

Labor Stranded

The effect of the "cash and carry" clause of the so-called neutrality bill passed at the special session of Congress was to put out of employment the capital invested in certain ships under American registry, for the bill practically prohibited the use of these ships.

Unemployed capital yields no return. Furthermore, the cost of the maintenance of capital during a period of idleness is prohibitive. Depreciation of value, particularly in ships, is greater when capital is idle than when used.

The owners of the ships, therefore, seek to transfer registry from the United States to a country which has not put the same limitation on the use of capital in this form. Capital must go to work. If there is any work for ships, and if American ships are not available, ships of other countries, that is, other capital, will quickly come into existence. Capital always appears where there is the promise of a return.

The rush of capital to the place of greatest opportunity of employment is as natural as the rush of labor in the same direction. Note, it is natural. It is neither moral nor immoral. To decry this movement of capital is as stupid as to scold a river for flowing down hill. And, by the way, if the transfer of capital in the form of ships from one country to another is reprehensible (as our emotionalists claim), how about the flight abroad of other capital because of our tariff walls? To wit: clothing factories in Canada, automobile plants in Europe.

The ethical effects of this new restrictive law are felt, rather, in the field of labor, simply because it is not as easy for the "beached" labor to transfer its field of operations. To change a ship's registry is merely an act of bookkeeping. To change one's citizenship is to break human ties, to uproot loyalties, to transfer life from one environment to another. Ships are ships—but men are human. Besides, it costs money to move from country to country.

But, then, labor has been roving for centuries all over the globe in its search of opportunity to work. Restrictive laws are not new; labor has always been forced to flee from them. In the past, however, freedom of movement was not curtailed by immigration laws, and somewhere in the world there was free land to work. According to our present day isolationism labor is a pest. Where can it find welcome to-day?