

## CHAPTER X

### AMERICAN LABOR

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**Nature of Labor.** — There are three factors in production, — land, labor, and capital. A survey of the natural resources of the United States, of the soil, climate, minerals, forests, and waterways, must necessarily be followed by a discussion of the second essential to production, — labor. The United States abounds in resources. To convert these resources into economic goods, labor is required. Labor has changed the face of the earth and nowhere is this more noticeable than in the city.

Indeed, the modern city is almost wholly the product of labor. In primitive societies, where men live by hunting and fishing, nature supplies nearly everything. Even in the country districts to-day the trees, the grass, the flowers, the rich soil, the springs, the waterways, the clear sky, and the clean air are nature's gift. But in the city, natural things have been altered. The trees, the flowers, and even the green grass are artificially placed and protected by warning signs. Water can no longer be secured from a near-by spring. It has been pumped into a reservoir or run through an aqueduct to meet the city's needs. Even the sky and air are polluted by smoke and dust.

In short, the man who comes to the modern city and looks at it analytically will discover that natural things are at a premium. Labor has shaped everything within sight. But evidences of labor do not appear in cities alone. The man plowing his ten-acre lot is laboring. The farmer's reaping machine, his house and barn, his macadamized road, his asparagus bed, his peach orchard, — all these represent an outlay of labor.

Again, modern industry is based on labor coöperation. The chair upon which you are sitting is the direct or indirect

result of the labor of thousands of men, women, and children. It was cut as standing timber in the woods of Michigan with axes and saws made in New England factories. It was hauled to a sawmill on bobsleds, the bolts of which were manufactured in Philadelphia, while the steel runners were made in Pittsburg. It was sawed by a band saw which in turn was produced in a great factory, employing several thousand men. Then, in the form of sawed lumber, this *In modern industry.* chair was shipped to a furniture mill over a railroad employing a hundred thousand men. When it reached the furniture factory, the lumber went through a great number of processes until it was converted into a chair; and each tool in each process was manufactured in a different city in a different part of the country by a different set of employees. Finally, the finished chair was shipped on a great railway system to the city, where it was handled by a trucking company, delivered to the wholesale house, sold to the retail house, and eventually purchased by the present owner.

Labor is one of the foundation stones of modern industry. Without labor, natural resources would be useless. Labor bears the same relation to land that mortar does to bricks; it brings natural resources together into a permanent structure.

In economics, when we speak of labor, we do not mean merely manual labor, but all effort either mental or physical which is expended in producing economic utilities. The man who works with a pick and shovel is a laborer; so is **Meaning of labor.** the woman who works with a needle; so is the man who works with the pen; so is the man who works with a brush; so is the man who spends his time in directing the energies of others in order that they may assist

in production. All of these men are "laborers" in the economic sense because the laborer is the man who expends physical or mental effort in the creation of economic utilities.

Labor is therefore an essential element in the production of wealth and in the maintenance of welfare, and every effort should be directed towards its conserva- **Conserva-**  
tion. Since the conservation principle demands **tion of labor:**  
that the things of the present be used wisely and handed on to the future in the best possible condition, it may be applied to labor in exactly the same way that it is applied to natural resources.

If men and women are overworked, badly fed, poorly housed, their efficiency will be lowered and hence their ability to secure income will be lessened. As the family standard is low, the standard of their children *Reason for*  
will be low from birth. Thus the inefficiency *conservation.*  
and low standards of one generation will be reflected in decreased efficiency and lower standards in the next generation; so that the evil conditions, which play so large a part in making men and women evil, will be perpetuated. Hence arises the necessity of adopting some policy of conserving the labor force of the country.

Both the welfare of the community and the efficiency of labor depend upon labor conservation. How then may this conservation be effected? Chiefly in two ways, — either through negative or positive measures. On the negative side, certain factors, like bad living conditions and insanitary or dangerous working conditions, must be corrected by purely repressive legislation. For example, laws *How effected.*  
are needed which will regulate the length of the  
working day; which will insure abundance of air and sunlight in both houses and factories; which will protect

women and children against industrial risks and accidents. This, however, is only one side of the question. It is no less desirable that the positive factors in the problem be considered. Welfare and efficiency depend upon education. Men in ignorance of working methods cannot do good work, and, since work to-day requires intelligence, it follows that the educated man will be the best worker. Furthermore, modern work, besides being arduous and monotonous, is wearing; hence some form of recreation and relaxation must be provided in order that efficiency may be maintained.

**The Labor Force of the United States.** — Since the American Indian has never done consistent work, American labor is wholly of foreign origin. From the middle of the seventeenth century until the present time, the country has been recruiting its labor from various parts of the world.

In the New England colonies the Puritan element predominated. Stern ideas of living, an abhorrence of pleasure, and a strong sense of the holiness of work characterized this group. The Puritans came largely from the cities of England, where they were artisans and tradespeople. Their religion gave them deep convictions and high moral standards, and they were persistent in their efforts to achieve any end upon which they bent their energies. They adapted themselves easily to the new surroundings, forming a strong and persistent type of man and woman well calculated to overcome the difficulties incident to the conquest of a wilderness. Because of their independence in religious and political matters, they developed into strong individualists.

