

**INDUSTRIAL
UNREST:
A WAY OUT**

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Industrial Unrest: A Way Out by B. Seebohm Rowntree

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— **A WAY OUT OF**
CALIFORNIA

BY

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

INDUSTRIAL UNREST: A WAY OUT

THE world is still staggering from the shock of the war, and every one agrees that the great need to-day is peace. And yet, although we cry 'Peace, peace,' there is no peace!

In the field of industry the atmosphere is as highly charged with electricity as in that of international relations. Capital and Labour, each suspicious of the other, stand by their guns ready for defence, or, if the occasion serves, for offence, while industry languishes and the morale of the nation is weakened by the long-continued idleness of nearly two millions of her people. The trade depression caused by the loss of a large part of our export trade through the state of Foreign Exchanges is serious enough, but whenever the clouds of depression show

a sign of lifting some far-reaching strike or lock-out throws us back again, till the task of impelling industry up the incline of prosperity seems as hopeless as that of Sisyphus ! Meanwhile, the cause of social progress suffers through the country's poverty. Surely never was it more urgently necessary to secure industrial peace ! Labour unrest is not a passing evil due to the war. It has always been present, and it was assuming menacing proportions before 1914, but its effects, though serious, were not then ruinous. It took the form of a constantly recurring series of slight earthquake shocks, which might damage a wall in the industrial structure here, or throw down a building there ; but it was not a catastrophic earthquake destroying the whole edifice. Moreover, British industry was in a strong position, and although much power might be wasted through lack of proper co-ordination among its working parts, it had still enough dynamic to render it prosperous.

But now circumstances have changed. The storm-clouds which had appeared on the horizon before 1914 are growing ever darker and more ominous, and very little thought is needed to convince us that the time has come to face the problem of industrial unrest, and see if we cannot in some way dispel this menace to our national well-being, at least in its more acute forms.

THREE THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE WAYS TO SECURE INDUSTRIAL PEACE

Theoretically there are three ways in which industrial unrest may be allayed.

Making Employers All-Powerful (1)

The first is for the employers to make their position so strong that the workers dare not raise their heads. This happened in the days of slavery and serfdom. Very occasionally the slaves were goaded to revolt against oppression, but their rebellion

was put down with such savage brutality that a long interval usually elapsed ere 'peace' was again disturbed. But slavery went long since, and the spirit of serfdom has been growing weaker and weaker among the workers for a generation, until the war finally destroyed it.

It is essential to a proper understanding of the situation to-day that we should realise that the spirit of serfdom has gone. Much unrest is due to the failure of certain employers to grasp this fact. Popular education began the process of destroying serfdom. An uneducated people might be willing, unquestioningly, to live and act and think as their parents did ; but education leads men to ask questions, and the workers have been asking them furiously for thirty years and more. They are asking why the employer should always be the accepted master and the worker the submissive servant, and why the position of the worker in industry should not be that of co-operator. They are ques-

tioning, often with little capacity for making due allowances, but none the less insistently, what we call economic laws; and they are asking whether they are getting a fair share of the product of industry, and why there should be so striking a difference between the life of the workers and that of 'the idle rich,' of whom, even if they do not come into personal contact with them, they read in the newspapers. These and many other problems are being put forward daily by the workers. Their education, poor enough, forsooth, has nevertheless roused them for ever out of the apathy which marked the servile mind.

But if education over a period of years has been slowly teaching men to think, and if thought has gradually changed their outlook, the war has swiftly banished the last traces of their servility. Just think what happened! Men who all their lives had worked at one job, perhaps in the same shop, following the trade that their fathers

followed, living always in one town, often in one street, and largely accepting conditions as they found them as a matter of course, were suddenly seized by some great power and deposited in France, Flanders, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Greece, where they mingled with men from all nations—men from all over the British Empire and from America. And what happened, think you? Was there not, during the long waiting hours, close questioning among these men as to working conditions? Were not these critically contrasted? And has not this comparison of English wages and conditions with those of the Dominions and the U.S.A. had a profound effect on the British workers who fought overseas? They learnt, too, the meaning of good rations and ample clothing. And then there was the challenge: 'Your King and Country need you!' They realised that they were needed in the trenches, and needed in the workshops at home. They realised that they were essential to the sav-