

Labor Questions Discussed by Two Union Leaders

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WASHINGTON, March 21.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—I give you herewith interviews with two men who represent the most intelligent and most skilled mechanics of the United States. Both are vice presidents of the American Federation of Labor, and each is the leader of a national union of skilled workmen whose members are to be found in every business center. One is James O'Connell, the president of the International Association of Machinists, and the other James Duncan, the secretary of the National Union of Granite Cutters. Each of these men had reached the top of the trade he represents before he was elected as its leader. Each knows how to work with his hands, and has done so for years at the highest wages. Both are conservative, diplomatic and practical. They understand their business and can hold their own in their meetings with the great capitalists and representatives of trusts with whom they daily come in contact to settle strikes or lockouts, or to make trade arrangements which shall govern hours and wages for one year or five, as the case may be.

I met President O'Connell at the headquarters of the International Association of Machinists here in Washington. They take up the greater part of the second floor of the McGill building, on G street, not far from the patent office; and their business is managed as carefully as that of a bank or a great mercantile establishment. Two typewriters were clicking away in Mr. O'Connell's office as I entered, and they kept on clicking while I talked. I first asked as to just what the International Association of Machinists was. Mr. O'Connell replied:

"The International Association of Machinists has more than 70,000 members, and it embraces about half of all the men in the trade. It has local unions scattered all over this country, Canada and Mexico, the largest being in the chief manufacturing centers. In Chicago there are about eighteen different unions, each of which sends its delegates to a district union which acts for that city. We have a large number of local unions in New York, Boston and Pittsburg, and more or less in every manufacturing city of the south and west."

"What do you mean by machinists?"
"The word machinist as applied to our trade," said President O'Connell, "represents the highest intelligence and the greatest skill among the men who deal with machinery. In our sense, the machinist is the man who makes, erects and repairs all descriptions of machines and machine tools. It is not the man who runs the machine to produce another product after they are made. Our men design and make machines with the aid of drawings. They operate machines to make machines and machine tools, and they have to be able to do all kinds of work and repairs on any kind of machine from patterns, and that within a reasonable time."

"Their work includes the making of the finest and most delicate machinery, such as the tools with which watch movements are made, and it includes the making of the heaviest and coarsest of machinery, even to the great lathes which bore out the guns for our men-of-war. The machines for making bicycles, automobiles, typewriters, sewing machines, and, in fact, every kind of machine and machine tool, is the work of the machinist. Such work requires great intelligence and skill. The man must be an inventor as well as a mechanic. He has new problems coming up with every job, and he has to use his judgment in almost every bit of repairs which comes before him."

"How many such machinists are there in the country?" I asked.

"There are all told about 150,000 in the United States."

"Then I suppose if the union has 70,000 members it practically controls the trade?"

"Yes, it does," replied Mr. O'Connell. "Any organized body is as strong as ten times the same number unorganized. If there are ten union men in a shop where a hundred men are employed they will do more as to regulating the hours of work and other matters than the ninety non-union individuals. We find this the case all over the country."

"What has your association done for your trade?" I asked.

"It has benefited it in many ways," replied President O'Connell. "We have reduced our hours from ten to nine. Before 1900 the machinists of the United States worked ten hours or more. At the beginning of that year we notified the employers that we should demand a nine and one-half hour day at the end of six months and the nine-hour day beginning with January, 1901. We carried our point. We have gotten the nine-hour day not only in our trade, which, including those not belonging to the union, numbers 150,000 men, but also for allied trades, which numbers 150,000 more."

"How about wages? Do you get the same for nine hours that you did for ten?"

"Yes."

"Does the association insist upon a minimum wage?"

"Yes; but the minimum wage varies in



SECRETARY DUNCAN OF THE GRANITE CUTTERS' UNION TALKS TO MR. CARPENTER.

different localities and is settled for each locality by an agreement with the employers there. In New York the lowest wage is \$3 per day. In some other places it is \$2.50 and \$4. Any employer can pay as much more as he pleases, but he must pay the minimum or our men will not work for him."

