

CHAPTER XII

WILL BIRTH CONTROL HELP THE CAUSE OF LABOR?

LABOR seems instinctively to have recognized the fact that its servitude springs from numbers. Seldom however has it applied its knowledge logically and thoroughly. The basic principle of craft unionism is limitation of the number of workers in a given trade. This has been labor's most frequent expedient for righting its wrongs. Every unionist knows as a matter of course that if that number is kept small enough his organization can compel increases of wages, steady employment and decent working conditions. Craft unionism has succeeded in attaining these insofar as it has been able to apply this principle. It has failed insofar as it has been unable to apply it.

The weakness of craft unionism is that it does not carry its principle far enough. It ap

plies its policy of limitation of numbers only to the trade. In his home the worker, whether he is a unionist or non unionist, goes on producing large numbers of children to compete with him eventually in the labor market.

The history of labor, says Teresa Billington Greig in the *Common Sense of The Population Question*, is the history of an ever unsuccessful effort upon the part of man to bring his productive ability as a worker up to his reproductive ability. It has been a losing battle all the way.

The small percentage of highly skilled or organized workers lead in the struggle for better conditions. Craft unions, by limiting the number of men available for any one trade, manage to procure better pay, shorter hours and other advantages for their members.

Disaster in the form of famine, pestilence, tidal waves, earthquakes or war, sometimes limits the number of available workers. Then those who live in parts of the world that are not affected, or who stay at home during wars, reap a temporary advantage. These advantages, however, are quickly offset by increased

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prices or by competition for jobs when soldiers return from war. This form of limitation of numbers works to the advantage of labor as long as it is available but great disasters are not constantly in operation while the worker's reproductive ability is. So in a few years they have lost what nature's destructiveness won for them.

The great mass of the workers — including children and women — are unskilled and unorganized. Not only that they are for some considerable part of the time seeking employment. They are, of course poorly paid. Thus through their low wages and their seeking of employment, they always come into direct competition with one another and with the skilled and organized workmen. As their families live in want and are often diseased they create the chief social problems of the day. They bring children into the world as fast as women can bear them. With each child they increase their own misery and provide another worker to force down wages and prolong hours through competition for employment.

This has been the way of labor from the beginning. It is labor's way in every country.

Having discovered that there is no relief in legislation, labor organizes to limit its numbers in certain trades. Meanwhile the women of the working class go on breeding more workers to wipe out in the future the advantages gained for the present. In Paris, for instance the proletarian quarters of the city show a birth rate more than three times as high as the birth rate in the well to do sections.

Dr Jacques Baillon furnishes us with statistics which prove that the birth rate in any quarter of Paris is in inverse ratio to its degree of affluence, says G Hardy in *How to Prevent Pregnancy*. The rich Champs Elysees has a birth rate a third of that Bellerville or of the Buttes Chaumont. From 1 000 women from the age of fifteen to fifty, Menimontant gives 116 births the Champs Elysees thirty four births.

It is the same in Berlin. For 1 000 women from the age of fifteen to that of fifty a very poor quarter gives 157 births a rich quarter gives 47 births.

And so it is the world over. The very word proletarian as Hardy points out means producer of children.

The children thus carelessly produced undermine the health of the mother deepen

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the family's poverty destroy the happiness of the home, and dishearten the father all this in addition to being future competitors in the labor market. Too often their increasing number drives the mother herself into industry where her beggarly wages tend to lower the level of those of her husband.

The first sickening feature of this general situation is the high infant mortality among the children of the workers. Many children come merely to sap the strength of the mother, suffer and die, leaving to show for their coming and going only an increased burden of sorrow and debt. The lower the family income the more of these babies die before they are a year old.

A survey of infant mortality in Johnstown, Pa., by the federal Children's Bureau gave these typical results for the year 1911:

Father's Earnings	Infant Mortality Rate
Under \$521	197.3
\$521 to \$624	193.1
\$625 to \$779	163.1
\$780 to \$899	168.4
\$900 to \$1,199	142.3
\$1,200 or over	102
Ample	88

These figures do not represent the total income of all families. Neither will money buy as much in 1920 as it did in 1911. Seventy per cent of the people of the United States have incomes of less than \$1,000. This means that from 142 to 197 children born into such families die before they are one year old. The births and deaths of these children represent just so much useless burden of anguish and sorrow to the workers.

Despite this high infant death rate, the workers of the United States still have more children than they can care for. There are enough of them left over to provide 3,000,000 child laborers, who by working for a pittance crowd their parents out of employment and force the families deeper into poverty.

