

Throwing Away Their Votes (October 26, 1908)

It is eminently fitting that workingmen, and especially organized workingmen, should examine their position in the existing wage system and consider remedies for the political and industrial ills that afflict them. This is particularly true at the present juncture when we are engaged in a political contest that will decide which party shall control the agencies of government for another term of four years.

A man's vote is an expression of his right to impress his will upon the machinery of government so as to make it operate in the manner he desires. His vote expresses his right to alter or repeal existing laws and to make new laws, or to inaugurate new policies or systems of government if he wishes to do so. Naturally men have no desire to throw away their votes. They want them to count as fully as possible in the accomplishment of the results they are seeking to attain.

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It may be assumed without argument that workingmen vote to improve their condition. They seek to impress their will upon the machinery of government so as to make it operate for their benefit. In short, they seek by their votes to accomplish the best results for themselves. If it shall appear that with all their voting workingmen have failed to improve their condition; that, on the contrary, their condition has actually grown worse; that they have been robbed of their constitutional guarantees to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, both through the law and in defiance of it; that their economic condition today is virtually one of slavery, as irksome and infinitely more brutal than the chattel slavery that has been abolished, then it must be evident that they have been throwing away their votes all these years.

The political spellbinder's stock of eloquent platitudes when fishing for the votes of workingmen have been marshaled around such meaningless phrases as "pauper labor," "protection to American labor," "the full dinner pail," "European conditions," "American standard of living," and others of like import, though fully as meaningless.

Workingmen have been told and will be told again in the impending campaign by Republican and Democratic orators that the very life of our glorious republic depends upon maintaining “our present high American standard of living.” They have been taught that this alone is the real foundation of all our greatness and glory as a nation; that this it is which enables us to stand forth as the one successful experiment in nation building in the history of the world; that this it is which has truly made America the land of the free and the home of the brave; and they have been, and will again be, implored, for God’s sake and the sake of their wives and children; for the sake of their homes, their families, and their glorious country; for the benefit of posterity and their common humanity, by the memory of Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, and all the other saints in our political pantheon, to walk up to the polls and save this country from degradation by casting the ballot of a free and enlightened American citizenship for the candidates of the Republican or Democratic parties, both of which have the interests of the dear workingmen at heart and would never consent to have them reduced to the “pauper level of European conditions.” Above all, they have been warned, as they will be again, not to “throw away their votes” by giving them to the Socialist Party.

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Should we look for results to correspond with the professions of the old party politicians we might naturally expect to find workingmen generally enjoying an exceptionally high standard of living. Indeed, we might look for them all to be in affluent circumstances. But it is not so. On the contrary, the American standard of living has been steadily lowered, until it now practically conforms to European conditions.

During more than a generation past there has not been a legislative measure advocated or enacted that has not been supported by the plea of benefit to the workingmen. Distinctly and repeatedly have American workingmen been told that the main purpose of all legislation was to uphold their wages and improve their condition — all for the good of the country, of course — and after all this legislation, founded upon burning anxiety for the welfare of the free and independent American wage earners, what are the results?

While money wages in a few selected trades have increased to some extent, actual wages in all trades and callings, as compared with the cost of

living, have enormously declined. By the indisputable evidence of official reports from capitalist sources themselves, workingmen are now receiving a far smaller portion of the product of their labor than ever before. Millions of them are on the verge of want even when employed, and when deprived of work from any cause are at once thrown into pauperism and slow starvation. By the enactment of laws and the judicial interpretation of laws already enacted their most sacred constitutional rights have been trampled upon and ignored. Their unions have been declared criminal conspiracies and a law enacted to protect them from discharge and blacklist by their employers, simply because of their membership in a union of their craft, has been declared unconstitutional by the highest court of the land.

They have been forbidden by law to boycott unfair employers of labor in the effort to maintain union conditions of employment, and have even been denied the right to strike except in a manner that will work no inconvenience or loss to the business of their employers; and in addition to the criminal penalties for disobedience to this mandate they are subject to threefold damages for any injury to the business of their employers which may be sustained by reason of a strike or boycott. In short, workingmen have been deprived of every vestige of protection afforded them by their unions, and are turned over, bound hand and foot, to the tender mercies of the most heartless oligarchy of wealth that ever existed in any age of the world.

