

LABOR LEGISLATION.

A Few Timely Hints to Working-men.

Now that the national election is over, we hope that we may be free to discuss a question or two which we deem vital to the interests of the workingman, without the charge being made that we are attempting to influence the toilers in voting for a nominee of some political party. It has been necessary in times past to guard against the introduction into the unions of subjects which might lead to an endorsement of candidates or parties, especially just preceding an election. Labor organizations were so constituted in their earlier history that even a matter of legislation favorable or inimical to the laborer scarcely could be mentioned in meeting because it would carry with it an apparent approval or condemnation of some one responsible for its existence or enforcement, who held an official position by grace of one party or another, and by the votes of the members of the union, says the Union Guide. But even under the rules adopted to this end politicians still sought entrance to meetings, under various pretexts, and tried to beguile the members by a show of friendliness and promise of future benefits. The unions soon found themselves deceived by the alluring promises of the vote-hunters when they gave hearing to this class of persons, and more stringent means had to be adopted to save their organizations from disruption.

The union of today, however, is not the union of former times. It has passed through the primary lessons of experience, and is able to define the meaning of terms erudite and complex, and to make its wants known in words of such strength and simplicity as to require no elucidation, but only yes or no for answer. It has expanded. It has grown in knowledge as well as in years and in numbers. It is advancing to a position to enable it to discuss the course of public officials in matters involving the welfare of the workers without danger of a hot protest from a zealous adherent of some political combination.

Every trades unionist has been free to choose his own way of exercising his political franchise, and no union has attempted to hinder him, but in the exercise of that right he has learned the futility of his attempts to better his condition alone. While no man may deride him for the interest he manifests in politics, he sees how senseless it is to quarrel with his brother toiler "because he tossed not high his cap in air" for some particular politician who wanted an office for the salary, and doesn't care a snap of his finger for those who are ready to fight over him. He has learned that it is better to be a good man and neighbor than a good republican, democrat, prohibitionist, or what not, and that his trade interests are of more value to him than the elevation of his party leader to office. He is almost ready to sit still and complacently hear his political paragon scarified until he assumes the appearance of a deviled crab, if he knows the truth is being related.

The majority of the workingmen realize that capital and the control of opportunity to earn a fair living are rapidly concentrating in the hands of the few, and the "statesmen are scrambling for a job." The army of idle workmen is increasing and getting hungry. Some are begging, some stealing, some starving. It will soon be some other people's turn to look in vain for employment, and they know that before long it will be up to the men who are now at work. The responsibility for this condition of affairs lies with the legislative and administrative or executive departments of government, local and national. The remedy must come through a reformation of those departments, and in our opinion it is useless for the workingmen to look to anyone but themselves

for relief. If they will not fight their own battles, how can they expect those whose interests lie on the opposite side to do so for them?

In plain words, many believe that the time is almost here when it is absolutely necessary for the unions to elect their men to public office; that they are strong enough to do it independently or induce the parties to place genuine wage-earners (not labor skates and fakirs) on their tickets. Whether this be done in the immediate future or not, there is nothing to prevent the laboringmen from discussing and planning measures for temporary relief, at least, and it will be done.

A LESSON TO THE PREACHER.

Rev. Dr. Thomas, of Chicago, after watching a group of men laying a hot asphalt pavement in front of his Monroe street residence, said:

"It has made me wiser more than ever that I might be in close touch with that underworld of labor. In this work I have seen some of the stuff that goes to the making of men. When the asphalt leaves the furnace, it registers 285 degrees, according to the Citizen. It is dumped into the street at a heat of 250 degrees. With boards bound to their feet these experts begin spreading the stuff. Their feet have become caloused to the heat in a great measure, but occasionally a workman would leave his task, take off the board and shoe and discover a long pouched blister along the bottom of his foot. With a penknife he splits the skin, lets the water out, and rubs salt into the opening. Then putting on his shoe and his plank sole, he goes to work again on a hot surface that would disable any ordinary man who would stand it five minutes. And all this is done in the utmost good nature, with no houndings by a captious boss. This work has been a great lesson to me."

GOVERNMENT SLAVES.

Since the postoffice employees of Chicago have formed a labor union under the American Federation of Labor, the executive council has thoroughly investigated the conditions of the postoffice clerks and finds them to be the most abused of wage-earners.

