

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LABOR STRIKES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF
EVOLUTION OF RELIGION.

The present situation in the industrial life of Pittsfield compels us to give our attention to as careful a consideration of what the conflict between employer and employee may mean as our time and capacity will permit. For many years now we have watched as from a distance similar events in other cities, and countries. But to-day the matter is brought to our attention in our own city, and in such a manner as to compel us to realize that after all we are dealing not with a question of academic theory, but with social facts that are real and powerful.

But while the existence of a strike in our own city brings the matter to our attention ~~EXACTLY~~ with such pungency, yet the very intimacy of our relations to it make it the more difficult to consider it from the point of view of a broad minded grasp of its deeper significance in the evolution of American life. Our calmness and impartiality of judgement and analysis is in danger of being dwarfed and perverted by minor incidences and accidents, by personal inconveniences or other limiting prejudices. If possible in what I have to say, I wish to be as critical and unbiased as a scientist watching an experiment in his laboratory. ~~AND~~ Above all else I want to eliminate from what I say as I try to eliminate from what I think all those ~~EXCESSIVE~~ personal factors which play an important part in every problem of this character, which tend also to dwarf our judgement, and to make small and mean and contemptible judgements that might otherwise be worthy of serious consideration.

POINT OF VIEW.

Not being a member of a trade-union it is impossible for me to think as a trade-unionist. On the other hand, not being an employer of labor or a manager of a factory it is equally impossible for me to speak from their point of view. By the very nature of the case I am compelled to speak from the point of view of one who is deeply interested in

the social problems of the day, and more especially from the point of view of those problems as they are related to the great changes that are taking place in the evolution of our modern life, and our changing attitude towards life's greatest value. Moreover I want to speak from the point of view, not of one who has a cure all remedy for all our social ills, but ~~from the point of view~~ of one who tries to accept the present facts of life and society and tries to understand the direction in which we may or should be tending and to assist in so far as possible in that development.

THE SITUATION.

As I have already said we are face to face with a strike in this city which directly affects ~~not less than three thousand~~ a very large porportion of our population and their employers, and ^{effects} which indirectly the entire city. It is an acute fact in our life. But we cannot consider it in this city without recalling the fact that it is but a local expression of a great movement which has been in operation ~~in~~ for more than a hundred years. Which has touched practically every industry and every large industrial center in the modern world. Within recent years, with seeming increase of intensity these strikes have occurred with such frequency and in such magnitude as to place it beyond the shadow of doubt that they are but the surface manifestations of very fundamental changes that are taking place in our social order. You have but to recall some of the more important strikes of recent years such as the Ludlow strike, the West Virginia, The great Garment Workers strike, the Lawrence Strike, and almost innumerable others to say nothing of the strikes that are now in progress, and the threatened general strike of the railroad employees to have impressed upon your minds that this is no superficial and ~~unmeaning~~ unmeaning coincidence. The fact that it has appeared in Pittsfield does not change the general nature and character of the development in our modern life. ~~That is all~~ two

There are two lines of development which have taken place in the last two hundred years with which you are perfectly familiar but which I recall at this time for the purpose of this discussion.

One is that almost hackneyed topic of the industrial change from the home industry to the factory. We do not have to go beyond the history of our own Pittsfield to trace the evolution of the process. If you will read ~~the~~ of the industrial of early Pittsfield you will learn of the very small industrial efforts in the way of smelting iron from the rough ore in these parts and manufacturing it in the small shops into such products as were useful in the simple and rugged life of those days. Later you will discover that small mills by the side of the streams were erected. The weaving and the spinning were gradually taken out of the homes and the goods that were worn were produced in the factory. In the earlier days these factories were conducted with the intimacy of relationship between the owner and the worker in a manner not always devoid of criticism but still permeated by that fact of human contact the absence of which we deplore so much in our modern industrial plant. But in time the mill by the side of the stream with its cottages and the owners house near by, to the existence of which we have some evidences in Pittsfield to-day, underwent a change which modified the character ~~and~~ of the institution, and completely swept away the old relationships. I know of no better and no more interesting document that illustrates this change than one written in her old age by a woman in this city who had been a life long mill-worker, and whose savings in the long years of toil were used for the purpose of publishing this little pamphlet called, The Recollections of a Mill Worker. In this in a very simple ~~and~~ straight-forward way she tells the story of this change, and with out being ~~a~~ conscious of what she is saying she pictures the transformation in the Pittsfield textile ~~and~~ industry from the neighborly, friendly relationships of the employer and the worker to the cash nexus basis of labour and capital.

