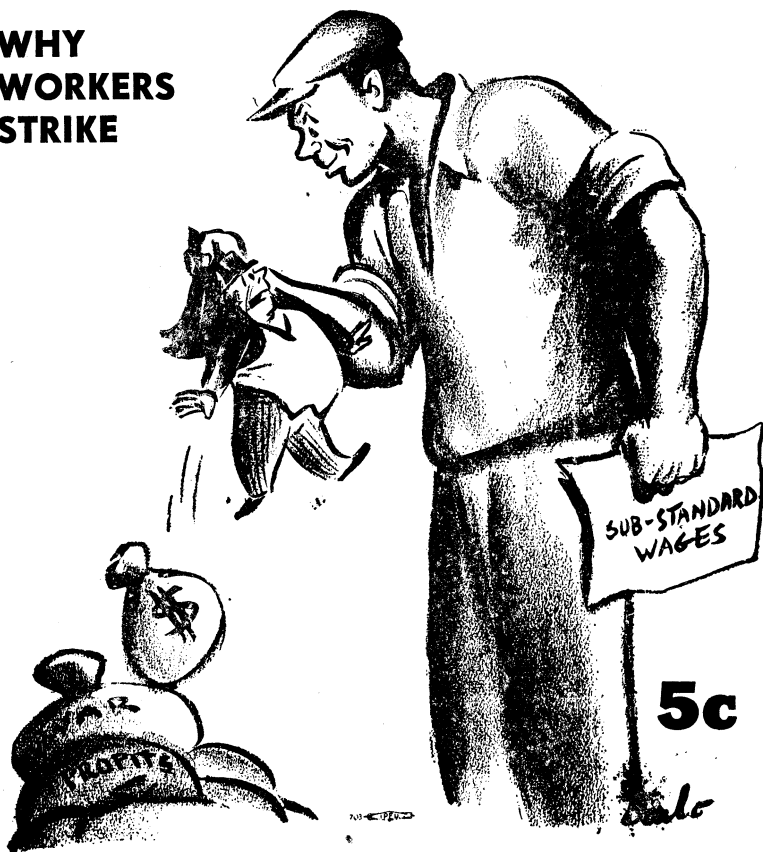


# Security and A Living Wage

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WHY  
WORKERS  
STRIKE



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# **SECURITY AND A LIVING WAGE**

**A STATEMENT BY THE  
NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
WORKERS PARTY**

**Max Shachtman, National Secretary**

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# **LABOR IS FIGHTING FOR SECURITY AND A LIVING WAGE**

Hundreds' of thousands of workers all over the country have already poured out in the first big post-war strike wave. The strikes are not confined to a single industry or a single locality. They reach from coast to coast. They have already affected the auto industry, oil, marine transportation, building service, moving pictures and a dozen others.

**These strikes are nothing but the beginning. Before long they will extend from industry to industry. The workers, faced by the arrogant and provocative attitude of the employers, will find themselves compelled to exercise the strike weapon more and more in order to gain their ends.**

**What do the workers want? How can they get it?**

**In every case of a strike, in every case of negotiating new contracts, the workers have put forward the demand for an increase in wages. In every case, the employers, swollen with war profits, present matters as if labor is a terrible leech, as if its demands are exorbitant, as if industry would collapse if these demands were granted.**

The fact of the matter is this:

In nine cases out of ten, labor is not even really demanding an increase in wages. With war production dying out, overtime work has been almost completely cut out. The result is that in practice millions of workers have taken what amounts to a *heavy wage cut*. The hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, who are already unemployed, must try to subsist on miserable unemployment insurance. Millions still working now have a take-home pay that is considerably below what they earned, with overtime, during the war. The cost of living, meanwhile, is not only not being reduced but is, in some cases, rising to new heights. Under these circumstances, what most of the workers are now demanding is nothing more than the take-home pay they received up to recently.

Actually, however, the strike wave, and the other labor demands that produced it, go much deeper.

## **Labor Speaks Up**

The workers of this country want, above all other things, SECURITY and A LIVING WAGE! These are the things that are really behind their demands.

The workers are fighting for their unions and right to organization; they are in practice wiping out the no-strike pledge which has so seriously hampered the labor movement during the war. In the face of a struggle for life, the workers understand that this struggle cannot even be fought effectually without a strong labor movement.

They no longer have any confidence in vague and empty promises. They have seen the amazing spectacle of war production. American capitalism was able to crush all its foreign foes under the sheer weight of the materials which poured out of industry as they never had poured out before.

The workers remember, also, that for years before the war began, industry was either prostrate on its back or, at best, limped along on one leg, while millions of workers who were willing and anxious to work had to remain in the ranks of the unemployed. They saw that industry reached an unprecedented height of production and employment for all **ONLY** when it was called upon to produce the weapons of death and destruction.

## **The Key Question**

Tens of millions of workers therefore ask themselves and everyone else this fundamental question, this key question:

**If industry could be organized in such a way and on such a scale for wartime, why can't it be done for peacetime? If we could produce the way we did to maim and kill and destroy, why can't we have full production and full employment in order to live and build and prosper?**

Big business and the government, with which it is inseparably linked, have not answered these questions and cannot answer them. But they are the questions that the workers want answered and must have answered. They are the questions in the minds of the workers who have launched the first strike wave and of those others who are also thinking of their problems.

