

## The Minnesota Compensation Act

### Affirmative I.

The subject of our debate this evening is "Resolved, that the Liability Law, by which employers give compensation to employees in case of accident or death, according to wage-earning power, is a just, humane and equitable law, and better than any measure involving mutual contributions from employer and employee."

In dealing with this question we shall endeavor to prove that, besides being just and equitable, the measure will be beneficial to the employer as well as the employee; that it will result in better citizenship and will improve the general welfare. In dealing with the two former arguments I shall try to show that while the law is but a tardy act of justice to the employee, it will be to the ultimate profit of the employer. The remaining points my colleague will take up. Of one thing we are assured,—if we do not present the stronger reasons for our side, the fault will be due to our treatment of the subject and not to any inherent weakness in the Minnesota Compensation Act.

The measure is just, because, as its name implies, it is a measure based on compensation, and it *is* compensation because it simply makes return to the worker for the benefits which he has conferred both on the general public and the private owner. He is a benefactor of the state, for without the energy supplied by his brawn and muscle there would be no development of our natural resources. Now, every form of industrial work is accompanied by dangers; but there are some operations in every large industry that are inherently dangerous and it is in the performance of these that most of the accidents happen. Yet somebody has to perform them for without them industrialism would be impossible. Who will say that the man, injured in doing these dangerous, yet necessary tasks, should not be compensated for his heroism? He deserves it by every title of right and justice because, in assuming the risks, he makes himself a public benefactor. At the same time he is a benefactor to his employer, for it is more directly in his interests the risks are assumed and the injuries incurred. And when we consider that, generally speaking, the more dangerous a work is the more profitable it will also be to the industrial owner, we will be forced to admit that it is the workingman who has to pay the heaviest cost wherever there is an accumulation of capital. Our government seems to have been long in realizing these facts, but it has been aroused to their truth at last, and in making the capitalist compensate financially the man who, by no fault of his own, has been

injured in the pursuit of his employer's interests, it is but carrying out a principle demanded by strict justice and the higher instincts of humanity.

In making stringent liability laws against employers, governments are justified on the ground that the industrial owner, in any business, supplies generally only the material element, namely, capital. The human element, labor, is supplied by the workingman. Being human, labor is more meritorious than capital, and, therefore, is the greater beneficiary when it comes to profits. You may say that the workingman receives an equivalent to his share of the profits in receiving his wages. Under ideal conditions and where no accident has to be reckoned, this is true; but everyone knows that in the actual order of things, the workingman's profit is proportioned to the stress of competition rather than to the laws of justice; and if he meets with accident and is dismissed from the service, as he certainly will be when no longer able to do his work properly, who will say that the little compensation demanded by the law is, in any sense, an equivalent to what he has contributed and given up in the service of his employer. The small sum demanded by the law bears no proportion to the gains of the employer and, if charity came into play, as it ought to among men so associated as master and servant, the injured man would receive a great deal more than the amount allowed to him by law.

The Minnesota Compensation Act is, then, nothing more than just and humane, as considered from the standpoint of the employer, and I am assured that it will prove not a disadvantage, but a great benefit to his business interests. The financial loss which he will suffer in compensating his men will be only an immediate one as the following reasons will show:—

1st. Under the conditions provided by the Bill there will be far less industrial disability than exists at present, and the employer will be the gainer by this; for where the labor market is stocked with men capable of yielding the average volume of work, an employer has a far more profitable field to invest in than he can hope for when laborers are scarce owing to the great amount of industrial sickness.

2nd. The quantity and efficiency of the labor in any given establishment will be raised to a higher level without increasing the number of employees; for, as every employer knows, a man in sound, normal health can do better work and more work than one who is suffering from a standing ailment, such as a lame back or a bruised thumb.

3rd. When the cost is ultimately counted, the money that pays for the injuries will indirectly come back to the employers, for the injured man and his family will thereby have something to