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THE  
VOICE OF LABOR  
IN HAWAII.



ISSUED BY  
THE FEDERATION OF  
JAPANESE LABOR IN HAWAII.  
HONOLULU, T. H.,  
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## THE VOICE OF LABOR IN HAWAII.

We are asking that the basic wages of common laborers be increased from 77 cents to \$1.25 a day, and that the wages of skilled laborers be increased in some reasonable proportion and we respectfully submit the following points in support of our claims.

We are in favor of a bonus system if reasonably devised and administered, but are desirous of having the number of working days at present required for participation in the bonus reduced, by the number of five days, that is, a reduction from 20 days to 15 days in the case of man laborers and from 15 days to 10 days in the case of woman laborers.

The bonus system has been regarded by the planters from its inauguration as a thing of great perfection, but the facts are to the contrary, since the bonus system imposes fetters around the legs of laborers. Evidences to bear out these assertions are not lacking, for there have been local instances where laborers having incurable diseases have worked in spite of their sickness merely in an effort not to miss their bonus, the result being that they worked themselves to death.

The bonus regulations provide that excuses from work on account of sickness are not approved unless issued by special plantation physicians. Granting that the plantations have fine hospitals under the charge of highly efficient specialists, can they always be depended upon to protect the health and lives of laborers, especially when the laborers understand little or no English and are unable to tell the doctors exactly what their troubles are, and more especially when such laborers need surgical operations or internal treatments?

We wonder how many laborers are really able to get excuses from the managers of the plantations under the number system as provided for by the bonus regulations,—whereby the system used in prisons,—that of numbering each inmate, and then forgetting his name, is adopted as part of the bonus system. Reporting to lunas or head lunas seems to be considered satisfactory form, but the probability in this case is that lunas are likely to refuse to accept applica-

tions for excuse on the assumption that they could better serve their manager by doing so.

Again, there are cases where laborers must go a long way to see the manager. Can laborers afford to do this when they have sick wives or children to look after at home? And besides, the common practice is that laborers are not granted excuses unless they themselves are sick.

Taking the foregoing into consideration, the conclusion seems to be that the twenty-day provision of the bonus regulations entails unreasonable hardship upon laborers, not to mention that it ignores the laborers' wives and children, no matter how serious the conditions they might be in. We do not know what the planters think about this; but we are simply presenting the facts.

Furthermore, the bonus regulations do not provide for laborers who stay away from work for necessary and unavoidable reasons other than those resulting from sickness. They do not permit laborers to share the joys and sorrows of their friends, nor do they allow the laborers to participate in the pains and pleasures of their relatives. The men who formulated the bonus system may have had the best of intentions, but the fact is inescapable that the fruit of their labor is faulty for reasons mentioned above.

The annual bonus system must be admitted to be a very harsh measure. This is exemplified, and it was exemplified very recently, in the fact that a laborer working on a certain plantation, of which C. Brewer & Company is agent, was unable to get his bonus last November because he had to lay off for some necessary reasons a month before the bonus year terminated. And when we consider that he had worked hard and without rest during the eleven months preceding, the harshness of the present annual bonus system becomes easily apparent.

The fact is that the twenty-day provision in the bonus regulations exclude about 60 percent of all plantation laborers from participation in the bonus, and that only about forty percent of the laborers actually participate in the ANNUAL, (as distinguished from the monthly) bonus.

In view of these cold facts, we are compelled to regard the present bonus system as a matter of benevolence and not as a source of steady income that will insure our security as the planters seem to think it is.

The planters say that they can not afford to put a premium on idleness, etc., when we insist upon reduction of the number of

working days at present required for participation in the bonus.

If we are to attempt convincing the planters regarding our real motive in asking revision of the twenty-day bonus provision by presentation of arguments, explaining that we are not impelled by love of idleness, in addition to arguments bearing on sickness and other reasons too numerous to mention, we are bound to confuse the minds of the planters. Consequently we simply ask reduction of the number of days laborers must work in order to be entitled to bonus. Meanwhile no fair-minded person will suspect us of baseless objections to the established system, or of requesting its amendment except as a reasonable provision against human ailments.

The planters assert, with exasperating assurance, that plantation laborers are getting considerably more than \$30 a month. To this we beg to reply that the planters include the bonus in their calculation and that they seem to forget that the bonus is not a matter of certainty. If the planters insist upon including the bonus as a part of the fixed income of laborers, would it not be the proper thing for them to eliminate the restriction relative to the number of days laborers must work in order to get their bonus? If the laborer really earns his basic wage, plus his bonus, why not pay him the whole as money earned—and not as a prize, present, or bonus?

The planters are vindicating themselves under all sorts of pleas dressed up in beautiful phraseology. But facts, and not pleas, no matter how mellifluous, have the final say, and we have no doubt that our facts will be upheld when put squarely before the fair and impartial people who constitute the third party, namely the public.

The rest of our demands bearing on protection of woman labor as well as on work on Sundays and legal holidays and other demands are all in accord with the foregoing.

The planters say that plantation laborers are far better off than laborers in Honolulu because they are given free houses, free fuel and free medical attendance in addition to wages and bonus.

We admit that laborers are furnished free houses. But what kind of houses are they? Many of them are such that they do not permit of sitting space when two beds are put in. How about the kitchen? There are stoves made of empty kerosene tins in them. And how about the toilet? They are hardly endurable. Is it reasonable for the planters to expect the laborers to be grateful for being permitted to live free in such houses?

