

ENGINEERS, LABORERS AND EDUCATION*

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EDUCATION is the most important question before the world to-day. I refer to the education of the people of the world to a better appreciation of their fellow-man, and especially to the education of the laboring man to make him appreciate the class who represent capital at their true value and on the other hand, the education of the class who represent capital to appreciate the laborer at his true value.

The object to be gained is to get the laborer and the officer pulling together instead of pulling asunder as they are doing to-day in the majority of cases.

That you may judge for yourselves my right to express opinions on this grave subject, I may tell you that being brought up on an eastern farm, getting my ideas from agricultural and similar papers antagonistic to representatives of capital, you will not wonder when I tell you that as a student, in my freshman year, I was one who hissed a noted professor of political economy when he made statements exactly along the lines my argument will take here to-day, although, I must say in justice, that I do not as yet share in the opinion he expressed of the laboring classes.

Capital not a Monster

There are several reasons why I consider this an appropriate occasion to discuss this subject. I may mention a few. No doubt a number of you are taking up engineering for the principal reason that lack of capital makes it necessary that you make the most of your education and take that course which will make it possible for you to be self-sustaining when you leave the university. You have ideas and theories of your own, and you know from the history of the past five years that there are several well-established theories that are not correct or good for the world. It is necessary that your ideas be sound and true, because you are going to be leaders of men.

I am a firm believer in the theory of the force of mind over matter to the extent that if we think right, we will live right and be right. It appears to me that this statement will be borne out by the fact that we can see for ourselves that socialism and anarchy make most progress in those countries where those forces are able to recruit the greatest number of university students.

How are you going to get the "boss" and the "servant" to pull together? Simply by having more confidence in each other and getting together to discuss each other's plans. I have never changed my ideas of the working man or of his rights. I radically changed my boyhood idea of the hideous monster, "capital," as soon as I realized that this inert body in itself could not destroy me nor do me any harm, and that it was not capital that we had to deal with but rather human beings like ourselves who represent or control capital.

I wish you would get this idea clear, namely, that you are not dealing with any mysterious and hideous monster, but with human beings like yourselves. To my mind, one of the greatest misfortunes of the day is the fact that in the minds of a large number of the laboring class, capital has taken the form of a creature the like of which never did exist, and as a consequence these people believe that they are perfectly justified in any action that they may take in harming or tending to destroy this terrible mythical creature. On the other hand, a large number of those who represent capital think that the laboring class is a lawless band.

We Are All Servants

They are both wrong. The idea that we should live by the "sweat of our brow" has been stated on pretty good authority and that idea seems to prevail very generally, so that as a matter of fact we are all servants, and justly so. It is, therefore, not correct to refer to any class as "the labor-

ing class" when we are all laborers, but that honorable distinction having been conferred on those who work with their hands for wages, I may state that I had the honor to belong to that class until I was 35 years of age.

At the age of 32, after the A.R.U. strike in the United States, I was working as a section foreman on a railroad. Since that time I have had thousands of working men under my direction, and my experience has been that the average working man, as an individual, is just about as intelligent, reasonable and sensible as the individual of any other class, and that he is just as capable of thinking on correct lines as the average citizen; and further, he is just as ready to reason and to think on such lines, if he is properly approached, as he is to listen to the socialism and anarchy which are being pumped into him on all occasions.

How Should Capital be Distributed?

My idea of labor is that every man should to the fullest extent enjoy the fruits of his labor, and that every man who is able and willing to work, and who does work, should receive enough to enable him to live comfortably, to support and educate his family, and in addition to be able to buy some of the so-called "luxuries" of life.

No country or nation can be considered economically sound or as resting on a sure basis if the majority of its population are in a condition verging on starvation. The need of bread has caused the ruin of more governments than any other cause you can mention.

Before you can prescribe a remedy for a difficulty, you should know and study the cause of the trouble. What is the trouble between the so-called "laboring class" and those laborers who represent capital? It is the division of their surplus earnings,—the old story of the division of the spoils. How should surplus earnings, or "capital," as we call it, be distributed? To find the correct answer is our problem, and it is no easy task. I can, however, say without fear of contradiction, that the proper solution will not be found in extremes in either direction.

While I am a firm believer in individualism and the principle of fully rewarding individual exertion, I can see how this principle could be carried to extremes. As an example: Supposing there were no laws restricting the entailing of property or limiting contracts in perpetuity, the humblest man on earth might be able to place one dollar out at 2 per cent. or 3 per cent. compound interest, to create a fund. He could then entail his right to this fund to his oldest next of kin relative, with a provision that the fund should not be touched for twelve or fifteen hundred years. What would be the result? The surplus earning of the world would not pay the annual interest on the fund. This would be an awkward position and one not likely to arise under any system, but it shows what might happen in extreme cases.

Wealth is Chiefly Invested

What are the conditions of to-day? The wealth of the world consists chiefly of plant and developed natural resources, with a small percentage of the medium of exchange, in form of gold and silver, called money. I wish you to get that idea clear, for it does not agree with the idea of the extreme socialist who thinks of the wealthy man as one grabbing all the cash in the world and rolling in money as he is cartooned, while as a matter of fact the slackers arrested in Winnipeg have been found with \$500 to \$1,000 on their person,—more actual cash than the average millionaire ever has at his immediate command.

What does the plant consist of? It consists of our homes, sewers, water-works, roads, railroads, factories, street cars, shops, farms, mills, office buildings, telephones, telegraphs and thousands of other things that contribute and add to the comfort, luxury and happiness of life in this world.

How was this plant created? Almost entirely by individual effort,—by men of master minds who either by themselves or by association with other men, had power and will to create industries that are producing comforts and luxuries for the world and especially for the poorer classes. To-day

*Address delivered recently to the engineering students of the University of Manitoba.