

“UNIONISM” IS THE SUBJECT OF ELOQUENT AND LOGICAL ADDRESS BY H. H. PARSONS

Labor Day Orator Discusses Many Problems of the Organized Workingmen of the United States, Calling Attention to Virtues and Weaknesses With Equal Candor and Commending Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt and the Conservation Policy.

From the speaker's stand on Higgins square, Harry H. Parsons addressed the Labor day throng. He delivered an intelligent and intelligible discussion of "Unionism: A Phase of the Labor Question," speaking with his usual brilliancy. Without recourse to tricks of elocution, speaking straight from the heart, seemingly, Mr. Parsons awoke his audience to enthusiasm time after time, and finally sent those who heard him home with plenty of food for thought. The problems, the virtues, the weaknesses of unionism, he discussed with candor, deprecating violence and advocating co-operation and arbitration. In the course of his address he commended Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt and the policy that upholds the conservation of natural resources.

The exercises of which Mr. Parsons was the principal feature were held immediately after the morning parade. George W. Scott, general chairman of the Labor day committee, presided, and the invocation was delivered by Rev. J. W. Tait, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal church. The Missoula Maennerchor sang "The Soldier's Farewell" before Mayor Logan, representing Missoula, bade the visitors welcome. After another song by the Maennerchor, Mr. Parsons was introduced. He spoke as follows:

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen—The celebrated Dr. Bouteiller was, I believe, accustomed to remark that doubtless the Lord might have made a better berry than the strawberry, but doubtless the Lord never did. I certainly voice the sentiments of this festive company today when I say that doubtless the Lord might have made a better man than the laboring man, but surely the Lord never did. From civilization's early dawn to this very hour, the seat of the earth has been the man who carries his bread by the sweat of his face. Whether serf or vassal, slave or freeman, peasant or poet, social existence and progress has ever depended and still depends on his labor and production. Our civil war marked the close of that immortal struggle for the ownership of labor, and we are now engaged in the negotiation of a peaceful and more universal struggle—a struggle to define and arrange the relations of capital and labor. In this Hesperian task we are fortunate beyond compare to have with us the heart and conscience, the courage and hard common sense of the American people, who have by law set aside this day in honor of the men and women of honest toil.

Labor day is dedicated to him who really works—to the genius who produces and adds to the capital and liberty of the race to the actual producer, whether by mind or muscle, whether in the form of physical exertion, the prophet's vision or the poet's song.

Ethically, the one great problem facing the people today is: HOW CAN MAN BEST BE DEVELOPED IN AMERICA? That is the question to which mankind bends its ear and unionism its energies. As a means of this end unionism has set itself to work to secure for every man a just reward for his toil, and to determine what proportion of all product belongs to capital and what to labor.

The production of wealth generally consists in the application of brains and brawn to the substances of nature. Neither is a potent producing agent, without the other. The forest of nature may be of little value itself, but when the laborer fells the trees, runs his furrows through the soil and plants his seed, it becomes a veritable garden of Eden—a temple of wealth—with powers of laborer, cuts the clothes he wears, the appliances he uses, his home, his friends and government are portions of capital without which the forest might stand and the soil remain forever virgin. So that in the production of wealth, each plays a part, whether small or great, and is entitled to credit in proportion.

There is always harmony in the process of production. It is only when the combined product is to be distributed that conflicts begin—when labor shows its teeth and capital its power. Economically the problem has ever been: how to determine what proportion of wealth produced is attributable to labor and what moiety to capital. A more difficult problem has not been dreamt of in your philosophy, Mr. President.

Difficulties Many. The difficulties of solution are many, though not insuperable. These difficulties are augmented by the fact that

not all employers are solvent; not all manufacturers and enterprises are paying concerns. There are pauper "capitalists" as well as pauper laborers, and the one is often as much an anti-social being as the other. I know of railroads which are nothing but a mortgage and a streak of rust. No employer can determine how much he can pay until his product is sold, and he measures the return of his capital—and these depend upon the season and the market. Then, again, under our beneficent government, with all its limitless opportunities, the servant of today becomes the master of tomorrow; your Lazarus in rags may tomorrow be a Dives of the royal purple.

