

Replied

November 20, 1912

Dear Mr. Leiserson:

Do not for a moment think of apologizing for neglecting to answer one of my letters. I know how busy you must be and if your secretary takes care of my requests I shall quite understand.

It is most entertaining and provocative when a railroad company rules that having a baby "is natural and not sickness." I think I shall have to begin collecting on that point. If women must work must they give up having babies? It looks bad for the future population.

If you have any more information on this subject please call my attention to it.

I have a little series on hand in which I am attempting to popularize some of the advanced steps, that is advanced as I see them - in industry - a discussion of those things which I feel must be carried on to stabilize the industrial machine. As you know the so-called popular magazine does pretty much what it pleases with the copy. However, I hope it is worth doing - and suffering for. I shall feel that something has been gained simply by publishing your conclusions in that printing case and something still more if they publish your photograph.

One of these days I hope I am going to have a good talk with you.

Faithfully yours

Mr. Wm. M. Leiserson
Antioch College
Yellow Springs, Ohio

(Copy)

Employer refused

Mr. LEYSESON: * * * * * I would like to bring this very important point out in connection with this matter. The coal companies issued a statement that what the men want, a 36 hour week is very unreasonable, that it will cut down production and it will cost the people of the country a billion dollars. The employees came back with the statement, "The only reason we do it is because we don't want to lie idle three days in the week and make up 48 hours on the other three days," or, "We don't want to lie idle for five and six months in the year and then make it all up the other months." The company put up the proposition that it couldn't be done because there were no facilities for storage.

Now if you don't have this industrial democracy machinery by which they talk these things over, you do not see that back of the demand of the mine workers is the request that this unemployment be not put entirely on their backs. You can't store coal at the mine. That is the burden that the public and the employer as well as the wage earner should bear, but the employers refuse or find it impossible to store coal, and the public refuses to buy in the summer for the winter, and the employees now have to bear the burden, but because they have the democratic power to state their case they say, "If you want us to bear the burden we will work only 36 hours a week and it will cost you so much or you will order coal in the summer and you will provide storage facilities." In other words, they have a means of bringing their problem up which you haven't got if you don't have that arrangement.

(copy)

MR. DeBLOIS: ***** Let us take an imaginary industry that has not been unionized, that has no tendency toward it, in which the employers have not adopted any shop scheme of industrial democracy, Which would you consider the best way to attack the problem, by the union idea, organize your employes into a union or start in the single factories and introduce the shop principle?

MR. LEISERSON: My usual way of answering a question like that in my industrial court is to say, "A judge never answers hypothetical questions." (Laughter) But I don't want to take advantage of my privileges. But there really is something in that, that a judge never wants to answer hypothetical questions because every one of these things depends upon the circumstances in the case. When I was with the Department of Labor doing consulting work on these things, and I came into a plant and they wanted my advice about organizing shop committee plans, I said, "I don't know whether you ought to have one or not, maybe you ought to have a union, but I want to look through your plant and see what the relationship between you and your employes is." Now if the union has never attempted to organize and the employer has never fired people because they did not try to join the union -- you see all the hypotheses we have to bring in. If there is the very best relationship between the employers and the employee which is a very big hypothesis, it might do very well. One of the men connected with our Division of the Department of Labor has actually told an employer, "It would be fine if you put in a shop committee plan because we think you can do it better than the union could in this

particular plant. Your relations are fine, but you are telling these employes always, 'Stick to your job, no absenteeism.' But when the Armistice was signed and you didn't know where you were coming out you laid a bunch off and as soon as you don't have material in a certain department you lay them off. In other words you are making them irregular. Now if you will issue a statement to your employes saying 'Fellow workmen -- or whatever you want to call them -- we, the firm acknowledge that in the past we have been making mistakes; we have in the past told you not to be absent, to be regular, but when our production methods were such that we couldn't keep you regularly we laid you off and made you bear the burden. Hereafter we won't do that. If our production methods are such that we can't keep you working regularly we will pay you for the time.'" He said, "If you will do that, then you can run a company union all right and they will be satisfied." He did it and they have got that arrangement and it is working well. But an employer who is not willing to go the limit to a thing like that, I would say, the best way to introduce democracy is to have it come from the outside and force it on him because he can't learn the lesson himself and somebody has to teach it to him."