



Ode To Labor

By WILBUR D. NESBIT

Majestic force that shapes the world,
Bleached by the smoke-wreaths curled
Against the sky—

(Confound the luck!
That roaring, rattling motor truck
Makes so much noise I cannot think!
'Twould drive a stronger man to drink!
There, it has passed.)

—Against the sky
Like to a flag that floats on high
And leads a vast, unconquered host
To meet—

(Oh! I'll give up the ghost!
Who's making all that racket? Hey?
Some carpenters at work, you say.
Well, how can anybody write?
It sounds like bursting dynamite.)

Majestic force whose silent strength
Makes new the desert place at length,
And builds our walls—

(Great guns! That sound!
Why do those boiler-makers pound?
It jars the ink right off my pen.
And how that foreman yells and bawls!
Well, here we go.)

—And builds our walls
And leads our highways fair and straight
From city gate to city gate.
It turns our dreams into deeds;
The future's great demands it heeds
And by its might—

(What? Bless my soul!
They're dumping in the winter's coal.)

Majestic force at our command—
Force of the strong and bravest band,
Of uncut steel and stout as steel,
Of shoulders wide—

(My senses reel
At this last wild and raucous blur
Of sound, a wild steam riveter!
There, it's shut off.)

—Of shoulders wide,
Of faith that labors eager-eyed,
Of sweating brow—

(Ker-slash! Bing! Bang!
Dodgast that loud track-laying gang!
Let's wind this up.)

—Of sweating brow—
Majestic force, that will not bow.
(What's that? Oh, why can't you keep still?
What? Can't I pay that plumber's bill?)

WILL STUDY LABOR PROBLEM.

A comprehensive investigation of the relations of capital and labor will be undertaken by the federal government. The investigation is to be conducted by a commission of nine persons to be appointed by the president, and with the advice and consent of the senate.

The commission is specifically ordered to investigate:

The general condition of labor in the principal industries, including agriculture, and especially in those carried on in corporate forms.

The existing relations between employers and employees.

The effect of the industrial conditions on public welfare and the rights and powers of the community to deal therewith.

The conditions of sanitation and safety of employees and the provisions for protecting their lives, limbs and health.

The growth of associations of employers and wage earners and the effect of such associations upon the relations between employers and employees.

The methods tried in any state or foreign countries for maintaining mutually satisfactory relations between employers and employees.

The methods for avoiding or adjusting labor disputes through peaceful and conciliatory mediation and negotiations.

The question of smuggling or other illegal entry of Asiatics into the United States or its insular possessions.

The underlying causes of dissatisfaction in the industrial situation.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF LABOR MOVEMENT

Striking Accomplishments That Have Resulted in Public Good.

WORK REVIEWED BY GOMPERS

Head of the American Federation Points to the Things Organized Effort for the Prevention of Human Misery Have Made Possible.

By SAMUEL GOMPERS, President American Federation of Labor, in Kansas City Star.

The greatest achievement and the greatest glory of the American labor movement is its laudable effort to prevent human misery.

It has mattered not whether such suffering was caused by accident, disease, greed or poverty, the men of labor have been equal to the occasion by devising practical remedies for industrial, social and political evils.

Unkindly critics when piqued, or at a loss for an argument to support their contentions, have at times thoughtlessly charged trade unionists as being "thoroughly materialistic" in possessing "no ideals or sentiments," and influenced by no great "soul-moving forces."

Sentiment in Organized Labor.

Such expressions can only come from those who are not informed, or such as are burdened with prejudice. In order that those who run may read and understand, a few facts are here-with unfolded so that cynics, critics, opponents and friends may obtain a glimpse in a condensed form of what these same trade unionists have accomplished—because of a great soul-moving force burning within them.

Conserving Men and Women.

The farther the American people advance in this direction in the future the more surely will they observe true economic principles—that is to say, the conservation of human resources and human energy of the toilers means the ultimate safety and well being of the nation and while it is only too true, and "pity 'tis 'tis true," that the greatest form of waste from which our people suffer at this time is the terrific waste of human energy, due to uneconomic methods.

Still, while it is true that these grave charges are daily substantiated, yet, if it had not been for the constant vigilance and heroic persistence of the workers in providing remedies for such awful possibilities, every trade and occupation would be equally subject to as frequent casualties as now occur in the mills and blast furnaces of the iron and steel industry, where organization of the workers has been slow to develop, as well as in those coal fields, where the mine workers are still subjected to serf-like conditions by agencies of predatory wealth.

