



Mr. Ford's Page



PERHAPS you overlooked it in the day's news, because the most important occurrences are not always deemed worthy of emphasis in the newspapers. But the fact that the farmers of the United States have considered the "strike" as a method of solving their own difficulties, and have arrived at the conclusion that they have no moral right to strike, is one of the most significant decisions made in this generation. And the conclusions which the farmers draw from their own attitude and belief are of very great importance to the labor question in general. Everybody at one time or another has asked himself the question, "Suppose the farmers should strike—what then?" Serious men have been appalled by the mere suggestion.

But wiseacres, who apparently do not know what is going on, have put it aside as impossible. "Why, the farmers are not organized," they say. Which shows how little they are informed.

It was at a national meeting of the organized farmers of the United States—The National Grange, the Patrons of Husbandry, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Cotton States Board and the Association of Farmers' Union Presidents—whose aggregate membership covers the country and whose influence is unimpeachable, that the decision referred to was made. If the farmers had so far forgotten their relation and duty to humanity at large as to put their private or class rights above the Public Right, it would not be impossible for them to start a curtailing movement that would make the wiseacres turn pale.

This national meeting adopted a memorial from which we quote one paragraph:

"What would be the verdict of the people if the farmers of the United States should go on a strike and should refuse to supply the wants and needs of those who are not in a position to produce food and clothing for themselves? The farmers would be condemned from one end of the country to the other, and the fact would be pointed out that the owners and tillers of the land had no right, either moral or legal, to bring about such a calamity? If the farmer has no such right, those who handle his products have no such right."

That is basically sound—both in economics and morals. It is especially notable because in the last sentence it links all industry with farming, and this is a point that we often forget.

WE ARE accustomed to say that the farmer produces our food. That is a partial statement. He produces our clothing too. Where do the wool and the cotton and the leather and the flax come from? Why, they come from the farm!

Farming produces railroading too. Would there be any railroads without farming? The farmer feeds the trainmen, and the moving of crops is the basic reason for the railroads' existence. Farming produces manufacturing too. It may be the coal beneath the boilers that keeps the factory wheels turning, but it is the farmer's products that keep the workers going. Food is the fuel of human effort.

Now, whenever railroad men, or mechanics, or miners go out on strike, they go out on the food which the farmer furnishes. The farmer is the commissary of everything, good and bad. And he has a right to his word when the very products of his toil are used to create conditions which make it harder for all the people to live.

The three great arts are linked together—Agriculture, Transportation, Manufacture. They all serve each other. But the origin and sustenance of all is Agriculture.

The farmer feels this more keenly than anyone else, because he still lives amid conditions that make for sanity of mind. He lives under the sky, he deals with the soil, he knows the flawless and beautiful order of nature's laws; and he sees also that the anarchy of human society is not constructive but steadily destructive.

Yes, he could strike too. The farmer could strike hardest of all. Why doesn't he? Because he feels deep and sacredly in the

core of his heart that when mere man grows so impudent as to attempt to hold up the God-given processes of nature, it would constitute the last rebellion of mankind on the physical plane. Whether he would say it in just those words or not, this is what the farmer feels. If he struck he would be a traitor to Nature. The shining sun, the falling shower would rebuke him. Seedtime without seed would denounce him, and harvest-time without harvest would curse him.

No, the farmer is not going to trifle with the Powers that are above and around him. He is Priest of the Soil. He would not profane his earthly altar. America should be thankful for the strength of the moral imperative among American farmers! Now, the question is, "Has any other man who handles the fruits of the soil the right to do what the farmer has no right to do?"

Has the miner the right to refuse coal that the wheat may be baked into bread? Has the spinner a right to refuse labor that the cotton and wool may be spun into clothing? Has the railroad man a right to refuse his skill that food and clothing and the means of living might be transported to those who need them? Clearly, if the farmer has no right to withhold, the others have not.

***WILL the Farmers strike?
They have declared they
have no legal or moral right to
hinder the processes of Nature
which feed the people. They
ask if anyone else who handles
the necessities of life has a right
to withhold them? The Farmers
have struck bed rock on this
question. They see clearly be-
tween the right to high wages
and the "right to strike."
There is no "right" to make
the innocent suffer. We must
find a way to secure full indus-
trial justice without strikes.
The strike had its origin in
the blindness, greed and in-
humanity of certain employers.
The strike is being continued
by the same defects among
selfish leaders of the workers.
It is wrong and wasteful from
any point of view.***

TO SAY these things is to challenge many popular fallacies. Our economic past has been so filled with greed and selfishness and absolute wrongdoing that it is difficult for some to believe that to deny the right to strike is not also to deny the right to high wages, proper working hours and conditions.

Let it be said right here that labor has a right to high wages, a right to proper hours, a right to proper conditions, a right to a share in the profits, a right to a voice in the conduct of industry. These are moral rights; they are inherent. Whether they are acknowledged or not, whether they are granted or not, they still remain rights, because they are fundamentally human rights—they are just, they are good, they are humane, they are practicable, they produce social good and prosperity.

But that these rights entitle anyone—to quote again from the Farmers' memorial—"to starve the people of the cities," in order to force, by the suffering of the innocent, a proper respect for rights on the part of the employing class, is drawing an unwarrantable conclusion.

"How are we going to get our rights without striking?" Here again we run up against one of the snags of our industrial system. If an employer won't do right, how is he to be made to do right?

Well, how would it do to educate the employer to a knowledge of how he could do the right thing and make it pay? And the men can do that, if the employer is not bright enough to see it for himself.

(An employer who cannot see these things for himself is not fit to direct his workmen.) Men have been dividing themselves off into classes for the sake of hindering and hurting each other, when they should have endeavored to draw themselves nearer together for the sake of educating each other in different points of view. The employer knows things that the employe doesn't know, and the employe knows things that the employer doesn't know—and all about the same economic conditions too. The sensible, direct way would be, not to begin to try to starve each other out because they don't know the same things, but to come together and share their light, and all get the broader point of view, and go on together in partnership of production and profits.

A strike is war. War is unnecessary. War is an irrecoverable loss to both winner and loser. Let us delay both war and strikes and use the simpler and more effective means of meeting man to man, face to face, as fellow-laborers who desire to find the right basis. For it is only the right basis that can continue. Anything that is not right, whether it temporarily favors the employes or the employers, cannot last—because it is not right.

And anything that is not consistent with our duty to ourselves, our work and the community, is not right.