

A BIOGRAPHY OF LABOR

By Andrew Furuseth, President International Seamen's Union

What is this thing called the "Labor Question," what does it mean? In what relation does it stand to social evolution based upon the teachings of Christianity? The status of the laborer in pre-Christian times was that of a slave. The concept was part of the religion, the origin of human life; and the duties arising herefrom. Substantially there was a Roman period but two kinds of men—the master, the heaven-born, who was sent from the gods to govern, to teach and to pray; and those who were born of the earth—earth-born—and who had no souls to be saved or damned. To the master class—the heaven-born—the worker was about the same as the domestic animals are to us, and so, at about the time of the advent of the Nazarene, there was roughly about 7 per cent. of free men—men sent from the gods—and about 93 per cent. slaves. Rome had conquered all possible enemies. It had made slaves of the conquered people and had used them to destroy the old Roman system of labor, which had made Rome the mistress of the then known world. It had suppressed three serious rebellions. It had the great mass of humanity—as we should say—at its absolute mercy, and mercy there was none.

The labor question, or the labor struggle is the Christian ideal seeking to enter upon the industrial field to transform it into its own image. The Roman society was like hammered steel. It was difficult to bend, more difficult to break; but bent or even broken, it remained steel. It



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them came at times religious teachers and political champions, sometimes as individuals, who had ceased to fear for themselves, and sometimes as warriors, who could sense realities, and who thus obtained the needed following.

A tremendous stimulus was given to the spread of knowledge by the invention of the printing press and to the imagination by finding the sea-way to India and the discovery of the American continent. Wealth undreamed of was to be had for the taking in both these new worlds. The adventurers took it in one way or another. It set new standards, developed new hopes, created new ambitions. The wealth, of course, could not help being distributed, at least to some extent. But the more important fact is that the trade routes were altered as well as the visible wealth increased. Nations in Europe fought over the trade and the routes and especially over the terminals of the routes.

England became the country where the aspirations toward political equality were permitted to grow. The house of commons maintained the power over the purse and had, therefore, the bases upon which to bargain with the king. It, the house of commons, laid down the maxim: "First redress of grievances then furnish supplies." This was opened the way for peaceful political evolution. On the continent the peaceful way had been closed, and there it had come through revolution and bloodshed. Through it all the third estate was rising into power, and it burst through all obstructions in the French Revolution. A new power—the money power—was rising and trying to take charge of the world. A temporary success, then, a temporary suppression, then the peace and the Holy Alliance—built to close the way for the new power.

When the spiritual and temporal powers came together and shackled all else, especially the manual workers, the feudal magnates insisted upon having right over life and death of the peasants, who were on their lands. Of course, land was of little use without workers on it, and since the masters had the power, why, indeed, should they not use it to tie the worker to the soil in real fact? It was done to defend the workers, or to show them how they might defend themselves. Their old leaders had for the time being turned against them. Just then there opened at least a slight chance of escape through migration to the new world. Of course they would be serfs there, too. They would be working under a binding contract to labor, but at least there was some hope, some perhaps. At least they might worship God in their own way, and then perhaps they might be able to buy themselves clear in some way at some time. Others went to the new world for other reasons, but mostly they went to find more freedom. The government—the system—however, followed them. But they—the workers—were not the only ones to complain.

The condition became more and more unbearable, and so the settlers came together and issued the Declaration of Independence, that document in which we find all that is really American and also much that is really anti-American—that is things of which they complain and to remove which they entered upon the Revolution, which was to end by the world accepting as American those things or ideas which the Americans in their hour of travail had promised to themselves were to form the foundation of the new nation. And behold, it is the fundamental Christian ideal, that men are born free and equal, that there is no distinction before God, nor sought there to be any in the State, nor properly speaking, ought there to be any in industry.

The policy of America is built upon individual freedom and equality of rights. America has, for economic reasons and probably very wisely, permitted the creation of supermen—corporations—substantially immortal, omnipotent and immortal. Through this creation it has been possible for the men controlling them to get possession of the nation's natural resources and such natural forces as the inventive gen-

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us of man has harnessed far man's use. It has resulted in immense fortunes, in political control and in such absolute industrial control as to destroy American liberty and equality of rights. This power, sometimes called the money power, controls the press through advertising and stock ownership, it controls, alas! too many of the churches through the pew, the legal profession, through fees and place, the universities, through endowments, and the common school through the school boards. It is rewriting the poets of the past, or suppressing them through the great publishing houses. It is reaching out for the spiritual power through control over public opinion. It seeks to prevent any general organization of labor through the so-called American plan, which is borrowed from the feudal magnates of Europe, invented by them and imposed upon a helpless people some two hundred years before Columbus found the West Indies. This power seeks to segregate labor into groups which can be cajoled, chloroformed or bludgeoned into submission pending the imposition of some philosophy, possibly from India that shall take away even the desire for an independent Christian life.

They speak of buying and selling labor power. Why speak they not of buying and selling God? They can if they so desire buy and sell that which God created—the result of the creative power in activity. The labor power of a man is the creative power in man, and if the Nararene be right, then that power is divine, because man is made in the image of God, and is the son of God. So much from a Christian point of view. What of the American policy? It says that man is free, that freedom is inalienable, that the State can not deprive any person of freedom except as a penalty from transgressing again and by so doing endangering the freedom of others. He has the right "peacefully to assemble," to worship, to freely speak and print and none may say him nay, he being held responsible for what he may say or print. Thus, it was ordained by America prior to the creation of the superman, who being himself the creature of the American people and to attempt it to violate the solemn promise which it, in its hour of travail, made to itself, and thus to incur the penalty visited upon those who sin against the Holy Ghost.

