

# A Striking Picture From the Workingman's Viewpoint

In a recent number of *The Public*, Louis F. Post's paper, a striking article written by Thornton West was published. *The Commoner* reproduces this article in full: It follows:

## AS WORKINGMEN MUST SEE IT

Are there two kinds of law in the United States—one for the rich man and one for the poor man? Are the petty thief and the poor criminal to be promptly and adequately punished, while the rich thief and the powerful criminal go unpunished, save for an occasional fine during the stress of aroused public opinion? Are members of organized labor to be prosecuted for capital crimes on dubious testimony, while rich and powerful mine-owners can bribe legislatures, can appoint governors and state supreme court judges, can openly, defiantly, and violently trample under foot state and federal laws, and with the aid of governor and militia—the latter confessedly in the pay of the mine-owners—suspend the writ of habeas corpus, nullify all civil law, depose civil officers, deport citizens, suppress newspapers, destroy property, and create "lawful" anarchy—with absolute impunity and without even a pretense of prosecution by state or federal authority?

From the viewpoint of organized labor and its sympathizers, those questions constituted the real issue in the Boise trial. This fact explains the deep and widespread suspicion and the expressed bitterness against "the state"—that is, the prosecution—in the Boise trial, and the denunciation of President Roosevelt for his untimely and unfortunate classification of the three accused men as "undesirable citizens."

It is "dangerous" and "unpatriotic" to minimize the revelations of the trial at Boise. Yet the labor troubles in Colorado and in Idaho are different only in degree from what happened in the street railway strike at San Francisco, from what happened in the Homestead tragedy, in the anthracite coal mining strikes, in the railway union strike at Chicago, and in a hundred other strikes of less impression on the public memory.

On the part of organized labor, what is the meaning of this unmistakable lack of faith in law and government, of this too ready resort to primitive and barbaric methods to obtain justice—as its members see it? On the part of organized capital, what is the meaning of this generally insidious, but when necessary, flagrant and defiant violation and usurpation of law and government? Surely, it is not merely a contention between employers and employes as to whether or not wages shall be temporarily increased or reduced?

Is not the present attitude of organized capital and of organized labor the outgrowth of a different method of doing business on a large scale, of a different spirit in industrial and in commercial enterprises—the different method and the different spirit being the product of the marvelous growth of corporations, especially of trusts?

Professedly, a trust is formed to reduce the cost of production and to establish and to maintain prices that will be just and fair to consumer and to producer alike. In reality, a trust is formed to crush out competition, to control the supply of the raw material and of the finished product, to reduce wages, to make the price of the product as high as the public will stand, and to limit the disbursement of profits to as few persons as is practicable—in short, to prey on the necessities of the people, to subordinate humanity to money.

Are not the violence of labor troubles in the last twenty-five years, and the almost universal and unanimous condemnation of the high-handed methods of railroads and all other monopolistic corporations—are not these an expression of a profound popular discontent caused by the glaring injustice of special privilege on the one side, and of constantly lessening industrial opportunity on the other?

Is not President Roosevelt's wonderful popularity due to the fact that he has called a halt on the abuse of corporate power, and has demanded at least the regulation of a few special privileges?

Are not the bitterness of organized labor and the strong popular feeling against monopolistic corporations potent proof that the world-old struggle is now being waged in this country more openly and more fiercely than ever before—the struggle between those who earn without getting and those who get without earning?

Do not the masses of the American people plainly see that now, as never before in our history, all men are not equal before the law?

It is universal knowledge that the officers of three of the largest insurance-companies in the world used trust-funds for speculative purposes, opened their treasuries to the devotees of "high finance," to the Wall Street sheep shearers—all for greed, for private gain. Not even one offender has been punished.

The few men that autocratically control the railroads of the country have brazenly violated law and equity, have treated the public with defiant insolence, and have maintained lobbies to corrupt state legislatures and congress. Yet the railroads owe their very existence to special privileges granted by the people; and every dollar used to build, to equip, and to operate the roads has been furnished by the people, directly or indirectly.

These same railroad autocrats have "won" hundreds of millions of dollars by juggling railroad stock in Wall Street, while the service and the equipment of the roads were not capable of handling the freight offered them. There is no record of any stock manipulator or railroad president being punished.

"Watering stock" is a favorite pastime of "high finance." Watering stock is but another name for stealing; it is taking money and giving nothing for it. Yet it places a heavy secret tax on the American people and their posterity. All of these hundreds of millions of fiat stock must pay dividends, and the American people will do the paying in the name of legitimate earnings but in fact for extortionate charges. A small group of men, dealing in public utilities and domestic necessities, have made hundreds of millions by watering stock. No stock-waterer, no dealer in fictitious property, has yet seen the inside of a prison, by operation of law.

The prices of nearly all the necessities and the commodities of life are arbitrarily fixed by trusts. As a trust means no competition—absolute control of the supply—the American people have no other course open to them than to submit to being "lawfully" robbed. Notwithstanding his hold-up methods of money making, the trust magnate continues to be an eminently respectable and exemplary citizen.

