9-20-1920

The Open Shop: Number Nine

Business Men's Association of Omaha

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/openshop

Part of the Labor History Commons, and the Labor Relations Commons

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE
Americanism or Classism?

The time is fast approaching when we must decide the political issues involved in the coming election. It is true in this election as it has been in the past that the vital issues are based upon the economic problems that face us. Regardless of all the noise that is being made and the charges and countercharges that are hurled back and forth there are some important issues that must be studied and conclusions that must be arrived at in a dispassionate manner.

Probably the most vital issue before us today is the one brought about by the rise of classism in this country. We see an organized industrial class entering into the campaign with the avowed purpose of "rewarding its friends and defeating its enemies." Its friends are either those whose official acts in the past have been particularly satisfactory to this class or who give assurance, if elected, to so act. Its enemies are those who have had the courage of their convictions and whose convictions have at some time or other run contrary to the views of organized labor's leaders. The test is not what may be best for the American people as a whole, but what will serve this class most.

We grant every man the right to vote his own convictions. That makes it all the more the duty of every man, who is interested in the welfare of all the people, to arouse himself and put down the sinister movement that seeks to benefit one class only.

Study the party platforms, the speeches of acceptance and subsequent pronouncements of the leading candidates and regardless of party affiliations vote for the perpetuation of those American principles that were first declared by that intrepid group of men on July 4, 1776 and later assured us by their embodiment in the Constitution.

Remember, besides a President, we are to elect members of the National Congress and officers of the state government. Test them by the issue as well. The American voter should weigh the statements of the candidates in their relation to the welfare of the whole people and not to one class. We see the results of class dictatorship in Russia and the ominous threats of it in England. Let us have none of it in America.

Which candidates will carry out the principles of Americanism as we have developed them in the century and a half of our life as a nation? This is the rule by which to gauge the candidates. Go to the polls on November 2 and vote intelligently on this great issue.

C. of C. Approves Open Shop

By an overwhelming majority the Chamber of Commerce of the United States approved the open shop principle in industry in a recent referendum submitted to its members. That labor organizations should be compelled to assume responsibility for their contracts and agreements the same as other organizations and that strikes on public utilities should be forbidden, with tribunals provided to fix wages and working conditions received almost unanimous approval.

This action by the National Chamber of Commerce is significant of a growing feeling in this country that the day of the closed union shop is doomed and that American industry intends to free itself therefrom. The "handwriting on the wall" ought to be apparent to the leaders of organized labor.
Our Creed

"The Open Shop" Believes —

In close co-operation between employer and employees, in united whole-hearted effort by both to achieve the greatest good for their mutual interest and that of the public.

In the settlement of problems between employer and employee by direct, open and fair negotiation.

In fair wages, good working conditions and complete freedom of employment, both by employers and employees.

"The Open Shop" Opposes the "Closed Shop" —

Because by this, union labor demands of the employer that none but union members be given work, that there be created a monopoly of labor in the hands of union leaders.

Because this principle is perniciously unfair and unjust to the individual, who has the right to exercise his own judgment as to whether or not he wishes to become a member of a union and whose right to earn a livelihood for himself and family should not be dependent upon that decision.

Because it is uneconomic in its tendency to destroy ambition, restrict production and lower all workmen to a dead level of mediocrity.

Because it is thoroughly un-American and undemocratic in the facility with which it lends itself to the creation of class antagonism and class politics.

"The Open Shop" is for a square deal for the public, the employer and the employee, union or non-union.

* * *

"Divine Rights"

The Courts of Kansas have upheld the new Kansas Court of Industrial Relations, and Judge Curran, who rendered the decision said: "The divine right to strike, where it affects the health and welfare of the public must be relegated to the realm where the divine right of kings has been sent. In stressing the divine right to strike, the divine right to work, the right of a man to have employment so he can provide for his wife and children has been sadly overlooked."

"Umbrella Mike" A Leader

Another "leader" of organized labor has received considerable publicity in the past few months. Catered to by public officials, is it any wonder that he has resorted to the most absurd means in asserting his leadership?

In January, 1917, after being convicted of conspiracy to violate the Sherman Anti-trust law by keeping non-union material out of Chicago, Michael Boyle, better known as "Umbrella Mike," was sentenced by Federal Judge Landis to one year in prison. According to the Chicago Tribune, "A reign of terror followed the labor move. Gunners and bombers got on the job, according to the charges, and a great deal of property was destroyed."

