

"ON TO WASHINGTON."

This Should be the Rallying Cry of Disinherited Labor.

A "CRANKS" ADVICE TO WORKINGMEN.

The Sleek Hypocrites and Robbers who Misrepresent the People at Washington Need a Lesson.

Ideas of a Radical Reformer.

One evening in the spring of 1886 I made a speech to an audience which packed Platt's hall in San Francisco from the back of the stage to the front doors on Montgomery street. There were other speakers early in the evening, and much that was interesting and instructive upon the labor question had been uttered from the platform. It will be remembered that the country was very much upset at that time over what the plutocratic press delights to call "labor disturbances." The big strike on the Gould roads centering in St. Louis was the chief "disturbance," and indignation was running strong among the workingmen and their friends over the advertisement Gould's representatives had inserted in the papers of St. Louis and other cities for men to guard their property "who will shoot to kill." Everything was at white heat in railroad centers and several strikers had been shot down by Pinkerton thugs in East St. Louis.

Congress was in session at the time, and from all over the land the cry went up for some kind of action by that body which would protect the citizens of the country from the greed and cruelty of the robber railroad barons. In my speech on the evening referred to I called attention to the indifference of the people's representatives at a time when the very existence of order was threatened and when railroad magnates had assumed the power to control the destinies of whole business communities and the lives of oppressed industrials. I dwelt upon the necessity of the common people asserting themselves at the ballot box and thereby securing a congress which could be relied upon to arise to an emergency such as then confronted us and to defend the right of the people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

As I paused in my remarks to wipe the perspiration from my face a tall, middle aged man, who looked like an intelligent, quiet mechanic, arose from his place near the middle of the lower floor and inquired if he might say something. Of course I assented, and then he said as nearly as I can remember: "All you say about the duty the people owe to themselves as voters is all right, and I hope that another election day will find the workingmen of this country giving evidence that they have learned some sense, but the present situation is imminent—it will not wait for election day to creep around. What shall we do now? Give us a practical suggestion for immediate application. The present congress is composed of our servants. How can we compel them to do their duty? How can we arouse them from the stupor into which they have apparently been lulled by the drugs administered by plutocracy?"

I recall today the reply I made to that man's impassioned inquiry more than seven years ago because it appears to me to contain the advice I would give now if a body of earnest workingmen should appeal to me. I said to my California friend: "Go out from here and construct a transparency and paint upon it in bold letters the words, 'On to Washington!' Tomorrow morning at sunrise start down Market street, with your face set toward the rising sun, and call upon the idle and starving workingmen to fall in behind you. Cross the ferry, then on over the plains, the mountains, the valleys, the hills and the rivers that lie between here and the nation's capital, gathering the hosts of the plundered as you go, pausing not unnecessarily until you stand with the millions around you at the doors of the magnificent pile within whose walls sit the traitors and dawdlers who have turned deaf ears to your appeals for relief. Tell them that in the name of millions who have been robbed of their birthrights, the enforced idlers who are begging for an opportunity to work and to obtain justice—the women and children who are crying for bread, by the blood of those who have been butchered by the minions of plutocracy at East St. Louis, by all these and in the name of every wrong suffered by the disinherited of this our once fair land you demand immediate action upon the part of your congress looking to substantial relief. And let them not go forth from that building until they have given you some show of justice!"

This, I say, is substantially the advice I have to offer the workingmen of the country today. You may take it figuratively or literally, but that it contains the germ of the true remedy for the awful conditions which surround and confront you I am convinced. The situation in which the common people of the country find themselves placed today is many times more terrible than that of 1886. *Examiner* 1877 have the surroundings. If those who live by their labor have so deplorable, and unless all signs fail even that hard year will be eclipsed by what

we shall have to endure between this time and next spring. Mills, mines and factories are shutting down all over the land. Since the first of June hundreds of thousands of enforced idlers have joined the ranks of the nearly 2,000,000 who were then out of work, and the end is not yet. The majority of those concerns which continue operations do so by shortening time or reducing wages.

It is no longer a struggle between the factory owner and his operatives. The old trades union plans of compelling fair wages and just conditions from the employer will not avail now. Generally speaking, employers are in as tight a box as the laborers are. It is true they are not in any immediate danger of starving or of being turned into the streets. But we must be just in our conclusions, and if we are we will admit that with some exceptions manufacturers cannot continue business under the arrangements which were in force six months ago. "Business is dead," said a traveling man to me the other day. "In ten days' travel over what has up to now been a good territory I did not sell enough goods to pay my transportation and hotel bills." When asked why this was so, he said merchants were not buying because they had not been able to sell the stocks they put in three months ago and that the prospects around them look very black.

Here, then, is the situation: The stores and warehouses are full of manufactured articles, and the granaries are full of food, but the consumers are without the means to purchase more than enough for bare subsistence, and so further production means to those who are still holding on only more accumulations. Plants and stocks are mortgaged, just as farms and houses are fettered. Wealth has increased during recent years at an abnormal rate. There is plenty in the country, and the sources are inexhaustible with industry applied. Yet hunger, starvation, stare the millions in the face, and the future is as black as a starless midnight. Why should this anomalous situation confront us? Here you have the question to which many answers are given, but there can be but one correct answer. Poverty exists with the majority because the wealth created by organized society is owned or controlled by the minority. That is all there is to it.

