women and new men workers into occupations where though in the main untrained they have been engaged on work of a character previously considered to be the strictly limited province of the skilled worker. The specialising and standardizing of machine production has made enormous headway, so that now, by a more scientific subdivision of labor than was hitherto applied, the whole of the operations performed by a skilled worker can be carried through by a chain of separate workers, each engaged in contributing his or her quota of the effort needed to turn out the finished product.

On the Railways, the centralising of control has resulted in the elimination of a great many competing services, the closing down of many stations and a considerable reduction of railway staffs. The employment of women workers in

connection with railway work has been tried, found successful and extended, and in addition the amount of work done by, say, an engine driver, has been materially increased by such methods as adding to the length of a train or the load to be drawn by the engine. All these changes, though many have been dramatic in their application, are but a continuation, speeded up, to be sure, of movements that were in operation prior to the war—movements, in fact, which are a part of social development, and which result in the main from changes which of necessity takes place in the technique and mechanism of production and distribution. Even if it were possible for the world to return to the conditions of things that existed before Europe became insane, it would not be desirable. The position of the workers then was such that they were always forced to be on their guard against continued attempts by the employing class to further exploit them, and they were, by virtue of the competition existing amongst themselves, forced to accept conditions they would otherwise have been strong enough to decline. Pre-war capitalism had nothing in its composition that merits a moment's "looking backward" on the part of the working class.

THE PROBLEM

Since to retrace our steps is historically impossible, how are the workers affected by the problem confronting them? The problem that will call for immediate solution if social catastrophe is to be avoided, is: How shall the employing class be prevented from using the millions of men who will be "set free" by demobilisation and by the great "turn-off" of munitions and other workers, for the purpose of so playing off one section of the workers against another in the manner so skillfully used during the war, that Capital will be able to ride roughshod over the people? If other things remain the same, the competition for employment is likely to assume the character of a mad scramble, and in a scramble, as a rule, more people are hurt than receive benefit. The changed character of industry will have brought conditions to which the workers cannot accommodate themselves by the painful process of "getting used to them," or of "finding their level."