Of the more complete and larger aspects of this change which has taken place we have a particularly good illustration in the Pittsfield Works of the General Electric Co. Here we have an illustration

tion of a great industrial corporation developed to a point that almost staggers our imagination. The General Electric Co. is an industrial corporation employing about forty thousand men and women. They have large plants in several of cities in this country among which Lynn, Pittsfield/and Schenectady are most familiar to us. A plant in Japan and ~~SEVERAL~~ interests in plants in European countries/ takes it beyond the national borders and makes it a corporation of international character all over the world. This vast property which fulfills so great a function in the intricate modern life represents the combined efforts of many minds and hands,. Great learning/great ability, and a tremendous amount of work, far beyond our comprehension has contributed to this great industrial corporation. The ownership of the company is probably as widely distributed as its factories, offices and workmen. And this indeed is one of the important and significant facts in the organization of this corporation and practically all corporations. Just who and just how many are the owners of the capital stock of this company I do not know. But the important fact to be noted is ~~EXACTLY~~ that but very few of those men and women who are employed in this great company have any ownership rights in it. Nor, indeed, do they know the men and the women who own the plant that they run. In fact it is probable that the managers of the various plants themselves, ~~KNOW~~ do not know personally more than a very few of the owners of the plants that they manage. To bring it down to the concrete situation here in Pittsfield we have a large industrial plant ~~KNOW~~ one of several owned by the General Electric Company. It is managed by a man who may or may not own any stock in the country. So far as I know there may not be enough general electric stock owned in the city of Pittsfield to cover the value of one of the departments of the Pittsfield works. The plant could still be run if there were not a cent of stock owned in Pittsfield. The fact remains that the control-

ing part of ownership is located outside of the city. Not only because of the fact of numbers of both employees and owners, but also because of the fact of absentee ownership, the personal human relationship, that once obtained on the small factory, is gone. With it too is gone the possibility of that ameliorative oversight which existed when the owner knew and shared largely in the interests of life, the joys and sorrows of the workers.

This industry has left the workman in a position where for the purpose of protecting themselves and furthering their own interests they have organized into trade-unions, which have become after a hundred years of varying experiences very powerful and very flourishing institutions, organized upon a national or even international basis. After many years of conflict in which there has appeared no little bitterness with a fair proportion of mistakes and errors on both sides, we have come to a point where the conflicting interests between the workers who operate the factories and the owners and their representatives in the management who control the factories often come to an open break. Sometimes this break is brought about by what is known as a lockout. But more frequently by what is known as a strike.

The essence of the strike, when all the accidentals and incidental are stripped away, is seen to be based upon the idea that the employees have the right to make a collective bargain with the employer and that they have the right to refuse to accept the terms which are offered to them by the employers? The right of collective bargaining and the right of collective refusal means the right to strike. And while circumstances have often obscured the real nature of the strike the fact remains that in the large it means simply the refusal of the men as organized to work for a given employer. That strikes have frequently been accompanied by fights and bloodshed does not alter the basic fact that in essence it is simply the organized effort of workmen to maintain what seemed to them their just rights in the employment in which they are concerned. Such then are the cold facts. Whether they are good facts or bad facts is not our immediate

concern.

Side by side with this industrial developemnet which I have discribed and more closely related than we at times imagine there ha taken place another developpent within the past hundred years or mor Perhaps going back to the French philospher Rousseau we can trace the appearance of an idea which has ~~completely revolutionized~~ and is still profoundly changed ~~the character~~ our conceptions of life and its meaning

This idea is in general that which we associate with the word democracy. It has back of it a point of view of life entirely different from the point of view which obtained in Europe throughout the period of its known history. The first expression of this idea in a significant political document was found in the declaration of Independence that "all men are created free and equal", or to put it in other words, no individual be he king or prelate, and no class, be it secular or ecclesiastical has any especially delegated authority to rule or dominate the life and destiny of fellow men. That the general tendency of modern society has been in the direction of the realization of a social order based upon these principles is not seriously . There have been, as there are to-day, groups and institutions in society survivals of previous ages that still oppose the further extension of the principle of democracy. They assert the right, or maintain the fact of their own particular class or institutions to certain privileges or responsibilities not common to all.

In spite of the opposition the advance in the principles of democracy has been one of steady the slow achievement. ~~UNANIMOUSLY~~ Acting from the point of view of these principles of democracy we have established our educational system, we have developed our political machinery, we have advanced in the ideas of religious toleration/ we are developing the science and the practice of sociology; we are spreading ideas and principles which lead men to the firm conviction that the place of any institution in society whether it be political, industrial, or ecclesiastical, must be measured by the constructive influence which it has in meeting the physical, mental and spiritual needs of man. In response to this we are developing a sense of the dignity and the worth of human beings. We are trying to feel ourselves and to have others feel that sense of self-respect, independence, manhood and womanhood which should belong to free men and women living together in a social order. This advancement in the principles of democracy has not been

