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# Important Lessons

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In the discussion of labor questions, there is no escape from the consideration of wages, and of late many collateral propositions are forced upon the attention of investigators, as for instance agitation is going forward upon the point made by many, that all work on Sundays, save that of charity, that which is absolutely required, shall be forbidden. Not because of the Sinai command solely, but because man's physical, mental and moral well being demands one day's rest in seven; that one-seventh of a man's life shall be dedicated and consecrated to rest — freedom from toil. Then we have the eight hour question up for debate, not a new topic, but one which for various reasons has lately assumed more importance than has hitherto been accorded it.

As the discussions proceed, the field broadens, and new problems are brought forward for solution. We are confronted with the question of Chinese labor, the "pauper labor" of Europe and "foreign contract" labor, all matters of unquestioned importance and so considered by the Congress of the United States. As we proceed, we find in most of the legislatures of the states that bills are introduced, designed to repeal or modify certain laws which do injustice to labor, and necessarily to laboring men, or, for the enactment of laws, demanded by public opinion to put a final stop to the rulings of courts which have in numerous instances made them odious.

But of all the questions fruitful of discussion and unrest, not one approximates the importance of strikes — strikes in general and great strikes in particular. When a great strike occurs, a great wrong, or a nest of wrongs is disclosed, and when the strike is over, without reference to results, the country is invited to study "the lesson of strikes." The invitation is accepted by a steadily increasing number of students, and from time to time we are presented with reports. This thing of studying the lessons of strikes is immensely beneficial to the

country at large, and it is to be hoped that the investigations will proceed, and the more assiduous the students, the better it will be for society at large. Bradstreet reports 679 strikes during the year 1888 involving 211,841 employees, a decline from 1887 of 23 percent in number of strikes and of 58 percent, in strikers; against 1886 the decrease in number of strikers is 52 percent. Higher wages or fewer hours were causes of strikes by 68 percent of the strikers in 1888, against 62 in 1887. Trades union questions were behind the strikes of 17 percent of the men enrolled in 1888, against 22 percent of the year before. Sympathetic strikes almost disappeared last year. About 45 percent of those striking were in Pennsylvania in 1888, against 32 percent in 1887. Only 38 percent of the strikes in 1888, involving 50 percent of the whole number who went out, resulted in favor of the employees, against 42 percent of the strikes, and 38 percent of those involved in 1887. There were 74,837 employees locked out in 1888, against 46,000 in 1887, of whom 82 per cent, were successful. The number of days' labor lost by striking and locked out employees in 1888 was 7,562,480, against 10,250,921 in 1887. If the labor be placed at \$1.50 per man, the estimated loss of wages to striking and locked out employees in 1888 would be \$11,343,720, against \$15,380,881 in 1887, a decline of 25 percent. In favoring the public with such valuable statistics, Bradstreet has afforded great aid to those who desire to study the lesson of strikes. And here, we inquire, what are the lessons taught?

Except in rare instances the lesson taught by a strike is that it occurred because of injustice more or less flagrant to which the strikers were subjected. It follows, logically, that those who study the lessons of strikes should be animated by a desire to learn the cause of strikes, what it is that gives rise to them, brings them into existence, and if this is not done the time devoted to studying the lessons of strikes is thrown away — indeed, worse than thrown away. In the absence of a full understanding of cause the discussion of effects has always been wild, and conclusions unsound and often vicious. Those who are responsible for causes which lead to strikes, seek by every means in their power to obscure them. They resort to every species of subterfuge to evade exposure, not hesitating when the case is desperate, to resort to mean mendacity, anything to delude investigators, and lead the public to false conclusions — and while practicing their schemes of deception, seek to magnify the effects of strikes, and because disaster follows a strike, their energies are concentrated upon a purpose to

convince the public that strikers alone are responsible for any and all inconvenience to which it may be subjected.

