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EDITORIAL

THE STRIKE BREAKER

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IN the *Saturday Evening Post* of November 5, there is an article that should be read by workmen interested in the irrepressible conflicts between Capital and Labor. It is called "The Strike Breaker," and gives an account of the object, evolution and organization of this product of latter day capitalism, and the difficulties he presents to the old or Gompers' type of trades unionism. Of course, there is a good deal about the strike breaker that is omitted, and a good deal more that, though included, is given a poetic coloring, in order to hide his repulsive features, but, taking it all in all, the article may be regarded as the first attempt to analyze and classify a development that must be reckoned with. While the reader is recommended to read the article in its entirety, a few statements and comments regarding it and the subject of which it treats will not be amiss here.

First, the writer shows that the strike breaker acquires importance because he substitutes an organized body of men for the unorganized unemployed in the breaking of strikes. This substitution has sprung from the capitalist necessity of having more reliable and better trained men than the unemployed to break strikes. Though the author does not say so clearly, those familiar with the history of strikes, can see that the strike breaker is an evolution of the employment bureaus and detective agencies that played so great a part in strike breaking before the advent of the strike breaker. The latter has taken these two agencies and combined them, and instead of trusting to the exigencies of each strike to secure men, he keeps a permanent body either on hand or within call, to act both as non-unionists and detectives. To this combination he has added the sustenance and care of his own employes while they are engaged in strike breaking, thus giving the combination greater solidity and perfection.

Second, the author depicts the employes of the strike breaker as being of two

main kinds: (1) the men who love adventure as did the knights of the Middle Ages and the chivalrous soldier, to put it mildly. This is rot. The “adventurous knights” and “chivalrous soldiers” of the strike breaker are professional bad men, thugs and semi-criminals, who will do any dirty work, provided the pay and immunity offered is sufficient to make it worth while. It is these plug uglies who do the shooting and create the disorder that furnish the pretext for calling out the police and militia, and arresting the strikers on wholesale charges of conspiracy. “Adventurous knights,” “chivalrous soldiers,” forsooth! (2) A more respectable class of men. The author describes them in this wise:

“There are men who have been dismissed from workingmen’s unions; there are malcontents; there are some who are opposed to the unions from prejudice or principle; and there is the sadder class of those who, though they have been strong union men and still perhaps are so at heart, have found the unions unable to protect them, and, desirous of working at the trade for which they are best fitted, find themselves almost forced to join the hostile ranks—men, these, who have been active in the union cause in some strikes, and afterward, when the strike is over and they have been taken back with others, not so prominent, have found themselves discharged for some ostensible cause disconnected with anything for which their fellow-workers can take up their quarrel and afterward find it impossible to find employment—for blacklisting, or what amounts to that, is an active force in certain lines. Upon this class the professional strike breaker places great reliance for it supplies him with a number of well-trained men.”

These victims of unemployment and the blacklist are the body of the wedge of which the “adventurous knights” and the “chivalrous soldiers,” i.e., the plug uglies, are the thin sharp edge. They follow in where the plug uglies have broken ground and prepared the way. After them come the great body of non-professional strike breakers, the “scabs” and the reserve army of the unemployed.

Third, the writer points out that to boil all he says into a compact phrase, the strike breaker is a sort of “balance of power.” While he cannot command enough men to fill all the strikers’ places, he can command enough to start the running of a street car line and keep it going until, with the aid of the police, militia and Judiciary, THE ANTI-UNIONISM OF THE TRADES UNIONS, the strikers involved have capitulated. The author cites the “L” trouble. There two strike

breakers, one a conductor and the other a motorman, were placed on each car, making defeat certain. But he fails to show that, in the meanwhile, the other employes, including the power house men, were ready to assist these very strike breakers crush the motormen.

After reading "The Strike Breaker," several things become more evident than ever before to one familiar with the labor movement. They are as follows: (1) the strike breaker can succeed, providing the police, militia and Judiciary are with him and the corporations employing him. (2) The strike breaker can succeed provided there is no general strike; in other words, the strike breaker is only successful when he has to break a strike in one branch of industry, with all the others at work; that is to say, his "balance of power" is only possible where labor is split into selfish unions of the Gompers' style, each intent on protecting its own interests and letting the devil take care of the hindmost. (3) The strike breaker can succeed where there is a reserve army of the unemployed to recruit from and back up his initiatory anti-strike moves. From all of which it follows that to defeat the strike breaker and the degradation which he aids to impose, labor will have to control the powers of government, i.e., the police, militia and Judiciary, and organize on the lines of Socialist unionism, i.e., on lines which, while taking care of the interests of each branch of industry, makes the interests of the entire working class paramount; and that, finally, would end unemployment by abolishing the system that causes it, i.e., by abolishing capitalism.

The strike breaker, in other words, is only another one of those agencies, which, through the inherent fatalism of capitalism, is driving the capitalist class to the creation of conditions that will eventually lead to its doom. The strike breaker will compel a re-alignment of the forces of labor that will eventually lead to the overthrow of capitalism. As such the strike breaker has no terrors for the Socialist, no matter what emotions he may inspire in the believers of the Gompers' style of unionism.

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