

NATIONALISM AND THE WORKINGMAN

This is the fourth of the series of editorials by Mr. Roosevelt on the general subject of "Nationalism and Progress." The article to be published next week will be "Nationalism and the Workingwoman."
—THE EDITORS.

One of the prime objects which the Progressives have in view in seeking to secure the highest governmental efficiency of both the National and the State Governments is to safeguard and guarantee the vital interests of the wage-workers. We believe in property rights; normally and in the long run property rights and human rights coincide; but where they are at variance we are for human rights first and for property rights second. Lincoln phrased it in one of his homely anecdotes when he said, "We are for both the man and the dollar; but if we must choose between them, we put the man above the dollar;" and in a more formal speech, when he said, "Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."

In this matter, as in other matters, we know that the goal we have in view cannot be reached immediately, or by any one expedient. But our vision of the goal is distinct, and bit by bit we intend to realize this vision. We wish to reshape social and industrial conditions so that it shall no longer be possible for masses of men—still less, masses of women and children—to be worked for excessive hours, or under conditions disastrous to their health, or at their own personal risk to life and limb, or for a wage too small to permit the living of a self-respecting life. As to some of the evils which need curing we do not yet see the remedy, and must confine ourselves for the moment to a diagnosis. But as to others we do see

the remedy, and we urge its immediate application.

At the outset let me make clear one point. I have no sympathy with any limitation of efficiency, no sympathy with any provision which seeks to reduce the work of the high-grade man to the level of the low-grade man. The very fact that I so emphatically believe in the high dignity of manual labor, and desire to do all in my power to raise its position as compared with merely mental labor, gives the reason why I feel we should welcome high skill in manual labor, extreme efficiency therein, just as we recognize skill and efficiency in any form of mental labor. Unless there is pride in efficiency in any line of work that work will never stand high in the popular estimation. If all that a man desires is to get through his job with the minimum of effort and skill on his part, then he will never have, because he will never deserve, the respect of his fellows. A couple of thousand years ago our ancestors ranked the smith as a fit companion for kings; but this was only possible provided that the smith felt that his work was of such a character that it behooved him to do it just as well as the king did his work. In modern times our aim should be to strive to bring about the same self-respect, the same power of inspiring respect in others, among the men who work with their hands as among lawyers or financiers or any other people. This, of course, means education on both sides. On the one hand, the community at large must have the right standards, must put the proper value on courage, address, perseverance, energy, physical power. My own personal feeling is one of hearty contempt for any man who fails to have this feeling. It has never been any effort on my part to respect the first-class railway man or blacksmith or carpenter or cow-hand as much as I respect a competent banker or lawyer; indeed, I have always felt a certain impatience with any one who does not admire physical address and daring; and there are many men who work with their hands among those whose judgment I desire on any question relating to the essential needs, social, political, and industrial, of our civilization. I do not mean that a man should limit himself simply to doing physical

work, or adopt the principles of the well-meaning but unbalanced enthusiasts who would require every man always to do manual work in addition to his other labor. Such conduct is not idealism but folly. I do mean, however, that, in my judgment, it is best, where possible, to combine physical and mental efficiency, and that the highest type of citizen is most apt to be a man who can thus combine them; and I mean, furthermore, that the high type of man who in driving an engine or erecting a building or handling deep-sea fishing craft shows the necessary moral, intellectual, and physical qualities demanded by his task ought to be instantly accepted as standing upon as high a plane of citizenship as any human being in the community. But he can never stand on such a plane unless he regards his work with such devotion that he is not content to do less than his very best. He ought to join with his fellows in a union, or in some similar association, for mutual help and betterment, and in that association he should strive to raise higher his less competent brothers; but he should positively decline to allow himself to be dragged down to their level, and if he does thus permit himself to be dragged down, the penalty is the loss of individual, of class, and finally of National efficiency.

In order to raise the status, not of the exceptional people, but of the great mass of those who work with their hands under modern industrial conditions, it is imperative that there should be more than merely individual action. The old plea that collective action by all the people through the State, or by some of them through a union or other association, is necessarily hostile to individual growth has been demonstrated to be false. On the contrary, in the world of labor as in the world of business, the advent of the giant corporation and the very wealthy employer has meant that the absence of all governmental supervision implies the emergence of a very few exceptionally powerful men at the head and the stamping out of all individual initiative and power lower down. Unrestricted individualism in violence during the dark ages merely produced a class of brutal and competent individual fighters at the top, resting on a broad foundation

of abject serfs below. Unrestricted individualism in the modern industrial world produces results very little better, and in the end means the complete atrophy of all power of real individual initiative, real individual capacity for self-help, in the great mass of the workers.

There must, therefore, be collective action. This need of collective action is in part supplied by the unions, which, although they have on certain points been guilty of grave shortcomings, have nevertheless on the whole rendered inestimable service to the workingman. In addition, there must be collective action through the Government, the agent of all of us.

Probably the chief obstacle in the way of taking such wise collective action lies in the mental attitude of those who still adhere to the doctrinaire theory of eighteenth-century individualism, and treat as a cardinal virtue the right to absolute liberty of contract—and of course, carried out logically, the theory of absolute liberty of contract simply means the legalization of all kinds of slavery. It is essential that the Nation and the State should be able to forbid the exercise of that kind of pseudo-liberty which means the abridgment of real liberty. There has been a steady growth in these matters, and views which a century ago the courts accepted as almost axiomatic are now upset in decision after decision. The Supreme Court of the United States on January 3 last stated the case as regards liberty of contract as follows: "There is no such thing as absolute freedom of contract. The power of government extends to the denial of liberty of contract to the extent of forbidding or regulating every contract which is reasonably calculated to injuriously affect the public interest." The decision goes on to state that the power of the United States is absolute as regards regulating commerce between the States.

