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ARTICLE

## CLEAR UNDERSTANDING NECESSARY.<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE editor of *The Industrial Worker* having requested me to furnish an article with practical suggestions that may be helpful in advance to delegates to the next Industrial Workers of the World convention, many of whom will doubtless be new men, along the line of insuring a more perfect organization and clearer understanding of the purposes and plans of the Industrial Workers of the World, I hasten to jot down these few thoughts in the limited time at my disposal.

The editor of *The Industrial Worker* correctly couples the idea of clearness of understanding of the purposes and plans of such an organization as the Industrial Workers of the World with the purpose of perfecting the organization itself. Indeed, the latter depends upon the former. Rough constitutional provisions may, in the measure of their wisdom or error, promote or impair an organization, the cleverest of constitutional provisions will not save a body whose purposes or plans are shadowy. It has been said that a good captain makes a good ship, but that no good ship can make a good captain—meaning that even a poor craft, well captained, will accomplish results which a better craft, ill-captained, will fail in. What the captain is to a ship, its purposes and plans are to a labor organization; what the ship is to a

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captain, its constitutional provisions are to the purposes and plans of an organization. Accordingly, though not everything, yet the principal thing with us of the Industrial Workers of the World must be to promote that clearness of understanding of the purposes and plans of our organization, without which clearness of understanding nothing else will stand, while with it all else will follow.

The Industrial Workers of the World stands upon the principle that labor is the sole producer of all wealth, and that consequently to labor all wealth belongs. The Industrial Workers of the World goes further: it does not, after the enunciation of that great truth, collapse, exhausted by the effort. On the contrary, invigorated by the inspiring thought, and steeled thereby to action, proceeds to drill its forces with the object in view of “taking and holding” the wealth of the land, together with the mechanism of its production, and administer the same by, through and for the people. Such a goal might seem clear enough. Nevertheless, in practice, no “goal” is really separable from the method to attain it. Where methods are inadequate, goals become visionary. The goal of the Industrial Workers of the World is no vision; it is none because its methods are adequate; these are adequate because they are forged in the furnace and hammered on the anvil of the class struggle of the human race. The methods of the Industrial Workers of the World are dictated by two main sign-posts, raised for the guidance of mankind by our forebears.

The first of these two sign-posts points to the fact that this generation is turning a cycle in the history of man. Traceable history finds man first at the “gens” stage of social organization. The foundation of the gentile system is man, and not territory. The social system of the gens was a reflex of its foundation—it was communistic; territory was considered only as an incident; it was reached through man, Labor; government reached territory only through the individual members of the gens. Out of the gens we gradually evolved, until the revolution was perfected which marks the “political” stage of society. Capitalist society is the fullest expression of this social stage. It completely reverses the system of the gens. While the gens was built upon men, political society is built upon territory; while the gens reached territory through its men, political society reaches men only through its territory. The changed foundation was likewise reflected in a changed social system. The system is the individualistic, brought on by property held privately, and raised

gradually above men, even above life. The defect of the gens brought on its dissolution; the defect of the political, now capitalist system, is, in its turn, urging on its own downfall. The man, or labor, basis of the gens was hampered, through the imperfection of the tools of production, in its straining towards that fully civilized condition which is dependent upon abundant production, dependent, in turn, upon the efficacy of the tool. The individualist, or capitalist basis, cured the defect; it perfected the tool of production; it thereby made civilized conditions possible—but only possible. Inherent in the capitalist system are the vices that annul its possibilities for human welfare. Its conquests had to be paid for by the temporary sacrifice of the virtues of the gens—the man as against the property basis of society. Life is more precious than property; property is there for the sake of life, not life for the sake of property. Society having reached, via the political or capitalist stage, the tools with which life can be promoted and common welfare insured, is now moving along the spiral, back and upward, where the gentile system of social organization is to be returned to, but upon that higher plane made possible by the conquests of political society—the perfected tool of production. This sociologic fact is one of the two sign-posts that guides the path of the Industrial Workers of the World. By framing its organic construction upon the industrial basis, the Industrial Workers of the World has acted obedient to the behest of the times—the behest to cast aside the political social stage, in which territory determines constituencies, and to resume the social stage in which man, labor, is the constituent element. By organizing its government upon the foundation of industries, regardless of territorial demarcations, the Industrial Workers of the World has acted obedient to the practical significance of the changed constituency—the significance that the government of civilization has outgrown the political stage, and should now be solely the administrative organism of the people's organized productive activities.

The second sign-post by which the Industrial Workers of the World picks its way is the distinctive feature of the working class, that is, the modern revolutionary class—the feature of economic impotence. In my address *The Warning of the Gracchi* (the second of the *Two Pages From Roman History*) I pointed out in detail the grave difference that characterizes the working class from all other and

previous historic revolutionary classes. I there summed up the argument in these words:

“Going no further back than the days of feudalism, the distinctive mark of the bourgeoisie, or then revolutionary class, was the possession of the material means essential to its own economic system; on the contrary, the distinctive mark of the proletariat to-day is the being wholly stripped of all such material possession. While wealth, logically enough, was the badge of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, poverty, likewise logically enough, is the badge of the proletariat. The sign, the symptom, the gauge of bourgeois ripeness, as of the ripeness for emancipation of all previous subject classes, was their ownership of the physical materials essential to their own economic system; the sign, on the contrary, of the proletariat, is a total lack of all material economic power—a novel accompaniment to a revolutionary class, in the whole range of class revolutions.”

All previous revolutionary classes were equipped with the economic power needed to put through their respective revolutions; the proletariat is the first on the list that is “equipped” with economic impotence. By casting its constitution in the mold of industrialism, and repudiating the craft form and spirit of organization, the Industrial Workers of the World has proceeded obedient, not only to the ultimate requirement of the times, in their heaving for the overthrow of “political society,” it also acted obedient to the fact of the badge that typifies its class—economic impotence. The craft form and spirit of organization not only ruptures the crafts among themselves, not only rends the whole working class into the “organized” and the “unorganized,” but it also fatedly, and as a consequence, keeps them in utter impotence by keeping their economic impotence unrelieved. The economic impotence of the working class nothing can offset except their integral economic organization. The constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World is cast in the mold that offsets the economic impotence of the proletariat. What ownership fails to do for it, industrial organization patches.

Such is the goal, such the methods to attain it, of the movement that ripened into the Chicago convention of last June-July. The Industrial Workers of the World was the product of those aspirations, curbed and controlled and guided by experience gathered in the past, and the sign-posts raised by history. The most practical suggestion I can make towards insuring a more practical organization

is—quoting from the monumental document just published by the Unity Conference of the New Jersey Socialist Labor and Socialist parties, the passage which declares: “Discipline is a matter that really cannot be legislated upon; it consists in the spirit of an organization, and it is only possible in a body that is clear upon what it wants, and clear upon how to go about getting it”—to emphasize the point that clearness upon what we want and clearness upon how to go about getting it is the quality that we must all train ourselves in. That done and attained, improvements will as readily suggest themselves. Thus triply united by the bonds of singleness of purpose, oneness of method, identity of goal, the second convention of the Industrial Workers of the World cannot fail to follow the pace set by the first convention, which rose so powerfully to the occasion as to crash through all opposition thrown in its way, dash the dearest hopes nursed by its foes, and start the ball rolling that will never stop until the slough of “political government” has been thrust aside and the land emerges in the festal garb of economic administration.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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