True unionism should never be misjudged. Let it be understood once for all, that unionism is not a crusade against inequality, freedom or capital—but a protest against caste and class legislation at all times and everywhere. It is neither a mendicant nor a beggar. It desires no relief or discriminatory legislation in its own favor; it simply asks for justice, for untrammelled opportunity and equality before the law. The labor of yesterday becomes the capital of today; that labor of yesterday is scarcely protected. Not so with the labor of today. Yesterday's labor gets double the protection and far greater pay than comes to the effort of today. Unionism simply asks that the one shall be given no more protection than the other. It demands only what is ethically and economically its own; it asks for nothing more, and by the grace of God it will be content with nothing less.

Not a Vandal.

Let it be understood once for all that the union man is not by education or nature either a vandal, an anarchist or a nihilist; that he neither desires the destruction of honest debts, nor the forfeiture of the rights of property; that when such settlements are heralded as union settlements that they are simply the agitations of misguided agitators, not the organization. For one I do not believe that there is any irreconcilable conflict between capital and labor; I do not believe that unionism demands hostile or repressive legislation against a man or an organization simply because he or it happens to be rich. No, never! I believe that honest capital and wages are of the same order; that they are like the blades of a pair of shears, powerless when separated, but irresistible when coming together. I believe that true unionism stands for regulated liberty under the law, that it stands equally for the protection of Dives with his millions honestly acquired, as well as for Lazarus in his rags; but that it seeks to equalize conditions that in the future no Dives can reign and no Lazarus exist.

Today two boys are born; one in yonder hovel without money, leisure, education or opportunity—the other in yonder palace, borne up by every wind of fortune "as on the eagle's wing"; unionism has undertaken to make the chances of the two as equal as is right, and before this movement is checked and through every child equal opportunity. I believe that unionism stands equally against the mind-blessed violence (sometimes committed in its name), and the fatal dry rot of fraud. I believe that capital and labor should be allies, not antagonists; and that they should, and are, will be, colleagues whose friendly co-operation is essential to our national and individual prosperity.

We have no such broad differentiations between capital and labor as obtain in Europe, where the status of the father is visited on the heads of the sons to succeeding generations. Our labor reaches beyond mere subsistence, or the power of providing for itself and creates a capital. As Mr. Webster said: "Gentlemen, the labor of the United States is respectable. We are emphatically a country of labor; and labor with us is not reluctant drudgery. It is cheerful, contented, spirited, because it is respectable, and because it is certain of its reward. Labor everywhere mixes itself with capital. The fields around us, how many of them are tilled by their owners? The shops of our town, how many are occupied by their proprietors, for the convenient pursuit of their callings? Hence, in the United States, we see capital and labor mixed together in a degree unequalled in the world."

Let us look, gentlemen, to the condition of other countries, and inquire a little into the causes, which, in some of them, produce poverty and distress.

The lamentations of which reach our own shores, I see around me many whom I know to be emigrants from other countries. Why are they here? Why is the native of Ireland among us? Why has he abandoned scenes as dear to him as these hills and rivers are to you? Is there any other cause than this, that the burden of taxation on the one hand, and the low reward of labor on the other, left him without the means of a comfortable subsistence. In Europe the case is different, those who are dependent upon him? Was it not on that account that he left his own land, and sought an asylum in a country of free laws, of comparative exemption from taxation, of boundless extent, and in which the means of living are cheap, and the prices of labor just as adequate? And do not these remarks apply, with more or less accuracy to every other part of Europe? Is it not true that so-called "safety" and industry, and good character can do more for a man here than any other part of the world? And is not this truth, which is so plain and obvious that none can deny it, founded in this plain reason, that labor in this country earns a better reward than anywhere else, and so gives more comfort, more individual independence and more elevation of character? Whatever else may benefit particular portions of society, whatever else may favor short-sighted commercial enterprise, professional skill or extraordinary individual sagacity or good fortune, be assured, gentlemen, that nothing can advance the mass of society in prosperity and happiness, nothing can uphold the substantial interest and steadily improve the general condition and character of the whole, but this one thing—COMPENSATING REWARDS TO LABOR.

There has never been a prosperous time when the dollar of invested capital paid so low a return in interest as it does today; nor has there ever been a time when the dollar that is earned would buy more of everything that is essential for the laboring man himself and family as it buys today; nor was there ever a time when so many dollars have been paid for such short hours of toil. And to what party, gentlemen, is the laborer more indebted for this condition of things than to unionism?

Power of Wealth.

