
Remedies for Wrongs

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One of the questions up for debate relates to the inauguration of a policy in the United States which shall establish on a permanent basis amicable relations between employers and employees.

These relations, as a general proposition, to use a common phrase, are “strained” — that is to say, instead of mutual confidence there exists mutual suspicion, the result being widespread unrest, forebodings of evil too often realized in industrial affairs.

Annually a certain amount of surplus wealth is created. Statisticians present the figures, and demonstrate that this added wealth mounts up to billions — sums so vast as to bewilder the mind.

The axiomatic truth is stated that labor, and labor alone, creates this wealth.

In looking abroad — in taking a wide survey of the situation and of conditions — the conclusion is arrived at that in the distribution of this surplus wealth labor has never been justly treated.

Where the Line is Drawn.

It is just here that the controversy begins, and the longer it is continued the more sharply defined become the lines that separate those engaged in the discussion.

Usually, on the side of the capitalists, there is great impatience with those who seek to demonstrate that labor does not receive its just share of the wealth it creates, and, refusing to call to their aid arguments based upon facts demonstrated by figures, they at once begin to pile epithets upon those who advocate the rights of labor. They prefer defamation to logic, and their policy in the past has been to them fruitful of success.

Of late years, however, the tactics of capitalists have not been exempt from intelligent and caustic criticism, which has yielded reformatory influences extending far beyond the boundaries of labor, and

have entered the domain of economics, political economy, statesmanship, and politics. Everywhere, on all sides, there is to be seen a mighty mustering of the mind forces of the country, the purpose being to find a solution of what is called the "labor problem" — such an adjustment of equities relating to the distribution of the wealth which labor creates as will satisfy just demands.

This new departure has been brought about by the organization of workingmen — not only the organization of numbers, physical force, but moral and intellectual force; and the among to this force, its discipline and power, has amazed the country and alarmed capitalists.

It is held in circles far removed from anarchists, socialists, communists, whatever such terms are supposed to mean, that something must be done to greatly modify present conditions if the country is to have industrial peace, based upon justice.

"Armed Peace."

As things exist now, industrial peace is, to use a European term, "armed peace." Where a semblance of peace is found it is patchwork, a combination of fear and force, strategy on one side and starvation on the other. The industrial class is hungry, the employer class is venal, a condition fruitful of enmities which, steadily deepening into hatred, must inevitably be productive of results which cannot be thought of with the least degree of composure.

In the discussions of the antagonisms found in industrial circles, the central, the pivotal point upon which every argument turns, radiates, and converges is that the producers of wealth are ceaselessly impoverished, while the capitalistic class is as steadily growing richer. On the one hand, the most conservative writers, the profoundest thinkers, to whom the pages of the best publications of the period are open, present the facts and support them by arguments so cogent that the public no longer hesitates to render the verdict that the complaints of producers are just, and that remedies must be sought and applied if the widespread unrest is to be abated.

The Farmers Are In It.

The farmers of the country "feed all," not only the home population, but the surplus product of the farms of America is the principle

item of our foreign commerce. These farmers declare the rates of transportation so high that, as a general proposition, the profits of farming are swept away, and worse still, that their capital, their investments in farms, and their equipment, is steadily absorbed until bankruptcy and ruin stare them in the face. This grievance, it is shown by state and national statistics, is not trumped up, is not a vagary, but a grim fact, and the farmers are organizing for the purpose of finding a remedy. Nothing within the entire realm of prudence could be more natural.

These farmers start out upon the proposition that railroad rates of transportation are to them ruinously exorbitant. They show the figures, and demonstrate that their products, their investments and toil bring no profits, but, on the contrary, plunge them further and still further into debt. They say — and they demonstrate the truth of their declarations — that the rates of transportation are too high, needlessly exorbitant, because railroad corporations, not content with collecting revenues based upon actual investments, double such investments by the addition of water, and thus compel the farmers to bear a double burden. That the farmers tell the truth in this arraignment is no longer debatable. The proof is overwhelming; it is no longer categorically denied.