He who denies that truth sets himself down knave or fool. It is when we come to consider how a few became possessed of the results of the joint efforts of all that men honestly differ in their opinions. And again there is a common ground upon which nearly all can meet. All honest and intelligent men will agree that, generally speaking, the conditions which surround us are the result of legislation. I do not mean to say that every case of poverty is directly traceable to the enactments of congress and the legislatures, but I do claim and can prove that every millionaire in this country is so because of the protection thrown around his operations by man made laws. There are those who will admit the truth of that assertion, but will argue that the laws are just and afford equal opportunities to all. This I deny emphatically, but I will admit that there are some honest people who are silly enough to believe that it is mainly true.

The daily press and "leading financiers and business men" agree at this time that our present condition is the result of legislation and that succor can come only through congressional action. These plutocrats take only a superficial view of the situation and see only the "disturbance to business," but they see the power of legislation. Those who see below the surface and witness the misery of the masses accept the remedy, but demand that the patient receive more than homoeopathic doses. Here, then, is the situation: Congress, which is in session, has the power to give us relief and to start us on the highroad to recovery. If the plutocratic editors and business men dictate the action, it will be trivial and the result doubtful. If Wall street and the eastern press have their way, it will mean disaster and death to our hopes of a brighter future. Should the voice of the common people, the nation's producers, be heard in the halls of congress, there are brighter days ahead.

Now, then, is the opportunity of the hosts of labor. "On to Washington!" should be the cry. You cannot all go in person. Then send your representatives, as many as can and will go. Let them gather by the thousands at the nation's capital, bearing nothing in their hands but the credentials of the oppressed millions, with no harsher words in their mouths than those of petition, with no feeling in their hearts but hope. Let them say to congress and the president: "All agree that you have the power. You assume the knowledge. We are not here to argue about details—we leave you to decide—but you must decide quickly and correctly. We have taken a leaf out of the book of our Belgian brothers, and we shall expect you to give us justice."

"Wall street, the Rothschilds, English money bags and the creditor class generally will be represented at Washington. They never miss a session. But it might so happen that the novelty of labor being there would make it the honored guest of the nation, and congress might find time to listen to its request. Politicians and press have been telling us for months that there must be a special session of congress to devise ways 'to protect our farmers and workingmen.' The farmers and wageworkers ask pardon if they feel compelled to put some but honest men on guard and hence refuse to allow the

politician and the plutocratic editor to do duty for them. These sleek hypocrites have been trusted several times too often already. Labor must speak now for itself while it can command attention. They are the robbed. They must not trust their case to the hands of the robbers.

"What does all this nonsense amount to?" I think I hear some well-fed office-holding labor politician say. It is not nonsense, but the most logical suggestion I can think of to follow up what my fellows have been telling us for years. When we have said that labor must cut loose from the old parties and make a party of its own and put it in power if it hoped to secure justice in the halls of legislation, you fellows have said: "No; that is impracticable as well as unnecessary. We can do better by remaining in the balance of power. Then we can dictate what legislation we want and get it." Now, I propose that we find out if there is any truth in what you have said. We never before had a congress or a president that was so generally credited as the result of "labor's uprising at the polls." Let us see if the voice of labor can be heard by that congress and that president over the hissing of the usurious reptile. The power is seated now in Washington. No quibbling over schedules and "parties" will fill the bill, and congress knows it—if it knows enough to hold its job. Let it know that labor means business, and we shall see what we shall see.

It looks as if unemployed, hungry labor intuitively knew in what direction to look for help. It is tramping toward the east. From the closed mines and unprofitable fields of the west it is coming like a stormcloud, gathering strength as it travels. Would it be unfit if it should settle around upon the lawn which encompasses the capital building? Where would they sleep and what would they eat? you ask. Where do they sleep now? By the roadside, in sheds, in empty box cars and under haystacks. What do they eat now? What the good hearted people on their line of march give them. We are told that the government vaults are full of silver dollars. They are said to be despised (by financiers, I suppose), but there are millions of farmers who will exchange breadstuffs and other life-sustaining articles for these dollars, and I haven't heard my butcher and groceryman refuse to accept one in exchange for wares. The poor and needy who gather in Washington might take the hoarded dollars to buy food and clothing and then use the empty vaults for sleeping rooms. Give them the money? Oh, no! Do it give the poor, starving wretches anything. Make them work for what they receive. Put them to making roads, building dikes, anything, but don't let them starve—and don't make fiends of them.

It isn't a new experience to me to be called a "crank" and a "demagogue," and I anticipate the reception many will give this letter by saying right here that I don't care a continental what you call me, and I say further that the workingman who refuses to join a movement to demand full and exact justice from the congress now in session, and failing to receive it continues to wear the collar of either the democratic or republican party, is a fool and deserves to get the worst of it clear to the end of the game. Ignorance may have answered as an excuse for you so far, but if you are outside of a lunatic asylum now it is either on to the poorhouse or on to Washington.

JOSEPH R. BUCHANAN.

A Plea for the Unemployed.

At the mass meeting held Thursday night at the court house to give expression to the general sentiment of approval of Hon. W. J. Bryan's magnificent speech in congress delivered against the unconditional repeal of the Sherman law, the following memorial was unanimously adopted:

To the Honorable the Mayor and City Council of the City of Lincoln—Gentlemen:

Whereas, During the present financial crisis it has become apparent that a very large number of the laboring population of the city of Lincoln are without employment; and

Whereas, If the present condition continues for any considerable length of time many of these men and their families will be destitute and in want;

We would respectfully petition your honorable body

1. To reduce the hours of labor of the employes of the city to eight hours per day, thus giving employment to an additional number of men, without additional expense to the city.

2. To dispense with the service of the street sweepers and graders, and employ human beings to do the work of these labor-saving machines.

F. L. LEIGHTON, Chairman.
J. W. JORDAN,
O. W. CROMWELL,
J. W. VOGAN,
H. M. REEVES, Committee.

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