

CHAPTER XX.

FAILURE OF WORKINGMEN'S PARTIES IN MICHIGAN.

"Class consciousness," a favorite expression of the socialists, has not as yet struck very deep into the workingmen of Detroit. They have had repeated opportunities to vote for workingmen—but, instead, supported the nominees of the old parties. With the official ballots in their hands containing the names of well known wage-workers, the opportunity to administer to capital a "swipe" is given the go-by.

For the past twenty or more years, with a persistency worthy of the best cause, a mere handful of men, some grown gray in the service, have kept up the work of holding socialist conventions and agitation meetings, and making nominations. They expected a great addition to their ranks when, under the Australian system, each voter would have before him a "real" workingman's ticket, yet their efforts have had no appreciable effect on the strength of the old political parties. There must be some reason for this other than lack of "class consciousness," and it would be well if the socialists, the social democrats, and the other workingmen's parties paused and considered.

As a rule it will be found that these workingmen's tickets demand of their candidates humiliating conditions not asked by any other party. In consequence good nominating material is scarce. Then they ask the electors to subscribe to planks so far in advance of public sentiment that even themselves do not expect to live to see them enacted into law. So the average wage-working elector prefers to place his ballot where

he thinks he is liable to get some good from it before the daisies begin to grow over his grave.

Another cause of the failure of workingmen's parties to make any marked progress in this country is the fact that the material condition of workingmen have steadily advanced. It is true that this advancement has not kept pace with the increase of the wealth producing faculties of mankind. We produce wealth more rapidly than ever in the history of the human race, and though the proportion given the wealth-producing classes is not as large as it was a few score years ago, still it is large enough to give comforts never before enjoyed by the workers.

Every new labor-saving invention has enriched the employing and landlord classes in greater proportion than it has the wage-working classes. The division has not been an equitable one, even though labor's portion has enabled it to enjoy comforts never before known, but it has been sufficiently large to lull the wage-workers into quietude.

Simply being trade unionists, however, is no reason for election to the legislature. When it comes to making laws, the "strongest" union man may make the worst legislator, even for the interest he represents. It is one thing to recognize an evil and another to formulate a law that will remedy it. On investigation it will generally be found that the fault lies in the enactment of some former law, and that the remedy is to repeal. Still a union man is as liable to support good laws for merchants and lawyers as merchants and lawyers are to vote for good laws for union men. It takes a pretty broad legislator to rise superior to his class.

One of the lessons learned by trades unions is not to ask for too much at once. When the political workmen become equally as wise, and are content to show the public that the movement is for some one essential, as a basis from which to work for others, it is possible that they may have greater success. Yet

while they are doing this, half the effort expended in building up a political machine of their own would give them control of either of the old parties, the machinery of which would enable them to win victories instead of suffering defeat. And the control of all municipal monopolies would be as good a thing to begin with, taking into account the present temper of the people, as anything else. Then would come a restriction of the monopoly of land, without which the landlord class would most profit by those economies eliminating franchise holders from the conduct of city affairs. In truth the fight against the monopoly of land is most important, but there are reasons why, after all, this could be more easily reached and captured after the municipal monopolies had been wiped out. The longest way round is sometimes the quickest way home.

With all public franchises done away with, and all taxes raised from land values, whatever was left in the shape of laws or customs that in any way oppressed labor could easily be attacked and quickly eliminated from the economic situation. But in all probability there would not be much left to worry about. At least the most vicious things would have passed away.

The proletarians have accomplished much through the aid of the old parties, in the way of labor legislation. It is very doubtful if they could have obtained any more with a successful "labor" party. At times it has been necessary for workingmen to stand aloof from both the old parties, no doubt, when neither would admit that their success depended on the workingmen's votes, but as a rule either the democrats or the republicans have been anxious to be identified with some workingmen's measures, and when elected have kept their promises. In the spring of 1901 the democrats accepted one of the fundamental planks of all the reform parties—that of the initiative and referendum, which, when enacted into laws, would enable 5 per cent of the electors to submit to the people any legislation they desired—even to the socializing of all

industries. Yet the socialists voted against the candidates pledged to bring about this great reform that at least would have killed boodling in all legislative bodies in Michigan, and prevented any legislator selling the birthright of the people to franchise grabbers. That one reform would do more for the people than almost any other legal enactment that could be devised.

From time to time workingmen have been nominated by workingmen's parties in Detroit, and indorsed and elected by the republicans or democrats. In not one instance can it be pointed out where these legislators broke their pledges. They conscientiously worked and voted for the measures they were sent to support, and most of the labor laws in Michigan are due to their efforts. What has been done once can be done again, and if the workingmen will unite with the minority party on a platform demanding proper labor legislation, it will not be long before most of the ameliorative demands enabling wage-workers to more clearly see the fundamental ones, will be on the statute books.

TENEMENTS AND LANDLORDS.

Millions of human creatures are housed worse than the cattle and horses of many a lord or squire. Nearly 1,000,000 of the London poor need re-housing; the medical authority has reported against 141,000 houses as unsanitary, in which the poor are huddled together, in numbers varying from four to twelve and more in a single room. What delicacy, modesty or self-respect can be expected in men and women whose bodies are so shamefully packed together?—*Cardinal Vaughan's inaugural address to the annual conference of the Catholic Truth Society at Stockport, published in the St. Vincent de Paul Quarterly, New York.*