The workers want full production because that means to them full employment. They want full employment because that means to them *security*, an end to the nightmare of insecurity, the curse of unemployment, of relief instead of wages, of doles instead of a living wage, a decent family life, self-respect and human dignity.

How can security be obtained?

Right now, workers are striking for a wage increase by which they will get the same take-home pay with the shorter work week that they got during the war with the longer work week. But that is not all. Millions of workers throughout the country have adopted the basic demands:

**A guarantee of a year-around job for all those willing and able to work.**

**A guarantee of a minimum annual wage.**

The gaining of these two simple, fundamental demands would really open the road to security and prosperity for the workers.

## **The Big Corporations' Plan**

The big corporations, however, are not concerned with the security and prosperity of the workers. They are concerned with one thing and one thing only: their profits, bigger profits and still bigger profits. They have a plan. They have organized a campaign of their own, backed by all the power at their command. They want to take advantage of the "reconversion" period, of the growing unemployment, in order to smash the labor

union movement and to cut down the living standards of the workers. That is the road to security and prosperity *for them*. The lower the wages, the higher the profits. The weaker the unions, the stronger the monopolies and trusts. All of them understand this. That's why they all react the same way to the simple demands of the workers.

There is the choice before us:

**Security and prosperity for the tens of millions of workers in this country who produce the nation's wealth by their labor—or security and prosperity for the tiny handful of profit-bloated trusts and corporations, the bankers and monopolists, the economic royalists and parasites of the country!**

Is there anything wrong with the demand of the workers that they enjoy security? Is there anything wrong with their demand that this security, this year-around job, this minimum annual wage, be *guaranteed*?

Yes, it is wrong—say the big corporations!

A year-around job cannot be guaranteed, they say. A minimum annual wage cannot be guaranteed, they say. We cannot even grant the modest wage increases the workers now demand, they say. Industry cannot provide the one or guarantee the other.

**J. H. Parmelee, spokesman of the Association of American Railroads, told a Senate sub-committee that the railroad companies could not afford to raise their minimum wage rate from forty cents to sixty-five cents an hour. Even at a forty-eight-hour week, sixty-five cents an hour (before deductions) would hardly be a living**

wage. The railroads, connected with the biggest industries and biggest banks of the country, say they cannot afford to pay a living wage.

Ira Mosher, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, testifying for big business, said substantially the same thing. He opposed raising the legal minimum wage rate to sixty-five cents an hour. He too declares that the corporations and monopolies cannot afford to pay a living wage.

The Texas Oil Co., in a public statement in all newspapers, objected to demands of its employees for a 30 per cent wage increase to make up for the shorter work week by arguing that "it must help avoid disastrous inflation." It says, therefore, that it can give a decent wage to its workers not at the expense of its tremendous profits, but only at the expense of the consumer at large. It, too, cannot afford a decent wage for its workers.

## ***This Is Free Enterprise***

C. E. Wilson, of the General Motors octopus, in rejecting the wage-increase demands of the United Auto Workers Union, made the same reply. It cannot afford these increases. It cannot afford a decent wage without collapsing, going bankrupt.

What are all these spokesmen of the monopolies, these self-styled "captains of industry," saying to the world? They are saying:

"We can afford to make and distribute profits. But we cannot afford to pay a decent wage to our workers.



We cannot guarantee a year-around job. We cannot guarantee a minimum annual wage."

This is the *declaration of bankruptcy* of the monopoly capitalists!

By this declaration, they are saying:

**"We, the great organizers and managers of production, are incapable of guaranteeing LIFE for the vast majority of society. We cannot guarantee that you will eat the year around, that you will be clothed and housed the year around, that you will be able to feed, clothe, house and raise your families the year around."**

In the face of this declaration, what should the workers do?

Why should the worker be interested in "free enterprise" if it does not provide him with food, clothing and shelter so that he and his family can live like human beings?

Why should be worker be interested in "free enterprise" if it means that the profits of corporations *can* be guaranteed and *are* guaranteed, but the life and happiness of the working class cannot be and are not guaranteed?

# WHAT IS LABOR'S INTEREST?

We are interested in production only to the extent that it provides all of society with the good and decent and comfortable things of life, that it provides them all the time, and provides us all with the opportunity to enjoy them.

**If the big capitalists, the monopolists and bankers, openly declare, as they do, that they cannot guarantee the tens of millions with security and a decent living, is it not high time that they were removed from control of production? Is it not high time that these self-confessed social bankrupts were dealt with as bankrupts?**

Is it not high time to take big industry out of their profit-loaded hands by nationalizing the monopolies, by nationalizing all big industry? If they cannot and will not guarantee a decent living and security for the masses of the people, let them make way for those who can and will!

Why cannot and does not the government guarantee security, a year-around job and a minimum annual wage?

