

# The Meaning of Labor Day.

By SAMUEL GOMPERS.



By WILLIAM A. DU PUY.

**T**HIS is Labor Sunday! It is the first Labor Sunday Chicago has ever celebrated. It is the first Labor Sunday ever celebrated in the United States or the world, for that matter. It adds another to the list of our national holidays for the Worker coming closely linked with Labor Day.

Father Dearborn has gladly thrown open his doors to the local Labor leaders and bids them welcome. Churches will be the scenes of impressive and interesting talks by local labor leaders, and ministers of the gospel in all denominations throughout the city will refer to the problems and achievements of organized labor—will discuss matters of interest to the wage earner, and will impart to the minds of congregations just what status he holds in the community.

Widespread interest has been aroused regarding this unique forerunner of labor day in Chicago. The Episcopal priests of the city will all join in to make Labor Sunday a feature in the Episcopalian services. Over a score of ministers of various Protestant denominations have agreed to preach on the subject, and many others will turn over their pulpits to men familiar with Chicago Labor conditions.

Nearly every church in Chicago will arrange services according to the "religious program" adopted by the American Federation of Labor for Labor Sunday which will hereafter be a yearly function.

The last convention of the American Federation of Labor, held in Toronto, passed a resolution which read in part, as follows:

Resolved, That the Sunday preceding the first Monday in September be officially designated by the American Federation of Labor as "Labor Sunday," and that the churches of America be requested to devote some part of this day to a presentation of the labor question.

Later the central body issued a broadside request to all ministers to participate in this treatment of labor questions. The various central and local labor organizations were asked to cooperate in calling this matter to the attention of the ministers and interesting them in the proposed celebration.

The scheme worked like a charm. It has been taken up generally throughout the country and there is hardly a pulpit in the land that will not today be occupied by a man who will give special attention to this subject. Incidentally, there will be hardly a labor leader in the nation who will not be called upon to occupy some pulpit and himself preach the gospel of organized labor. Mr. Gompers himself, for instance, is in Kansas City, where he is to deliver an address on Monday and will address a local congregation today.

**Origins of Labor Day.**

The late P. J. McGuire was the father of Labor day. It was in 1881 that the Central Labor union of New York came into being. It was to this organization that Mr. McGuire, who was prominent in its ranks, first made the proposal of a labor holiday. On Sept. 5, 1882, the holiday was first celebrated. The events of the day were limited to a labor parade, and the demonstration was made a great success. From it has grown the general observance.

P. J. McGuire became secretary of the national organization which was just then coming into prominence. Mr. Gompers was already president of it. The two worked unremittently in an attempt to make the observance general. Gradually it took shape, one state after another legalizing the holiday. Finally the national government took action which gave its sanction to the holiday. It made Labor day a holiday in the District of Columbia and in the territories. Grover Cleveland signed the bill on June 23, 1894.

To Oregon belongs the distinction of being the first state to create a labor holiday. It was enacted into law on Feb. 21, 1867. Colorado followed within the month. The other states passed laws in the following order:

In 1887, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts; in 1889, Connecticut, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania; in 1890, Iowa and Ohio; in 1891, Maine, Washington, Montana, Kansas, Indiana, Tennessee, New Hampshire, Illinois, and Georgia and South Carolina; in 1892, Virginia, Utah, Louisiana, and Alabama; in 1893, Texas, Delaware, California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Florida, and Rhode Island; in 1894, the District of Columbia and territories; in 1895, Missouri.

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**L**ABOR day marks a new epoch in the annals of human history. It differs essentially from some of the other holidays of the year in that it glorifies no armed conflicts or battles of man's prowess over man.

It is a deep seated propensity of human nature to observe with appropriate ceremonies the periodical return of certain times, suspending the ordinary business of life on certain days for the purpose of preserving the recollection of some important event or principle. The observance of such festivals is an evidence of growing civilization. Our inferior fellow animals pursue an unvaried course from day to day, but man varies his life by elevating some days above others.

The institution of the weekly rest day or festival called Sunday has been of incalculable benefit to mankind, and in comparatively recent times there were numerous other holidays to give needed relaxation to the laborers and cheer the heart of man.

Among all the festive days of the year, of all the days commemorative of great epochs in the world's history, of all the days celebrated for one cause or another, there is not one which stands so conspicuously for social advancement of the common people as the first Monday in September of each recurring year—Labor day.

Labor day is the day conceded by no one class or set of people to another—it is the day of the workers, secured by the workers for the workers and for all. Its observance now is sanctioned by law in thirty-three states, in the District of Columbia, and in the United States territories.

But Labor day, labor's holiday, was celebrated by organized labor years before its recognition as a legal holiday by the enactment of law. It appears that a beneficent purpose must be demonstrated by the people before our legislatures give it the dignity of the law's authority.

