

Nebraska Historical Society

# THE WAGEWORKER

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## The Facts

The Star of last Wednesday evening contained an interview with a member of the legislature, name not given, who seems to be laboring under a misapprehension. This legislator, thinking that the "convict brand" bill was not open and above board, said:

"It seems to me that there are three combined influences working against the present prison contractors in the interests of certain other persons who are engaged in the same line of business. The first is the legislation introduced to brand prison products as convict made, the second in the binding twine bill and the third is the re-organization of the American Broom company. The legislation to brand convict goods as such would operate as a boycott in favor of the wares of a concern like Harrison's. This, I presume is intended as an aid to the business in the case the twine factory is not established to wipe out competition."

This unknown legislator has had three guesses and shot wide of the mark each time. The "convict brand" bill was introduced at the request of the Central Labor Unions of Lincoln and Omaha. The Central Labor Unions have absolutely no interest in any factory or factories in the state save as workmen anxious to assist in making successful the business of any and all men who employ labor and pay good wages. The intent of the bill is to protect men and women when they purchase articles of common use, such as brooms. Hundreds of thousands of people, object to using convict made goods, and they are asking only that they be given an opportunity to know what goods are convict made. The law is similar in every respect to the oleomargarine law. Manufacturers of oleomargarine may sell all the oleo they please, provided it is not colored to imitate butter and is plainly stamped "oleomargarine." The Lee Broom and Duster company, or any other company, may employ all the convicts it sees fit or is able to employ, and sell its wares wherever it can, provided it does not deceive the people but gives the people an opportunity to know the truth by branding the wares "convict made."

That is all there is to this bill. It has no ulterior motive. It is plain, it is direct, it is simple and it is absolutely just and honest. This unknown legislator should investigate more thoroughly before impugning the motives of men just as honest as he or any other member of the legislature.

### MISSED IT

M. Foxworthy, as who represents the Western Newspaper Union on the road, is sorrowful and not to be comforted. At the Editorial Association meeting in Kearney the first of the week Judge Gaslin made a short talk to the association, and among other things said handed an oratorical bouquet to the "patent insiders." Mr. Foxworthy discovered when too late that the official stenographer had not made a report of Judge Gaslin's speech, and the oratorical bouquet was withered beyond hope before Mr. Foxworthy could get to it. What Judge Gaslin said is this:

"I have always been a great reader of the newspapers and the periodicals. Through them I have been able to acquire a vast fund of general information not obtainable elsewhere. I have always read the 'patent insiders,' for there, too, one may find the best thought and the best instruction that can be gleaned from the lives and writings of the greatest and deepest thinkers of the world. The press is the greatest educational institution in the world, and you gentlemen have a right to be proud of your connection with such a splendid educational force." If this will remove the cloud of gloom from the face of our good friend, Foxworthy, we'll be almighty glad of it.

### CENTRAL LABOR UNION

The Central Labor Union will meet Tuesday evening. The newly elected officers will be installed in office, and other important business will be transacted. President Kelsey will announce the committee that will undertake to frame plans for the erection of a labor temple, and as the present move looks like business considerable interest is manifested in the make-up of this important committee. Every union in the city should have delegates present at the meeting Tuesday night.

## Reasons Why I am a Union Man Out in Force

The question of the "open shop" or the "closed shop" has been receiving a vast amount of attention at the hands of the public press during the last two years, and no man acquainted with existing conditions will dare claim that the unionist's side of the question has been either fairly or honestly stated in the great daily newspapers. Of course there are three or four notable exceptions, but as a rule the great dailies, being owned and controlled by men engaged in other and vaster corporate interests, have been compelled by force of circumstances to give the employers' side of the case much greater prominence than that given to the employees' side.

Having been a union man for upwards of twenty years, and during all that time an active member of the Typographical Union, the writer believes that he owes it to himself and to his fellow unionists to attempt, as best he can, to give the union man's side of the case, and present, as well as possible, the reasons why he is a union man instead of what Mr. Parry calls a "free and independent workingman," and what is known in printers' parlance as a "rat."

