

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

Reflections on Current Events by the Boarders.

"Powderly said at the Armory the other night that in the States the political party which was prepared to give labor all its rights, always happened to be the one out of power," said Phil, "and when they in turn got in, it was the other party. This has been the experience of labor reformers everywhere. The song sung by the Democrats and Republicans during election times to labor audiences is the same as that sung by Grit and Tory in Canada or by Liberals and Conservatives in England or Australia; it is an old song and until lately was very popular with the masses in all constitutionally governed countries. Of late years, however, it seems to have lost its hold upon the people, more particularly in Germany, Australia and the United States. Old Abe Lincoln once stated 'that it was possible to fool all the people for a little while and some of them all the time, but, said he, you can't fool ALL the people all the time.' This is precisely what the old political parties have been trying to do, and the consequence is that in the three countries mentioned those of the people who 'can't be fooled all the time' have established independent labor parties. In England and Canada, however, there still seems to be a large portion of the people who, as Barnum said, like to be humbugged, and they will of course be fooled to the end of the chapter."

"I don't believe that you are quite correct in that statement," said Brown. "There is a large and constantly increasing percentage of the people of Canada who object to being humbugged as much as any people on earth, and the only reason why they are still found voting for the candidates of the old political parties is because there is no other party in the field. These men feel their position keenly, for they have practically no other choice than either to abstain from voting altogether and thus prove recreant to their duties as citizens, or else to cast their vote and appear as men who are too ignorant to understand that they are being humbugged, and yet no intelligent workman at this time believes in the promises of either of the old political parties. It is felt by every man who takes an active interest in labor reform that the time is ripe for the creation of a third party; it is felt that this has become necessary to the very existence of labor organizations in Canada. The Toronto Trades and Labor Council at its last meeting referred this question, which was introduced by the Legislative Committee, back, in order that the delegates might consult their constituents before final action is taken. It has in the past inaugurated many reforms and proved a bulwark to labor throughout the Dominion, but all it ever accomplished will be as nothing compared with the benefits accruing to labor should the Council decide upon forming an independent labor party. It would unite labor in this Dominion as it never was united before by giving it a well defined policy, in the success of which every organization would be equally interested. At present the various cities, and often organizations, work independently of each other or else neglect to take political action altogether, forgetting that it is only by and through such action that labor can ever hope to secure its rights. The practice of supporting hide-bound party politicians who have pledged themselves to labor reform in order to catch the labor vote has in every case proved a complete failure. We have two such representatives at present in Ottawa, and I have yet to learn of any measure or act calculated to advance the interests of labor which has been introduced by either Ingram or Lepine. They are no worse and no better than dozens of others who have secured constituencies by similar tactics, but it just shows that

the practice of electing old party men is bad. Two men elected by an independent labor party and free from any obligations to either of the existing old political machines could at this juncture in our country's history secure more for labor than a whole shipload of Ingrams and Lepines, because these latter can at all times be relied upon to support the Government, no matter where it may lead them to. In New South Wales the labor party, with 36 representatives in the Legislature, holds the balance of power and is virtually in a position to compel the Government to concede to its demands. Could this have been possible had the workmen of Australia contented themselves with voting for Liberals or Conservatives pledged to labor reform? Certainly not. It was an independent labor party which compelled Bismarck to create a system of national insurance against want in old age or sickness, which is the admiration of the world; it was an independent labor party which last year swept the South like a cyclone and brought both Democratic and Republican politicians to time in such a way that they will never get over the shock they received, and an independent labor party, and nothing else, will ever bring Canadian politicians to time. Let the Toronto Trades and Labor Council lead in this as it has led in most reforms and it can rest assured that it will secure the whole and hearty support of every labor organization from Vancouver to Cape Race. Let it issue a call for a national convention at some central place, and let a party be organized which will be of the people, for the people, and by the people."

BILL BLADES.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

THE WATER TAX.

To the Editor of THE ECHO.

SIR,—The wonderful intelligence, the extraordinary business qualities, the amazing tact, the large-hearted desire to do good, the love of doing justice and serving the best interests of the public, as exemplified by our City Council during the past two years on the Water Tax Question, commends them, almost without exception, lovingly to the public, not to allow them to sacrifice themselves any longer expending their vital forces trying to satisfy the reasonable demands of 90 per cent. of the people of this city who are clamoring like a lot of Socialists or Anarchists for such a monstrous thing as the abolition or the equalization of the water taxes. What a strain upon the brain power of that Special Water Tax Committee to rush through this business within two years! How they must have labored! Is it any wonder some of them wanted to lay it on the table for probably another year to enable them to recuperate before tackling it again (or because they are afraid they will have to pay a little more themselves)?

