

## A Good Chance to Start Right

IN Southern California, on the edge of the irrigated district of the Imperial Valley, there is a tract of some 200,000 acres of land, at present arid beyond imagination, but potentially as promising as the rich oasis below, if water can be brought upon it. And water can be brought, from the Colorado River, in adequate quantity and at a cost that is not prohibitive. There is at present a bill before Congress providing for this. Why should it not be pushed through to enactment? Does anyone prefer that 200,000 acres of our national domain should lie desert, nourishing only an occasional horned lizard, when they might offer the basis for a thousand prosperous homes?

Of course not; but it behooves us to be on our guard lest a gulf appear between the public enterprise of reclaiming the desert and the public enterprise of planting it with prosperous homes. Such a gulf does in fact appear in the pending bill, which proposes, as if the country had learned nothing from past failures, to sell out the land to be irrigated in lots of 160 acres, in its present state of hideous desolation, and to use the proceeds to help finance the ditches. The help will not be great. Arid land, even when water is promised in the indefinite future, is a discouraging investment. A private owner will sometimes sell arid land nevertheless, because he has not the resources to bring water upon it, or wait until water is brought. But the United States is not in the position of a land poor private person. It is under no necessity of making what must in any event turn out to be a bad bargain.

The financial absurdity of the proposed plan might be condoned on the ground that we have always handled our public domain in an absurd way, from the point of view of finance. There is another objection that is more serious. The kind of man who has the ready cash to sink in arid land is not, as a rule, the kind of man who will need to live on that land, or will care to do so. When his land has become multiplied in value by the government's enterprise in bringing water, he will sell it to the actual settler, or let it to tenants. Thus when all the world is trying to get rid of the calamitous system of tenantry and the only less serious evil of farm ownership saddled with excessive initial costs, it is actually proposed in Congress to create those conditions, gratuitously.

It is a gratuitous proceeding, because a much better way is known to everyone. The land to be irrigated lies in the state of California, which has demonstrated in a striking fashion how such a problem should be solved. By the California plan, as worked out in the colony at Durham, it has been

proved feasible to plan a thriving and happy rural community, without ultimate expense to the state and with every prospect of immediate and continuous prosperity to the members of the community. And that in spite of the fact that the land upon which the settlement was established had to be acquired at a high price. Now, are we to proceed with another example of our old sloppy bungling method of handling or rather mishandling the problem of public land disposal, in the face of a state that knows a better way? That is almost unthinkable.

Let us by all means redeem those two hundred thousand acres. But let us apply the machinery for planting them with settlers that the state of California is already operating successfully. And when we have so excellent an opportunity, why should we not experiment with soldier settlements under the plan? There were tens of thousands of soldiers who indicated their desire to become settlers under the plans proposed by Secretary Lane. Are our obligations to the soldiers already extinguished or outlawed? If not, we might at least make this small start toward fulfilling them.

## On the Doorstep

AN International Congress of Working Women is to be held in Washington, D. C., this October, a week before the International Labor Congress. It has a simple history. In the spring of 1919 the Women's Trade Union League sent a special commission to the Peace Conference at Paris. It consisted of Mary Anderson and Rose Schneiderman. They were to interview the Labor Commission, but they arrived too late. The Commission had adjourned. They got a copy of its report. Except for an amendment, painfully secured by the English trade union women, there was nothing in the report to indicate that women were to be consulted in the coming Labor Congress, although the agenda of the Congress provided for much discussion of women's work. And this amendment merely provided that when matters especially affecting women were to be dealt with by the Congress, one of the two advisers optional to each delegate should be a woman.

The point, as these Americans saw it, was that women would not be in any positions of authority at the coming Labor Congress, and that men, only one-fourth workers, would be formulating international standards for women's work. They therefore recommended to the June Convention of the Women's Trade Union League that "special impetus" might be given to this formulation if the

working women of the world themselves could be ready with definite and practical proposals. To get this impetus they suggested the calling of an International Working Women's Congress. The English trade union women heartily agreed to this plan and the American organization sent out the call.

This call has gone to thirty-four countries. Each has been asked to send ten women delegates. Each country will have ten votes. More significant than anything else—the delegates must bring credentials signed by accredited trade union organizations. If passport barriers are not raised, this Congress is to be the first great gathering of organized labor. Of course it will be only women labor, but as most of the delegates will come representing large bodies of voters it is fairly certain that their recommendations will be listened to in a receptive spirit.

The nature of the recommendations are not to be decided in the brief space of conference. There is nothing vague or Victorian about the questionnaire which has been sent to each organization to guide it in the preparation of material. Roughly summarized the main points are: What, in the particular country concerned, are the present laws and practices governing the employment of women before and after childbirth? The employment of women during the night? The employment of women in unhealthy processes? What legislative proposals are now under consideration? What information is available concerning the employment of children? Should fourteen years be the age limit? Night work? Unhealthy processes? And how has the country worked out two reforms affecting both men and women—the forty-eight hour week and the means of providing against unemployment?

A direct question covers every controversial point; and at the end the general question is raised as to whether it is possible to take effective international action on any of the program. Here, of course, enters the skeptic in the shape of a direct actionist. Might not these trade union women much better stay at home and mind their own political and industrial babies, they say, than run off to a congress which can only indirectly influence another congress which itself has no immediate power.

The first International Congress of Working Women needs no such justification by immediate results. Even if it has no finger at all in the formulation of international standards, or if the standards themselves are straws in the wind, this council will have the exceedingly practical effect of stimulating women trade unionists in all countries, even in those which can send no delegates. The stimu-

lus is needed because women are still having to work together for their own protection and for the privilege of being allowed to work together with men. They must still organize for the day when they will not have to sit on the doorstep of the world's conferences.

## Production and Cost of Living

WHEN the production of wealth declines, there will of course be less to divide. Somebody or everybody will find it harder to make ends meet. That is elementary. Now, the fact is that the production of material wealth is at present declining. It has been on the down grade, in this country, ever since the President, last fall, threw down the reins of economic control and invited private enterprise to find its own way home to the normal status. Perhaps this declining production is the cause of the high cost of living that is afflicting the country? That is a favorite thought of the financial writers, and apparently of the President himself. Suppose that everybody were to stop fretting and striking and go to work; would not this in itself cause the cost of living to come down at once?

Let us examine the matter point by point, a procedure made simple by the publication of that extraordinarily illuminating little document, *An Analysis of the High Cost of Living Problem*, submitted to the Secretary of War by the Council of National Defense. Where are our shortages? Not in wheat nor in meat. Here we have exceeded our former maximum of production. The report does not survey the milk supply, but it is safe to assume that production has not fallen away. Our coal production has fallen by about a quarter in comparison with last year. Heightened production in that direction would doubtless bring some immediate relief. The production of woollens for civilian use was at a very low ebb in the early part of the year, for the simple reason that the War Department had cornered most of the material. There is still a shortage of wool stocks and no increased zeal on the part of the shearers will mend this condition. Similarly the boot and shoe industry has fallen behind, for want of material. Matters are improving but the world shortage of leather is not soon to be overcome. The cotton industry faces a short crop, with intensified demand from abroad. Our mills, however, have not done so well as they might have done with available resources of labor and materials. It is to be suspected that it is price uncertainties which have deterred them from undertaking a more active policy.