

# THE LABORER

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## EDITORIAL—

### THERE IS NO LABOR MOVEMENT

While the subject hereof is remote to conditions as we know and see them here in the Republic of Panama, nevertheless, for the information of all concerned we quote in par answers by Mr. John L. Lewis, one of the ablest and foremost of labor leaders in the United States of North America, to certain question asked of him about U S labor, by "Collier's". (May 5, 1945.):

#### UNIONS AS POLITICAL AGENCIES

For a full decade, and increasingly in the last few years, there has been a skillful and sustained drive to make organized labor part and parcel of a political "machine." The promises of favors and special privileges have alternated cleverly with threats of condign punishment, and as a consequence the effort has met with no small measure of success. Today we witness the ever-widening spread of what can only be called "political company unions," as much under the control of a party as the "industrial company union" is under the control of the employer.

Increasingly the interests of the party are put above the interests of the workers. It is, in effect, an alarming approach to the situation in Russia, where unions are an integral part of the Communist state, without independent function, and purchase the meager right of mere existence by abject servility. Not one has a voice in the determination of wage scales and working conditions.

These U.S. labor leaders, who have bell-wethered their memberships into the abattoir of partisan politics, may seek to save their consciences by claiming that they are equal partners, not cogs in the machine, but the record gives them no support. In the last election nothing was more common than the spectacle of labor support for labor's open enemies, because these enemies were on the ticket that they were under orders to elect. As political party workers, these leaders are subject to party discipline, and party victory always takes precedence over every other consideration.

With this covering correction, I come now to the first of your questions. It is regrettably true that from the very first day of war, there has been industrial strife instead of the industrial peace demanded by America's peril. Precious days, weeks and months have been lost by bitter quarrels between management and labor. But it is not the workers who are to blame. I say to you that any honest analysis proves plainly that responsibility for the plague of industrial unrest traces back directly to politics and politicians.

When war came, what stood plainer than the need of a GOVERNMENT LABOR POLICY? A code that would lay down the rights, duties and high responsibilities of both employers and employee. And why was not such policy adopted and proclaimed? Because it would have meant agreement between management and labor, and even more important, labor's own unity. Such an arrangement, obviously, offered the politicians no troubled waters in which to fish. With group hatreds abated, there was small room for demagogic appeals. With labor united, the attempt to promote "political company unions" would fall flat. Deliberately, callously, therefore, they sabotaged the formulation of a government labor policy, not only continuing but deepening the divisions between workers and employers, between union and union.

It may seem to you that I exaggerate the importance of a government labor policy, overstressing out of a desire to make a point. Permit me, then, to go back to the first World War and lift Woodrow Wilson's labor policy from the tomb where it has been allowed to gather dust, along with every other chart that would have been of inestimable value today. Appointing a War Labor Conference Board, made up of union leaders and the country's foremost employers, President Wilson put the body in a room and told them to stay in session until they had framed an industrial code that would guarantee industrial peace. The order was obeyed, and out of long and heated discussion came agreement on these fundamental principles.

No strikes or lockouts for the duration.

It shall be the right of employers to form association and the right of workers to organize in trade unions, both to bargain collectively through their chosen representatives.

The National Labor Relations Board, created by statute, has been shunted into the back waters by the War Labor Board, set up by executive order. This board supposedly authoritative, is subject to veto by the Director of War Mobilization and the Director of Economic Stabilization. These two, in turn, receive their directives from the President. The Wilson body, administering and interpreting a CODE, laid down precedents that did away with piecemeal litigation. The overstuffed, cumbersome War Labor Board considers each case separately, and this only after a careful reading of the political barometer each morning.

A moment, if you please, for a brief consideration of this fantastic body, supposedly the supreme instrument for



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the maintenance of industrial peace. In July, 1942, it started modestly enough with 189 employees. Within a year it had swollen to 2,280 employees, of whom 238 were "economists."

#### NO LABOR DISCUSSION ALLOWED!

Out of the whole sorry business have come many Alice-in-Blunderland situations. When the Secretary of the Interior, for example, was first appointed custodian of the nation's coal mines, the whines of the War Labor Board gained a White House order that Mr. Ickes was without authority to discuss labor relations with the representatives of the miners. Here, in effect, was the manager of a plant, entirely responsible for production and facing an increased demand for coal, peremptorily forbidden to talk about wages and working conditions with the men from whom production was expected.