without its serious difficulty, perplexing problems, and bitter conflicts. No growth in the life of the individual or in the development of society ever has been or ever can be attained without the hard labour, the continual sacrifice and the frequent hardship of those concerned. Upon the basis of this idea of the dignity and the worth of a human being, and the possibilities and responsibilities for these achievement in all the big values of life as a foundation rests the whole structure of desire, and from this point of view must ^{they} be measured. Here then as I see it, is the crux of this labour situation in the country at large and in this city in particular. I grant you that it may not consciously from this point of view be so viewed by those most intimately concerned, but in the long run whatever may be the immediately outcome of the difficulty, the determining factor must be the extent to which contribution is made to establishing defining and assuring those directly concerned and their fellow citizens at large the greater security in living self-respecting lives. In other words, here is a fundamental conflict between two widely separated groups in our common life. At the present time they are at a dead lock. The essential issue between them is not one of wages although that is a factor. Nor is it indeed, the technical of the recognition of the labour union, although that is a factor. ~~XXXX~~ But it is the right of the men who work for wages in a factory which they do not own to have a collective word in determining the conditions under which they shall work as against the right of the owners of the factory who do not use it to dictate through their representatives the terms of employment, with no ultimate appeal. As you easily see this is no superficial disagreement. It involves the very foundations of our industrial life, and there are at stake those principles of democracy about which we seem to be so much concerned. So far as the ~~application~~ ultimate solution of this problem is concerned no sane man expects to see it solved here. But in my opinion and I believe in making this statement that I express the opinion

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opinion of practically that whole body of men and women, who have given themselves to a disinterested study of the situation, no settlement of this acute situation can be fair or just or in the interest of the development of society that does not recognize either directly or by implication the right of the men as a whole to have provided the proper machinery for presenting their claims and grievances to the owners of the representative managers of the owners of the factories in which they work. ~~It has frequently been said in the present situation~~

But the present situation either from the point of view of workman or manager or owners or from the point of view of the society at large is an intolerable one. Under the pressure of such an industrial organization as obtains to-day in our American life we are developing with a rapidity that is often astounding class divisions that are and ought to be intolerable in a republican or democratic society. And unless steps are taken with intelligence and foresight there are dangers ahead of us in this nation that threaten profoundly the peace and the stability of our national life. To-day we hear much about patriotism/about the peril of the republic, about the dangers of complications in European countries, about Hyphenated Americans. In comparison with the dangers involved there the danger involved in this rapidly developing conflict between economic classes is by far the greater. My appeal to-day is not to either one side or the other in this local situation as to what their feeling is or as to what their necessities are. I hope that the settlement of the difficulties may be immediate and satisfactory for immediate necessity. But my appeal is to both parties concerned and to the citizens of Pittsfield as a whole to direct their attention to that greater problem upon the proper settlement of which the future of our country lives in this country depends. Our task as citizens

is to live together in this land in such a way that no individual or group shall have control over the life and destiny of another, but living together we may provide ourselves ~~XXXXXX~~ with the necessities of life and to work together for its development and enrichment, and take our share in creating and establishing the most enlightened the most just social order that this world has ever seen? One aspect of the change of men's ideas in the world of religion has been to emphasise the glories of a heaven beyond death, and to emphasize more the necessity and the desirability of a more tolerable and a more just and a more Christlike world here. To this task for you men and women I make my appeal from the point of view of those men and women in church and out whose lives are not divided by denominational barriers or ecclesiastical interests, to you who are interested, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ in making your contribution to the development of a cleaner, safer world in which your children and your children's children may develop to heights of achievements towards which our faith in the principles of democracy and in the integrity of the universe compell us to look. ~~XXXX~~ The outcome of this possible development will be determined by your devotion in thought and action to this greatest question of our times. The achievements are great. As ~~XXXXXXXX~~ steps in the process of social development both the great co-operations and the trades-unions are tremendous achievements. But as finished products subject to no further modification or development they are intolerable and impossible. But within them both lie principles which under fair development and just direction may lead us out of the difficulties that now seem to beset our whole national life. To that great task then of applying the principles of democracy to the industrial life of tomorrow, in the interest of all men without distinction of class I make my appeal. I close by quoting a passage written about a hundred years ago by that great prophet William Ellery Channing in an address on the subject, Honor Due to All Men.

The sun, which is to bring on ~~the~~ a brighter day, is rising in thick

and threatening clouds. Perhaps the minds of men were never more un-
quiet than at the present moment. Still I do not despair. That a
higher order of ^{ideas and} principles ~~and~~ is beginning to be unfolded; that a wide
philanthropy is beginning to triumph over distinctions ~~and~~ of rank and
~~existing~~ nations; that a new feeling of what is due to the ignorant, poor
depraved, has sprung up; that the right of every human being to such
an education as shall call forth his best faculties, and train him
more and more to control himself, is recognized as it never was before
and that government is more and more regarded as intended, not to
elevate the few, but to guard the rights of all; that these great
revolutions in principles have commenced and are spreading who can den
And to me they are prophetic of an improved condition of human nature
and human affairs. Oh, that this melioration might be accomplished
without blood.