When all is said and done, the workers who produce large families have themselves to blame for the hundreds of thousands of unemployed grasping for jobs, for the strike breakers, for the policemen who beat up and arrest strikers and for the soldiers who shoot strikers down. All these come from the families of workingmen. Their fathers and mothers are workers for wages. Out of the

lions of labor they come into the world and compel surplus labor to betray labor that is employed

Nor is this all. When a workman of superior strength and skill, protected by his union, manages to maintain a large or moderate sized family in a degree of comfort, there always comes a time when he must strike to preserve what he has won. If he is not beaten by unorganized workers who seek his job, he still has to face the possibility of listening to the cries of several hungry children. If the strike is a long one, these cries often drown the promptings of loyalty and class interest — often they defeat him when nothing else could.

Is it any wonder that under handicaps like these labor becomes confused and flounders? It has been offered a multitude of remedies — political reforms, wage legislation, statutory regulation of hours, and so on. It has been invited to embrace craft and industrial unionism, syndicalism, anarchism, socialism as panaceas for its liberation. Except in a few countries, it has not attained to aggressive power, but has been a tool for unscrupulous politicians.

Even with the temporary advantages gained by the wiping out of millions of workers in the Great War, labor's problem remains unsolved. It has now, as always, to contend with the crop of young laborers coming into the market, and with the ever present labor saving machine which, instead of relieving the worker's situation, makes it all the harder for him to escape. Fewer laborers are needed to day for a given amount of production and distribution than before the invention of these machines. Yet, owing to the increase in the number of the workers, labor finds itself enslaved instead of liberated by the machine.

'Hitherto,' says John Stuart Mill "it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment, and an increased number of manufacturers and others to make fortunes."

That, in a few words, sums up the greater part of labor's progress. We blame capitalism and its wasteful, brutal industrial system for all our social problems but our numbers were

vast and our bondage grievous before modern industry came into existence We may curse the trusts, but our subjection was accomplished before the trusts had emerged from the brain of evolution We may blame public officials and individual employers, but our burdens were crushing before these were born We look now here, now there, for the cause of our condition — everywhere but at the one to blame We fight again and again for our rights, only to be conquered by our own kind, our own children, our brother s, our neighbor s

Let us carry to its logical conclusion the principle of limitation which has been partially applied by labor unions The way to get rid of labor problems, unemployment, low wages, the surplus, unwanted population, is to stop breeding They come from our own ranks — from our own families The way to get better wages, shorter hours, a new system for the advancement of labor, is to make labor s numbers fewer Let us not wait for war, famine and plague to do it Let us cease bringing unwanted children into the world to suffer a while, add to our burdens and die Let us cease bringing others into the world to compete

with us for a living Let the women workers practice birth control

What are the concrete things which the worker can gain at once through birth control? First a small family can live much better than a large one upon the wages now received Workers could be better fed clothed and educated Again fewer children in the families of the workers would tend to check the rise in the prices of food which are forced up as the demand increases Within a few years it would reduce the number of workers competing for jobs The worker could the more easily force society to give him more of the product of his labor — or all of it And while these things are taking place, the slums with their disease their moral degradation and all their sordid accompaniments would automatically disappear No worker would need to live in such tenements — hence they would be modernized or torn down At the same time, the few children that were being born to the workers would be stronger healthier more courageous They would be fit human beings — not miserable victims of murderous conditions

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Birth control does not propose to replace any of the idealistic movements and philosophies of the workers. It is not a substitute; it precedes. It is of itself a principle that lifts the heaviest of the burdens that afflict labor. It can and it must be the foundation upon which any permanently successful improvement in conditions is attained. It is therefore a necessary prelude in all effective propaganda.

A few years of systematic agitation for birth control would put labor in a position to solve all its problems. Labor organized or unorganized must take heed of this fact. Groups and parties working for a new social order must include it in their programmes. No social system, no workers democracy, no Socialist republic can operate successfully and maintain its ideals unless the practice of birth control is encouraged to a marked and efficient degree.

In Spain I saw a bull fight. It was in the great arena at Barcelona. As bull after bull went down, his magnificent defeated strength bleeding away through wounds inflicted by his weak but skillful assailant, I thought of the world of workers and their oppressors.

As each bull was sent into the arena, he was confronted by one assailant and twenty *confusers*. There was but one enemy for him to face but there were twenty brilliant flags each of a different color to distract his attention from the man who held the weapon. No sooner was his real antagonist in danger than one of the confusers fluttered a flag before his anger maddened eyes. With one toss of his horns he could have ripped the life from the toreador, but his confusers were always there with the flags. One after another he charged them, only to spend the force of his lunges in the empty air. He found that as he was about to toss one of his confusers into the air he was confronted by another flag which he charged with equal futility.

Finally utterly bewildered and exhausted too spiritless to meet the attack he falls under the sword thrust of the toreador. And the sun shines in the deep blue overhead, the band plays the ten thousand gayly clad spectators shout, while the victim is dragged out to make room for another.

It is the drama of labor

It will be the drama of labor until labor

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finds its real enemy That enemy is the reproductive ability of the working class which gluts the channels of progress with the helpless and weak and stimulates the tyrants of the world in their oppression of mankind