

The Commoner.

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VOL. 8, NO. 45

Lincoln, Nebraska, November 20, 1908

Whole Number 409

THE LABOR VOTE AT THE RECENT ELECTION

Now that the election is over and our party defeated, the explainer is abroad in the land. Some of the explanations are based upon observations in a precinct, some upon the conditions in a state, and others take a national view of the situation. The Commoner has received several letters containing complaints that "the labor vote was not cast for the democratic ticket," and that "the labor planks alienated more votes than they won."

Until the returns are all in and tabulated

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It is impossible to make any intelligent estimate as to the relative influence exerted by the various causes which contributed to the party's defeat, and it is not fair to announce a conclusion until a substantial foundation can be laid for such conclusion. While an adverse vote in a city containing a large labor element might be accepted as prima facie evidence that the laboring men did not support the ticket, a closer inspection of the returns might show that the labor vote was actually cast for the ticket, but that losses in other parts of the city overcame the gain.

Mr. Gompers and those closely associated with him as labor leaders must be credited with sincere, earnest and effective support of the democratic ticket. Their arguments may not have convinced as large a percentage of the vote of organized labor as was expected—upon this subject the statistics are not yet obtainable—but it must be remembered that under present conditions it is necessary to do more than convince. A great many people were convinced that the democratic position was the correct one, and yet were afraid to follow their convictions. The republican leaders confessed this themselves when they began to appeal to the fears of the employes. Many cases have been brought to our attention where employers warned their employes not to vote the democratic ticket under threat of reduction in wages. At Newark, Ohio, Mr. Bryan called attention to such speeches made by representatives of the New York Central railroad. There were cases where the support of the ticket in labor precincts perceptibly diminished when these threats were applied. It is easy enough to say that a laboring man ought to stand by his convictions and vote as he believes, regardless of threats, and yet human nature must always be

considered in passing judgment upon human beings.

After forty-eight years of almost continuous republican rule, the wage earners are living so near to the hunger-line that a few weeks' loss of employment brings the family face to face with want. The election comes in November—just at the beginning of winter, with fuel to buy, house rent to pay and warmer clothes to provide for the children. The laboring man is under a constant duress. A laboring man who has but little, if anything, laid up for the future, must have a strong heart to defy the expressed wish of his employer and cast his ballot for something which he believes to be permanently good, at the risk of passing through a period of idleness before that good can be secured.

Four months elapse between the election and the inauguration—four cold months. Be not too harsh in judging the man who bends to the lash and surrenders his citizenship when his conscience tells him that he should resist injustice and vote for better conditions. Be not too harsh in judgment—even in the holiest wars there are deserters; even when free government is at stake, many have turned back rather than endure the hardships and privations called for by the struggle. Let us rather be thankful that there were as many heroes among the laboring men as there were—even if there were not enough.

It must be remembered, too, that not all labor is organized, and the leaders of organized labor are not in touch with unorganized labor. On the contrary, the enemies of labor lost no opportunity to array the unorganized laboring men against the democratic party. There ought to be no feeling of antagonism between organized and unorganized labor for every advantage secured by organization for those who are members of the organization is soon enjoyed by those who are not members. When wages are raised or conditions improved, all labor ultimately enjoys the gain, although the burden of securing the improvement falls upon the members of the organization.

It is also true—let it be admitted with a blush—that there are those so prejudiced against the laboring men as to be alienated from the democratic party by the very fact that our platform contained labor planks.

Some of the officials of the Manufacturers' Association, of which Mr. Van Cleave is president, boldly appealed to this prejudice and attempted to make the labor question paramount in the minds of all those who look upon the laboring man as a sort of dangerous creature who, if not surrounded by actual bars, ought to be under constant surveillance.

Then, too, it must not be overlooked that a large percentage of the population seems to be entirely indifferent to the laboring man's condition and to his demand for remedial legislation.

The merchants, while they may not sympathize with the hostile attitude of some of the large employers, are not brought into sympathetic connection with the employes engaged in wealth production.

The clerks in the stores do not count themselves in the same class with the laboring men; they do not regard their interests as identified with those of the toilers.

The farm laborers also regard themselves as in a different class and they labor under conditions quite dissimilar from those which sur-

round the factory worker or the miner. The farm laborer is employed by an individual rather than by a corporation. His personal acquaintance with his employer protects him from the injustice to which the employe of the corporation is subjected.

The farmers do not as a rule understand the labor situation. Their business does not bring them into contact with the industrial life of the city, and the relations between themselves and their employes, instead of informing them on industrial conditions, is apt to give them a wrong impression as to the city laborer.

Now what is our party to do? Admitting that the laboring men are not as free as they should be to vote their sentiments; admitting that unorganized labor does not feel the sympathy that it should feel for organized labor; admitting that some of the larger corporate employers are distinctly hostile to labor as a class; and admitting that merchants, clerks, farm laborers and farmers do not thoroughly understand the legislative needs of the industrial laborers, what is the democratic party to do? Should it follow the example of the republican party and form an alliance with the forces that seem to control politics? Should it cater to the corporate employers; should it encourage the indifferent by misrepresenting the attitude and the plea of the laboring men? The democratic party is a permanent party and an universal party. While free government exists and wherever it exists, there must be a democratic party—a party in sympathy with the common people and devoted to the welfare of the common people. If the party which calls itself the democratic party fails to meet the requirements of the situation, some other party will step in and become the champion of the masses. It is impossible for any party to become a successful rival with the republican party for plutocratic support. If the democratic party were to adopt a platform entirely satisfactory to the beneficiaries of privilege and favoritism, it would simply commit suicide, for its record and the record of its leaders would make it impossible for the democratic party to secure any considerable portion of the plutocratic vote, while an abandoning of the democratic position would alienate the rank and file of the party.

The hope of our party, therefore, lies not in apostasy to democratic truth; not in the surrender of ideals; not in the desertion of the cause of the people, but in education.

The laboring men should be strengthened to resist the temptation which is presented every four years when they are asked to accept the promise of temporary employment in exchange for the hope of better things. It is an old saying that "no one need be a slave who has learned how to die;" bondage is only possible because men prefer bondage to death. With equal truth it may be said that no one need suffer injustice in a free country who is willing to risk his all in the effort to secure justice.

Unorganized labor should be taught that its interests are indissolubly linked with the interests of those, who through organization, are seeking to improve the condition of all who toil. The employer should be taught that industrial peace and harmonious co-operation between labor and capital are possible only upon a basis of justice and that it is short-sighted to deny to the laboring man legal protection in the enjoyment of his rights. It is time that the large corporate employers were forced to abandon the cant and hypocrisy in which they indulge when they express solicitude about the protection of non-union men from the union men. They are no more interested in non-union labor than they are in union labor. They use unorganized labor to defeat the demands of organized labor, but they are just as ready to oppress the unorganized