

THE WAGEWORKER

ALLIED PRINTING
TRADES UNION COUNCIL
LINCOLN, NEB.

State Historical Society

VOL. 2

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, DECEMBER 22, 1905

NO. 37

A BUSINESS MAN'S DEFENSE OF UNIONISM

(The following paper was read by Mr. William Hardy of the Hardy Furniture Co., before a recent meeting of the Candlelight Club in Lincoln.)

The consideration of labor unions really means the consideration of our present wage system, because labor unions are simply an incident or phase of our present industrial life.

We must recognize that the payment of wages is a very modern system in the world's development, and that it is not necessarily a permanent one. The laborers have been under three conditions: first, slaves; second, serfs, and now wage earners. Slavery lasted well down to the Tenth century and the serfs of Russia were freed in 1861, so that we must keep in mind that our present factory system and the payment of wages for labor are developments of the last hundred years.

We cannot claim that this system is perfect, or that agitation and discussion will not improve it, but we can claim that it is an improvement over serfdom and slavery. The two old systems passed away largely because they were repugnant to the deepest instincts and highest ideals of the human race; and also because any system of bondage is uneconomic and wasteful. We must notice here that as slave or serf the laborer had at least a minimum of food, clothes and shelter until death, while under our wage system he is not assured even of this.

As the feudal system disintegrated, industry passed to the free cities and the trade guilds were organized. Under the guilds master and workman labored together generally in the master's house, and every workman looked forward to a shop of his own. The old time guilds did in a small way for industry what the labor unions are trying to do now. They controlled the trade and no man could work who was not a member of that guild. They prevented conflicts of interests, guaranteed the quality of goods, stimulated the organization and division of labor, trained skilled workmen, regulated apprenticeship, gave a moral and educational impetus to the workman, and were the great benefit societies of the middle ages, lessening papperism, promoting thrift and cultivating in their members the qualities of good workmanship and active citizenship.

The guild system differed from the present in the one vital fact that under the guilds master and laborer were in the same organization and their interests were considered mutual.

Within the hundred years of the wage and factory system we have developed a highly capitalized form of industry where few are masters and many are workers. The vast majority of workers must always be workers, and as John Mitchell says: "The average wage earner has made up his mind that he must always remain a wage earner."

It is folly to hold out to the worker that thrift and industry and perseverance will place him in the master's class. It cannot be, only for the one in a million, and even now many of the masters are dropping back among the wage earners as industry is centralized and combined.

So it is the class who were slaves in the time of the Greeks and the Romans who were serfs in the middle ages, and who are wage-earners today that we want to benefit by labor unions.

With the advent of the wage and factory system in the Nineteenth century came competition, and as Ruskin well says, "Competition is death; co-operation is life." In the competition between master and worker, the worker always is ill treated, underpaid and the vitality of his life used up in the fewest possible number of years. The indentured servants of the Eighteenth century were treated worse than animals. "The sick servant was neglected lest the doctor's charge should exceed the value of his remaining service; and one thrifty master in Maryland required a servant, sick of a mortal disease, to dig his own grave in advance in order to save the other men's time." These were harsh times. The master class has nothing to be proud of in the history of the last hundred years. It is marked by brutality and blood and an ever-readiness to hold human life cheaper than money.

I quote from Walker: "The beginning of the present century found children of five and even three years of age, in England, working in factories and brick yards; women working underground in mines, harnessed with mules to carts, drawing heavy loads; found the hours of labor whatever the avarice of individual mill owners might exact, were it thirteen or fourteen or fifteen; found no guards about machinery to protect life and limb; found the air of the factory fouler than language can describe, even could human ears bear to hear the story. The waste of human life in the manufactories to which the children were consigned was simply frightful. Day and night the machinery was kept going; one gang of children working it by day and another set by night, while in times of pressure the same children were kept working day and night by remorseless taskmasters."

