

THE TWENTIES IN CONTEMPORARY COMMENTARY



— Labor & Capital —

“Labor and Capital”—the phrase was as common in postwar headlines as “Wets and Drys,” “Science and Religion,” and other social-political divides of the American Twenties. Industrial workers and their unions were LABOR. Industrialists and financiers were CAPITAL (*capital* meaning, very simply, money used to make more money through business, investments, or loans). Presented in chronological order, these selections from news periodicals, labor and business publications, novels, memoir, song, etc., reflect the labor-capital divide as it erupted in America after World War One. Hang in there during the economics lessons; remember that discussions of wages, prices, high cost of living, etc., reflect a struggle for equity, reason, and the “American sense of fair play”—as separately defined by “capital” and “labor.”

Son of the giant oil industrialist, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., offered a “practical suggestion for a new Industrial Creed”—industrial councils similar to those created in Britain during World War One with members from labor and capital led by a neutral chairman. *The Forum* was a monthly magazine of news commentary published in New York City.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
 “The Four Partners in Industry: New Working
 Principles for the Brotherhood of Man”
The Forum, February 1919

A gulf has grown up between capital and labor which is ever widening. These two forces have come to work against each other, each alone seeking to promote its own selfish ends. Thus has come about the various incidents of industrial warfare so regrettably common.

Industry has become highly specialized. The workman of today devotes his energies as a rule to the countless repetition of a single act or process, which is only one of perhaps a hundred operations necessary to transform the raw material into the finished product. Very naturally the worker loses sight of the significance of the part which he plays in industry and feels himself but one of many cogs in a wheel.

All the more is it necessary that he should have contact with those who are likewise related to the industry, so that he may still realize that he is a part and a necessary, though inconspicuous, part of a great enterprise.

“When Capital and Labor Quarrel”
Editorial, *The Columbus Enquirer-Sun*
March 28, 1919

Capital and labor should work together. Between the two there should be a bond of sympathy so strong that it cannot be broken. The one should stand by the other because the one cannot succeed without the other. There should be a

feeling of brotherhood that nothing but death can overcome.

But this is not always the case. Very rarely is it the case. There appears to be a hostility between capital and labor for which we cannot conceive of a reason. The one, instead of standing with and by the other, assumes an attitude of antagonism that the other resents, and the result is that troubles arise that are not easily settled, difficulties that are extremely hard to adjust.

And in the meantime each is losing valuable time and money. Capital is losing the interest on its investment as well as the profit it should receive for that which it produces when conditions are satisfactory and the machinery of industrial plants are turning, and labor loses its reward for service well and faithfully performed. And to the casual observer it does not appear that either the one or the other gains anything on account of the hostility and antagonism that exist between them.

Charles Merz
“Pittsburgh—Is It Revolution?”
The New Republic
October 8, 1919

Editor of the liberal magazine *The New Republic*, Charles Merz went to Pittsburgh—home of the U.S. Steel Corporation—during the nationwide steel strike to determine if it was a foreign-inspired plan to foment a Communist revolution, as another (unnamed) magazine editor had claimed.

It is not the “foreigners” but the duly constituted authorities of western Pennsylvania who have furnished for an observer in the Pittsburgh district a sample of “un-American” tactics during the first week of the strike. . . . Union organizers have been arrested, charged with disorderly conduct, because it was “suspected” that they “intended holding a mass meeting.” To what pass has democracy come if the right to assemble honorably for the free discussion of important questions can be classed as disorderly conduct?



Harry Grant Dart, “And in the Meantime the Lady Drowns,” *Life*, May 8, 1919

Walter F. White

"N.A.A.C.P.—Chicago and Its Eight Reasons"
The Crisis, October 1919

Assistant Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, White identified eight factors that triggered the deadly Chicago race riot of summer 1919. Citing race prejudice as reason #1, White factored the economic competition between white and black workers as reason #2, noting that the "age-long dispute between capital and labor" fueled the hostile competition.

With regard to economic competition, the age-long dispute between capital and labor enters. Large numbers of Negroes were brought from the South by the [meat] packers and there is little doubt that this was done in part so that the Negro might be used as a club over the heads of the unions. John Fitzpatrick and Ed Nockels, president and secretary, respectively, of the Chicago Federation of Labor, and William Buck, editor of the *New Majority*, a labor organ [publication], openly charge that the packers subsidized colored ministers, politicians, and Y. M. C. A. secretaries [directors] to prevent the colored workmen at the stockyards from entering the unions.

