

LABOR UNIONS IN THE UNITED STATES THEIR ORIGIN AND GROWTH

(Article No. 6)

In all the more important movements of labor unions there are certain general rules or principles that ought always to be borne in mind and observed as such. Among them the following may be mentioned:

1. They should never do or attempt to do anything in their dealings with employers, or others, simply because they can do it, regardless of the question of right or wrong which it may involve.

A violation of this rule shows a gross lack of the sense of justice—means an adoption of the infamous doctrine that "might makes right"—a barbarous and brutal doctrine, in the application of which, oppression and tyranny have drenched the earth with innocent blood and filled the world with want, misery, sorrow and distress. Those of us who belong to these unions should never forget, that however strong we may be, we are, by no means the "whole thing"—that however numerous we are, there will always be others—that we shall never, in all probability, become the "only pebble on the beach," scrambled for by everybody else—that while we may sometimes be strong enough to enforce unjust demands in some cases, and that, too, with impunity to ourselves, we shall never be able to do so always—and that if such ability should ever fall to our lot, it would ultimately prove a calamity not only to others, but to ourselves as well.

Absolute and unlimited power can never be long lodged with safety in the hands of any one man or set of men; and in this respect we union men are no exception to the general run of the human race.

2. They should never make a demand nor resort to any kind of means in enforcing a demand, which require the trampling under foot, so to speak, of the law of the land.

If, as is sometimes said, our laws are bad, the answer is that we working men are, in many respects, as much to blame therefor as others, and ought therefore to bear with such laws till we can procure their amendment or repeal, as right and justice would seem make necessary.

Again, if, as unions, such organizations encourage the violation of law in any one respect, they thereby encourage its violation in all respects and to that extent throw the weight of their moral influence toward the bringing on of a general state of disorder, uproar, strife, assaults, batteries, bloodshed and murder—a state in which we as union men are as likely to be sufferers and victims as others.

And, finally, we should at all times remember that lawlessness can never be relied upon permanently as a means to an end, however meritorious the end in itself may be. Such means will, sooner or later, turn out to be as treacherous as the quick-sand, which, instead of proving a solid foundation upon which to stand, only swallows up those who unwittingly venture to entrust themselves upon its smooth, inviting surface. Such means, habitually resorted to, even in the attainment of worthy objects, will, in due course of time, prove a disappointment, a curse and a ruin to those who expect to find in them a source of help and strength.

3. All their demands should be held within the limit of the just and the reasonable.

All demands should be just in their essence and substance, and reasonable as to time, place, manner and other conditions, proper to be taken into account in connection with them. In pressing for favorable action in a just cause we can at all times afford to be firm, brave, open and "above board," as we say, cheerfully inviting the world, if need be, to examine and pass its opinion upon it, and in good grace solicit the assistance of the friendly offices and moral influence of all disinterested people in our behalf upon all occasions where such assistance may with propriety be invoked. But we can never lend ourselves enthusiastically, energetically, boldly and confidently to the support of a cause we ourselves feel and know to be of doubtful merit. As a general rule human nature is so constructed that it hesitates, shrinks back from, cowers, cringes and experiences a sense of self-condemnation when it undertakes to force itself to do battle for what it realizes to be a bad cause; and in such a case no man can with any hope, heart or fervor appeal to others, for their approval, sympathy or help in what he is trying to accomplish. Such a situation is well expressed by Shakespeare, where he says:

"Thrice armed is he who hath his quarrel just; but naked he, though locked up in steel, whose conscience by injustice is corrupted."

4. No strike or boycott should ever be entered upon, however meritorious

the object thereby sought, until all milder means for its attainment have been fairly tried and proved of no avail.

This course requires time, patience, perseverance, and is sure to meet with opposition from the "hot-heads"—those who, as a rule, are quickest to urge on and get into a fight and also quickest to give up, throw down their arms and take to their heels when the battle begins to rage in royal terror; but in the long run it will bring better results than a policy which insists upon war methods without first awaiting a trial of what we may call the methods of peace.

5. No strike or boycott should ever

be entered upon, save in cases where, upon a full survey of all matters proper to be taken into consideration, there is a strong, reasonable probability of its being a success.

As a rule there is nothing gained in the fighting of losing battles. In the main, they are time, means and energy wasted—and worse. They discourage the vanquished, exhaust their resources and thereby render them less fit for future contests where victory might be more clearly within their reach; while on the other hand they give prestige, defiance and fortitude to the enemy, and in that way make him a bolder and more dangerous foe.

6. No strike or boycott or other

movement should ever be entered upon to enforce a demand or redress a grievance where such demand or grievance does not measure fully up, in importance, to the expenditure of time, means, and energy necessary to make the effort therefor a success.

In other words valuable time, means and energy ought not to be squandered over trifles. Labor unions will always act wisely when they husband their resources for the more substantial affairs with which they have to deal, instead of wasting them in contending about matters of little or no moment.

7. They should carefully guard themselves against running wild, over matters in which they have little or no interest at stake, against taking sides, one way or the other, in squabbles between other parties in which they have no practical concern.

We can safely count upon troubles enough of our own without unnecessarily thrusting ourselves into the mix-ups of other warring elements.

8. When strikes or boycotts are once entered upon, unions as such and union men should endeavor so to conduct themselves as to merit and command the respect and sympathy of a generous-minded and enlightened public opinion.

That such sympathy and respect are big factors in determining the ultimate result of a strike, lock-out or boycott, involving important interests and large numbers of men, will be conceded by all close observers; and the best way for such unions and their members to secure to themselves the benefit of such sympathy and respect lies in a careful observance of the several rules here laid down.

9. All matters of importance, so far as practicable, ought to be fully considered and discussed before being finally decided upon one way or the other.

Such a course will prevent many mistakes, many a useless collision, many a strike and lock-out, with all the strife, bitterness of feeling and losses of various kinds, they are sure to entail.

An observance of the rules here enumerated will not, it is true, prevent all injustices—will not accomplish all that might be rightfully desired—but it will do a vast deal more in that direction than can ever be reasonably hoped for where such rules are ignored, are held in contempt. As the mere writing of these articles has been somewhat hastily done, with but little time for carefulness in composing and revising them, they are submitted to consideration for their substance rather than for their style.

J. T. MORGAN.

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