

Why There Was No Strike

NO one can fail to rejoice that the railroad strike order was rescinded. It had been daily becoming clearer that a strike would be a disaster, certainly to the public and probably to the men. As was to be expected the settlement is in the nature of a compromise. The 12 per cent cut of last July stands and the roads definitely refuse to withdraw their demand for further wage reductions. On the other hand the men obtained from the railway executives a definite pledge that no carrier would seek changes in wages or working agreements except through the legal agency of the Labor Board, and from the Board itself assurance of an orderly treatment of demands which would give the unions ample time to present their case. And this is a substantial gain on which the Brotherhoods are to be congratulated. By their vigorous action they have checked the tendency toward peonage which Mr. Stone rightly told the Board was a worse calamity than would be a strike; they have nevertheless avoided a bitter struggle which in the present stage of public opinion would have hurt not only the railway unions but all labor organizations.

Undoubtedly it was public opinion which forced the men to accept this compromise. President Sheppard of the conductors phrased the matter unfortunately when he said, "We found that we . . . would be fighting the Government." That seems like an admission that the Department of Justice had been successful in threatening arrest for exercise of the right to strike which Congress had expressly and wisely refused to deny them. In our judgment the leaders were not much frightened by Attorney General Daugherty's threats of force against them. On the contrary, we have seen the backbone of important labor men visibly stiffen at the thought of those threats. But the pervasive and inescapable disapproval of the community is another matter. It was this as symbolized in "the Government" which Mr. Sheppard found he could not fight. There can be no doubt that the public's indifference to fundamental causes, the propaganda of the roads, and the tactical weaknesses in the unions' position, combined to create a situation in which striking railwaymen would have been defeated. Their indifference to other labor organizations had in no small degree lost them even labor sympathy. Oceans of ink have been spilled by earnest writers in bewailing the helplessness of "society" against a powerfully organized group of workers. The history of recent labor disputes here and abroad shows how greatly such fears have been exaggerated. If any labor group could hold up "society," it would be the engineers; yet they have not so used their power; and that is because, having isolated themselves from other workers, they were profoundly affected by the ill-will of their neighbors and the denunciations of the press.

No single group of workers can suddenly thrust itself into minority control of the masses. There is but one group in the country which is in a position to do that—the small group of financiers which, as Mr. Frank P. Walsh demonstrated in the last issue of *The Nation*, dominates railroads, steel mills, and coal mines. That oligarchy prevails not merely or chiefly by force but by control over the minds of men. It succeeds in persuading the public—even the mass of the workers—to acquiesce in, if it does not actively support, its own exploitation. Such control no specialized group of workers can suddenly attain. Labor can oppose

the power of financial interests only by the creation of a strong, intelligent, and articulate consciousness of solidarity and by the development of its own press to express and interpret that consciousness. Here the railway Brotherhoods have notably failed. Other unions might help one another in a strike, but, as a textile union secretary recently said, "We'd as soon think of going to Wall Street as to the Brotherhoods for any kind of aid to win even a little increase in wages such as the Brotherhoods would never dream of accepting." Yet not all the blame for this isolation lies on the Brotherhoods. It rests in the whole theory and practice of craft organization, each craft fighting for its own hand. There is truth in the Brotherhood contention that if in this controversy they had been tied up to a number of unions with varying degrees of strength and varying rules of procedure they might have found themselves in an untenable position. They could not be expected in a critical moment to risk their existence on what might be only a magnificent gesture of solidarity, but they and other labor organizations can be expected to reconsider a philosophy which divides their forces and makes it easy to defeat them in detail. The growing cohesion and centralization of powers of our financial oligarchy demands a corresponding cohesion in labor. A new solidarity of labor lies at the basis not merely of effective opposition to "Wall Street control," but of an effective reorganization of railroading. We have repeatedly urged the principles underlying the Plumb Plan as essential to a satisfactory cure of our transportation ills. We have urged that the control of an essential public utility by a group animated only by a desire for profit, and checked only by the demand of labor for wages and of shippers for lower rates, creates a situation which is the negation of efficient railroading and of industrial peace. But every constructive proposal is dependent upon the awakening of a new spirit in railway labor. There are not wanting signs of that awakening. May they increase and multiply during whatever respite this latest compromise may give us!

The Sanctity of the Ballot

SPEAKING at Birmingham, President Harding avowed the faith of thousands of Americans in these words: "There will never come a day when the rights of a minority are denied, however formidable or weak it may be, but no minority shall ever challenge the supremacy of the rule of law." To President Harding and those who agree with him certain very recent political history must come with somewhat of a shock.