On the other hand, the Negro workman is not at all sure as to the sincerity of the unions themselves. The Negro in Chicago yet remembers the waiters' strike some years ago, when colored union workers walked out at the command of the unions and when the strike was settled, the unions did not insist that Negro waiters be given their jobs back along with whites, and, as a result, colored men have never been able to get back into some of the hotels even to the present day. The Negro is between "the devil and the deep blue sea." He feels that if he goes into the unions, he will lose the friendship of the employers. He knows that if he does not, he is going to be met with the bitter antagonism of the unions. . . . He feels that he has been given promises too long already. In fact, he is "fed up" on them. What he wants are binding statements and guarantees that cannot be broken at will.



"A Real American Federation of Labor,"
The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 1, 1923

F. Scott Fitzgerald

This Side of Paradise
Novel, 1920

In Fitzgerald's first novel, Amory Blaine, a young war veteran, Princeton graduate, and Manhattan advertising copywriter, discusses the capital-labor situation with a wealthy businessman who has offered him a ride in his chauffeured limousine.

"You object to the fact that capital controls printing?" said the big man, fixing him with his goggles.

"Yes—and I object to doing their mental work for them. It seemed to me that the root of all the business I saw around me consisted in overworking and underpaying a bunch of dubs who submitted to it."

"Here now," said the big man, "you'll have to admit that the laboring man is certainly highly paid—five- and six-hour days—it's ridiculous. You can't buy an honest day's work from a man in the trade unions."

"You've brought it on yourselves," insisted Amory. "You people never make concessions until they're wrung out of you."

"What people?"

"Your class: the class I belonged to until recently; those who by inheritance or industry or brains or dishonesty have become the moneyed class."

"Do you imagine that if that road-mender over there had the money he'd be any more willing to give it up?"

"No, but what's that got to do with it?"

The older man considered.

"No, I'll admit it hasn't. It rather sounds as if it had, though."

"In fact," continued Amory, "he'd be worse. The lower classes are narrower, less pleasant, and personally more selfish—certainly more stupid. But all that has nothing to do with the question."

"Just exactly what is the question?"

Here Amory had to pause to consider exactly what the question was.

“Leonard Wood on Labor Problems:
An Interview by Evan J. David”
Outlook, February 25, 1920

General Wood commanded the federal troops ordered into Gary, Indiana, during the strike at the U.S. Steel plant. *The Outlook* was an illustrated news weekly published in New York City.

A great deal of this strife can be avoided if the capitalists take a human interest in their employees. It seems to me it would be wise for them to take as much interest in their workers as they do in their customers. If they applied the Golden Rule, I am sure there would be very few strikes. They should pay their employees a living wage. This wage ought to be sufficient to enable the worker to build himself a home, to educate his family, to bring up his children in the proper way, and to put something aside for his old age. The conditions under which he works should be as sanitary [healthy] as it is possible to make them, and he should be encouraged and given promotion if his work so deserves.

There ought also to be some sort of a profit-sharing plan devised, so that the employee might enjoy some of the benefits to be derived from the profits of his company. Some very notable examples of cooperation between capital and labor have already been worked out in this country. . . .

On the other hand, it seems to me that the workmen should also do their part in increasing production and in improving their efficiency. . . . They must realize that wages are paid from profits, and that profits cannot be made unless the material produced is of the very best . . .

They should not resort to strikes until every other expedient has been exhausted. When they do strike, they should be led by leaders who are Americans and who have the welfare of America at heart. They should discourage—and ninety-nine percent of them do—all kinds of violence or disorder. It is usually the one percent of labor, mostly I.W.W. or Reds, that cause the trouble, and their actions often reflect upon the labor organization to which they belong.

Senator Miles Poindexter
“Labor and the Open Shop”
Outlook, May 5, 1920

A Republican Senator representing the state of Washington, Poindexter took a firm stand against labor unions and the threat of Bolshevik/Communist influence among America’s industrial workers.

The strikes which dislocated our industry and delayed our productivity during the war were numbered by the thousands. In the past year strikes have been in existence, varying from month to month from a hundred or so to more than three hundred in existence at the same time.