It is, therefore, perfectly appropriate to draw attention to such a comparison before enumerating the legal measures of prevention and safety already established in the several states.

The first subject covered is naturally the "Conservation of Time" or "The 8-Hour Day." Without time to recuperate, observe, study, reflect, the workers are rendered hopelessly unable to act either in their own behalf or in co-operation with others for the public good.

Shortening the Working Day.

Observe the communities where the steel trust, the sugar trust, the cordage trust and the rubber trust are dominant, and where greed is all powerful, where the workers grind out a miserable existence twelve hours per day, and in many cases seven days per week, never less than seventy-two hours, frequently eighty-four hours per week. In such places race suicide runs rampant, sickness, vice, disease, drunkenness and deaths by violence are the rule rather than the exception.

Boarding house shacks, corner saloons and squalor abound; homes, schools and libraries are conspicuously rare or absent.

Human life is held cheapest in Pennsylvania, where the long and the many work days are prevalent. Butler loses 374 out of every hundred thousand of its people by violent deaths in industry; Pittston, 359, McKees Rocks and McKeesport 290, Shenandoah 279, Pottsville 276 and the large city, Pittsburg, with its diversified population, reveals in a violent death rate of 191 per one hundred thousand people, according to the mortality statistics of the United States census bureau in 1906.

The average age of these deaths by accident is thirty-three and a half years. This fearful drain occurs among men doing the work of the world before they have reached the

prime of life or the maximum of efficiency.

The unreasonably long work day that saps vitality and vigilance from the workers is the principal cause of this heedless slaughter of human beings struggling for an existence.

So much for the 8-hour day. We next come to the proposition of conserving life and health by means of factory regulation and factory inspection. Much has been done in many states along these lines and this accomplishment is due to organized labor. Much is yet to be done, and organized labor intends that the work shall be finished.

Laws regulating guards for cleaning of machinery were adopted by Massachusetts in 1882, in New Jersey in 1884. This was almost the beginning. As manufacturing has developed in the other states some protective provisions have been adopted. The present status of their provisions is as follows:

Twenty-four states require factories to be so ventilated that a sufficient amount of air space shall be provided for each operative.

Thirty-three states require fire escapes on factories and public buildings.

Twenty-four states require guards on dangerous machinery.

Twenty-seven states insist upon sanitary and sufficient toilet rooms for the sexes.

Thirty states provide factory inspectors to enforce observance of the laws.

Seventeen states make it mandatory for employers to report all accidents to an authorized state official so that accurate vital records can be readily obtained for the further advice and information of the people as to the needs of additional conservation of life and limb. This is an especially necessary provision.

Thirty-six states restrict night work by children.

Compensating the Maimed.

Thirty-eight states have enacted some form of employers' liability law, very few of which have been interpreted favorably for the workers by the courts. This is to be accounted for largely because the courts have clung tenaciously to former precedents of peculiar judicial reasonings, which have at times been referred to as the "unholy trinity," viz., "assumption of risk," "contributory negligence" and "fellow-servant" rulings, as if these obstacles were not large enough to offset a workman's claim for damages. Another method has been devised which the courts have duly recognized as valid and sufficient grounds to prevent an injured employe from obtaining an award for damages. This cunning device has been to induce or coerce an employe when arranging for employment to sign a contract "waiving his rights" to sue for damages in case of injury during employment.

Giving Life a Value.

Modifications of the common law rulings of "assumed risk" and "contributory" to "comparative negligence" have been adopted in several states, but such trifling with measures of such grave import is not sufficient. Just, humane and effective legislation must be enacted by the states—legislation that is uniform and uniformly good; effective legislation that will forever abolish the defense known as "fellow servant" rule, "contributory negligence," "assumption of risk" and "waiving of rights."

Industry must bear the financial burden of accidents to the human being, exactly as it does now toward mechanical accidents, or accidents that occur through the natural elements.

Compelling Safety Appliances.

The next in importance are safety appliance laws, enacted by the congress for the purpose of conserving life on the interstate railroads of the United States. Every one of these laws is a monument to the everlasting credit of organized labor.