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In this country men are theoretically equal. John Smith and John Rockefeller are assumed to have precisely equal rights and powers in the government. It is the cant of capitalism that we have no classes, and John Smith has been urged to support, and has supported, the same political party as John Rockefeller, on the fallacious assumption that the interests of labor and capital are identical. Smith is not to be blamed for this, as, sad to relate, the leaders of his union, whom he has looked to for advice and instruction in economic matters, have vied with the capitalist spellbinders in dinning this untruth into his ears, and have pictured to him in somber colors the dire results that would follow the introduction of politics in his union. Even now these same leaders, although forced by the inexorable logic of events to abandon their cry of “no politics in the unions,” are endeavoring to steer the votes of workingmen into the Democratic Party,

which is equally responsible with the Republican Party for the deplorable conditions of the unions. They still insist that the interests of labor and capital are identical, and seek to prevent workingmen from voting for the only party which accurately represents their class interests on the plea that such action would be equivalent to throwing away their votes!

Workingmen necessarily throw away their votes when they cast them for any capitalist party, as the relation between capitalist and laborer is one of thorough antagonism, and as long as a capitalist party, no matter by what name it is called, remains in control of the government, the laws will favor capitalism and the workers will be robbed. It is only by placing themselves in control of government, through a political party representing their own class interests as opposed to capitalism, that workingmen will obtain their rights, and they should remember that no vote to this end is a vote thrown away.

Every vote cast for the Socialist Party increases the strength of labor's protest and adds to the fear of capitalism. A united labor vote demanding justice for workingmen is the one thing that capitalism dreads, and every effort will be made to prevent voters from supporting the Socialist Party, as capitalism truly recognizes that party is the only one which is uncompromisingly opposed to its rule. It is only by demonstrating its power that labor can command respect, and even from the standpoint of palliative legislation workingmen should unhesitatingly support the Socialist Party.

As the strength of socialism increases and is registered through the party vote the economic condition of workingmen is improved by ameliorative legislation forced from capitalism through fear. This is true of all countries where socialism has become an organized political force, and it will be true here.

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Remember that the Socialist Party proposes not to reform the capitalist system, but to abolish it. By the magic of private property the capitalist has acquired ownership of the tools and materials of wealth production. He has obtained possession of the instruments which the laborer must use in order to obtain the means of life. By reason of this ownership the capitalist draws to himself wholly, without labor and by the mere right of ownership as it is legally recognized, the whole product of the workingman's

industry, save barely enough to support his existence, which is returned to him in the name of wages.

Under this system the whole product of industry belongs to the capitalist; all that the laborer can claim is his [consist of] wages, which are determined by laws of competition over which he has no control, and which, according to economic statement and the demonstration of actual facts, always tend to the minimum that will support existence at the worker's accustomed standard of living.

Under capitalism the worker builds a palace and lives in a hovel; weaves the finest fabrics and clothes himself in shoddy or in rags; makes fine shoes and wears the coarsest brogans; produces elegant silk hats and wears a fustian cap; builds luxurious carriages and breeds fine horses to draw them and then walks; extracts fuel from the earth, where a beneficent creator has placed it for the use of all his children, and freezes for the lack of it; in short, he produces everything and enjoys nothing. The entire produce of his ingenuity and his industry flows into the possession of the capitalist class as the price of permission to labor for a bare existence.

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In former days the slave was compelled to labor for the benefit of others by virtue of brute force exerted by the strong arm of his master, reinforced by law. In these days the slave is called a free man, and is compelled to labor for the benefit of others by virtue of his master's law-enforced ownership of the tools of production and his own necessity to live.

Give to one man the right to own and control the means of another's existence and he is as truly that other's master as though he stood over him with whip and gun and hunted him with bloodhounds if he attempted to escape, although the other may be called as free as his master. It is the result of the exercise of the power of man over man that constitutes the essence of slavery, not the manner in which the power may be exercised, and the laborer of today is as truly a slave as was his prototype in ancient and feudal times.

Capitalism is the latest, best, and most perfected form of mastership. The capitalist has merely stepped into the shoes of the ancient slaveholder and feudal baron.

This is the condition that is frankly recognized by the Socialist Party, and which it proposes to correct by abolishing the competitive wage

system and placing the worker in possession of the entire product of his industry through the collective ownership and operation of the means and instruments of production. Actually, as well as theoretically, it will give John Smith and John Rockefeller precisely equal rights and powers in the government.

A vote for socialism is never thrown away.

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