

LABOR, CAPITAL AND PRICES

(From the Springfield Republican) Labor Day this year is notable not only because it is a reminder of the unprecedented power of labor, organized to express itself collectively, but with more influence in labor matters also because all economic classes are and the more conservative labor lead- for a month past. The threatened undergoing a process of education ers themselves are strengthened in based on a remarkable economic ex- their efforts to restrain the more radperience. When the economic history of these times comes to be written been conspicuous for such develop-August, 1919, may appear a turning ments. point-of what sort only a prophet shop unions have advised a waiting could now say. But at least high policy rather than walkouts and tieprices then reached their peak, if ups., The sporadic railroad strike in present evidences are to hold good, as southern California was suppressed that a high-price movement sooner against them, initiated under the spur ing with the government. Mr. Gomconcurred in very generally by capital his influence is, being thrown on the

in August has fallen somewhat under fects upon general business of recent the concerted attacks made upon it developments cannot be ignored, but and this fact has probably done more the securities market late in the week than anything else to weaken the ten- reflected increased confidence by a dency toward strikes.

ical labor groups. The past week has The heads of the railroad as a sound policy. The price level side of moderation. The disturbing of in a lecture to London bankers: "A

sharp rise in railroad and industrial The President of the United States, shares and by a considerable abateas in his Labor Day message, speaks ment of the selling pressure in the bond market which has been notable strike in the steel industry remains a dark cloud on the industrial sky, however, and it is yet to be seen wether accommodation can be brought about that will not result in an industrial setback.

Capital is getting educated these days as much as labor. It has learned the result of a governmental drive by the railroad brotherhoods cooperat or later reaches a point where its own security is threatened by social financing of the war. The matter of of labor union representations, yet pers' latest utterances indicate that and labor unrest. As Prof. Nicholson, inflation has a direct bearing on high the British economist, recently said prices, and labor cannot know too

___dangerous to capital, cause may bring social revolution into the range of practical politics." This lesson was suddenly impressed on American capital last month, the lesson being dramatized for capital's benefit by the coincidence of the railroad brotherhoods' demand for railroad nationalization with their representatins to the President concerning wages and the high cost of living. It is no farfetched conclusion that the fall in prices during August was partly due to the prompt recognition by the most powerful financial producing and distributing interests that the upwardprice movement had reached the utmost limit of safety. Capital in short, sees that a fall in prices is now to its own advantage as well as to society as a whole, and it now hesitates to raise prices even when technical market conditions might warrant As for labor, its education from

continuance in the rise of prices i

current experience should not end with the discovery that it is useless to force higher wages if the higher wages are absorbed in a higher cost of living. It is more important to labor to get prices down than to get wages up. As a rule, economic history teaches that wage labor gains from falling prices and loses by rising prices, provided that the fall in prices is not attended by unemployment. Even before the war prices had keen rising for osme years and wages had not risen in proportion to the rise in the prices of the things labor most needs to live on. During the war and after, wages in certain strategic lines where labor was strongly intrenched for collective bargaining were forced up to profiteering levels but the mass of unorganized wage-earner sand salaried people were cruelly pinched by the extreme cost of living. The real causes of the great rise in prices in war-time are now of vital interest to labor, if labor's influence is to be used rightly in hastening the restoration of normal conditions instead of being used to strengthen the forces of disintegration.

One of the most essential things ahead of us is the increase of the production of the necessaries of life, hence strikes are a calamity because they hinder production and increase prices. The Pennsylvania coal miners won't help the world along or labor in general by demanding at this time a 60 per cent increase, in wages and a six-hour day. The practice of thrift and saving is today an economic virtue of the highest value in all classes. Thrift and saving force production out of unessential lines, and thus reduce the prices of the necessaries by making them more abundant; thrift and saving also increase the public's capacity to loan real money to the government and reduce the inflating which has attended the government much about it for its own sake.

There is a real price inflation in this country, as there is in other countries, due to the enormous war borrowings and expenditures of the government. The government borrowed heavily by an extension of credit and it spent the money thus borrowed at very high price levels for destructive purposes. In his recent statement on inflation Governor Harding, of the federal reserve board, recognized truth in saying that the credit expansion, which many identify as inflation because of its effect on prices, is measured by "the difference between the total of the war expenditures of the government on one hand, and on the other the total amount raised by the government through tax ation and by the sale of its obligations so far as paid for out of savings.' And to remedy "the present situation" not only must we "produce and distribute the largest possible volume of commodities" and "exercise reasonable economies" in consumption, but also the government's "obligations, so far as they are carried by the banks must be absorbed" by the people out of actual earnings. We have also a greatly expanded currency, directly the result of the rise in prices, yet combing with credit inflation to maintain prices at a high level.

Labor ought to see its own advantage in reducing this inflation, which is more fundamental than profiteering in keeping up prices, by insisting on all possible curtailment of government expenditures, especially of borrowed money. In the next place, labor may fairly ask if a lower price level may not be legitimately forced gradually, of course, by deflating the currency of the country. If labor does its part in increasing production, as it ought, it may fairly demand that those responsible for our banking and currency policy shall neglect to take no steps by which the volume of money may be reduced without causing a shock to business.

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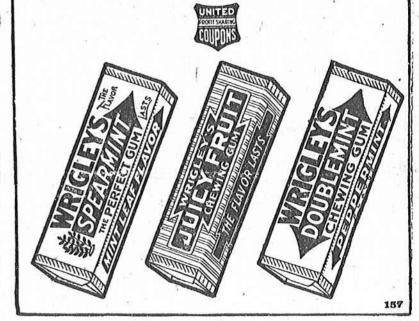
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