

UNIONS NOT TO BLAME

High Prices Cannot Justly Be Laid at Their Doors.

KIRBY'S STATEMENT REFUTED

Attempt to Saddle the Increased Cost of Living on Organized Labor's Shoulders Fails For Lack of Proof. Facts to Consider.

President Kirby of the Manufacturers' association is reported to have said in a recent address in the east that the labor trust (the unions) is the principal cause of high prices because it increases wages and limits output. This is the most absurd statement I have seen regarding the cause of high prices, writes D. F. Kennedy in the American Federationist. Mr. Kirby's position is untenable and utterly lacking in proof. The farm products have increased more in price than any other staple product, but there is no union of farm labor. Cotton has gone skyward, and there is no union of cotton producing labor—in fact, it is the cheapest labor in the country—and machinery is now used in picking cotton, which is still cheaper than the negro labor.

Lumbermen have no unions, and lumber is high priced. Woolgrowers and tobacco growers have no unions. Their labor is cheap from the ground to the finished product. There is not a single trust tobacco factory organized. Sugar uses no union labor.

The furniture industry and the Standard Oil industry are unorganized. A large part of the stove foundries are nonunion, and we note the nonunion stoves are as high priced as the union product.

On the other hand, we note that the railroads, interurbans and street cars, nearly all operated by union men, have not increased prices. Steel and iron products are decreasing in price. These are nearly all union made. Clothing is nearly all made in non-union shops. Printing is nearly all union, yet papers and magazines are cheaper and better than ever. Hats are nearly all union made, but they have not increased in price. The buildings are nearly all built by union labor, and yet the present is one of the greatest building eras in our history.

Now, Mr. Kirby, tell us what you base your statement on. We admit there is one way that the labor trust may have contributed in a small way to higher prices. By raising the standards of living in the industrial centers it has increased the markets somewhat. Unions have enabled hundreds of thousands of workmen to move into larger and better homes, and these homes are better furnished. Music dealers will tell you they now sell many pianos to workmen. They buy a greater variety and a better quality of food and clothing. But we assume Mr. Kirby will not find fault with this, for his organization stands for larger markets. Besides, if it is wrong for labor to raise the prices of living by living better it logically follows that it is wrong for his class to live high and thereby make larger markets and higher prices. The 15 per cent increase in wages is more than made up by the cheaper methods of production and the larger efficiency of labor.

The labor cost of a factory product is now only 30 per cent of the factory price and only 15 per cent of the retail price. An increase of 15 per cent in wages would amount to less than 2½ per cent increase in the retail price. This is more than offset by the improved methods. As for the limiting of output, statistics prove that the union factories turn out a larger per capita product than ever before. Mr. Kirby, the people want facts, not unsubstantiated statements. If the statements herein are not true we invite any one to refute them.

Plan of French Workmen's Pension.
The recent passing of the workmen's pension bill by the senate of France marks the end of a legislative struggle extending more than four years and of political agitation in France reaching back to 1882. The plan involves contributions from three sources for the creation of the pension fund: First, obligatory yearly contributions from the wage earner amounting to \$1.80 for men, \$1.20 for women and 85 cents for minors; second, the contribution of the employer, which equals that of the wage earner, and, third, the contribution of the state.

Even the experts differ as to what the latter will be, but the generally accepted figure is \$36,000,000 for the first year, the amount decreasing until the scheme works normally, when it will be about \$25,000,000. The beneficiaries are to draw their pensions at the age of sixty-five or after thirty years of service, with certain diminutions for advanced enjoyment.

Growth of Unions Abroad.
A compilation of trades union statistics in the principal countries of the world places the number of members in good standing at 9,000,000, or 1,000,000 more than last year. Germany contributes a gain of 400,000, which outstrips Great Britain and nearly overtakes the United States. At this time the United States and Canada have about 2,300,000 members, whereas last year Germany had 2,215,000. The unions of Great Britain were credited with a membership of 1,888,000 last year. Five European countries have more trades union members than the state of New York, but New York outranks Russia, Hungary and Spain, as well as the smaller countries.