I simply quote so much of this record of the masters to show why organized labor came into being, why it favors abolishing child labor, and demands fair conditions for women's work. The avarice of the southern mill owners of today (who are mostly residents of the northern states) has brought a condition of child labor into the cotton factories that has a parallel only in those of England one hundred years ago. Children as young as six years are working twelve hours a day. Only a few years ago Alabama repealed a law which limited to 60 hours a week the work of children under twelve years of age. Virginia failed to pass a law limiting the hours of women and children to ten per day. It is certainly to the credit

of labor unions that from the first they have been opposed to child labor, and it is largely due to their efforts that any laws have been passed restricting the labor of children. The master class has always been opposed to any laws raising the age at which children may be employed, or in bettering the conditions of their work. From the glass manufacturers of Indiana, where the blowers helpers are small children living in veritable slavery, and from the owners of the cotton mills of the south where nearly 15 per cent of their total employees are small children, to the rich department store owners of Chicago, the master is always fighting against laws and conditions that advance the welfare of the wage earner, his women or his children. Henry White, one of the strongest and clearest headed of the labor leaders in this country, says: "Instead of solution, I hope for less injustice, more humanity, for a larger participation by the average person in the benefits of civilization."

We find our railroads in this country injuring one in eleven of their trainmen every year, and killing one in every 137. They oppose all laws that compel them to safeguard the lives of their employes with modern appliances and improvements, while on the other hand they

was \$65 per year and food and sometimes lodging; but out of this the wage earner must maintain his family. The hundred years of conflict between master and man has certainly been of some benefit to the latter, as according to the accepted authorities today the average wage is \$436 per year.

So we believe we are fair in saying that the first 100 years of labor unions have brought about, first, rise in wages for the wage earner; second, shorter hours; third, better conditions of labor for his women and children, and fourth, a decrease in child labor.

There is much question as to the origin of the labor organizations, but they are generally considered to be a development of the Nineteenth century. Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the English authorities, claim labor unions as a product of the capitalization of industry, which makes the barrier between journeymen and master practically impassable for the great majority of workmen.

The first labor unions of which we have positive records in the United States are the Journeymen Shipwrights of New York, 1803, and the Boot and Shoemakers' Union of Philadelphia, 1806. From this time to the present there has been a remarkably steady growth of labor

and in several costly strikes lost most of its membership and is today hardly more than a name.

Upon the ruins of the Knights of Labor was built the American Federation of Labor, an organization having today a membership of nearly 2,000,000. The Federation is organized upon almost directly opposite principles from the Knights of Labor. It believes in the trades unions and the trades union idea as opposed to the labor union. That is, each trade shall organize the men in that business and form a union whose membership shall be based upon every man being a worker in that particular trade. Then each union as a body is a member of the Federation and entitled to send delegates to central meetings when questions of policy are decided. The idea of the labor leaders today is to have each union control its local affairs and keep an independent organization, subject only to general broad principles of policy as outlined by the national organization.

Judging by the past history of labor unions the successful unions of the future must beware of partisan politics, violence, and socialism. The strongest unions everywhere today are the ones which have carried the insurance idea

for their workpeople against sickness and old age. In all these countries there have been some insurance benefits obtained by fraud, but as one writer well says, the question now is, not as to whether insurance is desirable, but how to safeguard it and protect it from fraud.

The labor unions stand upon well defined principles, and should be judged by these principles, as to their soundness and benefit to the community. There has been much lawlessness, much violence, and many mistakes on the part of organized labor, but these are more than balanced by the greed, avarice and heartlessness of the master class. Labor unions must stand or fall by the conditions they are striving to bring about, and the principles and ideals they are upholding. Some of the most important of these are: First, Collective bargaining for the sale of labor, as opposed to the individual contract. The unions believe that the individual in bargaining for the sale of his labor must always accept what the employer will pay, as the worker must have work or starve, but the employer can always get other workmen. The history of labor clearly shows that the unrestricted employer always tries to get labor at a less and less wage, and even imports foreigners, with their lower standard of living. To make collective bargaining successful, all workmen must be in the union of their trade. This has led to the much discussed question of today, "the open or closed shop." Labor unions as a class stand for the closed shop, using this as a means to get all workmen into the unions. Union men have been freely criticised for their refusal to work with non-union men. It seems, however, that the very life or death of labor unions hinges on this one question. If the unions are working for the best interests of the wage earner, then all wage earners should be members and help in the work.

