
Is It Possible?

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Those who take an interest in the welfare of labor regard with special satisfaction the onward march of organization.

Already in the United States the armies of organized workingmen number fully a million. Argument, discussion, and agitation are doing a mighty work, and the indications are that past success is only the initial step in a movement which promises untold benefits to toilers.

We unhesitatingly concede all that organized labor claims. It proposes better wages. It insists upon honorable treatment by employers. It demands not only a less number of hours as a day's work, but in all cases where it is practicable, a state number of hours, so that when from any cause the hours are increased, pay may be demanded and secured for overtime.

Nor is this all. Organized labor puts into operation many practical projects having in view the improvement of wage-men morally and socially. And further still, many of the organizations are life insurance institutions in which money paid in in small amounts secures the depositors more or less money in case of disability, and in case of death a comforting sum to heirs.

Organization does still more for those who rally beneath its banners. It secures fraternal relations, a deep and abiding regard for each other's welfare. It is a bond of friendship and fellowship. It recognizes mutual interests and does all that men can do to promote harmonious relations. Nevertheless, is it possible with so much that is commendable, so much that commands approval and admiration, that in numerous instances organized labor is committing fatal mistakes? It is possible that while organized labor rightfully claims exemption from the penalties which organized capital imposes, itself inflicts penalties upon other violative of every principle of individual liberty which constitutes the supreme glory of American citizenship? Are there not

frequent occurrences transpiring throughout the country which make such interrogatories pertinent and appropriate? If so, what is their character?

“Come, now, let us reason together,” is an old exhortation. When men reason together they are frank, sincere, and without disguise. They state their propositions in a way to command approval. The tricks of diplomacy are not tolerated. The purpose is to arrive at honest conclusions; to deal justly. There is no word jugglery. No sophisms, only plain, straightforward argument.

Taking these things as a basis we start out by the assertion of a fundamental proposition that a man, at any rate an American man, has an irrevocable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and when pursuing such things within the limits of law, any penalty inflicted upon him has all the ineffaceable marks of the worst form of bigotry. It is a wrong so monstrous that justice hides its face and cries out “shame!”

It requires no stretch of fancy to say, “There are labor organizations composed of honorable men, profoundly interested in the welfare of labor — of workingmen. They work to better the condition of toilers, are ready to make sacrifices for them. They state correct principles and advocate them, and are accomplishing good.”

This can be said of labor organizations. We need not repeat what we have said in commendation of organized labor. But there are labor organizations which display a zeal very much like that which animated St. Paul when he went forth to persecute Christians, a zeal that degenerates into cruelty.¹

There are labor organization whose members are taught that it is *right* to deny a non-union man, or a man who is not a member of a labor organization, the privilege of working at his trade for a livelihood, and this great wrong is being perpetrated constantly throughout the country. For instance, a man is erecting a house; he has employed non-union carpenters; the fact is disclosed by the “walking delegate,” and forthwith the employer of these non-union men is required to dismiss them. Such a monstrous proceeding is an assumption of power on the part of organizations to do an act of unqualified injustice, a wrong so flagrant that it ought to arouse universal indignation.

¹ Reference to Acts, chapter 8, verse 2: “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”

It is held that the highest prerogatives of government are first, to take a man's life, second, deprive him of his liberty, and third, confiscate his property, but here is a labor organization, by the *one act* of depriving a man of work, which is in some measure equal to taking his life, because it deprives him of that which sustains life, it deprives him of the means of sustaining the lives of wife and children.

Here we inquire, of what offense is the man guilty that a labor organization should strike him down? This, and *only this*: that he has refused to join a labor organization. He is a non-union carpenter, bricklayer, painter, printer, or some other mechanic, who for reasons satisfactory to himself, declines to join a labor organization.

In this course of action, be it remembered, he has violated no law, human or divine. On the contrary, he could appeal to constitution and statutes in support of his cause. As a man he had a right to choose, and in doing that he wronged no man, and any penalty inflicted upon him, it is seen at a glance, is well calculated to introduce irritations fruitful of disasters, because there is not a court in Christendom, which, if appealed to, would not grant him redress.

True, it may be said, and is said, that ostracized workingmen should join a labor organization. It has been said by those who have persecuted men to death for heresy that they could escape fagots, dungeons, thumbscrews, and tortures of every kind by subscribing to the dogmas of the church in power. Gods! has it come to this in free America, that labor organizations have concluded to advance their fortunes by persecutions?

We are not discussing *scabism*. We make no reference to a class of degenerate creatures who seek the dismissal of union men that they may occupy their places, but rather to men who want fair wages and obtain them, but who choose to remain outside of labor organizations. And now we make this declaration, that imposing penalties on opinions, on acts inherently right, which neither God nor man has promulgated laws to suppress, will result disastrously to those who perpetuate the wrong.

We know of workingmen's organizations the members of which work in harmony with men who are "non-union." These union men seek to win over the non-union men by argument and convincing facts, and are meeting with success. A more liberal spirit than is displayed in certain instances would redound to the credit of labor organizations.

The present is not the time for intolerance and persecution, and above all things, workingmen who have ben the groaning victims of oppression and injustice should not use power when it is secured to inflict penalties upon other workingmen. Such an outrage should not be possible.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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