There is no doubt whatever, and it can be easily demonstrated, that the majority of these strikes have been fomented by radical agitators, who are not concerned merely with demands for increase of wages or reduction of hours—exorbitant as these demands are in many instances—but whose avowed purposes is to “abolish the wage system.” By this they mean communism.

They entertain their deluded [deceived] victims among the workers with specious [misleading] arguments to the effect that the wealth of the country was created by the workers, and from this they draw the silly conclusion that it is owned by the workers and that the workers have a right to seize it. Strike and sabotage, murder and assassination, are regarded by many of these leaders as legitimate means of bringing about this result. They overlook the obvious fact that the accumulated wealth of the world is the result of the efforts of mankind since civilization first began, and even before that remote period. . . .

Although these union leaders may claim to oppose Bolshevism, the result of the methods they advocate by a process of terrorization, by subjecting the public to cold and hunger through the suppression of transportation and essential industries, would of course be government by the dictation of the employees, which is the same object proposed by the Communist Bolsheviks. If economic questions are to be settled in this way, it means of course the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” however much this may be denied by the labor leaders who advocate these methods.

“Life Lines”
Life, humor column

The trouble with a class war in this country is that nobody knows for certain to what class he belongs.

February 24, 1921

The miners want more pay and less work.
The coal trust wants more dividends and less pay.
The public wants more coal and less talk.

October 13, 1921

“We are at one in wishing a living wage”

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN A UNION LEADER AND A PROTESTANT BISHOP

MARCH & MAY 1920

In February 1920 during a period of crippling labor strikes, Bishop William Quayle of the Methodist Episcopal Church accused the labor movement—and specifically Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor—with threatening the “very existence of our republican form of government.” Gompers responded to the clergyman and a brief correspondence ensued. It did not end well. The AFL published the letters later that year as *Letters to a Bishop*.

QUAYLE TO GOMPERS

March 17, 1920



St. Paul School of Theology

Dear Mr. Gompers: . . .

. . . I believe in the honorableness of labor and the dishonorableness of indolence [laziness]. I believe that an American Citizen has a right to a job if he is honest, industrious, and capable, and that no man or men or set of men have a right to hinder him

in getting it. I believe in labor’s right to organize as I believe in money’s right to organize. But I do not believe in the right of organized labor or organized capital to do unjustly by any man or set of men of the United States people. I do not believe in the autocracy of a Kaiser [German emperor] or a President or a group of labor or a group of capital. I believe the United States Government is for all United States people and when any interest or individual or organization interferes with the rights of the American People, then that interest or man or organization must go. . . .

During the recent strikes and proposed strikes, for instance the coal strike, . . . I never heard the slightest intimation in any quarter [i.e., comment from any union leader] of the rights of the American People. It was proposed to freeze them by giving them no coal, and it was proposed by giving them no transportation, to freeze them and starve them. It need not require any acute observation to know that that was a thing unthinkable and which never should occur again. A few hundred thousand men cannot be tolerated to administer the Government for their own special and private purposes. Government by threat cannot continue if a Republic is to continue. . . .

We are at one in wishing a living wage and first-class social and family conditions for the American people. Wages should be as high as the well-being, that is continuance, of business and the rights of consumers will permit. When they go beyond this and consider only the wishes of the man demanding wages, they become an infringement on the stability of business and the living rights of the body of the American people.

GOMPERS TO QUAYLE

May 22, 1920



Library of Congress

Dear Sir: . . .

. . . The trade union movement came into being as a movement of hunger. It was made necessary by conditions. . . . As it became possible to secure more food, other hungers demanded satisfaction. They demanded satisfaction through the union,

because they could get it through no other agency. The demands were for more and better food, for better clothes and for better homes. It required a struggle to satisfy these needs. The struggle was frequently most bitter in character. This was so because at every step of the way it was necessary to overcome the stubborn opposition of employers who were resolved not to recede and not to relinquish any of the powers and privileges which they possessed. . . .

There are in the American Federation of Labor and the railroad brotherhoods something more than five million workers. It may be said safely that these five million workers represent families having a total of twenty-five million persons. The American labor movement thus speaks with authority directly for approximately one fourth of the population of our country. Practically all of the remainder of those who work for wages in the industries of the nation are unable to speak for themselves, because they have no channel through which they can make themselves heard. These voiceless millions are in no sense unlike those who have organized themselves and created for themselves an ability to speak. Their aspirations and their needs are the same. The organized labor movement does speak with understanding and with authority for the wage-earners of our country. The wage-earners of our country must be included in any use of the term “the people.” . . . They do seek to remove oppression and to extend in every possible direction the practices of democracy, to which our country is committed. I ask you to think more deeply concerning this and to see if after such thought your conclusions ought not be reversed.

