

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

Reflections on Current Events by
the Boarders.

"The other day," said Phil, "a gentleman put a few questions to me which he would like to have discussed by the boarders of this ranch, and as we now have time to do it, perhaps it would be a good plan to take them up. What do you say to it?"

"You know," said Brown, "that this crowd is open to discuss anything from the laws of Moses to those of Jay Gould and from the siege of Troy to the strike of the Pennsylvania coke burners; fire away and let us hear what he wants."

"Well, then," said Phil, "the first question is:

"What is to prevent the manufacturer or employer—whether protected or unprotected—from forcing prices down to what he calls the 'living rate,' when he can argue that the 'living' price has gone down?"

"Taking the question as a whole, I would say 'The organization of labor,'" said Gaskill. "A manufacturer of any kind must, if he wishes to overcome the keen competition of the present day, cheapen his cost of production. There are only three ways in which that can be done, first, by reducing the cost of his raw material, second, by introducing improvements increasing the productive power of his establishment, and, third, by securing his labor at the cheapest possible price. As this question refers to labor alone, it is not necessary to discuss the many ways by which a protective tariff increases the cost of the raw material, or the inability to successfully operate the most improved machinery in a small and limited market; though both of these bear more or less upon the question raised. No manufacturer to-day bothers himself about what your friend calls the 'living rate' or 'living' price of labor. Where two men wish to sell their labor, and the one asks \$9 and the other but \$4 per week, everything else being equal, the manufacturer will take the \$4 man regardless of whether that amount will buy potatoes and salt or salt without potatoes for this man and his family. The only way to resist the encroachments of capital in this direction is for labor to organize and adopt a uniform scale of prices which will lessen this cut-throat competition among laborers themselves, until the whole system of wage slavery can be abolished."

"The statistics of our insurance companies and the figures compiled by Carroll D. Wright, Commissioner of Labor at Washington, prove conclusively," said Phil, "that labor receives less than 'living' wages. We find that the average life of a workingman is but 40 years, while that of the merchant, manufacturer and professional class is 60, and the capitalistic loafer, the fellow who lives on an income accumulated by his forefathers, and who never does anything useful from the day of his birth until the day he dies rolls up his three score and ten years every time. The tremendous difference is directly traceable to the inability of labor to secure sufficient proper nourishment and healthy surroundings necessary to recuperate its strength and vitality, and because of this fact I contend that the laborer receives LESS THAN WILL KEEP HIM ALIVE, which is altogether a different thing from what is commonly understood by 'living' wages. However, my friend continues:

"We are informed by free traders, U. R. and limited reciprocity partisans that the necessities of life will be cheaper under their systems than under a protective policy. Granted."

"Well, then, why not adopt free trade," said Brown, "and thus increase the purchasing power of your dollar."

"More particularly," said Phil, "when you consider that a protective duty never yet prevented a manufacturer from reducing your wages. It is

only where men are thoroughly organized that anything like a fair rate of wages is paid. But says my friend:

"Is it not true that the employer will always demand his present share of profits, whether protected or unprotected, and that at present the laws of the country are such that any endeavor to prevent him from acquiring or retaining his unfair proportion of said profits would be futile?"

"True," said Sharkey, "but cannot your friend understand that a protective policy enables a manufacturer to acquire a larger portion of what he calls 'unfair profits' than what he could secure under free trade? And if this is true, why not adopt a free trade policy? With reference to profit you cannot consistently introduce or enact any law which would limit profit to any certain percent. If it is right and just to make a 3 per cent profit it cannot be wrong to make a profit of an hundred per cent. But you can and should abolish profit. What is profit, anyway? It is the difference between what a thing costs to produce and for what it is sold. It is either withheld wages of the producer or an arbitrary tax exacted from the necessities of the consumer—it is robbery."

"Correct," said Phil, "but my friend continues:

"Then, if it is true, is it not a waste of their energies for labor societies to discuss free trade or protection? Should the trade societies not devote said energies to securing (a) an apprenticeship law, (b) a true anti-combines measure, (c) a measure to protect the workman from foreign labor; as if the entry of the article be taxed for the benefit of the employer, should not the entry of the foreigner, who can make the article, be taxed for the benefit of the native artisan? (d) a measure to give the same legal recognition to trade societies that the lawyers' and doctors' societies now enjoy. (e) A measure to prevent the employment of boys in mines, as in the Springhill."