This character got his sobriquet from his practice of hanging his umbrella on a bar rail in a Chicago saloon and compelling contractors and owners to drop a substantial cash contribution therein in order to insure them against strikes while their buildings were being constructed. He is reputed to be worth $500,000.

A legal fight lasting nearly three years ensued, but the sentence was affirmed by the United States Circuit Court of Appeals and Boyle began to serve his sentence last January. On April 28 the whole country was astounded to hear that President Wilson had pardoned him. While Mike was under sentence he was re-elected business agent of the Electrical Workers' Union, and when liberated he immediately called a strike of the union electricians, completely tying up the street car system of Chicago. Boyle's demand was that the south side car shops which had been operated as open shop, should be closed to all but union men.

It might be interesting to know that a protege of "Umbrella Mike," one Raymond Cleary, also convicted and while out on bond spent the spring and summer of 1917 in Omaha as a leader of Omaha workmen in the Building Trades strike of that year.
Omaha Street Car Decision

On August 18, the Nebraska State Railway Commission rendered its decision in the action instituted before it by the union employees of the Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway Company, for an increased wage scale, declining to grant any increase whatsoever.

The union employees complained that the wages paid were not sufficient to enable the Company to keep an adequate number of competent conductors and motormen, thereby impairing the service, and alleged they had taken a strike vote and intended to strike if adequate relief in wages was not provided by the Commission. An increase of 13 cents per hour was demanded for trainmen who now receive from 53 cents to 57 cents per hour, and a corresponding increase for other employees.

The Company raised the question of the Commission's jurisdiction to determine its wage scale. The union employees, through their attorneys and leaders, appealed strenuously to the Commission to assume such jurisdiction. This the Commission did, holding that under its constitutional power to regulate the service of and to generally control common carriers, it could, in order to insure continued service, establish a scale of wages 'sufficient to attract and secure the necessary number of men to operate the system.'

Thereupon the Company filed its answer to the complaint, denying the wages paid were inadequate or the service impaired and alleging its belief to be that the alleged 'strike vote' did not truly represent the will of its employees and that a large proportion of them were satisfied and did not intend to strike. The Company further averred it was operating at a loss and was financially unable to pay higher wages.

During a hearing lasting nearly four weeks much evidence was submitted to the Commission by both sides. In addition the Commission made independent investigation of wages paid generally in Omaha.

The decision is a complete vindication of the Company. Concerning the charge of 'impaired service,' the Commission says:

"In general the service of the Company is of a high standard. It now operates a larger number of cars, with a greater mileage than at any previous time in its history. It also has upon its payroll a larger number of men than ever before, and at present there is no lack of men."

The opinion of the Commission discusses wages at length and states that 720 trainmen working 25 days or more during May, 1920 (a typical month), earned an average wage of $152.66, the highest wage earned for the month being $204.98; that the remaining 138 men included those who for one reason or another did not work 25 days, and that—

"It is a fair statement to say that those who were experienced and worked faithfully during 26 days of the month and a reasonable number of hours per day, received on the average upwards of $150. ** It should be added in this connection that the wages of trainmen have been more than doubled from August 1, 1914 to this time. To be exact, they have increased on the average 114.98%.

The Commission reviewed wages paid other employees in Omaha "whose occupations are comparable with those of the Company's employees in skill, responsibility and effort required," and found:—

"Only two or three of them reach the level enjoyed by the street car employees. The testimony shows that men are continually leaving other employment, including some of those mentioned above, to engage in street car work. We cannot, therefore, say that the wages paid by the defendant Company is not sufficient to attract suitable men and the fact that its lists are now full is evidence that they are coming in sufficient numbers."

The Commission also found the Company's contention that it was financially unable to pay higher wages under the existing fare of "four tickets for a quarter," to be true.

In discussing the strike threatened by complainants, the Commission said:—

"There is no place for a strike in the public economy of a state that has provided for regulation ** *

"That the employees of the Company in this instance have invoked the jurisdiction of the Commission to settle the controversy between them
and the Company is a recognition of the fact that the people have the power to adjust these matters and that they have created a tribunal for that purpose and we have every confidence that the decision of the Commission will be received as a final determination by all parties except so far as they may desire to exercise this right of appeal."

Without rescinding the strike vote, but without putting it into effect, the Union has concluded to pursue its right of appeal to the Supreme Court of Nebraska.

***

**Think on This**

The three large cities in the United States that have had the greatest percentage of growth in the last decade are militant "open shop" cities. Akron, Ohio, has increased 201.8%, Detroit 113.4% and Los Angeles 80.3%.

