

The State Journal

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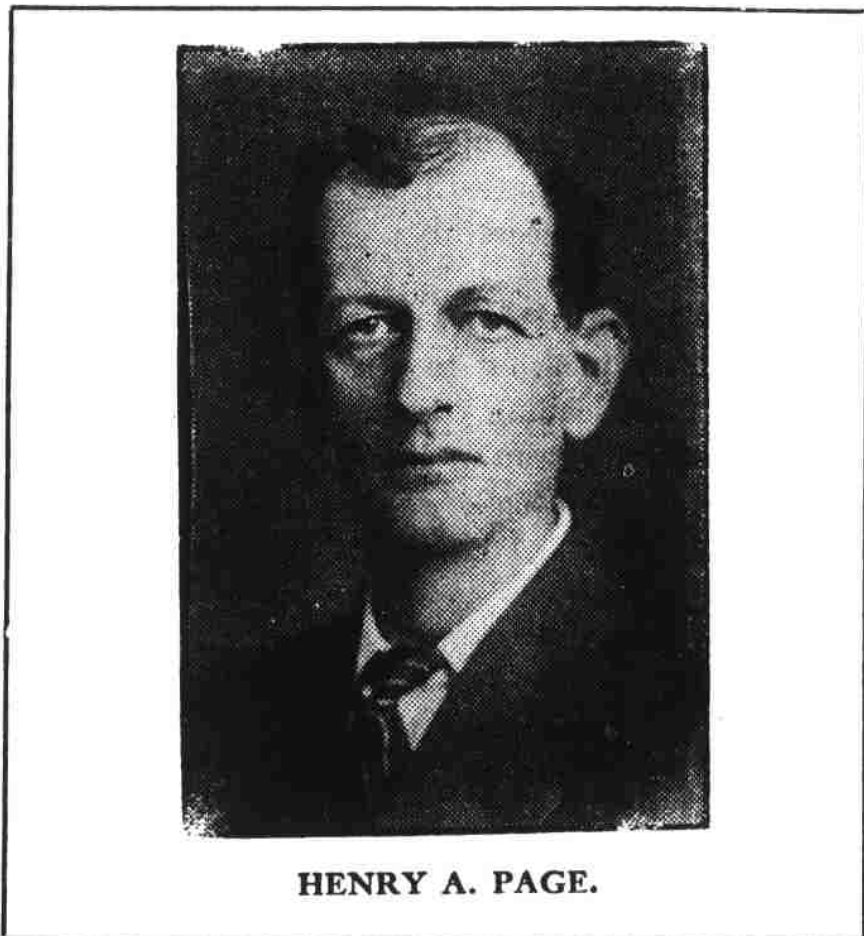
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MR. PAGE'S PLEA FOR CIVIC JUSTICE

I cannot think of this bill to regulate child labor as standing alone, but rather as a single article or section in a larger and more comprehensive measure, which might be called "an act to promote civic righteousness and knowledge; to encourage human development, and



to protect the poor and lowly, not only from the avarice and greed of the strong and ambitious, but also from their own sore need." Other sections of this great bill of rights, which this General Assembly is considering article by article, as they group themselves in my mind, are the school bill, and the compulsory attendance bill.

All of these, sir, are aimed at the accomplishment of a common object; the uplift of humanity from the bottom; the raising of the standards of human life; to aid in the banishment of ignorance and vice and disease and oppression and wrong and sorrow and suffering, and, in the last analysis, dire want and poverty from the borders of our commonwealth.

They all contravene and invade the great doctrine of "personal liberty" which has raised its hypocritical head and hand in the pathway of every forward movement that has ever been projected for the betterment of society and for the increase of the sum of human happiness.

They are akin further, sir, in that each and all of them meet the opposition, to some measure at least, of those who will be most helped by their enactment into law. Since the days of Galilee, ignorance and its offspring, vice, has

ever cried, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee?"

It is the high duty of organized society, otherwise, and in our case, the State, to legislate in the interest of the betterment of conditions of labor; the promotion of education, and the repression of vice; and to so frame the laws which govern the acts and conduct of men as to lead and to urge and to impel, always towards better conditions, and not to be content to follow the slow progress of crystallization of public opinion. To demand civic righteousness, instead of merely conceding it, is my idea of the proper function of government. If there are gentlemen in this chamber who conceive that they have measured up to the standard of the responsibility of the positions they occupy, when they shall have faithfully executed, merely the well known and overwhelming wishes of the people of their own counties, then I must confess that they fall far short of my conception of the responsibility resting upon every member of this General Assembly.

To be sure we must take into consideration the limitations of every situation with which we deal. But I argue for positive leadership instead of mere passive compliance; for the creative legislation which opens the pathway of the people to wider knowledge than the mere ability to haltingly read the printed language, and to a broader liberty than the liberty to do as they please.

It is true that the road to knowledge and to the liberty of usefulness and common helpfulness to which I refer, is filled with obstacles and obstructions, and we may take but one step forward at a time. But it is the law of nature that we may approach tomorrow's task only from the standpoint of today's duty well performed. The road to knowledge and to liberty broadens only as we move forward. Stand still, and the horizon never widens. But advance, climb the hill in front of us, and the sky line recedes as we go forward.

Enact these bills into law, this bill, take this next step immediately before us, in the upward development of a great State!

The evil results prophesied by the opponents of this measure will not follow; but, on the contrary, business and society will quickly adjust themselves to changes which make for morality and health and education and the lightning of the burdens of labor. The average of intelligence and virtue will be raised, and a sorely needed safeguard be thrown around our children and the mothers of our children.—Henry A. Page, Representative from Moore, in the House, February 20th.