

### Why the Cost of Living Comes High.

(From the Mooseheart. Published by request.)

Never before has the United States of America gone through such a series of dangers and crises as during the last six years. Even in 1913, although the country was in the full tide of prosperity, the relation between labor and capital, between the producer and the consumer, between the railroad and the shipper, between the big corporation and the small business men were very uneasy. In that year Congress established a new Trade Commission, straightened up the Sherman Act for dealing with trusts, set in action a new system of Reserve Banks, and made changes in the railroad laws. In 1916 it passed the Adamson Act for settling disputes between the railroad men and the railroad companies. Things were not moving very easily.

#### Changes of the War.

In 1914 came the European war, which within a few months caused a great demand for food and other supplies to be sent to other countries, and the building of immense factories for munitions and other material of war. In which the operatives earned wages unheard of up to that time. Never was there such an overturn in conditions of labor and business; and this confusion was increased by the effort of German agents through secret methods to divide the people of the United States and set them against each other.

In 1917 our own war with Germany caused the creation under forced draft of shipyards, arms factories, nitro plants, and farms. Within a few months four million men were taken right out of the work shops, the railroads, the farms, and the offices, to put on the khaki and go and fight for their country, immensely enlarging the demand for food and supplies of every kind, while cutting down the workers by something like a fifth. Naturally the good old Republic rocked under this strain.

In 1918, the war was practically over, and shortly after the boys began to come home. The result was the demand fell off for many lines of goods. The railroads had been taken over by the government, and found it hard to meet the changes in service and in labor conditions. Wages began to go up in many industries. Then the returning soldiers wanted their jobs back or wanted better jobs, for which their military service had helped to prepare them. For a time people thought everything would quiet down when the boys were all out of the service. They expected that the country would return to the place where it left off in 1914 when the European war broke out. Had not the nation settled down after every other war, and gone ahead with greater prosperity than ever? On the contrary, there has been a period of peace for a good hundred years when there has been so much commotion and pulling and hauling as today. What does it mean? Where shall we come out? Is the country in danger? What can we do for the Republic?

#### The Old System.

We may as well admit at the start that the United States can never go back again to the relations which existed even six years ago. The first reason is that the great World War has broken up the organization of trade and business which had worked itself out in the previous fifty years. Six years ago the commerce of the world was all fitted together like a Corliss engine, where every valve and pocket and gear works in harmony with every other. The great world trade in stable raw materials such as rubber, lumber, iron, and coal was all adjusted like clock work. The carrying trade of the world exactly fitting into it.

In the United States, there was always coal enough, and iron ore enough, and silver enough and copper enough, and flour enough, and potatoes enough, and cotton enough, and cars enough, and steamers enough, because wherever people saw a demand, they arranged for a supply. This country was better organized than any other, because there is hardly an important raw material, except rubber and sugar, and coconut products, which we have to get from outside.

So with labor, plenty of laborers were underpaid, and many of them were dissatisfied; but most of them had at least a living for their families at the prices that then prevailed. Even the very low rate of wages and poor conditions of unskilled laborers in factories and mines were so much better than those in central Europe that millions of immigrants came over to find work on those conditions.

Many people then believed that the whole system was such that the laborers as a class got less than their fair share of the total product and that the employers and owners got too much. Still the country as a whole was very prosperous. Many small business men enjoyed good profits and a good living; professional men got on; and brought up and educated their children. Low wages and low prices seemed to fit together.

#### The New System.

That state of things has gone by. Prices began to rise as soon as the war broke out in Europe, because Great Britain, and France and Italy

could not carry on without food and supplies from other countries; and the United States was the only other country sufficiently near and with a sufficient surplus to help out. Those governments bid high for food and munitions. They furnished capital to build new factories. They guaranteed to take rifles and shell at very high prices. These war industries broke up the balance of wages in the United States.

How could you keep a girl at a loom earning seven dollars a week when she could get into a munition factory and earn forty dollars in about the same number of hours? Why should a man stay on a farm at twenty-five dollars a month and board, when he could get work as a ship carpenter at seven dollars a day. After all, only a small part of the wage earners went into the new industries, and millions of women and men saw prices rising, while their wages stood still. When the war was over, the demand from overseas continued. The farmer got more than twice as much for wheat as in 1913, but had to pay twice as much for what he bought, and nearly twice as much for his farm labor.