As if there were not confusion enough with twenty-six "labor" boards, commissions, committees, etc., Congress decided to make its contribution to chaos and enacted the Smith-Connally law. No more inflammatory piece of legislation was ever passed, for this grotesque slave statute not only invites industrial conflict, but COMMANDS it.

On March 1st, by way of example, the United Mine Workers sat down with the operators to consider the terms of a new two-year contract. At the very outset, however, in order to guard ourselves against the criminal and civil penalties of the Smith-Connally Act, we were compelled to file legal notice that a national strike vote might be invoked.

What more provocative of suspicion and anger? Instead of the friendly atmosphere so necessary for successful collective bargaining, the strike threat, forced upon us by

#### BASIS FOR AN INDUSTRIAL CODE

On the statute books of the nation there are now these laws: The Narris-La Guardia Act, exempting unions from the punitive provision of antitrust legislation; the Wage and Hour Act; Social Security, with its protection against the terrors of old age and unemployment; a National Relation Act that guarantees the right of workers to organize, and lays down rules for collective bargaining.

THERE ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A CODE. Put the administration of these laws in the Department of Labor, under a competent head, and back them up by a trained mediation and conciliation service, recruited from the ranks of industry, and not made up of campus prodigies and social workers. This done, all that remains is to call a conference of management and labor for further agreements that will narrow every field of controversy.

Voices of protest, of course, will be raised against the establishment of an industrial code, for there are many who do not WANT industrial peace. Primarily they are: the politicians, for there would be no longer any possible excuse for the bureaucratic meddling that has as its secret purpose the fomentation of class hatreds and the subordination of labor as a political instrument for the seizure and perpetuation of power; the revolutionary agitators who fight any and every constructive measure, preferring those discontents that contain the seeds of revolt; reactionary employers who oppose understandings with labor as an interference with their so-called "economic law" of ruthless self-interest.

These are powerful and vocal groups. But against them stand the whole rank and file of labor, organized and unorganized, and a decisive majority of employers, large and small, who are equally sick of "dog eat dog" relationships. Above all, an overwhelming public sentiment, the call of America, eager for unity in the war years that still lie ahead, and demanding co-operation when peace presents its problems.

## The Laborer's Thanks

The Management of the LABORER uses this means of expressing profound thanks to its numerous friends, admirers and well-wishers of the City of Colon, also to the members of the reactivated Union of that City for the excellent support given by them in the purchasing of the paper, and wishes to state that in due course of time—not in the too distant future—to put on the market a much larger paper. Plans are being perfected by the management for the gathering of local news of interests to its readers. Watch—look out—for the next issue. Your continued support is earnestly requested; and please send in any news you would like to have published. We are at your command and willing to be of service to you.

Profound thanks also, to those persons (including members of the Bar Tenders and Waiters Union) for the suggestion anent allocation of additional space in the English Section of the paper. This has been given the required attention and as time progresses it is hoped to enlarge both the size and circulation of the paper, dependent, however, on the support given to it.

Our aim is to please one and all regardless of standing with the union.

The Management's further thanks to those persons who without solicitation have mentioned the truthfulness of the articles appearing in each issue of the paper. It is our purpose to give the public undiluted news at all times.

## Expression of Gratitude

The Board of Directors of the Bar Tenders and Waiters Union, desires to express the Union's highest sentiments of gratitude and deepest appreciation to Mr. Alfred Benjamin of the city of Colon, who, during the Board's sojourn in that City, on the 17th May, 1945, did everything possible in making its stay most comfortable and at home. This gentleman in order to make the Board's task a much lighter one than it would have been otherwise, proffered the use of the salon of his establishment for the holding of meetings, for which the union is deeply indebted and appreciative.

In similar breath, the Board of Directors expresses the Union heartfelt gratefulness to that amiable employer and friend of labor, Mr. Isaac Kersch, also of the City of Colon, for by his sympathetic, painstaking and superb gentlemanly manner in treating with all problems, whether they be in connection with labor or otherwise, he has endeared himself to the hearts of all those with whom he comes in contact.