First and foremost, let it be here and now asserted that the assertion of the "open shop" advocates that union men seek to prevent the employment of non-union men is only a half-truth, which is in most cases worse than a downright falsehood. The union man recognizes the right of any man to engage in any honest work where and when he may, and for whomsoever he pleases. But the union man does insist that he has a perfect right to refuse to work alongside the non-union man, and to make a "closed shop" contract whenever he can. The "closed shop" merely means that the employers owning that particular mill, factory or printery has agreed to employ only union men. The "open shop" merely means that the employer insists on employing union or non-union men as he may desire. This, of course, any employer has a perfect right to do, and every well organized and conservatively managed craft recognizes that right. But it may as well be stated, first as last, that the "open shop" is always a non-union shop. Union and non-union men can not long work side by side, for the non-union man, not being subject to union rules and regulations, not only fails to rise to the level of the unionists, but sooner or later drags the unionist down to his level. Do not understand me to mean by "level" that the non-unionist may not be as good a workman or as good a man morally as the unionist. What I mean is this: that having no organization the non-unionist has no protection, and being forced by circumstances or by selfishness to accept whatever wage the employer may see fit to give, soon demoralizes wages and thus wage conditions degenerate. The "open shop" not only means the death knell of unionism—and its advocates well know it and are therefore advocating it—but it means the loss of all that labor has gained by years of patient toil and sacrifice. Their plea of being the friend of the "free and independent workingman" is founded in selfishness and built of hypocrisy. When such friendship had full sway in this and other countries, the hours were from twelve to fourteen a day, and the wages were pitifully small. The "free and independent workingman" of that day lived in a hovel, his children were forced into the mills and the mines before they had tasted the first real joys of childhood, and were physically dwarfed and mentally stunted, to the detriment of citizenship and the deterioration of the race. Should such friendship again obtain full sway the old conditions would soon return, and that would set this republic back a century if not finally result in its overthrow. For no man is good enough to have arbitrary right to fix wages and hours, and human selfishness is so strong that the rights of the weaker would soon cease to command respect under such conditions. The "open shop" advocates insist that they have both the right to set the price on the labor they buy and the wares they sell. What this would mean if it were allowed without let or hindrance is enough to cause any thoughtful man who loves his brother to shudder with horror.

The country without labor unions is never a country of progress. The countries in which labor unions are strongest are the most progressive and in proportion to the strength of labor organization leaders in the world's commerce. The United States, Great Britain and Germany lead the world in manufacture and commerce, and in these three countries labor unions are strongest. There are no labor unions in China, India, Spain or Turkey, and in the commercial world these countries cut a most sorry figure. In the United States, Great Britain and Germany the working classes, although not by any means given all that they are entitled to, do get better returns for their labor, live better, raise better citizens, enjoy life better and are blessed with greater opportunities for advancement in life. And these advantages are solely the result of labor unions, never the result of the generosity of employers. No man who has studied the labor problem can successfully deny this proposition.

Show me a law on the statute books that safeguards the life and limb of the wage earner, and I will show you a law enacted through the efforts of labor unions and in spite of the opposition of men who prate so loudly of their love for the "free and independent workingman." Show me a law on the statute books that prohibits child labor, and I will show you a law enacted through the untiring efforts and sacrifices of labor unions whose chief opposition came

from the very men who are now making such tearful pleas for the rights of the "free and independent workingman." Did ever a man who profited by the toil and tears of little children of his own free will and accord dispense with that labor? As long as men are selfish, as long as greed is greater than humanity, just so long will men disregard human rights and seek to build their fortunes upon the misfortunes of his fellows. Without labor unions there would be no laws against child labor, no laws compelling sanitary conditions in mills and factories, no laws for safeguarding life and limb, no laws against sweat shops, no laws compelling the erection of fire escapes on mills and factories. Without labor unions there would be no eight or nine-hour working day, no sick benefits, no burial fund save that which consigns the unfortunate to the Potter's field, and no magnificent homes like the printers of the United States and Canada have erected at Colorado Springs.

The charge of the "open shop" advocates that the union puts the good workman on the same level as the inferior workman is absolutely and unqualifiedly untrue. No labor union fixes a maximum wage scale. Wage scales are fixed on an average, but in no instance within the writer's knowledge has a labor union fixed a maximum scale. The union merely says to an employer: "If you employ union men you shall not pay less than a certain sum. But if the man earns more than that you are at liberty to pay him any additional amount you and he may mutually agree upon. If the man is not capable of earning the minimum you are under no obligation to keep him." The fact that a man bears a union card is prime facie evidence that he is able to earn the minimum fixed by the scale.