**No Martial Glory.**

No martial glory or warlike pomp signals Labor day. The marching host of workers manifest their growing intelligence and unalterable determination for the effacement of the unnatural and brutal causes that impel man to raise his hand against his brother. Labor day stands for industrial peace and for the toiler's economic, political, social, and moral advancement.

Organized labor in its essence presents a rational, hence a peaceful means for the introduction of normal, fair, and just conditions for all; so there ought not and in the near future will not be conflicts other than those which are conducted normally, peacefully, and rightly. It is, in the best sense, the modern knighthood in defense of the toiling men, women, and children of our day and of the future.

The struggle of labor is to free man from his own weaknesses, from his own cupidity, from his own unfair, unjust, and unnecessarily cruel environments. The struggle is for home and fireside, for a higher life, a nobler manhood, womanhood, and childhood, which may look forward to the day of de-

liverance from absurd economic conditions and cruel burdens. The future will substitute the college and forum for the arsenal and jail; the home, and not the factory, for motherhood; the playground, school, and sunlight, and not the mill or workshop, for childhood.

In our time, when so many look upon the dark side of the progress of the labor movement, and predict worse things in store for the laborer, it is not amiss to call attention to the fact that the life of the human family is one vast struggle, and that though the progress is not so swift as I, as well as some of my impatient brothers and sisters of labor, would like it to be, yet the fact is that in our decade we can see the rights of labor more clearly defined, the vantage ground obtained of a clearer insight into existing wrongs, the more intelligent perception of and determination to achieve labor's rights.

**One Danger of Failure.**

There is only one danger of the failure of constant and peaceful evolution for the elimination of all abnormal conditions under which workers are compelled to toil, and this danger is the possible failure of the wage earners to realize the necessity of more general and thorough organization in the unions of their respective trades.

Such a failure beyond doubt would be taken advantage of by all the elements which prey upon and take advantage of the weak, and it is a source of great gratification that the workers have organized and federated so largely and comprehensively that there is little fear of a step backward. On the contrary, the evidence shows that the toilers have awakened to the new found power of organized effort. Never before in the history of our country have they been so well organized as they are today, and the good work is going on day by day.

In spite of the fact that occasionally we have great industrial disputes, yet the organized labor movement in its essence stands for industrial peace, and presents a rational method for the inauguration of fairer and more just conditions for all. The trade union movement carries the scars of many cruel battles of the past. It exemplifies all tenderness and genuine sympathy with the sufferers of the present. It voices the hopes and aspirations of the masses for future freedom and justice.

At no time in the history of the world have the workers demonstrated more clearly their purpose not only to be just, but to demand justice. They realize that without organization in this day of concentrated wealth and industry their lives and their liberties are doomed. They have organized, and are organizing, with greater rapidly than ever. The earnestness of their expressions, the sincerity of their actions, the solidarity of their movements, the fraternity which they engender, all bespeak a brighter future for all who toil, for all who are dependent upon them.

**Nothing to Overtake.**

Our labor movement has no system to crush. It has nothing to overturn. It purposes to build up, to develop, to rejuvenate humanity. It stands for the right. It is the greatest protestant against wrong. It is the defender of the weak. Its members make the sacrifices and bear the brunt of battle, to obtain more equitable and humane conditions in the everyday lives of all the people. It may be true that here and there a setback is encountered in the battle of labor; but it is simply a skirmish, for the grand army is ever moving onward and forward. One column in our ranks may be defeated, yet is only a retreat for greater organization, better preparation for a more propitious time.

Splendid as has been the progress in our (Continued on third page.)

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organization and federation within the recent past, yet there is much to do to convince the yet unorganized workers that their duty to themselves, their wives and children, their fellow workers, their fellow men, is to organize and help in the great cause. We must win or regain the confidence of the indifferent, negligent or ignorant nonunionist, to impress on his mind that he who will not stand with his brother for the right is equally responsible with the wrong doer for any wrong done. The excuse and justification for tyranny is the servility and indifference of the slave.

By the organization of the workers we not only quicken the conscience of those inclined to the wrong, but we create a healthier public opinion regarding the great cause for

which we stand. Hence, our fellow unionists, rank and file, officers, organizers, leaders, in fact all, are devoting themselves unflinchingly and persistently to the work of bringing the nonunionists within the fold of organization.

The workers can be free. Justice and right can and must be proclaimed, established, and maintained.

The full realization of these principles and potent purposes can come only by the work, and, if necessary, the sacrifices, of the hosts of unionists through whose earnest effort must be fulfilled the mission to unite the world of workers, and usher in the dawn of that bright day of which the poets have sung, philosophers dreamed, and the workmen struggled and yearned to achieve for the human family.