"Your friend evidently does not belong to any labor organization," said Brown, "or he would know that free trade and protection are not discussed as though either the one or the other were the settlement of the labor question. As to the suggestions he makes to organized labor, they are, with one or two exceptions, all right, but unfortunately about 30 years too late to be of any practical use to us. The employment of children in mine and workshop, the recognition of trades unions by law, the better regulating of the apprentice system were subjects which had for many years received the attention of organized labor before I joined my first union some 20 years ago. The labor movement is a progressive one, and the men in the thick of the fight do not look back; but if they did, the many laws placed on the statute books of many lands in connection with the above-mentioned reforms, and placed there by no other efforts than their own, might well cheer them in the fight and prompt them to greater deeds."

BILL BLADES.

WORKINGMEN

RUB YOUR EYES AND LOOK AT
THE PROSPECT.

(Written for the Echo by Cyrille Horslot.)

Legislatures within the last twenty-five years has spent many millions of dollars in North America in the construction of armories and arsenals, and for the equipment thereof with the modern appliances of slaughter. Walk or drive through the leading cities of this new continent and examine carefully the numerous great structures which, during the last two decades or so, have been built for the service of different military organizations. For what end are these immense walls so strongly buttressed? What is the object of their bullet-proof windows? Why do we see their bastions, corner towers and wall curtains between marked with loopholes for musketry, set with precision for raking and enfilading the adjacent streets? These frowning dungeons, these castellated

fortresses, these fortified barracks are not designed against Prussians, French, Russians or Sioux, or for defence against organized foes: They are, in fact and effect, the menace of the banks, mines, telegraph companies, railways, combines and land sharks against tyrannized workingmen who, it is feared, may some day revolt. They are set up against what the thieves in profession call "the mob"—that is, the possible discontent of labor. They are constructed, we say, only as a menace at the bidding of the professional class, and are designed to overawe the wage-earning masses, from whose toil and sweat, at last, all the cost thereof has been directly or indirectly wrung. And yet in spite of that, division, distrust and dissension abound at present in labor councils. The main ideas of the labor movement are being momentarily side-tracked, and the issues and the theories of doctrinaires are placed in the main line. Instead of picking up, clinging to and contending for the leading fundamental ideas, the tendency is to seize hold of new-fangled and most abstruse questions. Instead of banding together and moving forward as one man, we are going off in groups. Look at the situation as it stands now here and in the States, there are two full-fledged labor political camps. The effect is to rejoice the enemies of organized labor and to discourage, enervate and humiliate its friends.

What is true of the political aspect is true of the industrial reform aspect. There is rivalry, contention and clash on all sides. The time has come to call a halt on all this. The time has come to stop this internal strife and train all our batteries on the common enemy, monopoly and misused capital in every form. The time has come to get the main ideas of the labor movement back on the main track and drive the lesser ones aside. If for the great and noble purpose of securing unity of action this wise man or that wise man is obliged to sacrifice some pet idea, let him do it or be made to do it. The trouble with the labor movement to-day is not a poverty of ideas but a plethora. There is a trifle too much "big head" in it.

POLICEMEN COMPLAIN.

There is a considerable amount of grumbling just now in the ranks of the police force, or rather amongst those who have to attend the Court of Queen's Bench as witnesses, and there are substantial grounds for their murmurings of discontent. The men complain that they do not receive the indemnity allowed other citizens who have to appear and give evidence. They say that police who are on duty all night are often obliged to come before the court and remain there all day to make their depositions and have to resume their duty that same night. The indemnity of fifty cents a day, which they were previously allowed, has been stopped, which they consider very unfair. They are agitating to be again placed on the same footing as private citizens in this respect.

C. O. F.

The above Order of Foresters meet on Sunday afternoon at Angelus Court Hall, St. James street, and march to the Cathedral to attend solemn Benediction, and also to present an address to His Grace Archbishop Fabre. The thirteen Courts of the Order in Montreal will take part.

MR. MERCIER'S DEPARTURE.

A large number of Mr. Mercier's friends gathered at the Bonaventure Station yesterday morning to shake hands with him on more before his departure for Europe. The Premier, accompanied by Madame Mercier and Miss Mercier, arrived shortly before the departure of the Delaware & Hudson Railway train, and was warmly welcomed by his numerous friends in waiting. After a general shaking of hands Mr. Mercier, with his wife and daughter and the other members of the party who accompany him to New York, entered the special car reserved for them, and as the train moved out of the station hearty cheers were given for the Premier and for the success of his mission. Besides his private secretary, Mr. Mercier is also taking over with him an old servant named Caron. The Hon. Mr. Duhamel will have charge of the routine business in the Government offices here until the return of Mr. Robidoux.

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