Take Los Angeles for an illustration. We read in Current Opinion for August, "One indication of what the open shop has done for the southern California city is that in a circumference of five square blocks, ten class A office buildings are now in the course of construction or are shortly to be started." Upwards of thirty ready-to-wear garment factories have sprung up, employing nearly three thousand skilled workers. The Master Builders' Association recently refused to bid on an $800,000 factory, because the contract contained an objectionable closed shop clause. Wages are as high, if not higher, than in union dominated San Francisco.

The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company has just completed a $10,000,000 plant in Los Angeles which will employ thousands of people. This city was chosen as the location of the plant, so announces their president, because it is an Open Shop City. After reviewing all locations on the Pacific Coast they found Los Angeles labor free from the domination of the Closed Shop.

Dallas, Texas, is fifth in the list, with a growth of 72.6%. Here is the record in Dallas. Since the organization of the Open Shop Association last fall, building construction has broken all records. Building permits granted for the fiscal year ending May 1, 1920, totaled $20,881,488 and permits for the first half of 1920 were nearly $10,000,000. Before the organization of the open shop $8,000,000 worth of building construction was being tied up by labor troubles. All such difficulties have ceased under the new policy.

***

**From a Churchman**

In these days when prominent men in the church and school are speaking and writing on industrial subjects, often without close acquaintance with them, it is good to read the following extract from a letter Bishop Wm. A. Quayle of the Centenary Conservation Committee of the Methodist Church wrote to Samuel Gompers:

"I believe that under the Declaration of Independence and under the Constitution of the United States, it is absolutely illegitimate for any man or group of men to call any other American citizen a scab because he does not belong to their group or organization. I hold that that must cease if America is to remain a republic. I hold that the laboring man constitutes all who labor, and that the words 'laboring class,' to which all honorable Americans belong, must not be applied to a very small minority of the laboring people, to the exclusion of the great multitude of laboring people. There must be in America an absolutely open door to any man who wants to work to get it without being anything more than an American citizen."

"I am acquainted with the declarations that organized labor has made and have kept posted in them all these years, but am more concerned in what organized labor does than in what organized labor says, for in this business deeds speak louder than words."

***

**George Washington Said:**

"This government *** has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty."
Armies of Labor

Conscription of labor is now openly admitted by the bolshevist government of Petrograd.

It is defended by the Lenine-Trotsky regime on the ground that Russia needs every ounce of brawn in the country.

At first the soviet government pretended that the alleged conscription was nothing other than the voluntary agreement of labor to conscript itself.

Neutral investigators who have come out of Russia denied this, and charged the soviet leaders with actual enslavement of workers.

Just recently the international labor office of the League of Nations accused the bolshevik authorities of putting human labor under an iron military discipline.

"We must create armies of labor," declares Lenine.

But why "armies"? Why conscript workers? Why put them into chain gangs to make them work? How can bolshevism explain that? Wasn't it once the bolshevik theory that, decapitate capitalism, take away private property, and every person will be willing—yes, eager—to work? Lenine and Trotsky once spoke volumes in contention of that theory. American bolsheviks argued thusly.

So it was that a part of Russia destroyed the system so ardently disliked by Lenine. Capital was reduced to the ranks. Private property and individual profits were outlawed. The dictatorship of the proletariat came into actual being.

What result?

Conscription of workers.

Labor armies controlled by the ring-leaders of bolshevism.

Ten- and twelve-hour days.

Less production than ever in Russia's history.

Less food and less clothing for all workers, excepting among those nearest Lenine and Trotsky.

Less happiness and more misery throughout all of Russia.—OMAHA DAILY NEWS, Sept. 7, 1920. (EDITORIAL)

Employers Take Heed

For seven months Mr. Whiting Williams, vice president of a Cleveland, Ohio, steel company lived and worked side by side with coal miners, mill workers, ship builders and common laborers. He says of his experience:

"I am perfectly sure, from all that I have learned in these seven months, that the worker as a whole is not bolshevistic, has no desire to become an agitator, and does not wish an overturn any more than you and I. If he ever becomes bolshevistic it will be the result of bad strategy on our part and good salesmanship on the part of the agitator. As I see it, there is going on before our eyes the most crucial, most significant and most serious selling contest the world has ever seen."

The solution of the problem of labor unrest, he believes, is for the employer to look to the workers through the eyes of his daily job, to come into a sympathetic understanding with him, to give him some comprehension of the part he plays in industry and in general present the employer's side of the argument as skillfully and energetically as the agitators are pressing theirs.