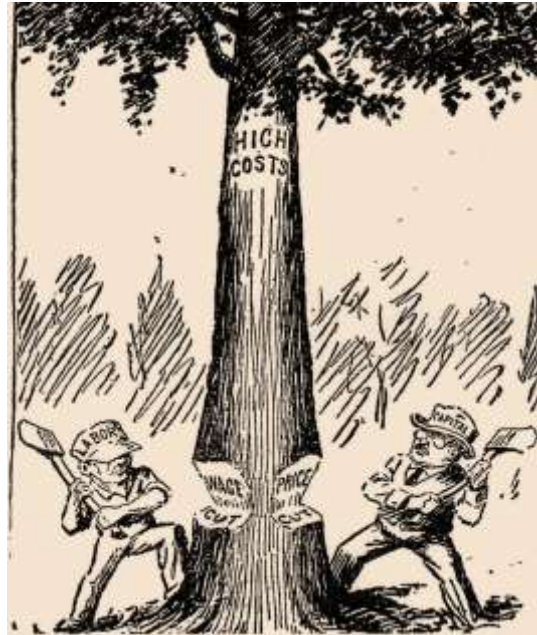
Alfred E. Keet [associate editor of the *Forum*]
"Labor's Opportunity"
The Forum, November 1920

A common danger draws people together. The war [World War One] brought about a new feeling between Capital and Labor—a real community of interest. The result is that today Labor has, to a much greater extent than ever before, become Capital's junior partner. Capital has thrown the door wide open, and no longer is the workingman a mere employee, with no standing in courts of justice.

He is now on the board of directors and makes his voice heard in council meetings on such questions as collective bargaining, hygiene [i.e. working conditions], hours, and pay—the financial and physical conditions under which he will work. . . .

But there are breakers ahead for both Capital and Labor. During the war and for some time afterwards, labor was well-employed at high and rising wages. He was working not only fulltime but overtime, and his pay envelope was of huge proportions, for Capital was making immense profits. Now, a different condition of things has come about. Business is slowing down, prices are dropping ten to fifty percent, factories are closing down or working only part-time, and labor is no longer scarce or unobtainable. And the manufacturer says he cannot continue cutting prices unless he cuts wages too.

Now the question arises, is Labor able to stand a cut in wages, or less work, or a period of no work at all? . . . Will Labor, in the face of these changing conditions, strain every nerve to increase the day's output and so enable Capital to continue paying him his present high wage, or will he let his great opportunity to prove himself in reality Capital's partner and ally slip by?



"There Must Be Cutting from Both Sides," *Brooklyn Eagle*, ca. May/June 1921, reprinted in the *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1921

"Capital-Labor Struggle Coming"
The Columbus Enquirer-Sun
November 20, 1920

The two editorials on this page assessing the future of capital-labor discord were published a few weeks after the election of Warren Harding, the Republican presidential candidate (he was inaugurated the following March).

Observers of national affairs here see a gigantic struggle between capital and labor, which will occur in the next [presidential] administration with an intensity never before seen in this country unless steps are taken now to avert the impending conflict. . . .

One of the reasons why a conflict between capital and labor is inevitable in the next administration lies in the high cost of living. Just prior to the world war, during the war, and after the armistice, the prices of all commodities rose and until recently were still at a very high level. Much of this increase was caused by war conditions. . . . The high cost of living is being gradually reduced, though slowly, and when the prices of commodities have reached a level near the costs of commodities, say several years before the world war, it is certain that the wages of labor will be reduced.

Labor leaders see this coming, and as their chief weapon to maintain the present high level of wages is the "closed shop" and unionism, naturally they fear an assault on their chief fortress by capital, when capital attempts to cut wages in conformity with the falling prices of commodities. . . . The enormous pressure of the law of supply and demand, which prevails in the labor markets as well as in the commodity markets, press on him [manufacturer] with such weight that he has to reduce wages or economically perish.