Another thing that has caused prices to rise is the rapid increase of taxation. In many cities, large and small, the tax rate has risen to three percent of the value of houses and lands, and the owner of a small house is pretty sure to be assessed up to or above the selling value. Then came the war loans and taxes. You cannot defend your country, and help to defend the world with four million men, without paying a big bill. Our bill is about 30,000 million dollars. Whether it is paid by taxes, or out of loans, everybody in the United States has to share in making that good; and that means that one's income, whatever it is, is reduced by those necessary taxes.

#### Labor.

Now comes in the effect of organized labor. The right of labor to organize into a trades union is just as clear as that of the same men to organize into a fraternity or a church or a political party. Modern industry is, however, full of specialties and groups of skilled laborers so that a comparatively small number of shirkers can throw everything into confusion. The United States is full of key industries. If the railroad switch men strike or the freight handlers, or the motemen on the trolley lines, or the power-house men, or (as has recently happened in Boston) the men who inspect wheels and brakes of passenger trains, before they leave the terminals, or the firemen on board steam craft, or the repairers on telephone lines, a whole city or a whole district may be left without power or transportation.

All our American cities are dependent on frequent shipments of food, so that a complete stoppage of transportation into a great city for a week or two might bring people to the famine point. The great bodies of railroad men and other transportation men are absolutely necessary for keeping things going, and their unions have corresponding power.

Hence, in nearly all the controversies over the wages of transportation men, the managers in the long run give way. The transportation men ask that their wages shall have the same purchasing power as wages not half as great six years ago had at that time. Of course, if the cost of transportation rises the cost of everything that is carried also rises, including the cost of the food and clothing, and other things used by the railroad men and their families. That is the "Vicious Circle."

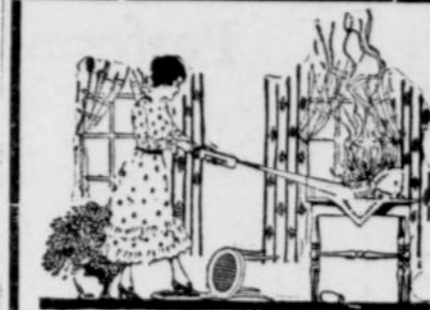
#### Remedies.

Little hope can be found that the cost of living will go back to the same place as before the war. All over the world prices are rising. In the countries ravaged by the European wars, there is no way out but for the people to eat less food than they were used to, to wear their old clothes longer, and to get on without many things that they used to think necessary. The people of the United States are accustomed to live well, to dress well, and to enjoy themselves. They know that it is also to give their children a better chance than they had themselves. The intelligent working man want an income that will enable him to see his children properly educated so as to give them a start in life. We do not wish to cut down the average scale of living.

The only way that seems at all hopeful is to get rid of the preposterous profits of the middlemen in furnishing the necessities of life and especially food. The five farmers who paid \$11.60 for a dinner in Washington, and figured out that the materials for that dinner netted the producing farmer only 82 cents, were on the right track. Somebody ought to get after the cereal trust which buys wheat at cents a pound, and puts not over 3 cents of labor and manufacturing upon it, and unblushingly sells the product at 25 cents a pound.

You may pay 85 cents a dozen for eggs, but the chicken farmer does well if he receives 45 cents out of that.

The people of the United States are famed for their skill in organizing great industries, it's time for them to cut out those ridiculous profits of men who run almost no risk, render



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very little service, and take a rake-off on every pound of flour and meat and potatoes.

In the course of the next two or three years, we must expect that a new balance of wages and prices will be established, but only after many heart-burnings and disturbances. People have got to recognize domestic service, for it is impossible to find enough people for the old-fashioned system of house-work. People must learn to make more use of co-operative methods, so that part at least of the large profit of the retailer may go back to the buyer in dividends. Many people can simplify their lives. Prohibition has brought about an unexpected lessening of the demand for expensive rooms and meals at the hotels, for people find their happiness does not depend on a three dollar dinner. Everybody can pare down in some direction without much diminishing his comfort, and without at all affecting his self-respect.

The thing that will do most to cause a tumble in prices and a reduction of the high cost of living is to increase the product of the worker. If the same force of hands can improve machinery and organization so as to produce 2,000 shoes a day in the same hours or fewer hours that were formerly necessary for 1,600 pairs, they are helping to reduce the cost of living for others while keeping up their own wages. There is no other road toward an adjustment which will leave all classes in the United States contented. Profiteering is a frightful evil which is very hard to deal with. The income tax on corporations takes away part of that surplus for the public needs and if those great incomes were made public as they ought to be those who enjoy them could be called to account. In the long run we must expect that progress of invention, machinery and organization combined with economy and saving habits will give a living income to all who are will to do a reasonable amount of work for that blessing.