The worker is a human. The more of a routine nature his job, the more his mind considers other things. The agitator is always there pointing out his difficulties to him and giving him solutions for them. The employer is pictured as one who has no troubles and who profits at the expense of the employee. The working man has a tremendous ignorance about the plans and purposes, ideal and character, in other words, the soul of the employing company. Give him an insight into the affairs of the company and he will have something to think about. Give him information that he may use it in combating the specious arguments of the agitator. Get in the personal touch. Make the workman a friend of the company and he will not listen to the arguments of the bolshevist.

++++

Hoover Speaks

Washington, May 14.—"The principle of individual freedom requires the open shop," Herbert Hoover declared today in testifying before the senate labor committee at hearings on proposed legislation for the settlement of industrial unrest.—OMAHA BEE.
New Recruits

The open shop movement is sweeping the country. Every day brings notices that other cities and whole states are declaring their freedom of closed shop domination. The fairness of the American Plan, as the open shop is being more and more frequently called, appeals to everyone who gives the subject any thought. Some of the most recent activities in this direction follow:

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

The Associated General Contractors of Chattanooga declared for the open shop last month and refused to sign a closed shop contract with the carpenters' union.

TOPEKA, KANSAS

The machine shop owners of Topeka, Kansas, have refused to sign closed shop contracts. This lines up Topeka with Wichita, Newton and Salina on the open shop basis.

DENVER, COLORADO

The Denver Gas and Electric Light Company has refused to recognize the union and is insisting on running its business on the open shop basis. As a result of the recent street car strike the Tramway Company is now running an open shop in all its departments.

FLORENCE, ALABAMA

The business and professional men of Florence have formed an Open Shop Association. The contractors of the community say that they have more and better workmen than they ever had before.

BUTTE, MONTANA

The American plan of employment has been successfully established by the Butte Associated Industries in the building trades. This is the outcome of constant trouble in this industry which finally resulted in a strike. Since the first of the year all construction work in Butte has been under the American Plan.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

The high handed methods of the Building Trades Council in demanding unusual and extravagant concessions determined the Utah Associated Industries to declare for the American plan in the building trades. After a short period of inactivity, building operations resumed on the open shop basis. On August 9, the Building Trades Council voted that union men were permitted to go back to work on the open shop basis. Contractors are retaining their non-union men and look upon the capitulation of the Building Trades Council as one of the biggest achievements in industry in this section of the country.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

Manufacturing retailers and wholesalers in the New York fur industry are operating open shop. The industry has been affected by a strike since last May and has taken this means to end the trouble. The same thing has taken place in Boston.

CLEVELAND, OHIO

The labor relations committee of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce refused to seek to arrange a conference between the employers and employees in the tailoring trade so long as the union would not agree to the elimination of the closed shop provision of the proposed agreement. The Chamber takes the position that it will not promote the adoption in any trade of an agreement, the terms of which differ in any vital particular from its declaration of principles on labor relations. The declaration opposed the closed shop.

BUFFALO, N. Y.

A campaign is in progress in Buffalo, N. Y., to make it an open shop manufacturing center. Four organizations started the campaign. They are the Chamber of Commerce, the Employers Association, the Commercial, a daily newspaper, and the Buffalo Clothing Manufacturers Association. The open shop is being maintained in the clothing manufacturing trade and by the traction company.

The Employers Association of Buffalo has adopted an Open Shop Label, which will appear on the stationery, packing cases and finished products of the plants.
which make up the membership of the Association. About one hundred thirty-seven of the industries of Buffalo are represented.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
At a recent joint meeting of the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs held at Montgomery, the Open Shop was almost unanimously endorsed. Montgomery has been a closed shop town for years.

TONAWANDA, N. Y.
The Standard Pattern Company, of North Tonawanda, N. Y., has declared for the Open Shop. In referring to the intolerable restrictions enforced by the union, Mr. Corbett stated: "I found it was impossible to put my own son to work in my own plant as an apprentice without first securing the consent of the union."

Farmers Speak
The National Grange, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Cotton States Board, and the Association of State Farmers' Union Presidents have challenged something organized labor holds sacred, the right to strike. These organizations say:

"What would be the verdict of the people if the farmers of the United States should suddenly decide to go on strike and refuse to supply the wants and needs of those who are not in a position to produce food and clothing for themselves?

"They would be condemned from one end of this country to the other and the fact would be pointed out that they, as owners and tillers of the land, had no right, either moral or legal, to bring about such a calamity.