Hence, under such conditions, a fight between capital to reduce wages, and labor to hold them at their present high standards, is certain. There is no other outlet. It is this condition, well understood by all intelligent labor leaders, that is paving the way for the conflict, which may not be avoided.

Sinclair Lewis
Main Street
Novel, 1920

In his best-selling novel, Sinclair Lewis modeled the midwestern town of “Gopher Prairie” on his home town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota. Unlike the usual portrayal of small-town America, Gopher Prairie was not an ideal haven of the best America had to offer. Its residents were narrowminded, unreflective, and fearful of everything “modern.” In this scene, Carol Kennicott, newly arrived from Minneapolis and the guest of honor at a welcoming party (she had married the town doctor), daringly questions her new neighbors on controversial issues of the day—including the capital-labor divide.

“Do you approve of union labor?” Carol inquired of Mr. Elder [the town banker].

“Me? I should say not! It’s like this: I don’t mind dealing with my men if they think they’ve got any grievances—though Lord knows what’s come over workmen nowadays—don’t appreciate a good job. But still, if they come to me honestly, as man to man, I’ll talk things over with them. But I’m not going to have any outsider, any of these walking delegates, or whatever fancy names they call themselves now—bunch of rich grafters, living on the ignorant workmen! Not going to have any of those fellows butting in and telling *me* how to run *my* business!”

Mr. Elder was growing more excited, more belligerent and patriotic. “I stand for freedom and constitutional rights. If any man don’t like my shop [workplace], he can get up and git. Same way, if I don’t like him, he gits. And that’s all there is to it. I simply can’t understand all these complications and hoop-tedoodles and government reports and wage-scales and God knows what all that these fellows are balling up the labor situation with, when it’s all perfectly simple. They like what I pay ’em, or they get out. That’s all there is to it!”

“What do you think of profit-sharing?” Carol ventured.

Mr. Elder thundered his answer, while the others nodded, solemnly and in tune, like a shop-window of flexible toys, comic mandarins and judges and ducks and clowns, set quivering by a breeze from the open door:

“All this profit-sharing and welfare work and insurance and old-age pension is simply poppycock. Enfeebles a workman’s independence—and wastes a lot of honest profit. The half-baked thinker that isn’t dry behind the ears yet, and these suffragettes and God knows what all buttinskis there are that are trying to tell a businessman how to run his business, and some of these college professors are just about as bad, the whole kit and bilin’ of ’em are nothing in God’s world but socialism in disguise! And it’s my bounden duty as a producer to resist every attack on the integrity of American industry to the last ditch. Yes—SIR!” Mr. Elder wiped his brow.

Dave Dyer added, “Sure! You bet! What they ought to do is simply to hang every one of these agitators, and that would settle the whole thing right off. Don’t you think so, doc?”

“You bet,” agreed [Will] Kennicott.

Henry Ford
My Life and Work
1922

As fervently anti-union as most American industrialists of the period, automobile manufacturer Henry Ford outlined his views of the labor-capital impasse in his 1922 memoir.

Take, for instance, this whole matter of union labor and the right to strike.

The workingmen, except those few who have been inoculated with the fallacious doctrine of “the class war” and who have accepted the philosophy that progress consists in fomenting discord in industry (“When you get your \$12 a day, don’t stop at that. Agitate for \$14. When you get your eight hours a day, don’t be a fool and grow contented; agitate for six hours. Start something! Always start something!”), have the plain sense which enables them to recognize that with principles accepted and observed, conditions change. The union leaders have never seen that. They wish conditions to remain as they are, conditions of injustice, provocation, strikes, bad feeling, and crippled national life. Else, where would be the need for union officers? Every strike is a new argument for them; they point to it and say, “You see! You still need us.” . . .

There is a change coming. When the union of “union leaders” disappears, with it will go the union of blind bosses—bosses who never did a decent thing for their employees until they were compelled. If the blind boss was a disease, the selfish union leader was the antidote. When the union leader became the disease, the blind boss became the antidote. Both are misfits, both are out of place in well-organized society. And they are both disappearing together.

“Anarchy in Illinois the Natural Outcome of Radical Labor Unionism”
 Editorial, *Manufacturers Record*
 June 29, 1922

In one of the most violent incidents of labor conflict in the 1920s, striking coal miners and their supporters in Herrin, Illinois, murdered twenty-two “strike-breakers” (men working despite the strike or hired to replace strikers) and mine guards. This editorial from a southern industrial weekly displays the outrage expressed in business and most general-circulation newspapers.

