

THE INDICATOR

History :: Economics :: Philosophy :: Current Events

Vol. 1 No. 2

VANCOUVER, B. C., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1919

FIVE CENTS

Ten Minutes' Talk With the Workers

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

The Socialist (Glasgow)

ON opening your newspaper this week you have probably been struck with the amount of space and criticism devoted to the great Labor Conference that is being held at Glasgow. It is to be hoped you take an interest in such proceedings, since, for good or ill, this Annual Congress of Unions indicates in a way how, and in what direction, the trend of opinion in the labor world is moving. No doubt you will say that a great many things said at such a gathering do not truly reflect the real opinions of the men and women of our class supposed to be represented. It is certainly seldom that we are consulted on the questions that are raised, these mostly being put forward by permanent officials, who never take the trouble to ask us what we are thinking on the matter; while many of the loudest talkers have been so long removed from the bench, or shop, that their acquaintance with our actual needs are second-hand.

That, however, is no reason for dismissing the proceedings of such Congresses as of no concern of ours, rather is it a reason why we should not only take a more active interest ourselves but encourage our mates to do the same. This we can do by taking up the most important matters raised at the Conference and discuss them amongst ourselves. It is better we should do that than take our opinions from the ordinary daily or weekly newspapers, which are generally interested in perverting the truth to our disadvantage.

But to be able to appreciate the arguments raised, and to give them justice, it is well that you should have a clear understanding of the purposes, or what we might call the foundations of the Labor movement. I don't know if it is necessary to refer to the absurd suggestion that is often circulated in what we call the

capitalist newspapers, viz., that the Labor movement is the work of agitators whose interests are wrapped up in self-aggrandisement. That in some instances there are such people is quite true. It is also probably true to say that no movement, whatever its denomination or character, can escape the poisonous influence of the type of person who always thinks of number one. But, not to insult your intelligence, while at the same time answering the charges, it is perhaps enough to say that while 50 or 500 people might be fooled for a time, it is absurd to think of a movement numbering 5,000,000 workers, not to speak of the millions in other countries, being maintained and carried on by deception. The "agitators" theory might be described by saying it is a false cry to side-track and divide us against each other, though whatever imposters may be found you would be well advised to give them their notice to quit.

Nor is the Labor movement a philanthropic or charitable institution, carried on by somebody outside ourselves who proposes to do something for us. I hope you have sufficient self-respect to spurn the thought, but you have probably met many of our fellows, as I have done, whose conception of the Labor movement was no higher than a benevolent society to which they might turn for help when in distress. With such people it is very difficult to make real progress since they are so self-possessed. Fortunately, however, there is a different type growing up in our ranks—a self-reliant and dignified type that takes its stand upon the right as workers to control the great forces of social life, which are made possible by our productive efforts in the mines, railways, factories and workshops. With such men and women

it is now clearly recognized that if we are to be free from the harassing conditions of present-day society, we must assert our rights as workers and clear out all who are not prepared to do some kind of social service on behalf of the community.

In other words, and despite the attempts of some of our so-called leaders to prove the contrary, it is becoming self-evident that the roots of our modern Labor movement lie in the economic relations of the classes.

You need not be alarmed at such phraseology, as the "economic relations of the classes." It simply means, that, thanks to our present arrangement of things, you and I, and the class to which we belong, are stripped of all property so far as the tools of wealth production are concerned and, consequently are dependent on another class (our employers) to obtain our living.

In the language of political economists we are the sellers of a particular article of merchandise—our labor-power—while our employers stand opposed to us as buyers. Such is briefly the actual relations of the classes.

It has become fashionable of late for some of our would-be advisers or leaders to discredit this great truth. They go out of their way to try and prove that we are not mere commodities. Putting aside ulterior motives what they really mean is that we, the workers, should not be treated, or bartered about, as so much raw material. What they evidently fail to see is, that a recognition of our commodity status in society does not imply our acceptance of it. Indeed, the basic object of the Labor movement, whether it is consciously recognized or not, is to destroy such a state of affairs as makes the bulk of mankind (the toiling masses) the slaves of the minority.

Despite all arguments to the contrary, the hard fact, that we are only looked upon today and treated as so much raw material for profit-making, forms the pivot of our working-class movement. All attempts to veneer it are doomed to failure. It will persist and be an influence for evil so long as we allow things to go on as they are, i.e., so long as we think our purpose in life is merely to work for wages and be content to leave others to do the "living."

Here, then, is where your responsibility comes in. Assuming you have made up your mind that life offers more than the mere prospect of working for wages that others might live in idleness and luxury; assuming also you are determined to make an end of this system, which compels us to combine in self-defence; you will agree that it is necessary to carry your mates with you. But to carry them with you implies an ability to convince them of the objects for which the Labor movement exists. Now it is quite possible you are deficient in that direction and feel you are not quite able to put up strong arguments. Should such be the case you have no need to despair. At the end of this month will begin the usual run of Social Science classes designed for such as you. If there is one in your district, you can not do better than enrol right away and get better acquainted with the scientific foundations of our working-class movement.

There is no better remedy for getting rid of the sentimental drivel that is often urged as a reason for our claims or demands, than a session of study in the principles of political economy, history, or sociology.

Above all it gives you that power which comes from knowledge, and without which we never can be free.

T. B.

Labor Forces in the United States

IN view of the determined stand of the Steel Trust against any form of organization in the steel industry, even of so reactionary a job-trust as the A. F. of L., a determination which is backed by Financier Morgan, who congratulates Gary on his stand for Liberty, and enforced by all the naked brutality of the steel trust's private army, fully equipped to handle "mass action," "direct action," or any other form of "fool action"; in view, also, of the fear that this is the beginning of war on all unions, it is worth while glancing over the situation of Labor in the United States.

The increasing discontent, due to the pinching of the slave's allowance,

is responsible for much of the ferment we read of, such as the race riots, Boston riots, huge strikes and so forth, though the situation of labor is not at its worst yet, as can be seen by the fact that so many strikes are successful. This shows that a big reserve force of unemployed, is not yet in evidence.

Nevertheless, the stiffening resistance of the employers to the demands for higher wages, and the open campaign against unionism, carried on by such organizations as the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, is causing the more enlightened slaves to agitate for a more concentrated form of organization, able to call out whole communities at one

stroke, instead of seeing their regiments march into battle piece-meal, there to be smashed, when the reserve force of unemployed is large enough and hungry enough to scab. The O. B. U. agitation in the West, inside the A. F. of L., shows the influence of the Canadian move, and also the Australian, and of the Triple Alliance of Great Britain. This movement of an increasing section of labor is bitterly fought by the treacherous fakers controlling the A. F. of L., and it is not likely that their control will be broken until they demonstrate the incapacity of their machine to win or even handle such strikes as the one in Pennsylvania.

There are so-called industrial unions

in existence now, but of no great strength. Most notable are the I. W. W., and the W.I.L.U., children, both of the Socialist Labor Party, and the old Western Federation of Miners. Born in 1905, amid great hopes, the I. W. W. split in 1908, into the two above named groups. Both avow their adherence to the class struggle, and though both are recognized by the Third International, they are bitter rivals.

The greatest success of the I. W. W. has been among the migratory slaves of the West. This class of workers are responsible largely for the O. B. U. agitation inside the A. F. of L.

They are courageous fighters, and have suffered as few groups have for their beliefs. Many rebels have

(Continued On Page Two.)