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ORGANIZED LABOR'S NEGLECT

The nervousness of organized labor over renewal of immigration is probably well grounded. With unemployment on the increase, and an industrial depression in view that may last several years, an increase in the supply of labor must have a disastrous effect on wages. But has organized labor done all that it could or should to ward off unemployment and an industrial depression? Has it left undone certain things which, if done, would have made the coming of immigrants an advantage to all? If so, why not pay some attention to this neglected duty?

Why should there be unemployment when individuals able and willing to work are in need of things that labor can produce. Why should there be involuntary idleness when labor applied to the natural resources of the United States alone could produce enough to supply the wants of the world? Why should immigration from foreign lands create or add to pressure for employment when by far the greater part of the nation's natural resources are unused? In view of these facts why should there be unemployment now, or why should there have been a high cost of living—which is still with us—due to shortage of production?

Of course the obvious answer to these questions is that although the natural resources of the United States are ample to supply the wants of the world and furnish luxuries besides, they are held as private property and can be used only on the owners' terms. Because these terms have been becoming more and more onerous, because prices for city lots are so high that it does not pay to build on them, because rents of improved lands have mounted so that it does not pay to do business on them, because coal and other mineral lands cost so much—when they can be bought at all—that they cannot be worked profitably, and because farm lands have boomed so that a farmer who pays the prices asked must work at a loss, the greater part of the land of the country which

some one wants to use is being withheld. In addition production and trade are further discouraged and impeded by a tax system that imposes heavy burdens on industry and bears lightly on the privilege of holding valuable land. It is consequently no wonder that a high cost of living prevails, that in spite of a shortage in necessities men are involuntarily unemployed and, with a population of only 33 to the square mile, we seem so crowded and so lacking in opportunities for work that the coming or prospective coming of a few more millions makes organized labor shiver.

Under these circumstances there are two courses open to labor. One is to demand that the power of landlords to hold valuable land out of use be taken from them. While this may be done in more ways than one, the most convenient would be to take for public use the entire rental value of all lands, exclusive of improvements, and abolish all taxes on labor and its products. The other course is to demand stoppage of immigration which, though it will not put an end to existing unemployment, must prevent to some extent its intensification. The first course is by far the fairer and more effective. But to put it in effect powerful opposition must be overcome, the opposition of every predatory interest, together with the opposition of ignorant, misguided or deluded laborers. For this reason, perhaps, organized labor has chosen the easier way. It is leaving the predatory interests alone and attacking immigration. This course suits the interests perfectly. So long as they can control opportunities they can manage during normal times to make the number of jobs a little less than the number of men and keep wages down to the bare living point. So they are glad that labor is not attacking their legalized right to hold opportunities out of use. It suits them that the poor immigrant is attacked instead. But why would it not be far better for organized labor to concentrate its efforts on its real enemy?