Because of the benefits that organization has conferred upon the man who works at a trade—benefits in the way of shorter hours, better conditions, better wages and fraternal helpfulness—I am a union man. Because organization means that I can be of help to my fellow toilers as well as the recipient of their help in time of need, I am a union man. Any church member will admit that his church membership helps him to better live up to his professions because it gives him the help of those who may be stronger than himself. Churches are organized for the sole reason that by so doing its members may help one another. Labor unions are organized for identically the same reason. And when the opponent of labor unions tells me that the unions have made grave mistakes, I tell him that that is no more an argument for the destruction of labor unions than the assertion that the church has made mistakes would be an argument for the destruction of the churches of the land. Being made up of fallible men the labor unions do make mistakes—often gigantic mistakes. But just as the church has profited by its mistakes and its experiences, so labor unions have and are profiting by their mistakes and experiences.

"But labor unions have countenanced assaults and murders and riots!" exclaims an opponent of unionism. Quite true, labor unions have been guilty of all that. But history tells me that blood has been wantonly shed and rapine allowed to run riot in the name of the church. Men undoubtedly honest in their convictions have fared forth with a Bible in one hand and a musket in the other demanding that other men accept the one or the other, and all in the name of the Nazarene whose every word breathed love and peace. And I note even in this day church organs that advocate a very similar doctrine, but do it under the claim that they want to "confer benefits upon the benighted." To claim that unions resort to assault and bloodshed is sufficient reason for the extermination of unionism is to claim that the church should be exterminated because some of its misguided zealots have resorted to similar tactics. But the church has almost outgrown that sort of thing, and labor unions are outgrowing it much faster than the church did.

"But you seek to prevent the non-union man from securing employment!" exclaims another advocate of the "open shop." I do nothing of the kind. I merely refuse to work at my trade alongside the non-union man. And why? The answer is not far to seek. I refuse to work alongside any man who is so selfish that he tries to share with me the benefits that he will not make equal sacrifice to maintain. I have paid dues and assessments for twenty years to secure better hours, better conditions and better wages, and I will not, under any circumstances, work by the side of any man who seeks to share those benefits with me without ever making any financial or physical sacrifices to secure and maintain them. He may be as good morally, or better; he may be as good a workman, or better; he may be my equal mentally, or even my superior—but whether good or bad, I insist that in all justice to me and my fellow unionists he has no moral right to lay claim to a share of something he did not help to bring about or to profit by my sacrifices and exertions.

I am a union man for the same reason that I am a church member—because my membership in the union is as helpful to me as regards my labor conditions as my church membership is to me as regards my moral conditions. And I frankly confess that I might be a much better member of both.

Labor unions make for better citizenship, teach patriotism, inculcate higher ideals, and put the family—the unit of society—above the dollar. Therefore I am a union man, and I hold my union membership as a prize and my working card as a badge of honor.

## Real Meaning of the Convict Brand

Only those directly interested in convict labor can take exceptions to the Epperson bill that provides that all convict made goods manufactured or offered for sale within the state of Nebraska shall bear in plain words the brand "Convict Made." The same argument and the same logic that resulted in the enactment of the state and national anti-oleomargarine laws bear equally well in favor of the Epperson bill.

Organized labor is not at this time opposing the system of contracting the labor of convicts, although organized labor is unalterably opposed to the prison labor contract system, and can give its reasons for the opposition to any man whose innate sense of justice does not already convince him without argument.

The Epperson bill asks nothing more than the anti-oleomargarine law provides—those who may want to buy convict made goods will have a perfect right to do so under the provisions of the Epperson bill. But just as the anti-oleomargarine law prevents the deception of those who want genuine butter, so the Epperson bill provides that those who do not want to buy prison made goods shall not be deceived, but shall have a plain distinguishing mark whereby they may know whether the article they are purchasing is made by free or convict labor. Certainly no honest and justice loving man can take serious exceptions to such a course. The bill does not pro-

hibit the use of convict labor nor the sale of convict made goods. The sole provision is that convict made goods shall be so branded.

