

Replies to Employers' Association.

Editor Evening Telegram.

Dear Sir.—On behalf of the Longshoremen's Protective Union I shall thank you to publish the enclosed reply to the communication of the Employers' Protective Association of the 19th inst.

Yours very truly,
JAMES CAUL,
Secretary L.S.P.U.

August 25th, 1921.

The Employers' Protective Assn.,
City.

Dear Sirs.—On behalf of the Longshoremen's Protective Union I beg to acknowledge receipt of your communication of the 19th inst. I am directed to point out that when the question of remuneration of the worker is discussed from a purely materialistic attitude, and when conclusions are drawn from such a basis as laid down in your communication, it is not at all surprising that there should be social and industrial unrest. In justifying the contention that a reduction in wages should take place, the principle reason advanced may be summed up in one word—business. In other words that the consideration of man as man may have its proper time and place, but it must not be allowed to interfere with the advancement of business and personal gain. A man might grind and crush the poor, pay starvation wages to labour, and yet stand justified by the principles of this system.

When a body of men—many no doubt of education and intelligence—urge as a reason that wages are governed by the economic law of supply and demand, they place the wage earner on the same level as the beast of the field, and if this false and irreligious axiom were once accepted as the determining factor, there remains the sole solution of lessening the number of workmen in a manner similar to that used in reference to cattle. Malthus when he put forward the theory that the earth was over-peopled, and that an artificial reduction of the human race should take place, would have had his declining years brightened had he known that men in this supposed enlightened age would be advocates and exponents of his theory!

The right of a wage earner to a living wage does not at all depend upon such a fluctuating and accidental indicator as that of supply and demand. It is a natural right, and being natural, is prior not only in time, but also in importance to social and economical laws, to laws of commerce and trade, which must necessarily be secondary outgrowths. This natural right is a right which takes precedence over other considerations, excepting a similar right which the employer has to a remuneration, which will enable him and his family to live in reasonable and modern comfort according to their position in life. The Union recognizes the importance to both employer and employee that the continuance and welfare of industry should be consulted. Beyond these concessions, however, there can be no question of profits until a living wage has been paid to the employee.

Concerning the specification of the term "living wage," it may be comprehensively determined as "sufficient to support the wage earner in reasonable and frugal comfort."—a wage, which when all reasonable expenses have been paid for family maintenance, the worker should have a surplus left to provide for days of unemployment and sickness. It is only by acknowledging this natural right to a living wage and the consequent duties which such involves upon employer and employee—for right and duty are co-relative—that proper relations between the two can be maintained. And a solution to the present problem, which is in its very essence at variance with such a fundamental and basic principle as natural law, can tend neither to aid the individual, or give relief to the present troubled state of affairs of our country, to which you apparently attach great importance, but only augment and aggravate the causes which produce such evil effects. The adoption of the theory, which you have enunciated as a basic principle, and which was first propounded by English economists, is the main cause of the vast social discontent to-day so widespread.

Before asserting that your position is erroneous, it would be well to prove the correctness of the minor statement of the premises, viz., that, granting a living wage is justifiable, it is interrogated are the members getting such a wage? There are approximately 400 steam boat labourers. Of this number about 280 obtain employment in loading and discharging steamers, and even those do not earn sufficient from the amount of work performed to furnish the common necessities of life. There are about 1800 fish wharf men, and of that number about 300 are permanently employed, whilst the remaining 1500 manage to procure from two to three days' work a week. Turning aside from the probability of a small reduction amongst a certain class of our Union men employed by you—for there is a possibility of room for discussion upon such a topic—were conditions of employment such as would afford permanent work, and viewing the few statistics given above, can one paying any heed to logical deduction or practical foresight, with

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any semblance of truth, maintain from reasonable conviction that men, and the greater majority of your workers employed but for two or three days in a week, are in a fit position to come to terms dictated by an employer for

a reduction in wages. When you treat of your employees it should not be as a commercial asset, as a puppet for your designs, but as an integral member of society, who possesses a rational soul similar to

yours, one who is subject to human aspirations, hopes and fears as you are, and not as an entity, to whom you may dole out, with a stunted hand, a wage which will only keep body and soul together, and at the same time keep your business running on progressive lines. This sets forward the essence of our contention; it is based upon natural right; it has its root set in principles promulgated and accepted long before the problem of supply and demand—from which you so insidiously draw your conclusions—had begun to agitate the minds of men, long before commerce itself had grown to such a power that it could distort the outlook of man in relation to his fellow creature. Assured that we are arguing from a correct premise, convinced that supply and demand

should not regulate the quantity of a living wage, and putting full trust in the rectitude of our deduction from the major proposition, we feel assured that we are fully justified in taking our present attitude.

Yours truly,
JAMES CAUL,
Secretary L.S.P.U.

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