

8. Spokane Labor Union Derides Anti-Japanese Prejudice, 1909

The Spokane division of the porters' union (A.F. of L.) held a meeting April 13 to talk over the invasion of the Japanese. According to the "Labor World," "vigorous efforts will be made to eradicate the brown men from industrial competition"—which efforts will have "the support of organized labor in general." The Industrial Workers of the World have the largest labor organization in Spokane or in any part of the country around. It must be understood that the I.W.W. will turn down any effort at discrimination against our Japanese fellow workers. Are we not correct when we say that the trades unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry; thereby helping to defeat one another? This is the same old game of "divide and conquer" on the part of employers and those labor unions which are influenced by prejudice on account of race, nation or language. If the workers controlled the U.S. government, or had at present anything to say as to whether the Japanese were "desirable citizens," it might be interesting for workingmen to take up the study of comparative ethnology; but the Japanese are here in the United States by the will of the industrial masters; being here, the matter should be dealt with as is best for the working class. Now it is not supposed that the members of the porters' union, for instance, would exterminate the Japanese by murder outright, but would be more humane(?) by letting the Japanese starve to death—providing the Japanese could be so far educated into the A.F. of L. principles as to be willing tamely to starve to death. The Japanese are here, they will not starve to death, and they will work as long as the boss will hire them. This being the case, what does the A.F. of L. man expect to gain by antagonizing these men, the Japanese, who are, it will be admitted, not lacking in brains? From all appearances, the porters' union is not so strong as to refuse help—even from a Japanese! Will any man explain just why, as long as the Japanese are here, it would not be better to unite with them to fight the common enemy, the master, than to waste time, energy and strength in fighting another group of workers simply on account of their color—to the huge delight of the employer? If the porters' union were but half as class conscious as the average Japanese worker, there would be better wages and better conditions for the porter than the wretched ones they are now forced to submit to. The Labor Commissioner of California says that in his long

From "Silly Race Prejudice," editorial, *Industrial Worker*, April 22, 1909; reprinted in *Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present: A Documentary History*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Daniel Rosenberg (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 193–194.

experience, the Japanese is the "most merciless" with his employer of any of the help in the California ranches, and bewails the mistake the employers of California made in getting Japanese who will exact everything possible, if they have but half a chance. Can as much be said of the porters' union—that they are "merciless" with the Spokane employers? Hardly! American or Japanese, Italian or Austrian, Swede or Irishman, German or Frenchman; do the employers quarrel among themselves on account of nationality? Not much! They are too wise.

Let the porter count his miserable pay on Saturday night; look at the wretched working conditions he puts up with, and then consider his comfortable, well-fed employer, and then turning to his Japanese fellow-worker, ask himself if it would not be wiser for him to unite with the Japanese to wring more wages and shorter hours from their common robber—the employer!