"Then you are not paid by the piece?"
"No; our association is against piece work. We believe it contrary to the interests of the workingman. The employer will say that such methods of payment give a greater chance for the individual and that every man can make more working by the piece than by the day, but it is not true. The system keeps every man up to a high tension. It makes him strain every nerve to produce a large output, and when the output increases the employer invariably reduces the rate per piece, so that the man finds he is working harder and receiving less than under the old day rate. This is a matter of experience."

"But does your association try to restrict the output?"

"No, it does not," said Mr. O'Connell.

"But how about your rule that one man shall operate one machine and no more?"

"That is certainly a restriction of output."
"Not in work like that we do," replied Mr. O'Connell. "Our machines are necessarily fine and we have to insist upon that rule to protect ourselves. The employer will say he is willing to stand the loss of any work spoiled by having a man run several machines, but we find that if the work is spoiled the man is discharged sooner or later. In some of our work a man does not need to touch his machine for a long time, as, for instance, in boring out the barrels of great guns. A machine may be set and take twelve hours before the boring is completed. We insist upon having a man watch that machine, for the least break or fault may ruin the whole work, whereas if the man is there he can remedy the defect the moment it comes."

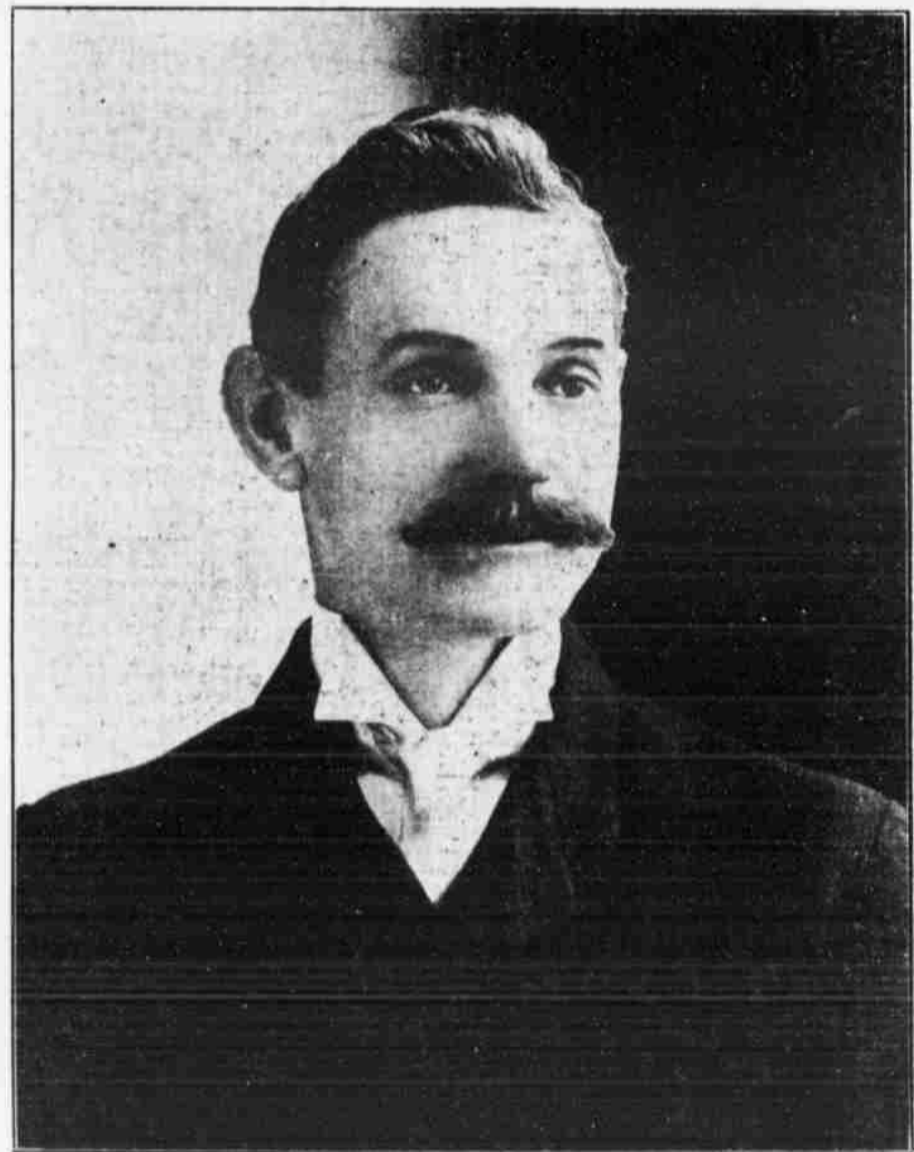
"Our machines," Mr. O'Connell went on, "are so fine that they need constant watching and the mistake of a hair's breadth may cost thousands of dollars. The bricklayer knocks off too much from the corner of a brick with his trowel in laying a wall; he throws in an extra pint of mortar and the fault is repaired. In the machinist's work the mistake of one ten-thousandth of an inch may destroy a machine and much of our work has to be correct even to the hundred-thousandth of an inch."