Oh, noble Committee! Oh, brave City Council! What should we do without you, personally composed as you are? Your noble actions and brave deeds will certainly be handed down to posterity in the records of Longue Pointe, Verdun, or the Jail.

About two years ago, at the request of that outlandish institution, the Central Trades and Labor Council, (composed as it is of nothing but everyday workmen who produce, as a rule, about three times as much as they are allowed to consume, these same men representing thousands of others like themselves), you condescended to appoint a committee to enquire into the Water Tax question, and after spending more than a year racking your fertile brains to find a way out of this terrible nightmare, you reported—I mean the committee—back to the City Council that a new committee had better be appointed, because—because—they did not know exactly why. But I will tell you. Either they did not want to offend the landlords, the majority of whom object to any change being made, or else there was not enough executive ability about these wisecracks to bring in a report without making a laughing stock of themselves before everybody. However, a new committee was appointed who, to all appearances at first, was going to go through the whole business in quick style; but alas for appearances. The committee met time after time, called witnesses, was supplied with statistics by Mr. Hellbronner, (which Mr. Robb nor anybody else ever proved were wrong.) Finally the matter was referred to a sub-committee, said sub-committee being in reality G. W. Stephens, although others were appointed with him. In a short time Mr. Stephens

brought back to committee a prepared report, advocating nearly all we ask, embodied in it, but it was too strong for the stomach of the whole committee. So they pruned it down, and at last decided to present it to Council, and although it is not one-quarter what it should be, is certainly a step in the right direction.

Now, I want to know is any action going to be taken on that report? The tenants of Montreal have been fooled and robbed long enough by this august body, who has the presumption to say that 90 per cent. of the people of Montreal have no right to representation with them. Bricks and mortar is king. We are a superior body to the Legislature of Quebec or the House of Commons at Ottawa. The common people who have no property must not associate with us, says our civic legislators. Yet they have, by their report on this Water Tax Question, admitted an injustice being done to the poor, and I would strongly advise them to adopt remedial measures at once or the people may take the matter into their own hands. The injustice being acknowledged by the committee, the public are fully aware of the fact, and will certainly not submit to be quietly robbed any longer by representative landlords.

The people are prevented, under the present system, of being represented at all in the Council. This being the case, the opportunity for bringing about peaceable reforms through the ballot box is taken away, leaving only two ways open. One is relying upon what little common sense and principle there may be left in the Council to concede to the public—justice; the other way is to take forcible possession of the City Council and run the business ourselves in the public interests. Which shall it be?

W. D.

UNFAIR DIVISION OF WEALTH.

Examine the statistics of distribution. Society is composed of two classes, the "rich" and "poor." The first, consisting of about two million families, receives as its share of the annual production of wealth the sum of, roughly speaking, £800,000,000. This immense tribute exacted from the workers is made up of rent of land, interest on capital (usury), and the remuneration of exceptional ability in business management—the exorbitant cost of a University education, giving the rich a practical monopoly of that ability. The average income of this class, then, comes to £400 per family, but included in it are two hundred thousand families receiving incomes of £1,700. These are only averages, however, and it should not be forgotten that some of our great land-owners and pastoralists are in receipt of from £20,000 to £450,000 per annum. No wonder that the members of this class can live on an average for 55 years, as against the average life of 30 years of the workers! The remainder of the yearly wealth production—about £450,000,000—falls to the "poor" class, whose labor produced the rich class portion in addition to its own, and has to be divided among five million families, giving each family an average income of £70. But of these five million families, about three millions are in receipt of incomes far below £70, the remaining two millions consisting chiefly of the aristocracy of labor, absorbing the overplus. These figures take no account of the unemployed or partially unemployed workers, who during dull times are one-eighth of the laboring class. When we consider that the workers are the creators of wealth, when we see how inadequately their toil is recompensed, when we see how the rich class is legally enabled to filch so much from them, then we are naturally inclined to seriously question the justness and usefulness of a social organization which results in so illogical an inequality of reward. These statistics demonstrate that idleness is at a premium supported by legalized robbery; while honest labor has to earn two shillings for its "betters" for the privilege of being allowed to earn one for itself. We dare not continue preaching that virtue will be rewarded, when practical experience convicts us being liars. The results of toil are almost all appropriated by an idle class, therefore it is a patent hypocrisy to maintain that society is founded upon the principles of Christianity. Whoever says so is in ignorance of the facts of the case. Is there no means whereby our practice may become reconciled with our better conscience? Yes, I believe, by the ultimate municipalisation of land and industrial capital. But that is in the future; what can be done immediately to alleviate the injustice of the present social inequalities? The placing of all taxation upon the land, which would greatly lessen the pressure of competition and overcrowding in large towns, and the establishment of municipal workshops for the absorption of the unemployed, and for the benefit of the "sweater's" victims.—CHARLES MILLAR, in The Democrat. (Australian).

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