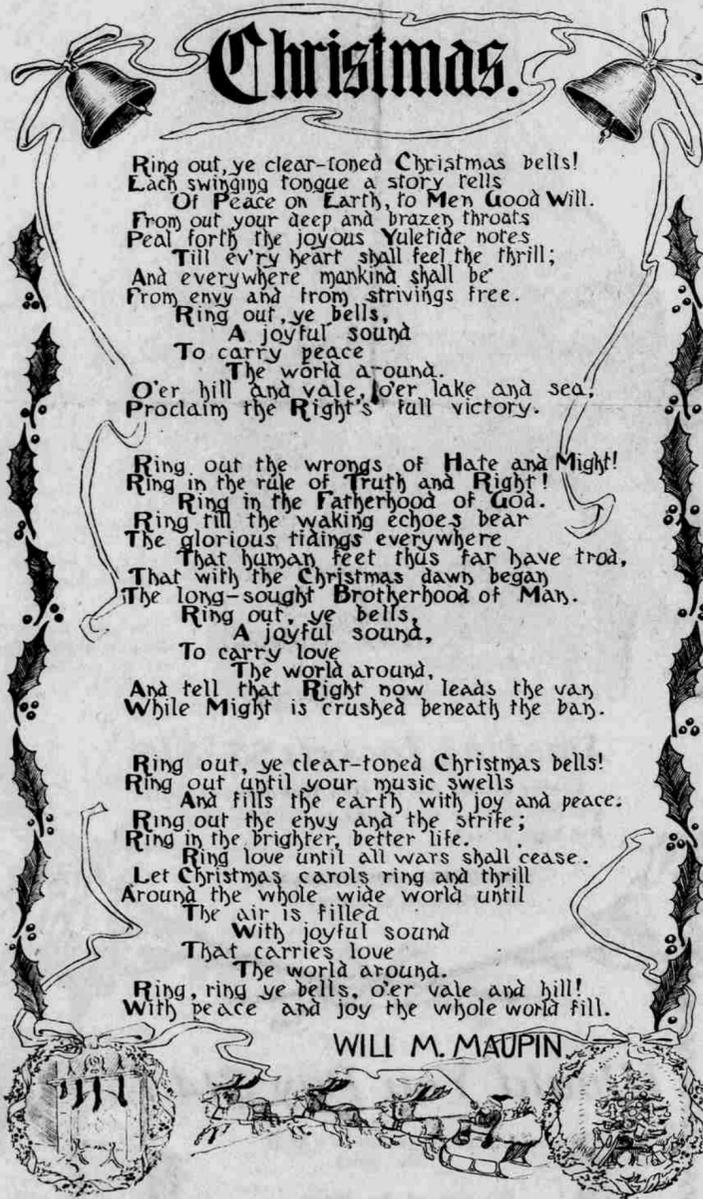
Second—Wages: The unions have always demanded better wages and better standards of living for the workman. Much has already been accomplished, but there is still much to do. John Mitchell believes that the lowest paid worker should receive a minimum wage of \$13.50 per week. When one looks closely into the items that make up a family budget, and considers that today we want children in school until 16 years of age, it seems almost impossible for a family to live on this wage. If sickness comes, it almost immediately plunges them into the poverty class. I wish to plead for a standard of living in which every family may have a home and a grass plot, where children may be raised in pure air and sunshine, and have the happy school days of youth, instead of the pinching poverty, its toiling hours, the joyless existence of such a vast number of our slum children of today.

Third—Hours of Labor: The unions stand for an eight hour day, as they stood a few years ago for the reduction of hours from 12 to 10. Labor is now intense and without doubt the worker of today produces much more in his eight hours than was produced by the worker of 100 years ago in his fourteen hours.

Fourth—Conditions of Labor: The labor unions believe in healthy, sanitary and safe conditions for all labor. It has been largely through the demands of organized labor that factory inspection laws have been passed. The unions are opposed to the sweat shop system of labor. They are working today for laws compelling manufacturers to have factories and to have all goods manufactured there, thus doing away with the working of women, children and men in crowded tenement houses. The sweat shop system is today one of the greatest evils that the master class has to answer for, and labor unions are entitled to great credit for their fight against this condition.

Fifth—Work of Women and Children: The employment of women in our industries is so extensive and so much a part of our life, that the labor unions, only in rare cases have opposed their working. The unions rather stand for the amelioration of the hardships of women's work, and for equal pay with men for equal work. They oppose women working in the industries which require great physical strength and endurance, as in mines, iron mills and foundries. It was largely through the efforts of the labor unions in England and this country that the working of women in mines was done away with, and we hope the unions and the people who believe in a fuller development of human life will not relax their efforts until child labor in our factories and mines is a thing of the past. Women and children are employed in the factories because they will work cheaper than men, and because there has been such an insane race between employers to produce goods cheaply. As nearly as can be determined the average wage for women in this country is \$5.50 per week, according to the United States Department of Labor. As one writer puts it: "Five dollars a week means less than a proper amount of nourishing food, less than a room to herself, less than sufficient clothing to protect her from the wet and cold. It means the sacrifice of most of the comforts and many of the deencies of life." There is a growing belief now that a healthy, prosperous and satisfied workman will do more work even in proportion to his wages than the workwoman. This is because women with few exceptions, consider their work temporary; they look forward to marriage and a home life.

