

Labor's Protest to Congress

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The workers ask from congress the relief which it alone can give from the injustice which will surely result from the literal enforcement of the Sherman anti-trust law as interpreted by this decision. The speedy enactments of labor's proposed amendment to the Sherman anti-trust law will do much to restore the rights of which the toilers have been shorn.

We submit for consideration, and trust the same will be enacted, two provisions amendatory of the Sherman anti-trust law, which originally were a part of the bill during the stages of its consideration by the senate and before its final passage, and which are substantially as follows:

"That nothing in said act (Sherman anti-trust law) or in this act is intended nor shall any provision thereof hereafter be enforced so as to apply to organizations or associations not for profit and without capital stock, nor to the members of such organizations or associations."

"That nothing in said act (Sherman anti-trust law) or in this act is intended nor shall any provision thereof hereafter be enforced so as to apply to any arrangements, agreements, or combinations among persons engaged in agriculture or horticulture made with a view of enhancing the price of their own agricultural or horticultural products."

It is clearly an unwarranted assumption on the part of the courts or others to place the voluntary associations of the workers in the same category as trusts and corporations owning stock and organized for profit.

On the one hand, we have the trusts and corporations dealing with purely material things and mostly with the inanimate products of labor. On the other hand, there are the workers whose labor power is part of their very lives and beings, and which can not be differentiated from their ownership in and of themselves.

The effort to categorically place the workers in the same position as those who deal in the products of labor of others is the failure to discern between things and man.

It is often flippantly averred that labor is a commodity, but modern civilization has clearly and sharply drawn the line between a bushel of coal, a side of pork and the soul of a human, breathing, living man.

The enactment of the legislation which we ask will tend to so define and safeguard the rights of the workers of today and those who will come after them, that they may hope to continue to enjoy the blessings of a free country as intended by the founders of our government.

In the relief asked for in the proposed amendment to the Sherman anti-trust law which we present to congress, labor asks for no special privileges and no exemption from the treatment which any law-abiding citizen might hope to receive in a free country.

Indeed, the present parliament of Great Britain at its session in December, 1906, enacted into law what is known as the trades dispute act. It is brief and we therefore quote its provisions in full:

"1. It shall be lawful for any person or persons acting either on their own behalf or on behalf of a trade union or other association of indi-

viduals, registered or unregistered, in contemplation of or during the continuance of any trade dispute, to attend for any of the following purposes at or near a house or place where a person resides or works, or carries on his business, or happens to be (1) for the purpose of peacefully obtaining or communicating information; (2) for the purpose of peacefully persuading any person to work or abstain from working.

"2. An agreement or combination by two or more persons to do or procure to be done any act in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute shall not be ground for an action, if such act when committed by one person would not be ground for an action.

"3. An action shall not be brought against a trade union or other association aforesaid for the recovery of damage sustained by any person or persons by reason of the action of a member or members of such trade union or other association aforesaid."

We submit that if such relief from the onerous conditions brought about by the Taff-Vale decision of the highest court of Great Britain can be enacted by a monarchical government, there ought to be no hesitancy in conceding it in our own republic.

The unions of labor aim to improve the standard of life; to uproot ignorance and foster education; to instil character, manhood, and an independent spirit among our people; to bring about a recognition of the interdependence of man upon his fellowman. We aim to establish a normal work-day; to take the children from the factory and workshop and give them the opportunity of the schools, the home, and the playground. In a word, our unions strive to lighten toil, educate their members, make their homes more cheerful, and in every way contribute an earnest effort toward making life the better worth living. To achieve these praiseworthy ends, we believe that all honorable and lawful means are justifiable and commendable, and should receive the sympathetic support of every right-thinking American.

Labor asks only for justice. It asks that it be not victimized and penalized under laws never intended to apply to it.

We hope for a prompt recognition on the part of congress of the wage-workers' very reasonable and moderate insistence in this important matter.

In addition, the other most important measures which labor urges are: The bill to regulate and limit the issuance of injunctions—"Pearre bill."

Employers' liability bill. The bill extending the application of the eight hour law to all government employees, and those employed upon work for the government, whether by contractors or sub-contractors.

There are other measures pending which we regard as important, but we feel especially justified in urging the passage of those mentioned, because they have been before congress for several sessions, and upon which extended hearings have been had before committees, every interest concerned having had ample opportunity to present arguments, and there is no good reason why action should longer be deferred by congress.

We come to congress hoping for a prompt and adequate remedy for the grievances of which we justly complain. The psychological moment has arrived for a total change of governmental policy toward the workers; to permit it to pass may be to invite disaster even to our national life.

In this frank statement of its grievances the attitude of labor should not be misinterpreted, nor should it be held as wanting in respect for our highest law-making body.

That the workers, while smarting under a most keen sense of injustice and neglect, turn first to congress for a remedy, shows how greatly they still trust in the power and willingness of this branch of the government to restore, safe-guard, and protect their rights.

Labor proposes to aid in this work by exercising its utmost political and industrial activity, its moral and social influence, in order that the interests of the masses may be represented in congress by those who are pledged to do justice to labor and to all our people, not to promote the special interests of those who would injure the whole body politic by crippling and enslaving the toilers.

Labor is most hopeful that congress will appreciate the gravity of the situation which we have endeavored to present. The workers trust that congress will shake off the apathy which has heretofore characterized it on this subject, and perform a beneficent social service for the whole people by enacting such legislation as will restore confidence among the workers that their needs as law-abiding citizens will be heeded.

Only by such action will a crisis be averted. There must be something more substantial than fair promises. The present feeling of wide-spread apprehension among the workers of our country becomes more acute every day. The desire for decisive action becomes more intense.

While it is true that there is no legal appeal from a supreme court decision, yet we believe congress can and should enact such further legislation as will more clearly define the rights and liberties of the workers.

Should labor's petition for the righting of the wrongs which have been imposed upon it and the remedying of injustice done to it pass unheeded by congress and those who administer the affairs of our government—then upon those who have failed to do their duty, and not upon the workers will rest the responsibility.

The labor union is a natural, rational, and inevitable outgrowth of our modern industrial conditions. To outlaw the union in the exercise of its normal activities for the protection and advancement of labor and the advancement of society in general, is to do a tremendous injury to all people.

The repression of right and natural activities is bound to finally break forth in violent form of protest, especially among the more ignorant of the people, who will feel great bitterness if denied the consideration they have a right to expect at the hands of congress.

As the authorized representatives of the organized wage-earners of our country, we present to you in the most conservative and earnest manner this protest against the wrongs which they have to endure and some of the rights and relief to which they are justly entitled. There is not a wrong for which we seek redress, or a right to which we aspire which does not or will not be equally shared by all the workers—by all the people.

While no member of congress or party can evade or avoid his or their own individual or party share of responsibility, we aver that the party in power must and will by labor and its sympathizers be held primarily responsible for the failure to give the prompt, full and effective congressional relief we know to be within its power.

We come to you not as political partisans, whether republican, democratic or other, but as representatives of the wage-workers of our

country whose rights, interests and welfare have been jeopardized and flagrantly, woefully disregarded and neglected. We come to you because you are responsible for legislation, or the failure of legislation. If these, or new questions, are unsettled and any other political party become responsible for legislation, we shall press home upon its representatives and hold them responsible, equally as we now must hold you.

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