#### Danger Ahead.

The unceasing and, in many cases, exorbitant wage demands of organized labor may or may not be justified by the increased cost of living. That is the question on which there are wide differences of opinion. But, whichever view of the matter is correct, the wage demands go on, the increases are granted, the extra burden is passed along to the consumer, and the cost of living rises to correspondingly higher levels.

Labor, both organized and unorganized, has gained, not lost, by the war. Higher wage standards are established do not come down. Once up always up, is the rule. And while labor has thus been the gainer and not the loser by the war upheavals, the same is true of the farmer. The prices of farm products, particularly cotton, grain and live stock, have gone up by leaps and bounds. The farmers have more money to spend, more luxuries within their reach than they had known for decades before the war broke out.

Neither are the very rich nor the bankers war sufferers. Such bankers as handled foreign government business and invested in munitions manufacture are heavy gainers. Many of them, as well as thousands who engaged in miscellaneous manufacturing, have piled up enormous war fortunes. The very rich, even though taxed as high as from 50 to 75 per cent on their incomes, still have so much left that they need not and do not deny themselves anything. In all these quarters money-spending is going on at a prodigious pace. Hotels demanding enormous rates are crowded to capacity. The theatres of New York and all over the country are doing a record-breaking business. So are the high priced restaurants, the dealers in jewelry and in the most expensive kinds of men's and women's apparel, the purveyors of all the infinite varieties of things unnecessary and of high cost. It has been and is a riot of money spending such as the country has not known for years.

Are there, then, any real sufferers from the war and the war's after-

math reactions? Ask the teachers, the clergymen, the clerks, the writers, the editors, the tens and tens of thousands of professional and semi-professional men, the men and women of small incomes sufficient for their smallest needs before this orgie of high prices, but now cut to half and less than half in purchasing power, and at this day spelling deprivation to the verge of want where before they spelled a modest independence. These are the real after-the-war sufferers. Their name is legion.

Compared with current living expenses, the salaries paid to clerks, to teachers, to writers, to editors, to clergymen are derisory. Likewise they are an infamy.

Where other salaries and other wages have gone up, here they have either stood still or increased by figures that are niggardly. Men and women of learning, of the highest attainments, those on whom depends the education of American children, the moral guidance of the American people, are paid salaries that a hod-carrier or bricklayer or a stevedore would scorn. It is this submerged, unorganized, inarticulate middle group, the very flower of the country's intelligence, the group on which we all depend to maintain the Republic through clear thinking and staunch fidelity to basic American principles and traditions—it is upon those that the present day burden of living cost falls with crushing weight. It is they who shoulder their disproportionate share of the ever-increasing load shoved upon the consumer's and the rent-payer's shoulders by the granting of extortionate union demands; by reckless waste of Government funds wrung from the country's overburdened taxpayers.

They have been a patient lot thus far, these real sufferers from the war's inevitable consequences. Their voices are seldom heard in complaint. They are inarticulate and unorganized. But the thing cannot go on forever. Either salvation must be worked out in some way and soon for this vast group, or we shall pay the penalty by seeing them join the turbulent forces of unrest and disintegration. And when that happens, sheer ruin will not be far away. When such Americans as these cannot earn enough money to live their frugal lives and educate their children, then indeed is there danger ahead.—Harvey's Weekly.

#### Poor Bankrupt Europe.

"Poor Bankrupt Europe," sighed Raymond Hitchcock. "Poor bankrupt Europe. A room at the Piccadilly is three pounds ten, a dinner for two in a cozy corner at the Ritz at least five quid and a suit of clothes ten times that figure. That's London. Multiply it by two or three and you have Paris. If by there is a waiting list a block long at every London hotel. You can't get a table at the Ritz unless you know the head waiter personally and even if you were wearing a barrel it would be three months before any Bond street tailor would deliver you a pair of trousers."

"Poor Bankrupt Europe!" the comedian sighed again. "You can't buy a seat in any playhouse except for weeks in advance. The jewelers and silversmiths are running three shifts and a lot of the aristocrats don't know where their next Rolls-Royce is coming from. Yet we Americans are told that we must help poor bankrupt Europe. I've chipped in to three different collections today for indigent Europeans. It was so funny I couldn't resist."

Mr. Hitchcock has just gotten back from Europe. He makes his money in America. Consequently he tells a very different story from those disinterested humanitarians, those superb Samaritans, the International Bankers who are so deeply worried lest the "heart of Europe" be broken—before they get their money out of it.—EX.

Another campaign has been started in Washington to reduce the high cost of living. But has anything been done to reduce the high cost of Washington's campaigns to reduce the high cost of living.

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