**Didn't the government guarantee the profits of the corporations during the war—the biggest profits they ever drew in all their rich history? Didn't the government underwrite "cost-plus" contracts, which guaranteed the corporations a profit no matter what it cost them to produce the materials ordered by the govern-**

**ment? Didn't the government guarantee them a "post-war reserve" so that they would be assured of the greatest possible wealth no matter how things went after the end of the war? Didn't the government guarantee them handsome returns on their "excess profits" tax in case their post-war profits fell below a certain figure? Didn't the government guarantee them super-profits, in the guise of "reserves"—reserves they are now using as a strike-breaking and union-busting fund?**

## ***Nationalize Industry!***

The question every worker asks is this: If the government can guarantee the profits of the big corporations, who represent a few thousand wealthy parasites, why can't it guarantee a year-around job and a minimum annual wage to provide security for the tens of millions of workers, of producers, in this country?

If the government can come in to every family and take its sons and fathers off to get killed or wounded in a destructive war, because it says the war is necessary for the welfare and progress of the people, why can't it take equally drastic measures for the genuine welfare and the genuine progress of the people during peacetime?

If the government can build plants left and right; if it can freeze wages and jobs; if it can fix prices and rations; if it can intervene in the social and even the personal life of everyone in a thousand different ways during wartime—why can't it act with half as much firmness during peacetime to assure us all of security and a decent living standard?

The answer to these questions is a simple one. Every worker must understand it if he is to achieve his legitimate demands.

**The government we have is a good one—good for guaranteeing profits, good for those who get the profits. The government we have is a good one—good for guaranteeing the regimentation of the masses in a war of death and destruction. The government we have is a good one—good for cutting down the taxes of the monopolists and leaving the taxes on the workers and little people of the country. The government we have is a good one—good for the capitalists, but not for the workers!**

To get security, industry must be nationalized. It must be taken out of the hands of the self-avowed bankrupts, of the monopolistic capitalists whose only interest in production is the fabulous profits they get out of it.

The present government will not nationalize industry, of that we may be sure. It will do nothing to break the tremendous social power of the monopolists, because at bottom, it is *their* government.

What we need is *our* government, a Workers' Government.

The present government will make all kinds of promises about what it will do—some day. But promises will feed nobody, clothe nobody, shelter nobody. Promises mean neither wage increases nor security, and these are what the workers want and must have.

# FOR A WORKERS GOVERNMENT

A Workers' Government, composed of the workers, working in the interests of the workers, would not hesitate a moment in a situation such as exists today. It would not hesitate to nationalize industry and operate it in the interests of the working people. It would not allow the profit-interests of the monopolists to stand in the way of the life-interests of the people.

The leaders of the Auto Workers Union, for example, are right in saying that if the big automobile corporations refuse to pay a living wage to their workers, it is a confession that they cannot manage and operate the industry in the interests of society.

This is a challenge. It should not remain an empty phrase. If it is to mean something, the organized labor movement must say:

**"The monopolists stand in the way of the life-interests of the masses of the people. They are confessed bankrupts. We demand the nationalization of big industry under workers' control."**

Labor must make good its challenge with this demand. It must declare that we, the workers, are ready to control, manage and operate industry because the monopolists have failed to provide security and a decent living to the millions of working people, because they have avowed that they *cannot* provide what the people want and need and must have.

The Workers Party is wholeheartedly in support of the workers now on strike, wholeheartedly in support of their legitimate demands, wholeheartedly in support of their longing for security, for a year-around job, for a minimum annual wage.

These demands are the very demands of socialism itself, the socialism which the Workers Party champions as the basic solution of the problems and conflicts of society today.

All that socialism sets itself to do is to achieve plenty for all, peace, brotherhood, security, freedom. As socialists, we of the Workers Party march hand in hand with the workers in every step they take toward improving and strengthening their economic, social and political position. That is why we are unreservedly with the labor movement today and with the just demands that it is making.

That is why we urge upon the labor movement the adoption of a clear-cut, militant program for the realization of what is uppermost in the minds of every worker—security and a decent living, a year around job and a guaranteed minimum annual wage.

# LABOR: ADOPT OUR PROGRAM

To achieve these ends, the labor movement must demand:

**Nationalize big industry under workers' control! Out with the bankrupt monopolists!**

To achieve this end, the labor movement must take steps to:

**Establish a workers' government, a government of, for and by the workers!**

As the first step toward achieving this end, the labor movement must:

**Break with the capitalist parties, the parties of monopoly, and form a National Independent Labor Party based on the organized trade unions!**

The fight for security and abundance has only begun. Labor will have no difficulty in winning it, provided it relies on its vast superiority in numbers—we are millions, the monopolists are thousands—on its own organizations and on its militancy and righteousness. Labor can win the fight if it marches under its own banner, with its own political party and with the aim of setting up its own government.

The Workers Party, the party of socialism, which calls upon all working-class militants to join its ranks and work with it toward this end, stands pledged to unconditional support of the whole working class in the fight it is making for higher living standards, for full production, for full employment and for complete social security.

**National Committee of the Workers Party,  
Max Shachtman, National Secretary.**

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