But no one should be surprised. These men had the seeds of hatred planted in their hearts by mouthing demagogues and unscrupulous labor leaders, who have been preaching Bolshevism which says “to hell with all churches and all governments.” What else could have been expected of the more ignorant men than the ripening into a harvest of hatred and murder blacker than the records of civilization show, when men who have been permitted to live under this government deliberately carry on such a campaign as that which brought death to dozens of independent, or non-union miners in Illinois?

Here were men who had committed no crime. They had not even been charged with any criminality. But because they were operating mines—the output of which was essential to the business welfare of this country—striking miners tied them together in bunches and ordered them to run, and as they ran shot them down deliberately and in cold blood.

Until these criminals are hunted down and punished to the full extent of the law, and until every labor union in the country puts itself on record in bitter denunciation of such criminality under the guise of labor unionism, this country will be forced to recognize that there is no safety in labor unionism, and that the only safety lies in the independent or Open Shop, untrammelled by the teachings of [Samuel] Gompers, [John L.] Lewis, and every radical labor leader who denounces courts or who seeks to sow the seed of hatred in the hearts of other men.

There are many thousands of good honest Americans in labor unions. Surely they must hang their heads in shame over the crimes committed in the name of labor unionism by the miners of Illinois. But in vain will they hang their heads unless they take some vigorous action to clean out their organizations and to stand for honesty, integrity, and freedom from crime, and for the right of every man to work without regard to whether the union label is stamped on his body and his soul or not.



“Calls upon Capital and Labor to Stop Bickering: Farmer Tired of Industrial Disputes That Only Hurt Him”
The Charlotte [NC] Observer, August 15, 1922

LEESBURG, VA.—The farmer “calls upon capital and labor to cease their petty bickerings and resume production, trusting to American

institutions and the American sense of fair play to see that justice is done to both of them,” Secretary [Henry C.] Wallace of the Department of Agriculture declared in an address here today before the local farm bureau.

Mr. Wallace presented comparative figures to show that the purchasing power of the farmers’ dollar had decreased sharply since 1913, “while the wages of the workman, and especially in organized industries, are considerably higher than they were before the war, whether measured in dollars and cents or in purchasing power.” . . .

“In short,” Mr. Wallace emphasized, the farmers of the country, numbering almost one third of our entire population, have borne altogether the heaviest burden of deflation and they have not struck. . . .

“If the various groups in this country are determined to prey upon one another and abandon law and order for strong arm methods, the farmer can take care of himself. He can reduce his production to his own needs. He can follow the example of some others and refuse to sell what he produced.

“But he does not believe in that sort of thing. He knows that such a policy would bring about in this great republic exactly the same sort of conditions that exist in Russia.

International Workers of the World (IWW)
Historical Catechism of American Unionism
1923

In contrast to the American Federation of Labor, which affirmed its commitment to worker equity within the capitalist system, the IWW espoused the Marxist goals of destroying capitalism and achieving the global takeover of the “means of production.” In these excerpts from its 1923 “catechism”—a Q&A compilation of a group’s beliefs—the IWW rejects the possibility of capital-labor accord.

I.W.W. Archives

15. Should the employer be permitted in a labor union?

No more than a coyote in a sheepfold.

16. Why?

Because the interest of the boss is to that of the worker as the interest of the coyote is to that of the sheep. The union cannot serve the worker and the boss at the same time, though many of the workers believe it can be done.

17. Why can’t the union serve both the employer and the employees?

Because their interests are opposed. The boss wants low wages, while the workers want high wages; the employer wants the workers to speed up, while the worker does not wish to. So that it would be impossible for the union to serve these opposing interests.

...

20. Is there an employers’ side to every industrial question?

Well, if there is, let them look out for their side. We have all we can do to attend to ours.

21. Then you have no regard for the employers’ interest?

The only regard to be felt for them is to regard them as our enemies, economically.

22. Should they be fought all the time?

That is what a union is, if it is anything at all—a fighting weapon of the workers. People do not take fighting weapons to a picnic; they do take them to a battlefield—and that is just what modern industry is. There is an unceasing battle between the working class and the employing class. The union is the weapon with which the workers wage battle in behalf of their interests.