"If the farmers who own and occupy land have no such moral or legal right, then why should it be conceded by anyone that those who handle the farmers' products have a right to block the transportation or industrial facilities of the country and thus jeopardize the food and clothing supply of the nation?

"No such right has ever existed and no such right now exists. It is economically unsound."

Donlin Blames Labor
John Donlin, president of the building trades department of the American Federation of Labor, must have given the ranks of his organization an unusual jolt when he said in his annual report to the Montreal Convention of the A. F. of L. that the workers are shirking their responsibility and that curtailed production is equally to blame for the hardships suffered by the public.

"The wage earner is just as much responsible for the high cost of living as any other agency, is the way he is reported to have expressed his view.

"If every worker doing physical labor would insist that production equal pre-war times there would soon be a reduction in the price of commodities. The higher wages go and the more production falls off the more the worker is going to be hurt."

This statement, coming as it does, from an official of a labor organization, merits more than a passing glance. It should make the worker take notice that he has heretofore been upholding a false doctrine. Similar acknowledgments from other officials of high rank in labor unions, of the soundness of the employer's view would do much toward bringing about increased production and a consequent reduction in prices.—National Metal Trades Association Bulletin.

Gompers for Cox
Samuel Gompers and two others of the non-partisan political campaign-committee of the A. F. of L., have issued a report addressed to unions affiliated with the Federation urging members to vote for Cox for President.

This is a further attempt "to deliver" the vote of organized labor in the coming election. It is safe to say that this effort on the part of a committee to decide for and dictate to the workers how they shall vote, will have no great effect one way or another, even among the rank and file of organized labor, for they like all other good American citizens, will decide for themselves, according to their own convictions and conception of the true worth of the candidates, which shall receive their vote, regardless of instructions from "higher up."
A Woman's View

(Dr. Frank Crane in the Philadelphia Bulletin)

I wonder, writes a woman from Lowell, Massachusetts, I wonder why nobody has ever written about what the women think of strikes.

We hear much about the good they do the "Cause of Labor" and all that, but we women are not a Cause, we are human beings.

Of course we stand up for strikes because our husbands do, and we are loyal if nothing else, and are for our men folks first, last, and all the time.

But when we are alone we think differently, and when we get together, just a few workers' wives, and there are no scabs or spies present, here is what we think:

1. It's a great pity people can't go along and do their work peaceably without fighting and disputing.

2. What is a government good for if it is not to prevent injustice and keep people from being treated unfairly? There ought to be some other way than strikes, with their loss and hard feelings and violence, to get more pay and better conditions when they are needed.

3. We hate the sight of the professional agitators who flock to town when a strike is threatened. The passions of the men are already inflamed and these agitators make things worse. The more trouble they can stir up the more money they can make for themselves; that's the way it looks to us women.

4. We have to see that the home is kept up, the children fed and clothed, and things kept going. When the pay envelope is stopped we are the ones who suffer most. If the men had to stay home and make their pot boil instead of loafing around at meetings they would see things in another light.

5. Especially is a strike dreadful when there is sickness in the family and funds are low.

6. Most of the men's troubles are local, and if all of those connected with the local works could get together and talk things over they could soon settle matters. It's the outside agitators and big guns that mix in and make trouble.

7. One bad thing about strikes is you never can tell when they are over. When one is settled another is liable to break out any time. We sometimes doubt if all the good we get out of them is worth the continual distress of mind they keep us in.

8. If employers and bosses would take half the trouble to get acquainted with the workmen and co-operate with them that the agitators do it would be money in their pocket.

9. The working men have rights, the capitalists have rights, and the public has rights; we are always hearing about them; but what about the rights of the women and children?

10. Men go out on strike lots of times without knowing what it's all about, just because the others do. Well, what if they found their wives on a strike when they reached home, and the women would not cook and clean and sew and take care of the children, but spent their time at meetings talking about their rights?

I hope you will publish this, but don't print my name, as I have trouble enough as it is. Only I thought somebody ought to speak up for the women.

+++ From Labor's Friend +++

"Industrial liberty, like civil liberty, must rest upon the solid foundation of law. Disregard the law in either, however good your motives, and you have anarchy. The plea of trades unions for immunity, be it from injunction or from liability for damages, is as fallacious as the plea of lynchers. If lawless methods are pursued by trades unions, whether it be by violence, or by intimidation, or by the more peaceful infringement of legal rights, that lawlessness must be put down at once and at any cost."—Hon. Louis D. Brandeis, Justice of U. S. Supreme Court.