



Tell Me How Long

(Second Section)

The "worker"!

Let it now be said that I have defended the so-called gyppe (which he isn't) as a worker. As a piece worker, I am not defending him. I am concerned about the nature of his work. I am defending him as a worker.

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Since a piece worker is not a contractor employing labor, he can in no way be called a gyppe and since a sub-contractor employing labor by day or piece is called a gyppe (and his outfit a gyppe outfit) it will become clear that I have not defended the gyppe. But I have defended labor and will do so again—whether he does little or much; whether he works by the piece or by the minute—I make no distinction.

We are organizing the working class as we find them. And the organized working class will change things to suit themselves, always bearing in mind that organized workers cannot change things but for themselves and, while unorganized men are numerous, organized men cannot change things for themselves even, to say nothing about doing things for those who are not a party to the organization. We must have all—as nearly all as possible.

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But I have noticed lately a tendency, in the papers and bulletins, to "kid" the working class that already has been over-kidded by "its masters." Huge jokes appear from time to time—it would not surprise me in the least to pick up a bulletin and learn that a bunch of cows are working in this and that camp; that a bunch of idiots are at such and such a place—and the word SCAB carrying inference that all those who receive less than they produce are to be classed with those who take the job of a striker during an actual strike.

I expect to see an item reading: "There are three men working here, the rest are cutting cord wood—this last one ain't so bad." It has a certain "suddenness" about it that pleases; like pulling a tooth. And, I do not expect much logical argument to be used WHY this and that should be changed; or HOW it could be done. I do not expect good natured wit to help solve the terrible dilemma in which labor finds itself today—I fully believe disordered livers will hold the fort and one-sided minds will surrender our victory.

When I get pessimistic the sun turns blue. It is argued that piece makers cannot strike until "the strip" is finished; that if they do they can't get their money. And, our editors are practically compelled to print it because it is special stuff passed on by some committee. It is just like a monthly man cannot strike "only twelve times in a year." And do you know, I've seen seven or eight "piece-maker-strikes," where, in two of them, the boss wouldn't let them even square up their strips when they called his bluff holding the money.

Such unattended statements are not very constructive and are not based on fact sufficiently—a striking day worker and a striking piece worker can get their money at any time—and when lined up with the Wobblies, the money comes a little quicker. Even men who sign contracts can get their money at any time—nothing is impossible in these thriving days. The boss is not yet the invincible rascal he is made out to be. He knows his lord almighty same as a good Christian—alle samee.

There is nothing about piece work that prevents a man joining the I. W. W. and striking if he wants to. There is nothing that is done by the piece worker that is not done by the day worker—only difference is a piece worker works fast semi-voluntarily (the system drives him, directly) and the day worker works fast semi-involuntarily (being driven by the boss) furnishing jobs for bosses and straw bosses—this later, until we find a condition where every six men have a driver and believe me, we go some; or down the road. Of course, there are exceptions—but exceptions don't win class struggles. All workers must get together.

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Despite the fact that all work comes to us in quantities instead of as chronology, I am not defending piece work. The mere fact that work takes the form of chunks or pieces rather than time does not cause me to grow sentimental over it. Although work comes to us in inches, bushels, gallons, tons, in material form, rather than spiritual, or as time or space, that is no reason why I, at this time, should commit myself in favor of measuring why I, at this time, should commit myself in favor of measuring it one way or other. My sole concern is to get some skids in under those who mismeasure it for us.

Measuring it by the calendar or hour glass may be as good a way as any but I doubt it—and in the case where each man is supposed to do an equal share of labor, the time system finds itself in trouble in so far as some men prefer to get their work off their hands quickly in order to have more time for liberty. Be that as it may we will not decide that now.

We will keep our preferences from the boss—a secret—lest he give us that which we don't want. It is to his interest to keep us at variance so as to get us squabbling among ourselves—and it is to his interest to get us to take a certain stand on this thing of a dim future . . . To finish what I have to say would require ten columns of print, forty hours of study, yet the whole thing can be said in one sentence: Lay off from the gyppe—lay off from the working class—tackle the boss if you feel strong. The solidarity of the lumber worker must not be broken.