The farmers say: “We have tried all the great political parties, but they have turned a deaf ear to our complaints, to our entreaties, and to the facts. We will no longer trust them.” Hence, the Farmers’ Alliance, the new departure in politics.¹

On the other side are the corporations, which, in a fight at once federate, unify, consolidate, and they represent in cash and water about \$9 billion, an incomprehensible sum of money.

The Corporation’s Evil Influence.

In the past, and even now, the corporation has dominated legislation — debauched legislatures, courts, and congresses. Its power has been autocratic. It has issued its decrees and it has been obeyed. To pay dividends on water it has not only impoverished the farmers, but

¹ The Farmers’ Alliance is a general name given to a number of agrarian reform organizations established during the decades of the 1870s and 1880s. These included the National Farmers’ Alliance (“Northern Alliance”), the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union (“Southern Alliance”), and the Colored Farmers’ National Alliance and Cooperative Union (“Colored Alliance”). This broad agrarian movement was the forerunner of the People’s Party, established in 1891.

it has robbed the railroad employees of fair pay, of honest wages, and thus it happens that the farmers and the employees have practically the same grievance; the rate of transportation impoverishes the farmers, and the rate of wages impoverishes the employees, and both are robbed that dividends may be collected on water; and this stupendous wrong has proceeded for years, and has been upheld by legislation and by the courts.

It is just here that the Von Moltke strategy and tactics of the corporation come prominently into view.² The corporation, as in the case of Iowa, says to the farmers, "If you reduce rates we will reduce the number of trains; if previously we charged you so much as to destroy your profits, we will now so reduce facilities that your products will be delayed in reaching market, and your condition will be worse instead of better; you will have jumped from the frying pan into the fire; and since you appeal to the legislature for redress, we will show you that we have our employees under such subjection that they will hold meetings and protest against your plans of redress, and we will issue our orders and have our employees vote against candidates who are pledged to introduce bills to remedy the evils of which you complain."

This is history, true to the letter — naked, unadorned truth. It has been written, and can be produced when required.

The play upon the employee is done so artistically that satisfactory responses are anticipated, and disappointments are few and far between.

Intimidating the Employee.

The employee, metaphorically, is incited to look down into his flour barrel, to make a survey of his smokehouse, inquire about his grocery bills, count his surplus cash, and balance his bankbook. This done, he is told that to reduce rates of transportation, to comply with the demands of the farmers, one of two things is certain to happen — he will be relieved of employment entirely, or his wages will be reduced; in either case the penalty would be crushing, and taking alarm at the intimidating threat, the employee is bulldozed to the extent that he arrays himself against the farmers and obeys orders; but he

² Reference is to **Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke** (1800-1891), a Prussian Field Marshal regarded as one of the most original and innovative military strategists of the age.

goes, or has his wages reduced all the same. Nor is this the end of the humiliating business.

The railroad employee, realizing that he, too, ought to have some legislation to redeem him from the serfdom imposed by "common law," which is no law at all, goes to the legislature for redress — as, for instance, if disabled in the line of his duty he demands the right of going into court with his claim for redress, or if killed, that his heirs may have a hearing and a jury decide the case.

The farmer in such cases may, doubtless does, say to the railroad employees who are battling for justice: "When our bill was up for a redress of our wrongs you opposed us under the whip of the corporation, and now in return we mock at your solicitations. Endure your wrongs as we endure ours. Wanting in courage, you not only deserted us in time of need, but you protested against justice being done us, and petitioned to secure our defeat."

Such is the law of human nature, and having secured this antagonism between the farmers and the employees the corporation is happy, and is in a position to bring its resources to bear and maintain the practice of the "common law" iniquity, by which the infamy is perpetrated, and the crippled employee, at his leisure, may whistle for redress; or, if killed, his wife and children, enshrouded in gloom, may die of starvation.

