

XXXII

PLYMOUTH, LABOR DAY

SEPTEMBER 1, 1919

THE laws of our country have designated the first Monday of each September as Labor Day. It is truly an American day, for it was here that for the first time in history a government was founded on a recognition of the sovereignty of the citizen which has irresistibly led to a realization of the dignity of his occupation. It is with added propriety that this day is observed this year. For the first time in five years it comes at a time when the issue of world events makes it no longer doubtful whether the American conception of work as the crowning glory of men free and equal is to prevail over the age-old European conception that work is the badge of the menial and the inferior. The American ideal has prevailed on European battle-fields through the loyalty, devotion, and sacrifice of American labor.

The duty of citizenship in this hour is to strive to maintain and extend that ideal at home.

The past five years have been a time of rapid change and great progress for the American people. Not only have the hours and conditions of labor been greatly improved, but wages have increased about one hundred per cent. There has been a great economic change for the better among all wage-earners.

We have known that political power was with the people, because they have the votes. We have generally supposed that economic power was not with the people, because they did not own the property. This supposition, probably never true, is growing more and more to be contrary to the facts. The great outstanding fact in the economic life of America is that the wealth of the Nation is owned by the people of the Nation. The stockholders of the great corporations run into the hundreds of thou-

sands, the small tradesmen, the thrifty householders, the tillers of the soil, the depositors in savings banks, and the now owners of government bonds, make a number that includes nearly our entire people. This would be illustrated by a few Massachusetts examples from figures which were reported in 1918:

Number of Stockholders

Railroads	40,485
Street railways	17,527
Telephone	49,688
Western Union Telegraph . . .	9,360

117,060

Number of Employees

Railroads	20,604
Street railways	25,000
Telephone	11,471
Western Union Telegraph . . .	2,065

59,140

Savings bank depositors . . .	2,491,646
Railroad, street railway, and telephone bonds held by savings banks and savings departments of trust com- panies	\$267,795,636
Savings bank deposits	\$1,022,342,583

Money is pouring into savings banks at the rate of \$275,000 each working day.

Comment on these figures is unnecessary. There is, of course, some reduplication, but in these four public service enterprises there are in Massachusetts almost twice as many direct owners as there are employees. Two persons out of three have money in the savings bank — men, women, and children. There is this additional fact: more than one quarter of the stupendous sum of over a billion dollars of the savings of nearly two and a half million savings depositors is invested in railroad, street railway, and telephone securities.

With these examples in mind it would appear that our problem of economic justice in Massachusetts, where we live and for which alone we can legislate, is not quite so simple as assuming that we can take from one class and give to another class. We are reaching and maintaining the position in this Commonwealth where the property

class and the employed class are not separate, but identical. There is a relationship of interdependence which makes their interests the same in the long run. Most of us earn our livelihood through some form of employment. More and more of our people are in possession of some part of the wages of yesterday, and so are investors. This is the ideal economic condition.

The great aim of our Government is to protect the weak — to aid them to become strong. Massachusetts is an industrial State. If her people prosper, it must be by that means in some of its broad avenues. How can our people be made strong? Only as they draw their strength from our industries. How can they do that? Only by building up our industries and making them strong. This is fundamental. It is the place to begin. These are the instruments of all our achievement. When they fail, all fails. When they prosper, all prosper. Workmen's compensation, hours and conditions

of labor are cold consolations, if there be no employment. And employment can be had only if some one finds it profitable. The greater the profit, the greater the wages.

This is one of the economic lessons of the war. It should be remembered now when taxes are to be laid, and in the period of readjustment. Taxes must be measured by the ability to meet them out of surplus income. Industry must expand or fail. It must show a surplus after all payments of wages, taxes, and returns to investors. Conscription can call once, then all is over. Just requirements can be met again and again with ever-increasing ability.

Justice and the general welfare go hand in hand. Government had to take over our transportation interests in order to do such justice to them that they could pay their employees and carry our merchandise. They have been so restricted lest they do harm that they became unable to do good. Their surplus was gone, and we New Englanders

had to go without coal. Seeing now more clearly than before the true interests of wage-earner, investor, and the public, which is the consumer, we shall hereafter be willing to pay the price and secure the benefits of justice to all these coördinate interests.

We have met the economic problem of the returning service men. They have been assimilated into our industrial life with little delay and with no disturbance of existing conditions. The day of adversity has passed. The American people met and overcame it. The day of prosperity has come. The great question now is whether the American people can endure their prosperity. I believe they can. The power to preserve America is in the same hands to-day that it was when the German army was almost at the gates of Paris. That power is with the people themselves; not one class, but all classes; not one occupation, but all occupations; not one citizen, but all citizens.

During the past five years we have heard

many false prophets. Some were honest, but unwise; some plain slackers; a very few were simply public enemies. Had their counsels prevailed, America would have been destroyed. In general they appealed to the lower impulses of the people, for in their ignorance they believed the most powerful motive of this Nation was a sodden selfishness. They said the war would never affect us; we should confine ourselves to making money. They argued for peace at any price. They opposed selective service. They sought to prevent sending soldiers to Europe. They advocated peace by negotiation. They were answered from beginning to end by the loyalty of the American workingmen and the wisdom of their leaders. That loyalty and that wisdom will not desert us now. The voices that would have lured us to destruction were unheeded. All counsels of selfishness were unheeded, and America responded with a spirit which united our people as never before to the call of duty.

Having accomplished this great task, having emerged from the war the strongest, the least burdened nation on earth, are we now to fail before our lesser task? Are we to turn aside from the path that has led us to success? Who now will set selfishness above duty? The counsel that Samuel Gompers gave is still sound, when he said in effect, "America may not be perfect. It has the imperfections of all things human. But it is the best country on earth, and the man who will not work for it, who will not fight for it, and if need be die for it, is unworthy to live in it."

Happily, the day when the call to fight or die is now past. But the day when it is the duty of all Americans to work will remain forever. Our great need now is for more of everything for everybody. It is not money that the nation or the world needs to-day, but the products of labor. These products are to be secured only by the united efforts of an entire people. The

trained business man and the humblest workman must each contribute. All of us must work, and in that work there should be no interruption. There must be more food, more clothing, more shelter. The directors of industry must direct it more efficiently, the workers in industry must work in it more efficiently. Such a course saved us in war; only such a course can preserve us in peace. The power to preserve America, with all that it now means to the world, all the great hope that it holds for humanity, lies in the hands of the people. Talents and opportunity exist. Application only is uncertain. May Labor Day of 1919 declare with an increased emphasis the resolution of all Americans to work for America.