These early immigrants from England, together with those who came later from Scandinavia and north central

Europe, made up a population whose home institutions and racial ideals were so nearly alike that there was no difficulty in welding them into a homogeneous group. Each new element which arrived from Europe was readily assimilated and formed an integral part of this solid mass.

This New England population very readily conquered the adverse conditions of northern geography and climate. They built ships because shipbuilding materials and harbors were abundant. They traded with the West Indies because the fish which they caught all along the coast formed an exchangeable commodity when salted and transported into the southern countries. They carried on manufacturing because the numerous rivers supplied much valuable water power. In short, the New England population measured up to the demands of the new surroundings and utilized them in a manner beneficial to themselves.

While the people who came to New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware were of a somewhat different group, the basic elements of this population were the same as those of the New England settlers. The Quakers of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware came *The Middle* largely from England. They were soon joined *colonists.* by groups of Germans, Swedes, and Scotch-Irish, who settled on the land, developed the agricultural resources, and paid considerable attention to the establishment of manufacturing. In New York the Dutch were the first settlers, but they soon were reënforced by groups of English and Germans.

Therefore, it may be seen that the general characteristics of the New England settlers were distributed pretty freely throughout the Middle Atlantic colonists. Many of the newcomers came to America because they believed in a political or religious principle and were willing to make

sacrifices for it. If to these qualities are added the perseverance and adaptability for which the New England colonists have become justly famous, a reasonable picture of this middle group is presented.

The people of the Middle colonies, like those of New England, developed industry rather than agriculture for two reasons, — first, because their agricultural land was inferior in quality, and, secondly, because the opportunities for developing industry were so abundant. Not only could ships be built, but fishing could be carried on profitably. It was later discovered, too, that the deposits of iron could be worked, that hides could be manufactured into various products, and that the textile industry was not only possible but lucrative.

In the Southern colonies, agricultural land was abundant and fertile. Then, too, the climate was suited to the production of tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton. While industrial resources were slightly developed, the *The Southern colonists.* South devoted a great portion of its energy to agriculture because from that occupation the greatest gains could be secured. Then, too, the land in the North was divided into small holdings, while in the South the land was laid out in large plantations worked by indentured servants and slaves.

Slavery did not prevail in the North because there was no economic way in which the slave could be used. Slavery is desirable only when a large number of men can be worked together under the charge of an overseer. In industry this is not possible. But since it is possible in agriculture, large groups of slaves were used profitably throughout the South. While the labor force of the North was composed almost exclusively of people working for their own

advancement, that of the South consisted chiefly of three classes, — the landowners, the indentured servants, and the slaves.

The early population of the United States was drawn almost exclusively from Africa and northwestern Europe. With the exception of the slaves, nearly all of those who came to America were members of one of the Baltic stocks. They had all developed their ideas and ideals *The* in the same general part of the world and along *conclusion.* the same general lines. In the North these settlers were therefore easily assimilated and developed into one compact group. In the South, however, the presence of a body of people who could not assimilate with the whites made the development of a homogeneous group impossible.

By the middle of the nineteenth century new population elements migrated. Between 1840 and 1850 the food shortage in Ireland sent millions of immigrants to the United States. Between 1850 and 1880 the political and economic disturbances in Germany were responsible for the immigration of millions more. Since 1880, however, the source of immigration has been gradually shifted from *Later* northwestern Europe to southeastern Europe. *sources :* Besides this European shift, bringing Slavs and *The newer* Italians to the Central States, a large number of French *elements.* Canadians have also come into New England. Thus, while the Baltic countries of Europe furnished the early American immigrant, the central and southern European countries are responsible for most of those who have migrated during the last three decades.

In 1900 there were, roughly speaking, thirty million wage earners in the United states. Of this number, six millions were born abroad, while five millions were born in this



country of foreign parents. Thus, a large portion of our labor force, even at the present day, is made up, not of native Americans, but of foreigners or the children of foreigners. If we are to maintain the efficiency of labor, the problem which we are now confronting is to instill into this labor population the capacity for work, the power of application, the intelligence, the energy, the perseverance, and the adaptability in developing natural resources which characterized the early settlers.

*The resulting problem.*

#### TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. To what extent is labor essential in production?
2. What is the relation between the amount of labor expended on an article and its selling price?
3. Should labor be the sole element in determining the cost of an article?
4. Has labor become more or less important with the development of machinery?
5. Does the average street laborer work hard?
6. Of the street laborers that you have observed, which race works hardest?
7. What environmental advantages have American laborers over laborers in Europe?
8. Point out the most salient characteristics in the original labor force of the country.
9. Can a distinction be made between the original labor force of the country and the group of immigrants at present coming to the country?
10. Has the Anglo-Saxon race any peculiar economic characteristics?
11. Upon what grounds do Anglo-Saxons base their claim to leadership?
12. What steps can the country take to Americanize immigrants?
13. What traits do the immigrants possess that are not possessed by Americans?