The right to regulate the conditions of labor for women and children has now been settled so authoritatively by the Supreme Court of the United States, and by most State courts, that it ought to be no longer regarded as open to serious discussion. Child labor legislation in accordance with this principle is imperatively demanded from the National Government and from

most State governments, there being but a few of our States in which this regulation has gone far enough. It has worked admirably wherever it has been applied. As regards women, there should be strict regulation as to the number of hours they are allowed to be employed and as to the conditions of their work, both as regards cleanliness and surroundings. As yet no way has been devised by which the Government can directly deal with the cases in which the wages paid are insufficient to sustain life under the conditions demanded by the woman's self-respect. I am well aware that this is a question fraught with the greatest difficulties, but it is imperative for us to face the fact that we are making a failure of our democratic experiment just to the extent that there exist large classes of people, and especially large classes of women, who work under conditions and for salaries such that they cannot retain their self-respect. No adequate remedy has yet been proposed. In all probability a great many remedies would have to be concurrently tried and adopted. But nothing is gained by blinking the fact that remedies are imperatively needed.

Indeed, we cannot afford to blink the fact as regards men any more than as regards women. The idle man is a curse to the community, and cannot be a good citizen. But neither can the man who is exhausted by incessant and excessive toil be a good citizen. Men who work thirteen hours a day, including Sunday, week in and week out, simply have not the opportunity to develop themselves or to produce the kind of citizenship which it is absolutely essential for a democracy to possess if it intends to remain a real democracy. The eight-hour day is an ideal towards which we should strive to attain. We should apply it wherever the Government has power, and should consistently endeavor to help in its achievement in private life.

In Nation and State alike there should be far-reaching and comprehensive workmen's compensation acts, and in Nation and State alike there should be far-reaching and comprehensive legislation to guarantee safe and healthy conditions for the workmen while at work. In both these regards the workman should not be left

to fight for his own interests, and should be explicitly forbidden from making contracts which would imperil these interests. His protection in the place where he works, and his right to compensation if injured, should be guaranteed by the laws of the land. If one of the machines owned by an employer is damaged, the employer has to pay for the damage; and if the man who runs it is hurt, it is just as much the duty of the employer to compensate him as it is to repair the machine. In each case those who use the product will in the end, and quite properly, pay for the damage.

In this matter we are far behind most other civilized countries. It is humiliating to think that until very recently we had done nothing whatever to regulate such an industry as that of the manufacture of poisonous matches, and that even yet we have to struggle against that attitude of mind which has shown itself among those judges who have decided against workmen's compensation laws on the ground that they interfere with liberty of contract. The railway employees on any railway doing inter-State business can be guaranteed their rights only by the action of the Federal Government, and no greater wrong can be committed against labor than the wrong committed by those who, on the bench or in the Legislatures, seek to prevent the Federal Government from having full power in this matter. The Federal Government should pass drastic compensation laws as regards its own employees, and as regards all wage-workers employed in connection with inter-State commerce. But as regards labor the field of action is wider for the State governments than for the Federal Government. The legislators in the several States should see to the abolition of the sweat-shop system everywhere; they should secure to the laboring man release from employment for one day in seven; they should secure far-reaching and thoroughgoing workmen's compensation acts, and acts providing for the sanitary inspection of factory, workshop, mine, and home; they should provide suitable and plentiful playgrounds for children in all the cities; they should rigidly supervise the conditions of tenement-house life, should pass and enforce

rigid anti-child-labor laws and laws limiting women's labor.

Wages and other most important conditions of employment must remain largely outside of governmental control and be left for adjustment by free contract between employer and employee, with the important proviso that there should be legislation to prevent the conditions that compel men and women to accept wages that represent less than will insure a decent living. But the question of contract between employer and employee should not be left to individual action, for under modern industrial conditions the individual is often too weak to guard his own rights as against a strongly organized body or a great capitalist. In the present state of society, and until we advance much farther than at present along lines of genuine altruism, there must be effective and organized collective action by the wage-workers in great industrial enterprises. They must act jointly through the process of collective bargaining. Only thus can they be put upon a plane of economic equality with their corporate employers. Capital is organized, and the laborer can secure proper liberty and proper treatment only if labor organizes also. It is, I trust, unnecessary to say that the most emphatic recognition of this need does not mean any condonation of whatever is evil in the practices of labor organizations. Labor organizations are like other organizations, like organizations of capitalists; sometimes they act very well, and sometimes they act very badly. We should consistently favor them when they act well, and as fearlessly oppose them when they act badly. I wish to see labor organizations powerful; and the minute that any organization becomes powerful it becomes powerful for evil as well as for good; and when organized labor becomes sufficiently powerful the State will have to regulate the collective use of labor just as it must regulate the collective use of capital. Therefore the very success of the effort we are making to increase the power of labor means that among labor leaders and among other citizens there must be increased vigilance and courage in unhesitatingly rebuking anything that labor does that is wrong.

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