This complication of life-saving and life-preserving legislation enacted by the state legislatures and the United States congress at the behest of the organizations of labor is far from being a complete record, but it is sufficient at this time to enthrone the workers and to convince the most skeptical as to the great good which has been accomplished for all labor—unorganized as well as organized—and particularly for that part of society sometimes defined as the general public, who have been safeguarded while traveling on railroads, while resting in hotels, amused in theaters, or when coming in contact with those who might disseminate disease propagated in workshops or factories that would remain insanitary and dangerous if it had not been for the vigilance, fidelity and foresight of the organized workers.

So we feel cheered on this Labor Day. We even feel like laying aside the hardness that is acquired in the course of many battles against big odds and allowing the sentimental sides of our natures to show themselves. We feel like talking of our women and children, and the battle organized labor is waging to make them comfortable at their work and healthy in their homes. We want to cite the human suffering that the organized workers have been able to abolish, and to pledge ourselves anew to a continued battle to bring decent working hours and conditions into those dark places of the nation that are still its most crying disgrace. And, withal, we are sanguine of a day that is coming when all working people may perform their tasks with the satisfaction that a happier life is possible to them. The progress has been such that there is occasion for hopefulness.

Samuel Gompers



It chanced that once upon a time remote,
The weary giant, known as Labor, smote
His thigh a sounding whack and cried, "I'm blest,
But I have toiled enough and now I'll rest.
I'll let the world wag onward as it may,
While I go home and have my holiday."
So, Labor laid aside his tools and crept
Deep in his cavern, where he promptly slept.

An hour went by, an hour without a sound,
The shops were stilled, no more their wheels went round,
The mills were fastened close with bolt and lock,
The steamship idly rubbed against her dock,
The engine moveless slept, the anvil stood
As silent as a gravestone in a wood.
While Mankind, startled by the awful still,
Together whispered, awed, "Is Labor ill?"

And as the moments passed o'er town and farm,
And all was still, there rose a great alarm,
Went forth the giant Commerce, loud to shout,
Deep into Labor's cavern, "Friend, come out,
You're needed by us—needed in a trice.
Please come at once! We'll pay you any price.
You've slept an hour already—all your fill.
Come forth at once. The world is standing still."

And Labor, wakened by the other's cries,
Stretched forth his brawny arms and rubbed his eyes,
And mused a bit, then with good-natured smile,
Said, "Yes, I'll come, but make it worth my while.
One day each year you'll give me privilege free,
One day each year you'll consecrate to me,
While one day I will consecrate to play,
And (chuckling, said), we'll call it Labor Day."

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY LESSON OF LABOR DAY

An Annual Holiday That is More Than Just a Play Time

The ultimate aim of the labor movement is to establish a condition of society, first, that will insure to each head of a family equal and ample opportunity to secure a livelihood, which will be sufficient to provide his family with the same necessities and luxuries of life enjoyed by any other citizen; second, that will enable him to give his children an education in whatever direction they may decide to follow, equal to that received by the children of every other member of society.

To enlarge the opportunity to secure employment, the trade unions are advocating and establishing a shorter workday for its members. To insure equal education, the trade unions are endeavoring to secure the enactment of compulsory education laws and child labor laws in every state, territory and province in America, thus withdrawing the children from the factories, mines and workshops.

The trade unions assert that all benefits accruing from the inauguration of labor-saving devices or cheap forms of distribution should be enjoyed equally by all the people, instead of being diverted to the benefit of the few.

The labor movement holds that all people are entitled to partake equally of the joy of living; that a condition that permits part of our people to live in affluence, while another part is compelled to work long hours for meager wages, should be abolished; that a condition that furnishes work to only a fraction of the people and leaves another fraction without employment, and helpless for long periods, should be eliminated from our civilization.

Many claim that efforts along that direction are an iridescent dream and cannot be realized for years to come. In my opinion it will come. It is now approaching. It will come with the full awakening of the consciousness of our people; a consciousness which is rapidly growing in strength and power, and is now in abeyance, awaiting the psychological moment when the great vibrating will of all the people has been crystallized into an active and intelligent force that will sweep aside all obstacles that resist its purpose to mete out justice to all mankind and establish among all the peoples of the earth—the Brotherhood of Man.

Frank Morrison

A Trophy of Victory. The annual holiday of labor is not a bit of driftwood picked up by accident. It is one of the trophies of battle and victory. Its message is of labor's rights and struggles and triumphs, not of labor's play spells or of gifts received from any source.

The only demand the 250,000 shopmen in the Federation of Federations are making is for recognition of the federation as the only contract making organization in the railroad industry between the shopmen and the companies.