Credit, however, must be given to the improvement of housing conditions on the plantations that has lately been inaugurated, and

there are one or two cases where these improvements have nearly approached perfection. But the greater bulk of the plantation camps are still as they were in the past, a typical example of which may be mentioned, viz, the plantation quarters on Paauilo and Pepeekeo plantations on Hawaii.

On some of the plantations, we are aware of, laborers' quarters seem more poorly constructed and less sanitary than stables housing the mules and horses used in the cane fields. This is not a pleasant thing to talk about, but it goes a long way toward strengthening our argument that we are afraid that the planters are saying too much when they prate of free houses furnished their laborers.

The planters further say that they are giving free fuel to laborers, but facts do not agree with what they say. A good example of this inconsistency is furnished by the Hawaiian Agricultural Company, of which C. Brewer & Company is agent, which has been charging \$4 a cord for all fire wood delivered to laborers until January 20, 1920, when it finally decided to discontinue charging money for such fuel as a result of negotiations with laborers. And we do not think it takes any great amount of effort to find plantations still selling fire wood to laborers.

Again, the planters say that they furnish free water to laborers. And thoughtless people some times talk of threats of cutting off the water supply. But it seems to us the planters are overlooking the fact that all plantation laborers pay their taxes, a portion of which is expended by the government toward the preservation of the water supply. Does it not appear evident from this that the planters are talking on the assumption that they own the sources of water supply which the government maintains when they talk too much of free water?

Our demands, we have no hesitation to say, made upon the Planters' Association on December 4, last, were mild and legitimate. But the attitude of the Planters shown toward them was none too pleasant except in the phraseology of its reply.

Rejection of our demands by the Planters' Association did not discourage us, however. We twice asked of the the Association a reconsideration of our demands. And we probably would never have done this had we not cherished the utmost regard for the peace of society and had we not been permeated with the spirit of cooperation between capital and labor for the development of Hawaii's sugar industry. But the planters not only arrogantly disregarded our repeated petitions for reconsideration of our demands but laughed

at us on the ground that our demands were the voice of agitators and not that of laborers.

Not yet discouraged by the uncompromising attitude of the planters, we made further efforts toward presenting our case to them for consideration by asking our representation at the meeting of the trustees of the Planters' Association. This, too, was denied.

Ever since January 20 labor conditions on this island have been in a state of unrest. And during the first week of this labor unrest when tension was high and the situation difficult at its best, the 3000 laborers of this island quietly stopped working and waited for some encouraging news from the Planters. And after one week of patient waiting, when it became definitely known that the planters utterly ignored our demands, we went on strike as a final resort.

We are not in this strike because we like it but rather because we have exhausted every peaceful effort in settling our differences with the planters through the latters' unyielding attitude.

Meanwhile, we are sure, and it is already common knowledge, that the planters are facing an opportunity of making enormous profits in view of the aviation of the price of sugar, the reduction of war taxes, scarcity of bottoms and the reduction of price of fertilizers.

Let us frankly ask who is right in this controversy.

Is it the planters, who in utter disregard of the interests of labor, are reaping tremendous profits due to the hard and persistent toil of laborers who have given their best during the past decades toward the upbuilding of Hawaii's sugar industry but who today are groaning under the pressure of the high cost of living?

Or, is it the laborers, who have appealed to a strike as a final resort after every peaceful effort has utterly failed to appeal to the moral scruples of the planters?

We are putting this before you in order to make known our prime motive in conducting this movement and in order to ask your fair and impartial judgment.

#### THE FEDERATION OF JAPANESE LABOR IN HAWAII.

### OBJECTS OF THE FEDERATION

The following are the conditions, aims, and objects of the Federation of Japanese Labor:

1. The Federation is composed of delegates freely and demo-

cratically chosen by the individual Island unions of Japanese labor, for the purpose of constituting this Federation, and of handling and managing the general interests of Japanese labor in Hawaii. The suggestion, often put forth in the local press, that the common laborers on the plantations are ignorant of the acts and purposes of the Federation, is quite without foundation.

2. The suggestion, and intimation frequently repeated in the English-language press, to the effect that the present movement for a wage increase is in reality a Japanese nationalistic movement, based upon political considerations, including the pique and resentment of the Japanese colony because of the anti-Japanese School Movement, is entirely unsounded and unfounded. The present movement in favor of higher wages for labor, is an economic movement, pure and simple. It is entirely dissociated from any considerations of local or foreign politics, as well as from questions of the advantage or disadvantage to other groups of nationals resident in Hawaii, as such. The racial composition of our associates in this enterprise is a matter of entire indifference to us, but we propose to treat them all with the same degree of consideration and fairness that we would expect from them under similar conditions. The suggestion, frequently put forward in print, that "the Filipinos are simply being used as a cat's paw by the Japanese",—has no more foundation in reality than any other untruth.

3. The Federation has no official connection (not even a backstairs connection) with the Japanese Government or any of its officials, whether resident in Japan or in Hawaii. Neither has it any such connection with any newspaper, whether printed in the Japanese, or in any other language. Nothing could be more natural than that some, at least, of the Japanese—language papers in Hawaii should support a movement in which so many of the Japanese race are deeply concerned. We are grateful for any and all such support, but it has not controlled and will not control the attitude of the Federation as a whole.

4. Answering the charge that the Federation or its agents are endeavoring to enlist in its support certain other organizations of Japanese within the Territory, we desire to deny said charge, and to assert that while the Federation and its members will receive with gratitude every act of assistance, whether material or otherwise, from those outside of its ranks, yet it has solicited the aid or assistance, of no other organization whatever, and we have no purpose to do so.