The American people have been plucked of hundreds of millions of dollars by means of the "Dingley bill," a protective tariff law passed by a pre-election bribed congress, in consideration of the munificent contributions in the first McKinley-Bryan campaign—a bargain and sale that has no parallel in history for its audacity in deliberately taxing all the people for the benefit of the few.

After "swollen fortunes" had been taken from the pockets of the people, the "Dingley bill" promoters and beneficiaries formed trusts, created monopolies, and wound up by issuing hundreds of millions of stock without adding a dollar to the actual value of the plants.

By the judicious use of a small percentage of this special privilege tax, the "protective" tariff beneficiaries have been successful, up to date, in keeping congress in a "stand pat" attitude, and the special taxation of all the people for the benefit of the few still goes industriously and merrily on.

There is no more bitter sarcasm nor mocking humor than the tariff beneficiaries' plea that the "protective" tariff is for the protection of the American workingman. It is true that the American workingman has wrested from employers higher wages than ever before; but this is through the efforts and the sacrifices of organized labor. It is true that he is better fed, better clothed, and better housed than those of his own class and occupation in other countries; but he is a much more competent and valuable workman than the foreign wage laborer.

Nevertheless the American workingman is worried, and he has been led to do some thinking and investigating; first, because 14,000,000 girls and women in the United States find it necessary to labor; second, because his share of "unprecedented prosperity" does not abide with him, but is taken from him by the greatly increased cost of living—the tariff-protected trusts being the largest beneficiaries of this increased cost.

He sees that there are two distinct classes of citizens; the producing class and the exploiting class. He sees the shining lights of "high finance," of stock-watering, of public franchise huckstering, of special privilege, and of graft

of all kinds and degrees, lined up in the front ranks of the exploiting class—the class that has added nothing to the nation's happiness or to its material welfare, but that has debauched private and public morals at home and has disgraced the nation abroad.

He sees the stock-jugglers, the stock-waterers, the trust magnates, the tariff-tax beneficiaries, the special privilege recipients, parading their evidence of unlimited wealth. He sees them contributing with princely liberality to churches, to libraries, to colleges—to popularize and to perpetuate the present system of protective tariff, trusts, and "high finance." He sees them with their villas and their castles at home and abroad, their public postoffices within their private grounds, their private cars, their yachts, their banks, their railroads, their newspapers, their lobbies in and out of the legislatures and of congress. He sees them on intimate terms with law makers and federal judges, even hobnobbing with royalty. He sees all this, and he feels that he pays a large part of the toll, very much against his will.

He is not envious of the so-called plutocrats because they have "lots of money;" but he is convinced that lots of their money is other people's money, for which they gave no value and to which they have no moral right.

He has learned that if he steals \$50, he goes to the penitentiary; but that the man who steals millions is admitted into "high finance" and is heralded as a foremost American. He has found that if he violates the injunction of a court, he goes to jail, and his home is sold to pay the court's costs; but that when the corporation magnate violates an injunction, he gives bond and goes free.

He has learned that when a corporation is the complainant, federal judges are not only prompt to assume jurisdiction, but only too often they assume also the spirit of the prosecutor.

He sees the leading business men of the country placing pride of self above pride of self. He sees them proclaiming and exemplifying the heresy that the dollar is the standard of success, and that this success is the standard of character, of worth.

He hears himself patronizingly asked to accept a "full dinner pail" in lieu of a full share of civic rights and full opportunities in life.

He has discovered that the devotees of "high finance" have two systems of arithmetic. When they buy, they estimate the cost of labor, material, and machinery, by the formula of 2 and 2 make 4; but when they capitalize to sell stocks and bonds, it is 2 and 2 make 22.

He is told by the railroads that the rails made and sold by the steel trust at exorbitant, protective tariff prices—are defective, and are continually breaking, thus causing railroad wrecks, and daily and hourly endangering the lives of thousands of people; and he is told by the railroads that the tariff-protected steel trust monopoly turns out these defective rails so as to save money—the money going to pay dividends on hundreds of millions of watered stock. But no one in authority has even suggested that the steel trust rail makers are criminally responsible.

The government itself tells him the railroads, congressmen, senators, and men of large wealth have conspired to defraud the people of thousands of acres of valuable mining and timber lands, but he sees one of these very senators at the head of the prosecution of the mine union leaders of Colorado.

He sees corporation lawyers appointed to federal judgeships. He sees corporation lawyers in the federal cabinet. He sees cabinet officers go direct from the administration to become intimately associated with Wall Street leaders of "high finance."

He has been given ample evidence that even the United States senate, the highest law making body of the nation—and the body that confirms the appointments of all federal judges—is controlled, when necessary, by senators elected to represent railroad trusts, tariff-beneficiaries, and other special privilege recipients.

Then, too, he has learned that newspapers are selling their columns, even their editorial columns, to those who fatten on special privileges, and who rob and oppress the people—"lawfully."

Seeing and knowing these things, he feels that there is something radically wrong in the system of economy that brings forth, and in the