"What does it cost your members to belong to the association?" I asked.

"The dues are 75 cents a month, of which 40 cents goes to the National Association and 35 cents to the local union. Our system of bookkeeping is such that we keep track of every one of our members from month to month and can tell if he has paid his dues and is in good standing. In case of a strike or lockout, every such member, if unmarried, receives \$5 a week, and if married, \$7 a week as long as the strike continues. He gets the same amount if he is victimized."

"What do you mean by victimized?" I asked.

"A victimized man is one who is discharged by his employer without cause, or for standing by the rules of the union. We also pay death benefits of from \$50 to \$300, according to the length of time deceased has been in the union."



JAMES O'CONNELL, PRESIDENT INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MACHINISTS.

"We take in and pay out several hundred thousand dollars in money every year, but our accounts are as carefully managed as those of a bank and our losses are comparatively much less."

James Duncan, the secretary and treasurer of the Granite Cutters' National union, spent years in cutting out cemetery monuments, granite statues and building blocks before he was chosen as the leader of the Granite Cutters' union, and he tells me he can make more money today polishing granite than by acting as the secretary of his union. I asked him something about the granite business of the United States. Said he:

"The granite industry represents hundreds of millions of dollars. Its chief center is in New England, but it is carried on in nearly every part of the country. You will find our men at the quarries and in the shops of almost every city. Their work is in every cemetery and their buildings everywhere. Nearly all the government, state and municipal buildings are granite. The \$4,000,000 Pennsylvania depot which is about to be built here will be of granite, and the greater part of the \$20,000,000 worth of public buildings, which they have decided to put up in Washington in the near future will be granite structures. We have

many great granite quarries, and the business of taking out and preparing the stone is a special trade."

"But, Mr. Duncan," said I, "do not the members of your trade cut other stones than granite?"

"No," was the reply. "The granite cutter has a trade of his own. There is as much difference between him and the soft stonecutter as there is between the shoemaker and tailor. The soft stone man shapes his work with chisels of soft steel, which he pounds with a wooden mallet. He owns his own tools and carries them from job to job. The granite cutter works with the finest steel. He uses a steel hammer. He does not own his tools, and he is ready to work with tools or machines as his employer directs. All he asks is that his employer keep to his agreement with the union, giving him reasonable hours and fair wages."

"How many granite cutters are there, Mr. Duncan?"

"We have about 14,000 in the United States, and 97 per cent of these belong to the Granite Cutters' union."

"And what wages do such men get, Mr. Duncan?"

"According to our national agreements

(Continued on Page Sixteen.)