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EDITORIAL

## THE CAUSE OF THE INDUSTRIAL TURMOIL.

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**T**HE great amount of industrial turmoil now prevalent in this country has caused considerable discussion to arise concerning its origin. The intelligence of all classes is exercised in the endeavor to find a cause for it all, and, having found the cause, to apply the remedy demanded. Accordingly many theories have been propounded and exploited.

Among these theories there are two, which, by their contrasts, serve to illustrate the situation. The first, enunciated by a representative manufacturer, traces all the trouble, present and prospective, to the arrogance of trades unions, which he claims has forced employers to organize and fight. All that is necessary, according to this theory, is for the unions to cease their arrogance and treat the employers of their members with reason and respect—then all will be lovely. The second theory traces the present industrial turmoil to the refusal of the government to prosecute the trusts within the past year. The result is the formation of countless little trusts, and strikes. According to this theory all that is necessary is to end “trust domination.” With the end of “trust domination” the whole trouble is ended. As will be seen, this theory is the reverse of the first, in that it attributes the industrial turmoil primarily to organizations of capital, while the other attributes it to organizations of labor.

Both of these theories are erroneous in many respects. Both of these theories ignore industrial turmoil in the generations preceding the period to which they are confined, and, consequently, do not explain them.

While there can be no doubt that trade union “arrogance,” promoted by trust capitalists against independent manufacturers, has stimulated organization among the latter, we find that, since the inception of capitalism, capitalists have organized to combat labor. We find capitalists, through their Boards of Trades, Chambers of

Commerce, and industrial organizations, fighting strikes, boycotts, lockouts, etc., etc., in this country since 1770. So, too, do we find big strikes growing in frequency and destructiveness subsequent to the governmental prosecution of the Sugar and Standard Oil trusts in the '80s. Notable among the strikes is the great Chicago Railroad strike of '94,—a strike which was summarily broken by President Cleveland, famous as an advocate of trust busting by governmental means.

It is evident, then, that we must look to other causes for an explanation of the industrial turmoil. First, there can be no doubt that many strikes are capitalist strikes, i.e., they are promoted by one set of capitalists against another. The coal strike of last year was such a strike. It was no coincident that made Mark Hanna, the bituminous coal operator, line up with the strikers against President Baer, the anthracite coal operator. These strikes have done much to develop pure and simple trades unionism in this country, and consequently, cause strikes in general to spread and increase. Second, behind this kind of strikes and strikes not of this kind, are other causes, such as the increased cost of living, the intensification of labor in some industries, and last, but not least, the comparatively greater demand for labor due to “prosperity.”

The last cause may be said to be the most important factor. Labor in times of comparative prosperity seeks to recoup the losses of panic times. Says Karl Marx, in his *Value, Price and Profit*:

“Capitalist production moves through certain periodical cycles. It moves through a state of quiescence, growing animation, prosperity, overtrade, crisis, and stagnation. The market prices of commodities, and the market rates of profit, follow these phases, now sinking below their averages, now rising above them. Considering the whole cycle, you will find that one deviation of the market price is being compensated by the other, and that, taking the average of the cycle, the market prices of commodities are regulated by their values. Well! During the phases of sinking market prices and the phases of crisis and stagnation, the workingman, if not thrown out of employment altogether, is sure to have his wages lowered. Not to be defrauded, he must, even with such a fall of market prices, debate with the capitalist in what proportional degree a fall of wages has become necessary. If, during the phases of prosperity, when extra profits are made, he did not battle for a rise of wages, he would, taking the average of one industrial cycle, not even receive his AVERAGE WAGES, or the VALUE of his labor. It is the utmost height of folly to demand, that while his wages are necessarily affected by the adverse phases of the cycle, he should exclude himself from compensation during the prosperous phases of the cycle.

Generally, the VALUES of all commodities are only realized by the compensation of the continuously changing market prices, springing from the continuous fluctuations of demand and supply. On the basis of the present system labor is only a commodity like others. It must, therefore, pass through the same fluctuations to fetch an average price corresponding to its value. It would be absurd to treat it on the one hand as a commodity, and to want on the other hand to exempt it from the laws which regulate the prices of commodities. The slave receives a permanent and fixed amount of maintenance; the wages laborer does not. He must try to get a rise of wages in the one instance, if only to compensate for a fall of wages in the other. If he resigned himself to accept the will, the dictates of the capitalist as a permanent economic law he would share in all the miseries of the slave, without the security of the slave.”

Thus it will be seen that labor is simply trying to profit by prosperity—to raise its wages so as to secure its value. And as usual the capitalist is resisting the attempt. In fewer words, the cause of the industrial turmoil is due to the antagonistic interests of employer and employee growing out of the capitalist ownership of the means of production and distribution. These antagonistic interests have endured ever since the inception of capitalism and have intensified as capitalism has developed. The remedy, then, lies not in the removal of trade union “arrogance” or the end of “trust domination” for middle class domination, but in the removal of capitalism and the end of the rule of the capitalist class for Socialism.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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