...

201. When was the I.W. W. organized?

In Chicago, June 27, 1905, with an initial membership of somewhere about 50,000.

202. Is it purely [an] economic organization?

Yes. Originally it declared for political as well as economic action by the workers, but at the fourth convention (1908), the idea of political action was discarded, and the I.W.W. decided to devote itself exclusively to industrial action. This won for it the hostility of the politicians. In fact, it has succeeded in antagonizing every anti-labor and pseudo-labor element in society since it refused to be a breeding ground for fallacies.

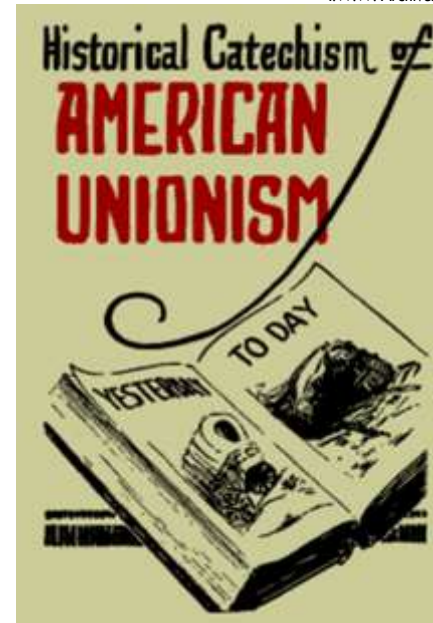
203. What are its principles?

The basic principle is recognition of the class struggle. because of this it is a militant labor organization. it is attempting to organize the working class for victory over the capitalist class. Its preamble [to the 1905 IWW constitution], as amended by the fourth convention and endorsed by the membership, is:

PREAMBLE

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.



“Labor and Capital”
Editorial, *The Independent*
September 12, 1925

The Independent was a national weekly of political and social commentary published in Boston.

In this country few laborers are class conscious in the sense of admitting their condition as hopeless wage slaves destined to toil for just enough to keep body and soul together. In almost every trade, laborers are actual or potential capitalists. Their effort and their ambition is to join that class which is currently believed to be conservative. Every logical conservative, therefore, should, for example, assist the trade union effort for increased wages which is designed to recruit new capitalists who will safeguard the country in which they have a stake. The trade union movement is not a threat against property; it is an encouragement to become property holders.

Viewed in this light, a strike to obtain better wages and living conditions is not in any sense a struggle between Labor and Capital; it is rather an effort on the part of the laboring men to become capitalists. The workers are people who want desperately to join a club. They are not opponents of it unless they are permanently blackballed; they are really its most enthusiastic and vehement supporters.



The Independent, Sept. 12, 1925

George J. Saul
“The Colorado Battle Line”
Labor Defender
December 1927

On November 21, 1927, during a statewide coal miners’ strike called by the IWW, state police shot into an unarmed group of over five hundred strikers and their wives, killing six and injuring thirty-six in a confrontation at the mine company gates. This article from the *Labor Defender*, published by International Labor Defense, a Communist organization that provided legal defense for striking workers, displays the outrage expressed by much of the labor press.

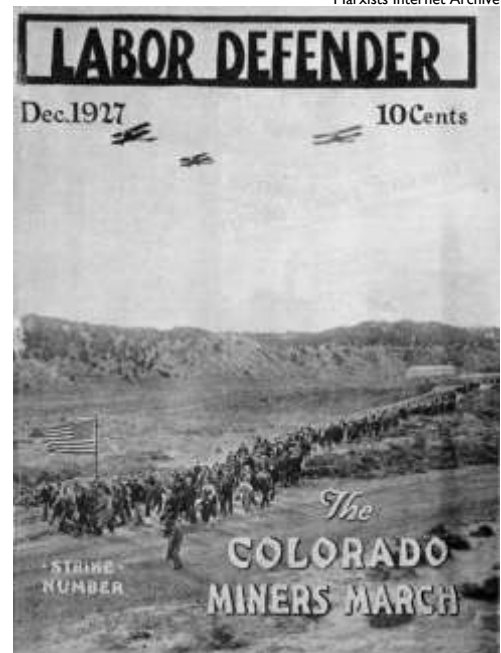
The first to die at the hands of the coal operators [owners] of Colorado, headed by Rockefeller’s Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, have now fallen at the Columbine mine, filled with the bullets of the state’s officers for the enforcement of “law.” It is absolutely certain that five were murdered: . . . Many were wounded, and some few so badly that other deaths are expected any moment. . . .

