

THE WORKERS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

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The workers in American history by James Oneal

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JAMES ONEAL

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AMERICAN
HISTORY**

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IN
AMERICAN HISTORY

By
JAMES ONEAL

FOURTH EDITION

Revised and Enlarged

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PREFACE

In 1910 I wrote a small book of 136 pages bearing the title of this one and two editions were exhausted the following year. This booklet was devoted to the colonial and revolutionary period of American history, concluding with a short summary chapter.

In the meantime I had received many letters urging that in the next edition I should attempt to cover the period following the revolution. This I did by adding another chapter to the third and much larger edition which appeared in 1912. This edition was nearly exhausted late in 1914 and in the meantime lecturing and traveling did not permit me to further enlarge the book, as I was conscious of its limitations even with the added chapter on the post-revolutionary period. Then the world war brought with it soaring costs of publication and I was compelled to abandon any thought of another edition until its close.

This revised and fourth edition contains two additional chapters dealing with the modern period since the Civil War. Most of the preceding chapters remain as they were in the third edition, except for the correction of some minor errors of statement that had crept into the text and some abbreviations which, in making, have not made necessary the omission of any important fact or conclusion that appear in the last edition.

While the book is now a fairly complete survey of the workers in American history from settlement times down to a recent period, I am still deeply conscious of its imperfections. So much has been crowded into the pe-

riod following the Civil War that the best I could do in the space available to me was to note some of the more important facts and tendencies relating to the history of the working class in this period. The period of the world war I have been unable to consider at all, except for an occasional reference to the modern history of the American Federation of Labor.

However, with its imperfections I am confident that this edition gives a fairly complete view of some of the more important and fundamental aspects of the history of the American masses down to a recent period. Readers will also find in the footnotes a guide to more extensive reading should they desire to further investigate the matters mentioned in the text. A Finnish translation of the book also appeared in 1913 and arrangements are being made for a Yiddish translation. It is probable that an Italian translation will also appear soon.

Here the writer may be pardoned for stating one weakness of every division of the labor movement in America. We have no historical traditions. No other labor movement in the world has a more rich, valuable and interesting historical background than the labor movement in America. Yet this background is practically lost to the present generation. This history must be written and rich materials are available for the purpose.

It is significant also that the scholarly "History of Labor in the United States" by Professor Commons and Associates did not appear until 1918. Not until modern "civilization" began to totter from the shock of the world war was a general history of the organized work-

ers available in this country. Invaluable as this great work is, however, it is devoted mainly to the history of labor organization and not to the history of the working class in general. It is my own conviction that a general knowledge of the historical evolution of the American working class; its subjection to various forms of economic servitude in the colonies; its social and economic life at various periods in American history; its splendid achievements as an organized force in the three decades following 1828, and its subsequent history, would give the modern workers a historical culture that would add to their discipline and solidarity and enable them to march to the front as the most intelligent and progressive working class movement in the world.

Our large alien population makes this historical education especially necessary, although it may also be said that even the native workers need this almost as much as their alien brothers. The gross misconceptions of the American working class since the world war burst upon the world and the exotic programs offered in some quarters, indicate the vital need of understanding the historic backgrounds of the working class in America.

In the preparation of the present work I am indebted to my wife for her aid in typewriting the manuscript and for assistance in reading the proof and preparing the index.

JAMES ONEAL.

Brooklyn, March, 1921.

To the workers of America, who are now besieged by the Powers that Prey, in the hope that this small volume will reveal to them how present tyrannies came to be and how they may be abolished.

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