

politics. Party newspapers continually speak of it as though its principal aim were the election of workingmen to representative positions. Politicians try to head it off, as was done in Toronto and Hamilton, by giving the party nomination to trade unionists—and express themselves amazed at the folly and ingratitude of the Labour Reformers when they refuse to be satisfied with such working-class representatives. If to put "workingmen" into Parliament were the only motive of the new departure, its adherents might very reasonably have supported the candidature of Edward F. Clarke in this city, John Burns in Hamilton, and A. B. Ingram in West Elgin—all genuine members of the working class, and trades unionists. But the Labour Reform movement is far broader and more comprehensive in its scope. Not simply to elect workingmen, either in the enlarged or the restricted sense of the term; but to effect an entire and organic change in the relations between labour and capital is the real object in view. The platform itself, radical as it is, embracing many reforms so sweeping that their accomplishment can hardly be looked for in this generation, conveys an imperfect idea of the spirit of the new departure. Every platform is necessarily a compromise, embodying concessions not only to weak brethren but to public opinion. It is freely admitted that the present demands of the Labour Reformers are merely tentative, including only such reforms as it is now expedient to agitate for. Present organizations, measures of plans of action, are merely the germs. The precise form of their fuller development none can foresee.

Obviously, the mere election of workingmen who are also partisans and the nominees of the old parties would not in the least avail towards creating such a revolution in present habits of thought as must be accomplished even before the ameliorative measures now demanded could be carried into effect. So long as members of Parliament are the slaves of the caucus, bound to answer the summons of the party whip, it matters not whether they are wage-earners or members of the professional and capitalist classes. The old parties, Liberal and Conservative, alike are dominated by capitalism—pervaded root and branch with the ideas of the old political economy; believers in the theory that industrial matters are and ought to be regulated by competition under the law of supply and demand. The single exception of the N.P. proves nothing. The Conservatives have never carried the principle of tariff protection to its logical conclusion by undertaking to protect labour against capital. Should a limitation of the hours of factory labour to eight per day, or a system of compulsory arbitration for regulating wages according to profits be proposed, both parties would array themselves against such measures. Liberals and Conservatives alike would denounce them as an interference with the "right of private contract," and invoke the law of supply and demand as being the necessary and sufficient principle determining the length of the working day, and the distribution of the value created by labour. While such opinions prevail—while men are content to quote the platitudes of a system of political economy, formulated under entirely different conditions than those which now exist, and persistently ignore the changes wrought by the progress of mechanical invention and the wonderful expansion of the industrial system, the work to be done by the Labour Reform party is mainly and essentially educational. The securing of a few palliative measures such as the Factory Act, the Employers' Liability Act and the like, and the election of a wage-earner to the legislature, are infinitesimal gains in themselves, important only as vantage-ground won in a battle which must be fought inch by inch.

The Canadian Labour Reform movement, like nearly every important political or social agitation which obtains a foothold here, derives its impulse from the United States. Let those who would condemn it on that account remember that the Confederation of the provinces, the protective policy, the Scott Act, and many other Canadian institutions and measures, owe their origin to the same source. This is not wholly due to imitation. It is rather a case in which like causes produce like effects. The conditions of Canadian life and industry are similar to those on the other side of the border, but as the Americans are in a more advanced stage of national development, having a larger and denser population, the conditions demanding and producing social and political changes show themselves sooner in the United States. Canada nearly always follows in the same direction, after an interval during which we have been growing up to the condition, and developing the same phases of public opinion through which our neighbours have previously passed. It is so with the labour question. Owing to the exhaustion of the public domain; to cutting off the wage-workers' opportunities for self-employment; to the building up of large cities with populations absolutely dependent on the labour of their hands; to the mobilization of the forces of labour by the wonderful expansion of steam transportation, the conditions of life for the masses in the large centres have been approximating very rapidly to the European standard. Comparisons of the rate of wages paid now with the scale of a generation ago are misleading and fallacious. With the growth of large cities the landless labourer loses many advantages for which no advance in wages can compensate him. The squalor and filth of the tenement house, with its enforced associations with the vicious and criminal, the impossibility of procuring wholesome and comfortable house accommodation with fresh air and elbow room, the expenses entailed by modern city life in many directions formerly unknown—all these tend to make the lot of the urban wage-earner increasingly irksome. Popular education—defective though it is—democratic institutions, with their teaching of the doctrine of human equality and brotherhood, and the extent and universality of industrial organizations, have combined to force the question to the front. Since the establishment of the order of the Knights of Labour, designed to supplement the trade unions by welding together all branches of labour for common action and the securing of radical and permanent reforms, the question has taken on an entirely new phase. It is slowly beginning to be understood that the Labour question is not a mere matter of the increase of wages or the shortening of hours, to be fought out between workingmen and their respective employers, but a far deeper and more difficult problem, involving the overthrow of those conditions which no concessions, however extensive, by individual employers, or even by the whole class of employers, could effect. It is realized that behind the employer stands the power of monopoly in all its forms, by which the land, the railroads and the financial system are controlled by the few, and used to exploit industry. The pressure of these influences is such that the employer of labour, even if willing, is powerless to do much to remedy existing abuses. Labour Reform, as understood where the question is of older standing than in Canada, is a demand for social re-adjustment; for new standards of public opinion; for a re-written political economy; for the establishment, in short, of labour value as the only test of any man's right to draw from the community the products of the labour of others.

That the full import of the contest upon which they have entered