
Labor and Legislation

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Thoughtful workingmen are considering in what regards, and to what extent, labor can be benefited by legislation. But before we come to the consideration of legislative action, other matters preliminary to such questions demand attention.

In the first place, as workingmen we are to consider in what measures laws are required to secure for labor simple justice, because justice to labor works no wrong to society, but, on the contrary, promotes the general welfare, while injustice to labor is in every instance productive of general injury — necessarily so, since labor is the great force and factor in promoting the public welfare. Any injustice to labor is wide spreading and far reaching. Labor, contented and prosperous, measures the progress and prosperity of communities everywhere; while labor, discontented and impoverished, marks decay and retrogression in all branches of business.

Labor, having investigated conditions and arrived at conclusions relating to such laws as are required to correct prevailing wrongs, should be able to unify its forces for the purpose of securing the election of men of first class capabilities to champion its measures in legislative bodies. If at this juncture there is division and faction, failure is inevitable, regardless of the justice of the measures proposed, the wrongs complained of, or the rights which labor ought to secure.

The fact ought to be recognized, and have weight, that comparatively few men are successful legislators. There are men in the ranks of organized labor in all regards capable of being law makers, but they are few in number and far between in location. This is not the result of mental incapacity, but is owing to the fact that workingmen have had, as a general proposition, neither the time nor the opportunities for study and mental discipline required to equip them for preparing bills embodying their demands, in matter and language required in statutes which must be constitutional in their provisions, and so con-

structed as to challenge the acumen of lawyers when appealed to, for the purpose of affording labor the relief it demands. Hence we infer that in selecting men to represent labor in legislative bodies, two prime questions should be considered: First, are the men the ardent, uncompromising friends of labor? Second, are they fully equipped by native ability, education and experience, to legislate — that is to say, to frame measures legal in form, free from ambiguity, and which if enacted into laws will accomplish the purpose for which they were enacted?

We are confident labor is making serious mistakes in this matter of legislation, by electing men who, however well meaning and honest, are sadly lacking in equipment, as law makers. They are always at the mercy of others. They propose measures they do not construct and are therefore incapable of analyzing them. They do not comprehend the intricacies of phraseology nor discover lurking technicalities. Wanting in legislative sagacity, amendments, and provisos are injected, and when the bill becomes a law it is shorn of usefulness and labor pays all the penalties, or the bill finds its way into the custody of an unfriendly committee and by various subterfuges is placed where it cannot be reached, because its friends were incapable of applying such forces as experience and capability could wield to overcome opposition.

Viewing matters from such standpoints, what would seem to be the essential requirement? Manifestly, for labor to concentrate its votes upon the friends of labor whose qualifications for legislators are admitted, regardless of any connection with labor organizations. They need not necessarily be lawyers, but most certainly if they are lawyers so much the better, as lawyers are best equipped for framing laws; they, more readily than others, discover defects in bills; they are the best judges of phraseology, and know when a bill meets the demands of labor. Besides, there are to be found, everywhere, lawyers who are in profound sympathy with labor and who know the wrongs to which it is subjected, and are the best judges of legal remedies. Ordinarily, lawyers are equipped for presenting to deliberative bodies the strong points of a measure, and are trained to detect and expose the strategic movements of opponents, and as legislators, shape all laws. Hence, as the advocates of labor measures, they become of great value.

In these times no labor bill that touches in any way the assumed prerogatives of employers and corporations, can be introduced into legislative bodies without arousing fierce hostility. Money has its

henchmen in these bodies, and throngs of them, as lobbyists, men who are selected, if representatives, because for a consideration they will "sell out." They are known to have their price, like certain witnesses who swear for their clients, shaping their statements without reference to truth but in a way to escape the penalties of perjury. To expose these debauched creatures or to render their schemes powerless has become one of the supreme duties of legislators who are governed by principle — not always nor indeed at any time an easy task — and labor in a special sense needs such men to champion its measures, and the lack of their assistance accounts to some extent for the slow progress labor legislation is making in the country.

Labor deems it prudent to have what it calls "legislative boards," to see that certain measures are introduced and to watch their progress. These boards constitute lobbies, and by their operations often do more harm than good, and serve directly to create opposition lobbies made up of shrewd and unscrupulous men, whose operations cannot be as severely criticized as they deserve, because labor, having a lobby, is required to remain silent. As a result, in the battle of lobbies labor generally suffers defeat.

In such cases labor is in the habit of saying, by acts if not by words, and often by declarations, that the enemies of labor, or those who oppose labor measures in legislation, will be watched and defeated when again they are proposed for legislative positions. To say the least of it, such intimations of reserved penalties are not wise; reticence as to what labor will do, or not do, would be preferable, since in scarcely any given case can any one foretell what labor would do. It seldom unifies — far more frequently splits and factionizes. Labor boards for legislative purposes could be prudently reduced in number with a prospect of more favorable results. In so far as the future welfare of labor depends upon the enactment of wise laws, we feel satisfied labor must, in several essential points, change its program; men must be found, first and foremost, who are capable; nothing in such positions condones ignorance and inexperience, however honest the representative of labor may be. The time has come when the champions of labor in legislative bodies must be not only earnest and honest, but so admittedly intelligent, so sound in legal lore and strategy, that whether in committee or on the floor they will be found the equals in all regards of the enemies of labor. To be watchful in these regards means future victory for workingmen. To neglect them is to insure defeat.