

# The Labour Movement.

## ITS MOTIVES, AIMS, AND PURPOSES.

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Arthur Young, an English agriculturist, travelled France just before the outbreak of the Revolution, and he has given us an account of his observations. The sum of them all is this: He found that the land was entirely owned by the nobility and the clergy; that the peasants had access to only a small part of it, but could not own any of it, that it was one vast waste, devoted to the sport of hunting by the idle class.

Meanwhile the people were reduced to a poverty that beggars description. It can hardly be imagined; it could not be told in words. The result was the Revolution. And yet Mr. Young saw, as any one can see, that the Revolution might have been averted. It was not necessary that France should then have inaugurated the Republic. Indeed, it is fair to say that the French people were not prepared for the Republic, and do not seem to be yet. All that was necessary then was to give the peasants of France their natural, God-given right—their right to free access to the land. That was all. The rest of the problem would have solved itself.

That was an agricultural age. The land was the sole source of living. Our age is the age of machinery. It is the machinery to-day that holds the key to a living for the multitude. And because it holds the key to a bare subsistence, it also holds the key to practically everything else that workmen want or can have.

All that is necessary to-day, in order that humanity may begin its march towards a higher destiny, is that the machinery of industry shall be freely accessible to all the people. This is the fundamental need.

What the working people are asking for or seeking is the chance

to produce freely, and to receive the just equivalent of their labour, if they be allowed to produce freely, the other question solves itself.

And yet there are still people in the world who imagine that industry is governed by the law of supply and demand. We ought to know that there has not been a time in the last hundred years when the supply was within hailing distance of the demand. And we ought to know that never in all coming time, under a just system of things, can the supply exceed the demand.

There is hardship and suffering, and crime and prostitution, and all sorts of evil, because the greed for gold is permitted to preside over the market and limit the supply in the interests of private profit.

Workmen should understand that their quarrel is not with men, but with a system. They should understand still further that there is no extrication for their difficulties individually. The formation of trade unions is a confession of the fact. And if it is a confession of the fact that there is no hope of winning their victory man by man, it is also a confession that there is no hope of doing so union by union. The only logic of the trade union movement is the Union of Unions. The formation of one union cannot be defended as sound in principle or wise in fact unless it be admitted that the unions of all the labourers of the country and the world is necessary.

And what does this Labour union propose as its aim and purpose?

It is fair to assume that it has a purpose for which it is striving. Is it the gaining of a little higher wages? Or is it the abolition of the wage system altogether?

We ought to understand that the trouble is not with the men who are employers. Wages do not depend

upon the will of the employer. They depend upon the market. And the market is a part of the system. One employer of labour cannot extricate himself from the rest and pay what wages he likes. He must pay what the others pay.

There is no hope for the Labour movement so long as it attacks the employers only. It must attack the system, and it can do that only by united action all along the line.

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If the economic interests of labourers are identical, as you confess by your unions, it ought not to be difficult to see that your political interests are equally identical. All economic questions are political questions. Government is industrial from base to dome. It is the interests of commerce and industry that determine government. All effective political action, therefore, must be along economic lines.

If the interests of all working-men are the same, must it not follow that their political interests are the same? And if that is the case, are they not undoing all the good they seek to accomplish by their unions when they insist upon acting separately in the political field?

The one vestige of democracy in this country is the suffrage. It is the one point at which all citizens are equal. One man, one vote. And yet the working people continue the absurd pastime of fighting capital with capital—fighting unlimited capital with their ludicrously small resources. That fight is a failure at the start.

It is the part of wisdom for an army to choose its own ground. If the army of toilers were wise it would choose its own ground, and that would be the place where it is overwhelmingly powerful. To-day our political contests are fought upon fictitious issues. The political power of Labour is utterly wasted. They come out of every such struggle worsted. Not a general election brings any real gain to the workers. True, we may have prosperity. And who reaps the benefit of it? The capitalists. And

who creates prosperity? Those who labour with hands or brain.

There is scarcely a difference of opinion to-day as to the fact that labour does not receive its just share in the products of civilisation. Capitalists admit it. But they are powerless to change the system which works such injustice. That can be done only by Labour, and by Labour organised for political action.

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What is a political party? Is it a fetish to be worshipped? Is it a sacred thing to be placed on a pedestal and deified?

No. It is simply a tool to effect certain ends. Its value is determined wholly by its efficiency in obtaining those ends.

In this country a party is of use in so far as it makes effective the will of the people to change the laws in the direction of justice. A party is useful to the working people in so far as it embodies their interests. It can embody their interests only as it proposes to inaugurate such changes in government as will abolish the profit system by which the labourer is deprived of the value which he produces.

There never was and there never will be but one party which has the interests of the labourer at heart. And no other party should command the support of labour. No Labour union which was devoted to the interests of capitalism would be regarded as representative of the interest of Labour.

Under our present system the interests of Labour and Capitalism are opposed. That you declare when you form a trade union. I wonder why it is that workmen do not carry their reasoning a little further, and see that the political interests of these two classes cannot be identical.

And if they cannot be identical the labourers and capitalists cannot wisely support the same political party.

And if they do, one or the other of these two classes is getting fooled.

Which one is it?