Sixth—Attitude Towards Machinery: There has always been a more or less determined opposition on the part of labor unions to labor saving machinery, but this is passing away and today the great mass of unionists have been convinced that prolonged resistance to machinery is impossible, and that the real



Christmas.

Ring out, ye clear-toned Christmas bells!
Each swinging tongue a story tells
Of Peace on Earth, to Men Good Will.
From out your deep and brazen throats
Peal forth the joyous Yuletide notes
Till every heart shall feel the thrill;
And everywhere mankind shall be
From envy and from strivings free.

Ring out, ye bells,
A joyful sound
To carry peace
The world around.
O'er hill and vale, o'er lake and sea,
Proclaim the Right's full victory.

Ring out the wrongs of Hate and Might!
Ring in the rule of Truth and Right!
Ring in the Fatherhood of God.
Ring till the waking echoes bear
The glorious tidings everywhere
That human feet thus far have trod,
That with the Christmas dawn began
The long-sought Brotherhood of Man.

Ring out, ye bells,
A joyful sound,
To carry love
The world around,
And tell that Right now leads the van,
While Might is crushed beneath the ban.

Ring out, ye clear-toned Christmas bells!
Ring out until your music swells
And fills the earth with joy and peace.
Ring out the envy and the strife;
Ring in the brighter, better life.
Ring love until all wars shall cease.
Let Christmas carols ring and thrill
Around the whole wide world until
The air is filled
With joyful sound
That carries love
The world around.

Ring, ring ye bells, o'er vale and hill!
With peace and joy the whole world fill.

WILL M. MAUPIN

have passed wherever possible laws limiting their liability.

We find the master class ever ready to make the laborer work 11, 16 or even 18 hours a day, and fighting with all their power the laws which reduced the work day to 11 hours and then to 10 hours just as they are now fighting the 8 hour day. This same condition has marked the fight of the wage earner for better wages. One of the earliest strikes recorded in this country was in 1803, when the sailors of New York struck for an increase in wages from \$10 to \$14 per month. Like so many of the later ones this strike was unsuccessful. It is worth while to note the wages of 100 years ago, so as to see what the wage earner has gained since that time.

Laborers on the Pennsylvania canal were paid \$66 a year and lodged and fed in the poorest manner. Hod carriers and mortar mixers on the work at Washington received \$70 per year. The hours of labor were from sunrise to sunset and in New York wages averaged 40 cents per day. According to McMaster the average wage at this time in the United States

unions. At first there were a large number of small unions, loosely organized semi-political, which dissipated their energies in political reform questions, and went to pieces. Then old customs would be abandoned and a larger and stronger union was the outcome. The International Typographical Union, founded in 1830, was one of the first of the national unions. The National Labor Union, organized in 1866 grew in a few years to a total membership of 640,000, but was drawn into politics and the question of irredeemable paper money, and perished. The next strong union was the Knights of Labor. Starting from a small local union of seven garment cutters in 1869, it grew to 600,000 members in 1886. It had a highly centralized form of government, and although starting as a trade union finally admitted to membership anyone over 16 years of age who was not a lawyer, banker, professional gambler or liquor dealer. The official policy was to discourage strikes and boycotts, and to depend upon political action, co-operation and education. The Knights of Labor became involved in the free silver campaign of the '90's,

the farthest. The strongest of the English unions pay weekly benefits of from \$1.00 to \$3.00 to the unemployed, sick, and those disabled by accident. They pay an old age benefit for life, and on the death of a member a certain sum for funeral expenses. It is easy to see that these features have a very great influence in holding the men together. The English workman pays about \$8.50 a year to his union. This is more than an American workman pays, because the insurance feature is not so fully developed in this country. There are a good many unions in the United States paying benefits of one kind or another and it is only a question of time when insurance will be common. America must provide for its working people in sickness and old age either through its labor unions or through some system of state insurance. Under the guidance of Bismarck, Germany began compulsory insurance against sickness, accident, invalidity and old age for nearly all classes of workmen earning less than \$500 per year. Austria, Denmark, Belgium, France and Italy have followed the lead of Germany and all have some form of in-

[Continued on Page Four]