SAFETY APPLIANCE LAW.

Makes Railroads Responsible For Defective Equipment.

The legislative agents of the various labor organizations at Washington are distinctly pleased over the agreement in congress on the so called safety appliance legislation. This new law is called "an act to promote the safety of employees and travelers upon railroads." It is amendatory to the existing law, which compels railroads engaged in interstate commerce to equip their cars with automatic couplers and continuous brakes and locomotives with driving wheel brakes.

One of the chief objects of the new legislation is to bring about uniformity in equipment. Some of the new requirements provided under the legislation are:

First.—That in the loading and hauling of long commodities requiring more than one car the hand brakes may be omitted on all save one of the cars while they are thus combined for such purposes.

Second.—The interstate commerce commission receives authority after hearing to modify or change and to prescribe the standard height of drawbars and to fix the time within which any modification shall become obligatory.

Third.—Where any car shall have been properly equipped as provided in this legislation or by preceding laws and the equipment shall have become defective while the car is being used by any carrier upon its line of railroad the car may be hauled from the place where the equipment was first discovered to be defective or insecure to the nearest available point where the car can be repaired without liability for the penalties imposed by the law.

Fourth.—The movement or hauling of a car with defective equipment is to be at the sole risk of the carrier, and nothing in the act is to be construed to relieve such carrier from liability in any remedial action.

Fifth.—The hauling of defective cars by means of chains instead of drawbars in "revenue" trains or in association with other cars that are commercially used unless the defective cars obtain live stock or perishable freight is prohibited.

The legislative agents of the employees on the railroads have represented to congress for a long time that many of the fatalities on the roads were the result of defective equipment. The railroads, it is asserted, took long chances. If a car with defective equipment was urgently needed it was allowed to continue in service. The railroad employees are hopeful that the interstate commerce commission will enforce the new law rigidly. The commission will, of course, afford the roads a reasonable opportunity to make their equipment conform to the provisions of the new legislation.

Barbers Trust Threatened.
The barbers are now said to be threatened with competition along the lines the cigarmakers have been up against with the tobacco trust. It is reported that a corporation is being formed for the purpose of putting in elegantly furnished barber shops in all the larger cities. The new corporation is said to be backed by ample capital and in addition to competing will spend all the money necessary to annul all anti Sunday work ordinances and statutes.

German Strike Statistics.
Statistics published in the Imperial Labor Gazette show that there were 1,347 strikes in Germany in 1908 alone against 309 in England. France and Austria had, respectively, 1,073 and 721. Germany, too, had far more strikes than any other country in Europe in 1909. Of 1,419 German strikes for higher wages, 255 were successful, 488 partly so and 676 failed. The German trades unions disbursed on account of strikes in 1907 the sum of \$3,500,000.

Printing Must Bear the Label.
The Maryland legislature has passed a law requiring that the union label of the Allied Printing Trades be placed on all the printing done for the state. The bill did not meet with much opposition, as the wisdom of the provision seemed to be generally recognized.

LABOR GOSSIP.

The Harbor Boatmen's union of New York city has a membership of 3,000. The Central Railroad of New Jersey has raised the wages of the employees on its ferryboats 6 per cent.

In Boston 1,800 painters have been accorded an increase of \$1.96 a week, making a wage of \$20 a week for painters and \$22.20 for decorators for forty-four hours work.

A wage agreement between the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph company and the Pacific district council of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, signed recently, calls for a raise from \$3.50 to \$3.75 a day.

The United States senate has passed the house bill, so amending the employers' liability law as to give the state courts concurrent jurisdiction with the federal courts in dealing with suits for damages growing out of accidents. This law will affect interstate railroads only.

The Carpenters' District council of Boston has announced that the referendum vote of the 6,000 members of the affiliated unions was unanimously in favor of demanding 50 cents an hour, an increase of 2½ cents of the present rate, on June 1. No change in working hours will be asked, the men now having the forty-four hour work week.