It was a massacre, just a brutal massacre. And a framed one. That violence was used against the miners both at Aguilar and at Serene [mines] the same morning; that Thomas Annear, chairman of the Industrial Commission, Sterling B. Lacy, State Budget Commissioner, and Colonel Newlon of the National Guard were there to witness the scene so as to testify falsely about what happened; and that the Governor was so ready to believe what they falsely stated and respond in the way of calling out the Guards, causes the whole situation to appear as having been premeditated.

. . . A virtual reign of terror exists. The iron hand of the Rockefeller dynasty has descended heavily upon these workers who presume to fight for decent conditions enjoyed by others. . . .

The strikers are fighting a heroic battle. They have a history and a heritage of rights. They have not forgotten Cripple Creek and Ludlow [miners’ strikes of 1894 and 1915 in which strikers were attacked and killed by the state militias].

Remember that only a few months ago thousands of Colorado miners struck in solidarity with their brothers Sacco and Vanzetti [executed in August 1927]. They need some of that solidarity now from the workers of the rest of the country. The memory of Ludlow stares them in the face. The blood of the strikers at the Columbine mine has served only to strengthen their determination, and their angry resistance to the slave standards of the coal operators.



Ella Mae Wiggins
 "The Big Fat Boss and the Workers"
 Union song, ca. 1929

A widowed mother, mill worker, and union organizer in the southern mill town of Gastonia, North Carolina, Ella Mae Wiggins gained international fame for her workingmen's ballads—and for her unsolved murder during the Loray Mill strike of April-May 1929.

The boss man wants our labor, and money to pack away,
 The workers wants a union and the eight-hour day.

The boss man hates the workers, the workers hates the boss,
 The boss man rides in a big fine car and the workers has to walk.

The boss man sleeps in a big fine bed and dreams of his silver and gold.
 The workers sleeps in a old straw bed and shivers from the cold.

Fred Beal he is in prison a-sleeping on the floor,
 But he will soon be free again and speak to us some more.

Fred Beal: northern organizer for the National Textile Workers' Union

The union is a-growing, the I. L. D. is strong,
 We're going to show the bosses that we have starved too long.*

I.L.D.: International Labor Defense, Communist group that provided support and legal defense for Gastonia strikers

Margaret Larkin
 "Tragedy in North Carolina"
The North American Review
 December 1929

A union activist and writer, Larkin reported on North Carolina labor unrest in 1929 for the northern press. (As a songwriter, she also compiled the lyrics to several of Ella Mae Wiggins's union ballads.)

The "new South" is in the throes of its first great industrial struggle. In the cotton mills, many of them built with Northern capital, twenty sporadic strikes under local leadership and three led by labor unions have occurred within the past year. They have been accompanied by spectacular violence. Six strikers were killed and twenty wounded in Marion, N.C., when they were picketing their mill. The Aderholt murder trial resulted in long prison sentences for seven union organizers. Aderholt was shot when he led a police raid on strikers' headquarters in Gastonia. The grievances of the mill workers are three-fold: low wages, long hours, and the introduction of efficiency systems. . . .

Publicly all the mill owners present a united front against unionization. Privately some of them will acknowledge that organization is inevitable and that the employers ought to take thought as to how this may be accomplished.

Some such effort is apparent in the legislative program announced by Governor Gardner. He will recommend a 55-hour week and abolition of night work for women under eighteen years of age. The concession in hours has been made by many mills already. . . .

The Southern press has been wholeheartedly on the side of the mill owners in every strike. No matter what the leadership, it has accused the "outside agitators" of belief in every Southern bogey [bogeyman]—Bolshevism, free love, racial equality, anarchy, and atheism. Conservative leaders of the American Federation of Labor, who hate and fear the Communists as much as any Southern mill owner, have been tarred with the same stick.



The News & Observer, Raleigh, NC

Striking textile mill workers, Loray Mill, Gastonia, North Carolina, spring 1929 (detail)

* Margaret Larkin, "Ella Mae's Songs," *The Nation*, October 9, 1929. (Wiggins's name was misspelled "Mae" on her gravestone.)