It is needless to say, that in the past, those who have perpetrated the wrongs that have been productive of strikes, have been able, in a degree most lamentable, to obscure their iniquitous schemes, and by the use of money, secure the influence of the press to aid them in debauching public opinion. We hear much about the “public heart,” the “public conscience,” the “public judgment,” etc. But the powerful corporations, by the use of money, have ever been able to reach the public ear through the press and thus secure verdicts in their favor. As a general proposition, the public could study the lessons of strikes only through the press, and hence, if the press was less than just, in presenting the facts, if it failed to tell the whole truth or, for any consideration, it distorted facts, the verdict of the public, based upon such perversions of truth, would convict the innocent and permit the guilty to escape merited censure. This is just what has been going on for years past, and as a consequence, the conclusion has been reached, that men who strike are in the wrong or, that the wrong complained of, did not justify the strike.

The great public studies strikes only when inconveniences to the public result — and as a consequence, there are hundreds of strikes in which the great public feels no concern whatever. But a strike by railroad employees, which interferes with transportation at once creates universal anxiety; but this anxiety has no reference to the rights or the wrongs of employees. The great public is selfish to the last degree. It studies the lessons of strikes only as its interests are involved. The great public want trains to run regularly; any obstruction creates unrest, alarm and indignation. The great public does not stop to inquire the reason why the strike occurred, by which transportation was interrupted, and confusion took the place of order, or, if it does inquire, it is told by the corporation, that “organized labor, again, with mob blindness and violence is attacking capital.” The wires flash the news over the country, the press reproduces the falsehood, a verdict is rendered against the strikers. The redress they sought is denied. The corporation triumphs and workingmen pay the penalty of idleness and the sacrifices incident to idleness.

We have pointed out the way the lessons of strikes are studied by the great majority. But a change is coming in the methods of studying the lessons of strikes. The press is no longer the pliant tool of the corporation. A press devoted to labor interests has been established —

and is exerting a mighty influence, and not only the labor press proper, but the political press, without reference to party, in numerous instances, when a strike occurs, seeks to give the public the correct view of the matter. This being the case, the lessons of strikes are likely, at no distant day, to be productive of many and great benefits to society.

Of the 679 strikes in 1888, 464 of them were caused by demands for higher wages or a reduction of hours constituting a day's work. In numerous instances, it is found, that while wages are beggarly low, the number of hours out of 24 men are required to work is an injustice which all fair minded men admit without controversy. Men who are studying the lessons of strikes for the purpose of finding remedies, discover in low wages and excessive hours devoted to toil, the fruitful cause of the mental and physical wrecks, which everywhere bear testimony that the prosperity about which some people are so boastful is productive of social misery and degradation to a degree well calculated to produce alarm. The strike is therefore simply a protest against a condition of things, which, steadily growing worse, is fraught with danger to the peace and prosperity of society. As a consequence the investigation of strikes is becoming a matter of national importance, and it is becoming clearer every day to men capable of reasoning from cause to effect, that employers who insist upon the minimum of pay and the maximum of hours, are the enemies of society, selfish and soulless men, who, considering only their own welfare, would fill the land with idleness and crime, if, thereby, they could add to their private fortunes.

If a strike never occurred, if workingmen were so abject, so debased and degenerate, as to accept wrong and insult without protest or resistance, if American workingmen could be reduced to the level of the Chinese, and the lowest order of Italian and Hungarian slaves, capitalists would be serene. The work of degradation would go steadily forward and the workingman's chains would the more securely riveted. But American workingmen will protest, they will agitate, they will strike, and it is because of this manliness, that thinking men, statesmen, philanthropists and economists are called upon to study the lessons of strikes, and the more the lessons are studied the better it is for the strikers.

In all such investigations it is found that workingmen are not the enemies of capital or of capitalists, but that they simply resist wrongs which if not effectually eradicated, torn up by the roots, will be pro-

ductive of consequences which no patriot can contemplate with composure. The outlook is full of promise. Throughout the broad land the hosts of labor are coming together. They too are studying the lessons of strikes. They are the students of labor problems. They are measuring and weighing with scientific exactness the opposition that confronts them. The unifying process may be slow, but it is certain. The right men for leaders may not have been found, but they will come. The final outcome is to be federation — not for the aggrandizement of one man, or any set of men — not for office or the emoluments of office, but for the redemption of labor from the thralldoms of unjust and discriminating laws and its emancipation from the degrading domination of corporations. The drift is in that direction and the immediate future is one of hopefulness.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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