

UNIONIST OR NON-UNIONIST.

The side of unionism upon which the capitalistic attack is nominally to be directed is that which requires unionists to refuse to work with non-unionists and by extension requires unionists to refuse to touch, taste or handle non-union goods; "nominally directed" because as a matter of fact what Capitalism really seeks is the total suppression or emasculation of unionism; and this is only a little way it has of reaching the end it so devoutly seeks. It is insisted that the employer has a "right" to employ whom he will, and that to attempt to "coerce" men into joining unions by refusing to work with them unless they do is tyranny so abominable that the very thought of it chills the blood of the noble and magnanimous employer. It is in the name of "Liberty" that Capitalism proposes to deprive unionism of a safeguard which has been found absolutely necessary to save it from being victimised out of existence, which reminds one of Madame Roland's famous apothecosis: "Oh, Liberty, Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!"

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Before discussing the point it is necessary to understand the position which unionism has taken up. The employer has never been denied the right to discharge a workman for incompetence or gross insolence or neglect. What organised workmen deny to the employer is the right to get any of them to work for him if he victimises one of their number simply because that man is active in unionism; they consider that the dismissal of a workman because he is a delegate or because he is an "agitator" or because he is a unionist is an unjustifiable attack upon their right to organise, which right is at least as unquestionable as an employer's right to employ. It is manifest that the Organisation of Labour must either go to pieces or go into secret session if it cannot generally protect its members from being starved into subjection by the unjustifiable action of victimising employers. It is in sheer self-preservation that it has been compelled to fight such victimising, both directly and indirectly, by fighting employers who openly victimise and by cutting the ground from under the secret victimiser's feet by refusing to work with non-unionists.

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and he would ultimately come to be treated as tenderly as the Red Indians treated the Lunatic. But the distinct capitalistic pressure which seeks all the time to make men non-unionists alters all this and renders it absolutely necessary to close the ranks in self-defence.

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The capitalistic press and other capitalistic mouthpieces will deny the existence of this pressure. Yet it has been applied by the Brisbane capitalistic press itself. Every union in the world has felt it not once, nor twice, but repeatedly. Every unionist is perfectly conscious of its existence. Every new society is formed in the face of the victimising of leading spirits and every old society has to guard with jealous care the right of its officials to use their own time regardless of the prejudice of employers. It would be wasting time and space, in addressing unionists, to quote cases in proof of this. They occur daily. The history of unionism is one long account of the victimising of unionists by employers and the resistance to victimising by unionism. And if direct persecution has been thus common, what shall be said of indirect persecution, of the attempts to throttle unionism by steadily preferring non-unionists to unionists for hiring and preferring unionists to non-unionists for dismissal?

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There are fair employers who under ordinary circumstances will not differentiate between unionists and non-unionists, but the majority make it clearly understood that the workman who dares to join a union will not have nearly the same show for earning his living as the man who does not attempt to combine for the betterance of his condition. And workmen, knowing this, naturally take refuge in insisting that all shall be unionist and in laying upon the broad back of the "union" responsibility for action which they fear they would be victimised for if the capitalist knew they approved it. They are compelled to do this in self-defence. They will continue to do this wherever they can for it is the only means by which they can so protect themselves against tyrannical employers as to make unionism possible.

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Close unionism is the only effectual form of unionism and without unionism the workman is a very slave. The shipping companies have already practically admitted how inhumanly they were treating the marine officers by offering to raise wages *after the strike began*; the squatters would have cut bush labourers' wages to 20s. and 25s. per week after New Year's Day had it not been for unionism; always the non-union workers are the worst paid and the worst treated unless it happens for the time being to pay Capitalism to bribe them to sell their birthright and blackleg. That this is so all workers know, even the blacklegs themselves. The necessity for unionism has become so apparent that all the capitalists now openly contend is that they don't want aggressive unionism, in other words they want unions which will do just exactly what Capitalism wishes regardless of the fact that unions only exist to enable the workman to get a better living than he would have were he in Capitalism's unrestricted power. Capitalists

There is this, however, that unionists must never forget, which is that unionism can only be rightly "close" so long as it recognises and defends the right of every man to work and live. We may justly say that all workers in the organised occupations should be unionist and that the non-unionist who there blacklegs to Capitalism and turns traitor to his brothers shall be fought as part and parcel of that Capitalism which seeks constantly to enslave and degrade the labourer: but we may not say justly that a union shall be closed to any man who can do the work covered by the union, indeed it is becoming more and more certain that we cannot say wisely that the average union shall be closed to any man whatsoever. We must deal justly with men if only for our own sakes, and the first axiom of social justice, as workers are coming to see, is that every member of a community has a right to work and live in it without asking leave of any man. . . . And though we cannot, under the circumstances which surround us and confine us and which the political recommendations of the General Council seek to alter, carry out to its logical conclusion such an axiom, yet as far as we can do so we must do so if we would see unionism rooted so deeply in our sense of right that it will be strong with the wisdom that is right-doing. Any union which endeavours to bar out men capable of doing its work, by extravagant entrance fees, by absurd residence requirements, by demanding indentures, by confining membership to those who have acquired another trade, by not making fair allowance for a drifting membership which cannot reasonably be expected to remain financial in several unions at once, is not dealing justly with Labour, is making for itself enemies who sooner or later in some hour of need will surely destroy it. The close union rule is justifiable if the union is otherwise so conducted as to deprive no worker of fair chance to work thereby; if a union does not give admittance to any worker under conditions easily fulfillable its close unionism wrongs Labour and cannot hold. We have a right to defend ourselves against Capitalism. We have no right to make a monopoly of any form of labouring to the exclusion of brother-men who have as good a right to work as ourselves; if we do we drive these men into the arms of Capitalism, which uses them to crush us.

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