This is so much more surprising, since it has been generally the belief that postoffice employees, employed by Uncle Sam under the civil service rule, had a comparatively easy berth, says the Erie People. Quite the contrary seems to be the case, however, according to the statement of President Gompers, who says:

"We not only found that the clerks were compelled to work 12 to 14 hours a day, but that they have no day of rest. They work seven days a week. For all this time given to the government the majority of the clerks receive from \$600 to \$750 a year. Then there is a system of fines that is un-American and should be abolished. We will not ask the Chicago postmaster to change the system, but will go direct to the postoffice department at Washington. We will not take up the question of legislation for the clerks until later, as there are pressing grievances that can be remedied without legislation."

THE BITER BEING BITTEN.

The trusts are finding some things in New Jersey besides mosquitoes and liberal charters. The little original star of the American Union has had the reputation, for years, of living sumptuously on corporations, and the habit has become fixed. The state opened its arms and heart to those who sought to monopolize the earth, and sent them forth fully equipped, under the great seal of the state, with power to plunder and possess. It has been the ceaselessly operating incubator, hatching trusts by the wholesale. Every egg, no matter how bad, incubated, too. New Jersey hatches are to be found all over the country,

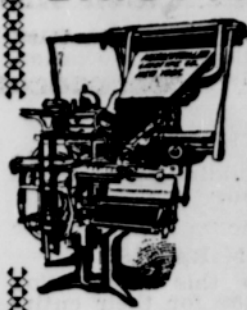
and are always vigorous. But the state has recently assumed the role of "come into my parlor," said the spider to the fly." It has increased the taxes of a certain class of corporations from \$70,900,000 to \$260,574,000. All corporations that use public property, that enjoy special privileges, such as the use of streets and roads, for instance, are subject to the increased tax. Naturally there is much excitement among the "tax ridden" victims, and all sorts of unpromising things are being said against the state that has gathered the trusts under her wing, as a hen hovers her chickens. The idea of compelling a monopoly to pay anything for having the people turned over to its tender mercies, strikes these autocratic creations as monstrous, and subversive of the fundamental principles of our commercial systems. It is said that the state is "pillaging the corporations," and attacking property rights. Why of course it is. It is up-setting the whole system of corporate enterprise, which was inaugurated to take in money and not to pay it out.—Agricultural Epitomist.

THEY ARE HEATHEN SLAVES.

There is a phase of the employment of Japanese and Chinese labor which the average American citizen and employer of labor overlooks, and which should be brought to the attention of all classes of American citizens, says the Union Record. Every struggle of the American people has been for personal freedom of the individual. Every clause of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States takes ground for common freedom and liberty. The struggle of 1861-65 freed debased race, and made it impossible for an individual to reap profit from negro slavery, and the oppression of ages was settled with a stroke of the pen of Abraham Lincoln, and the clash of arms resulted in forever destroying a system which had stood for eighty-seven years a menace to constitutional government and individual freedom.

But the lust for gold and the greed of individuals continued, and ways and means to secure cheap labor at the expense of the wage-earners were eagerly sought for by unscrupulous employers. Cheap labor from Europe was imported to the coal fields and cotton mills of the East, and Chinese coolie labor and Japanese from the West. The feature we desire to call attention to is the fact that in nearly all cases these cheap laborers are brought here by labor contractors and padrones, who contract these men out and receive their pay, and settle with them on terms arranged before they are brought here. They have their own means of compelling these miserable slaves to submit to the system they have agreed to before they are brought here. The average American would not agree to own a slave, and the point we wish to make is, how can they consistently employ a slave who is owned body and soul by a greedy slave dealer? There are not ten Chinamen under the age of 40 years, on the Pacific Coast or in the balance of the United States, who do not pay monthly tribute to the Six Companies, and probably 90 per cent of the Japanese who now inflict themselves on the industries of this country pay daily tribute to a padrone. It is small argument for employers to say they have difficulty in securing labor when they stand ready and willing to employ Japs and Chinese. If there was not a sordid demand for this condition of things the Japs and Chinese would not be here, and we would not have every line of cheap labor flooded with these Oriental slaves, to the detriment of our own young men and women, who would gladly accept the menial and cheaper classes of labor as stepping stones to something better. One appalling feature is the apathy of the average employer, who is directly responsible for the infliction of this monstrous and dangerous system on the community.

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