

Present Industrial Problems

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The Labor movements in both the political and industrial spheres are causing the Governments of many countries considerable concern, for the strength of these movements is great and growing. In Great Britain, the organised workers are more than five millions. In the United States, the American Federation of Labor has a membership of from three to four millions, and, in addition, the more radical Industrial Workers of the World, and other bodies have a considerable and fluctuating membership. The organised workers in Canada number about a quarter of a million, and organisation is proceeding or being attempted in such occupations as Bank and Insurance Clerks, journalists, store assistants, domestic servants and others.

In Great Britain, there are now welcomed into the ranks of the Labor Party all workers whether by hand or brain. Their political strength is rapidly increasing, so that in some quarters it is predicted that they will shortly assume the reins of government.

In Canada, workers by brain as well as by hand are welcomed by the Fifth Sunday Meeting Association which is an organisation for drawing more closely together the brotherhoods of the workers engaged upon the railways. Suggestions are also often made that the workers should cooperate with the Farmers' Party in an endeavour to secure proper political representation if not control.

In the United States, Labor is active in spite of its defeat at the hands of the Steel Manufacturers, and of the consequences of the Court injunction in the case of the strike of the coal miners. Here also labor has determined to take some part in politics, although until recently, it has been averse from such a policy.

It is obvious that the power of Labor through its means of association is no sudden outburst likely to undergo an equally sudden decline. It is also obvious that it possesses clear-cut ideals many of which are capable of being translated into achievement quickly and without any violent reversal of present conditions. Furthermore, organisation, policy, and achievement in one country substantially affect the attitude of labor in another; hence the value of a recital of conditions past and present, prevailing in England, for, by virtue of her early, and, for a time, undisputed supremacy in the industrial field, she has passed through experiences and developments which may be of much more value to other countries.

No less powerful than that of labor, is the rapid organisation of the employers in recent years. Association, in spite of anti-trust laws, has grown apace, and has taken many forms, such as "honorable understandings," pool arrangements, associations for controlling output and fixing prices, employers' federations in order to meet the demands of labor, and finally the Trust. This development, economically sound when the ownership is properly vested and controlled, is, with increasing rapidity, concentrating industrial power into few hands, giving an apparently indefeasible solidity provocative, in some cases, of an attitude of arrogance and intractability. Such an attitude constitutes a menace to that orderly introduction of democratic principles into industry which cannot long be denied, at least in some degree, to the insistent workers.

To a student, whether academically trained, or having practical experience of industrial life, it is obvious that these issues, of more serious import today than others, fall clearly into three classes, namely:

- (1) The recognition of the right of collective bargaining; an issue long conceded in most of the older industrial countries.
- (2) The demand of the workers for specific improvements in the conditions of their work and their wages.

(3) The demand for a democratic share in the control of industry. This demand comes in different degrees for different industries, and also according to the view prevailing, whether conservative or radical. In many industries, the workers are prepared to accept a joint share in the control of industry. In others, it is held that the industries are ripe for national ownership with operation in large part under the control of the workers. Those with more radical views hold that all industry should be owned by the community.

No age can escape the necessity of finding solutions for its own particular problems. The weightiest of those of our day is the problem of fusing into one co-operative whole the contentious interests and parties in industry which industry itself has created. Such an aim can be achieved only by constructive progress, not by destructive revolutionary methods, and still less by efforts or inaction tending towards reaction. Constructive progress postulates a desire to retain all that is good in our institutions, replacing that which is bad only after careful study and test of that which is proposed as fit for substitution.

But study and test, no matter how may be the conclusions which flow therefrom, are of little value in themselves unless the master masses of Democracy will support the conclusions. A support, stable in character, can only be counted on as a result of conviction arising from knowledge and debate.

Here, then, plainly lies the duty of the individual—to seek to know and then to pass judgment upon the problems confronting him. Difficulties may be met in the search,—difficulties from ill-advised suppression of the truth, or hindrances to free speech; but, none the less, the duty is plain. For the preservation of Democracy itself, let us hope that this duty may be performed.

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