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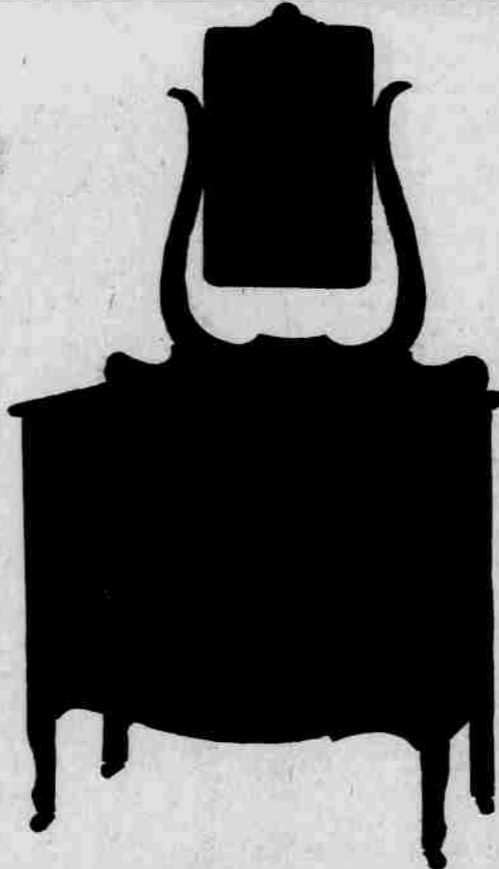
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On sale at..... 12.50



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CHURCH AND LABOR.

Investigation Will Be Made of Conditions in Steel Plants.

The industrial situation in the Steel Works at South Bethlehem, Pa., is to be investigated by the Social Service Commission of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, which church comprises the united Protestant forces in the United States, having eighteen million members and a constituency of nearly forty millions. The resolutions with regard to the appointment of the Social Service Commission and an outline of its duties was published in the Labor Press some time ago and it will be remembered that reference was made to it in the address which I gave at the last convention of the American Federation of Labor at Toronto.

This investigation is the first of its kind that has ever been undertaken by any church body. It will have to do very largely with the moral and ethical principles involved in this controversy but it will also investigate quite fully, the economic conditions which have brought about the present situation. The report of the commission will be presented to the churches throughout the United States and it will serve as a basis for future action with regard to industrial controversies.

It can no longer be said that the church is not interested in the everyday affairs of the workingman. This does not mean that it will always endorse the position of the laborer, but when he is right, the church should stand by him in his controversy and help him to win his battles.

The Committee appointed to make the South Bethlehem investigation,

consists of the Rev. Charles Stelzle, secretary of the Social Service Commission, Dr. Josiah Strong, president of the American Institute for Social Service, and Paul U. Kellogg Director of the Pittsburg Survey.—Rev. Charles Stelzle.

COME ON WITH IT.

Don't Spare Our Feelings, or Hide Behind Insinuations.

If ever there was a time when union men should stand shoulder to shoulder that time is now. The "hammer welders" should be forced to take a vacation.—The Wageworker.

The first sentence, so far as it applies to present conditions, should be observed. Yet in the same issue of the Wageworker we note that they wield the "hammer" without a scintilla of cause. We do not care to pick or make distinctions. But when a scurrilous statement is sent out for political, or any other purpose, with no foundation of fact, we do appreciate consistency.—Cincinnati Chronicle.

O, come on with the rest of it. Don't hide behind the "injured feelings" or "beneath contempt dodge." The Wageworker will stand by anything it says if it believes it is right.

We don't know what the Chronicle refers to, but were willing to wager a doughnut or two that it refers to The Wageworker's stand on the booze business.

The Wageworker is not in the habit of making "scurrilous statements" about anything or anybody. It cordially invites the esteemed Cincinnati Chronicle to make good by being more specific.