It is to be expected that the Lee Broom and Duster company will oppose the bill, for the Lee Broom and Duster company employs the labor of Nebraska convicts in the making of its wares. Naturally the enactment of the bill into law will interfere seriously with the sale of the company's wares in Nebraska. But the anti-oleomargarine law killed the oleomargarine industry, and as a result the laboring men of Nebraska are paying from 35 to 35 cents a pound for the same butter that sold for 18 and 20 cents when oleomargarine was a competitor. And vastly more money was spent for oleomargarine, and knowingly, than is spent for Lee brooms.

Organized labor asks the enactment of this bill into law because it believes that the result will be beneficial to free labor. No broom manufacturer who pays fair wages for free labor can hope to compete with a firm that gets its brooms made by convicts at the rate of 50 cents a day per convict. It is a serious and unjust handicap to the employer of free labor. It is an injustice to the men who have banded themselves together for the purpose of bettering the conditions of themselves and their fellows. Free laboring men have a right to know whether the brooms they must buy are made by convicts or free workmen.

The demand for the enactment of the bill is founded on justice, and opposition can be founded only on selfish interest.

The city council chamber contained a large number of visitors last Monday night. Most of the visitors were members of the allied printing trades who are interested in the label ordinance introduced by Councilman Stewart. The ordinance had been referred to City Attorney Strode, and as that gentleman was ill and unable to attend the meeting the ordinance was not brought up. It is more than likely that it will be taken up at the next meeting, and the printing trades will be well represented in the council.

Councilman Malone created some excitement and favorable comment by opposing Chief Clement's recommendation that certain firemen be given an increase of wages. Mr. Malone made it plain that if any firemen were to be given an increase all would be given it. He was playing no favorites. He believes that the firemen are entitled to more money, a belief shared by every union man in the city. And if Councilman Malone will undertake to secure the increase he will have the support of men who believe that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

### CAPITAL AUXILIARY NO 11

Capital Auxiliary No. 11 to Lincoln Typographical Union No. 209 met with Mrs. Bowers Friday afternoon, February 17. A very enjoyable meeting was held and a goodly number of ladies were present. After the business meeting the hostess served refreshments. The next meeting will be held at the home of Mrs. C. E. Brown, 2314 N street, Friday, 2:30 p. m., March 3. Several ladies were reported sick. Mrs. G. H. Freeman, who has been very sick, is much better.

Mrs. Eleanor Garrett, who has been visiting her daughter, Mrs. H. W. Smith, has returned to her home at Omaha, Neb.

The Auxiliary extends their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Bert Pentzer. The Auxiliary will give a social to the printers and their families at Red Ribbon hall, 1034 O street on Monday evening, March 6.

Mrs. Maupin and Mrs. Righter have gone to Kearney to attend the Press Association.

Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Sayer have the heartfelt sympathy of the Auxiliary in the loss that has come to them through the death of their son.

### LADIES' LABEL LEAGUE

The Ladies' Label League will meet in regular session Monday evening at Central Labor Union hall, 1034 O street. A full attendance should be had at this meeting, for with the opening of spring business the League will have a better opportunity to prosecute its objects and aims and it should be getting in readiness to do so. The Ladies' Label League is in a position to be of immense service to the cause of unionism, and it should be the duty and pleasure of every unionist's wife to become an active member. The League has been meeting regularly all winter, and despite the meagre attendance the interest has been kept alive and the work pushed along.

Union men should take an active interest in the welfare of the League and assist it in every way possible. They are invited to become members and to give the women the benefit of their advice and presence.

### RESOLUTIONS

Local Union No. 399, Bartenders' International Union, adopted the following resolutions at its last meeting:

It is with sincere regret that we are called upon to record the death of Mrs. Krone, the beloved mother of our esteemed brother, Fred W. Krone. Therefore, be it resolved, that we, the Bartenders' of Local No. 399, of Lincoln, Nebraska, hereby extend our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family and friends. Resolved, that these resolutions be spread upon our minutes and a copy sent to the Wage-worker for publication.

G. A. WALKER, V. P.  
M. J. WILBER, Fin. Sec.

### AT KANSAS CITY

There is trouble in the printing business at Kansas City and printers are warned to steer clear of the city at the mouth of the Kaw until matters have been adjusted. The Wage-worker's private reports from Kansas City are to the effect that the trouble is spreading rapidly and threatens to involve most of the job printers now employed there.