Manifestly, there is a common ground upon which farmers and railroad employees may meet and battle for justice, side by side; not only railroad employees, but all wealth producers, for all of them have interests in common.

A Demand for Justice.

It is no longer doubted that a "third party," or a new party, is to enter the field of politics. There is no mistaking the signs of the times. The shibboleth of this new party is "Justice to the producers of wealth."

In finding remedies for colossal wrongs it is quite probable some mistakes will be made, but they will be infinitesimal compared with the mistakes that have been made in establishing the wrongs complained of. It sometimes happens that a broken bone is set in such a way as to produce a deformity, and it has to be broken again as a remedy. When antiquated wrongs are torn up by the roots the operation has often been production of commotion — of revolutions, of war,

and all the evils which war entails; but the time must come, it is the verdict of history. The eternal years are pledged to the triumph of Truth.

Here, in what is termed a "God favored land," wrongs ought to be eradicated by peaceful methods; but in view of recent events, when a continent shook beneath the tramp of armed men; when all the streams ran crimson to the sea; when sulfurous clouds obscured the sun in its meridian brightness; when the thunder of the far flashing artillery, the scream of shells, and the rattle of musketry blended with dying groans and the shouts of the living that the star spangled banner must be, what it never had been, the symbol of freedom, here, with such facts in full view, it were well to be cautious in outlining the future.

It is largely within the province of prudent speech to say that many of the wrongs of which the producers of wealth complain could be removed by legislation; to say that all could be so extirpated would be folly.

Sovereign Power of the People.

The sovereign people could, if they would, compel railroads to collect dividends on actual cash investments. The sovereign power of the people touches all things relating to government. It knows no bounds; from it there is no appeal. It makes and unmakes constitutions and laws. In granting a franchise it may absolutely determine the terms of its existence. To say that it creates a corporation with power to collect dividends on water, on fictitious capital, is preposterous; but admitting, for the sake of the argument, that this has been done, then it becomes the sovereign power, by legislation, to remedy the wrong, and afford an overtaxed people the relief demanded. It is not required to enlarge the argument, since all wrongs the result of legislation, or non-legislation, may be cloven down or uprooted by the sovereign power of the people, and a political party with such a battle cry will not want for popular favor.

To succeed it will have to overcome the power of organized capital, organized capitalists, the plutocratic class, and every movement in that direction ought to be hailed by wealth producers, by workers in every department of industry, with loud acclamations of approval.

In some regards the outlook is cheerful, in others it is gloomy. The plutocratic class believe they can disrupt the Farmers' Alliance,

and to do this they propose to use members of the Alliance, just as railroad corporations propose to defeat federation by debauching members of organizations high in official position.

The Coming Battle.

It should be understood that the plutocrats and the corporations will yield only as superior power compels them to surrender their vantage ground. The coming battle is to be one of giants, not of pigmies. The new party will come forward with proof of the wrongs of which it complains, and will pile up the facts to alpine heights. Their arguments will have the power of axioms. Ten thousand eloquent tongues will plead the cause of justice to workingmen, the wealth producers of the country.

But on the other side will be the plutocrats with their cash and their decree for the people, when the day of election comes, to vote the plutocratic ticket, to fall down and worship the golden image they have set up, and they will see to it that the fiery furnace is in full view to warn the recalcitrants of their doom. How many will yield it is too early to conjecture. It will be a battle for freedom, and once begun though defeat may attend the first engagement, the fight will be renewed. If victory by the ballot is too long postponed; if the Pharaohs of the period will not listen to just demands; if the cry of the oppressed takes on a deeper moan, a louder wail, then destiny, always pledged to the redemption of the oppressed, by pillars of cloud and pillars of fire,³ will lead them to freedom, though it be through another Red Sea.⁴

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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³ Reference to *Exodus*, chapter 13, verses 21-22: “*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*”

⁴ Reference to *Exodus*, chapter 14, in which the oppressive army of Egypt was slaughtered in a supernatural cataclysm.