Mr. Roosevelt, in a recent speech, told you that he was an optimist on the question of unionism; so am I. He told you that it was a force with boundless powers of good, and he believed it; so do I. But looming over the horizon there comes another power—the power of wealth, the inordinate power of combined millions. I confess that the only fear I ever entertained in regard to our future is whether there will be found any adequate remedy to stay and check the increasing power of incorporated wealth. Few, indeed, are the public men that dare defy it. Our politicians have bowed and cringed and fawned to his power and idol until they are hump-backed in their idleness. It is to the great masses of the people we must look in the hope that their sense of danger may be aroused in time to grapple successfully with it. President Roosevelt grappled with the monster, the unions are grappling with it and with the people's help and God's will they will carry it through. Who but the union and our expresident and public sentiment compelled the anthracite magnates to submit to arbitration, and compelled in other cases obedience to our laws?

The strength of unionism lies both in its promise and in its accomplishments. The laborer who has not read the signs of the times, nor the pages of history, to him who has not fathomed the far-reaching and subtle influence of unionism, its power and its achievements will out-fable fairly here. The founders of the old craft-guilds knew that there was no safety in the use of a prejudice; they builded strong and long because they builded, not upon passion or error, but upon a moral principle. The main design and general movement of the founders of unionism has ever been to ameliorate the condition and insure the elevation of man. While unionism is not a religious institution, its ethical work approaches that of a church; while it is not a political party, it has shaped the course of legislation and our common destiny to an astonishing degree; and while it is not purely an economical entity, it has created, and is solving some of the mightiest questions which have ever agitated a people.

King-craft as a ruling power is at an end in America; it is the workmen who are putting forth their hands to govern. Was it not a meeting like this in New York in 1834 that first agitated the proposition to open public lands to actual settlers, and that first started the crusade against those boundless land grants? Was it not through the unflinching efforts of unionism that the old laws which imprisoned an honest man for debt were repealed—that bankruptcy laws were adopted—that the old "commodore" laws by which a meritorious employe became a criminal by consulting with his fellows and asking for an increase of wages, were abolished? Was it not in compliance with its demands that labor bureaus, national and state, were organized—that the government revoked land grants of millions of acres to dilatory railroads which failed to comply with the terms of the gift? Where do you find a stronger advocate of our public school system—that safeguard of American liberty—than among unions? In our struggle with slave power, were they not found on

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THE CRESCENT

The able that ennobled and dignified labor? Did they not recognize the fact that moral self-respect was a primal condition for national prosperity? And did they not know that no laborer could have that respect unless he was free from any and all masters? And who will guarantee that the labor vote does not determine most of our national elections?

But, gentlemen, potent as unionism is in political life, it is no less powerful as an economic factor. Through its influence the old "truck system" was abolished; the old laws prohibiting the incorporation of unions have been repealed, and the distinction between the wages paid to men and to women for the same work and the same hours is gradually disappearing. They have done as much to equalize taxation as any other party; they have limited the convict labor policies; they are proving and establishing the efficiency of the co-operative system of labor; they have secured laws which give to every mechanic a lien for his wages; they have procured fellow-worker laws by which an honest employe performing honest service should not leave his family in destitution by reason of his being wrongfully injured or killed; they have enacted employers' liability acts, under which a master can no longer be negligent with impunity, as well as mining and health inspectors which make for the general good and the public weal; finally, they have secured eight-hour laws, by which time is given for education, leisure and rest, and that a higher wage so that the common laborer of America has more luxuries, education and knowledge than formerly fell to the lot of prince, potentate or king.

Not content with improving the condition of its own members, unionism has entered the broader field of ethics and given to others the benefit of its experience and wisdom. Laws have been passed prohibiting the employment of children under certain ages, and only for certain hours; it has regulated the condition of apprentices; it has ceased to advocate violence, but instead has secured general boards of arbitration; it is abolishing the black list, establishing aid and charitable bureaus, and using its very effort for the cause of temperance and sobriety; it is insuring the brothers of the craft, and paying out millions of dollars on such insurance, and has ever obtained, on many roads and in some enterprises, a pension system, through which the broken and unfortunate laborer, like the disabled veteran, can lie down in the evening of life in peace "like a prince." Verily, by their fruits shall ye know them.

An organization which has thus shown the quality of its genius, its powers, its charity as unionism has done, will finish its mission. It will go forward, not backward. I have an abiding conviction that by its co-ordinating influence there will ultimately be established the principle of "equal rights to all and special privileges to none," so that its blessings will be felt and enjoyed in "states unborn and generations yet to be." Gentlemen, we shall NOT fail! A "moral principle multiplies us by tens as it multiplied the early abolitionists."

(Continued on Page Seven)

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