They—the money power—fearing that the worker may resist too strongly, if organized to assist each other, to practice mutual aid, and to bear each other's burdens, seek to deprive the workers of their rights as citizens by denying to them the full use of the rights and the freedom guaranteed by fundamental Americanism. By controlling wages it determines whether the toiler shall marry or not, and if he has the temerity to marry, it determines the kind of food that the wife and children shall eat, where they shall be clothed and how they shall be sheltered. By controlling the hours of labor it determines how often the toiler shall see the wife and children, if he hath them. In other words, it is in his home, it sleeps with him in his bed, sits with him at his table, and follows him to the friendly society and watches over him there, follows him to his trade-union and watches over him there through the employment of detective agencies, or otherwise. It follows him to the polls, because it is very important how he votes, and it exercises such control that at last America was compelled to establish the secret ballot. It goes with him to the church and watches over him, endeavoring to control the preacher's sermon. The power of kings were as nothing compared to this, and the so-called open shop is an important part of this by isolating the individual, the "American plan," is part of this by isolating the group.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS URGE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The general level of wages should not be lowered. "It is to be hoped that the right of labor to organize and deal with the employers through chosen representatives will never be called in question by any considerable number of employers." Labor ought gradually to receive greater representation in the industrial part of business management. Such statements as these are brought out prominently in the new Summary of the Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction issued by the Washing-

ton office of the National Catholic Welfare Council.

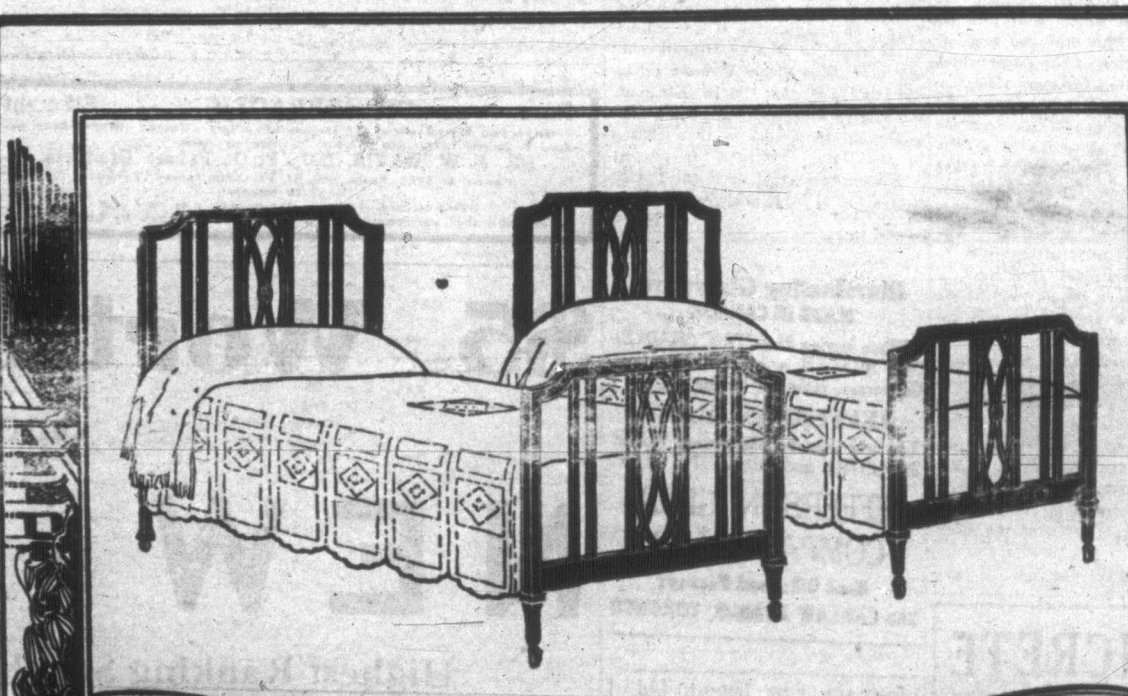
The original document was issued on Lincoln's birthday, 1919, by the Bishops who formed the Administrative Committee of the National Catholic War Council. Since its publication it has been frequently pointed out as one of the most authoritative programs of reconstruction written. The Summary gives the Bishops' program in shorter form and in a more modern style to present needs.

Other statements are included concerning the right to a decent liv-

ing wage, the legal minimum wage, conciliation and arbitration, women workers, co-operative societies, a federal employment service and housing question. Social insurance is recommended as well as public health clinics and vocational education. A system of land colonization carried out by the United States government and the states is also advocated.

The program states that while the arrival of the common ownership is improbable and also undesirable, the present system stands in grievous need of considerable modification and improvement.

are declared to be: "Enormous inefficiency and waste in the production and distribution of commodities; insufficient income for the great majority of wage earners; the unnecessarily large incomes for a small minority of privileged capitalists." For each of these defects specific recommendations are advocated, the heart of which are co-operative distributive organizations among consumers and farmers, and industry, a condition in which the majority will be the owners, or at least in part, of the instruments of production.



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