In November, 1919, the citizens of Greater New York elected five Socialist assemblymen and six Socialist aldermen. The presence of these radicals was equally resented at the State Capitol and at the City Hall. The legislature, under up-State Republican leadership, expelled the Socialists. New York City is a bit too sophisticated for such measures, and—what is more important—the radical vote in the city, as contrasted with the State, was strong enough to command a certain measure of respect from politicians. Besides, New York district bosses long ago learned simpler methods of disposing of Socialist candidates than ousting them. A bi-partisan understanding between Republican and Democratic election officials in New York City makes it comparatively simple to intimidate or confuse Socialist

voters and to throw out Socialist votes. In spite of these tactics, four Socialist aldermen were elected by majorities which could not be denied and were duly seated. In two districts, the Eighth and the Twentieth, the returns showed a narrow defeat for Algernon Lee, former Socialist leader in the Board of Aldermen, and for Edward F. Cassidy. Unfortunately for the plans of the local bosses, rowdiness and fraud had been employed against the Socialists in these districts so crudely that, on evidence presented by Socialist watchers and others, the Supreme Court ordered the Board of Elections to recount the ballots. The recount showed a majority for both Lee and Cassidy. Now under the City Charter the Board of Aldermen is the sole judge of the qualifications of its members, though its action is subject to court review. This Board, controlled by Tammany Hall, resorted to masterly inactivity. Not until July, 1921, and then only under threat of court action, did the Committee on Privileges and Elections begin the official recount of the ballots. The process dragged interminably. Finally, Socialist counsel went into the Supreme Court and secured from Judge Wasservogel an order directing the committee to report. It did not do so within the time limit set, and contempt proceedings are now under way against the majority of the Committee on Privileges and Elections. It is reported that the Mayor has called a special meeting of the Board for November 3. It is obvious that if on that date, under fear of judicial action, the Board finally seats Lee and Cassidy, these gentlemen will, nevertheless, have been deprived of their seats for two years during which time their districts have not only not been represented by the men of their choice but have been misrepresented by men whom they had defeated. Even the belated victory of the Socialists will have cost large sums for court proceedings which they can ill afford to pay. For this state of affairs responsibility belongs not only upon the shoulders of the Democrats in the Board of Aldermen but upon Mayor Hylan. This gentleman rejoices in the sobriquet of Honest John. He is running for reelection on the platform, "I may be stupid but how I love the people." Yet he has acquiesced in the deliberate frustration of the popular will in two of the most populous districts in his city; and the Republicans who for political reasons have voted against the Tammany tactics in the Board are members of the party which acted with equal ruthlessness against the Socialist assemblymen at Albany.

The moral? Simply this. It is quite futile for President Harding and other statesmen and politicians to talk about democracy, the rights of minorities, and the will of the people, so long as men who, surmounting all the handicaps which confront radical candidates, nevertheless win elections, may then be deprived of their seats merely because their opinions or personalities are obnoxious to the majority. If there is a growing cynicism in the United States as to the efficacy of political action the reason is not to be found in "un-American agitation" but in this American practice of making elections meaningless when it suits the whim of the dominant political parties. Those who ought to pay most heed to the story of Lee and Cassidy are not radicals or revolutionaries but those honest conservatives and liberals who still believe that in American law and practice we have adequate guaranties that the will of the people can be ascertained at the ballot box and made effective without interference from political parties, domineering bosses or special interests of any kind whatsoever.

Blue Blood or Bluenose

PRAISE be to Allah, we have lost a yacnting cup at last! For seventy years the trophy won by the schooner America has been knocking around our shores until it has become rusty and covered with germs. Nobody would dare drink anything out of it now other than carbolic acid or what the lumberjacks of upper New York State call "dynamite water." We have offered the America's Cup continuously to all comers, have advertised it around the world, yet it is still on our hands. We have bought enough tea of Sir Thomas Lipton to enable him to build a thousand challengers, and in fact he has sent over a procession of Shamrocks until we have lost track of the serial number of the last one. All to no purpose!

And it looked as if the new cup, for the championship of the North Atlantic fishing fleet, was going to prove just such another puss-in-the-corner as the goblet won by the schooner America. We started off badly when the Esperanto of Gloucester easily outsailed the Delawana of Nova Scotia last year. But this year the Gloucester sailing sharps were not content to put up a real fishing craft to defend their championship against the challenging schooner Bluenose. Instead they decided to beat the Bluenose with a blue-blooded racing toy called the Mayflower. The Mayflower would have been all right for a regatta in Massachusetts Bay, but she wasn't built for a January storm on Georges Banks or salt fishing off the Virgin Shoals. She would have turned up her nose in disdain at a cargo of mackerel, and if one had plumped a 500-pound halibut on her deck she would have run for the nearest port in a blue funk. They say in Gloucester:

Them blue-nosed Nova Scotians,
They have sech foolish notions.

But there was nothing foolish in the judgment of the cup committee that the terms of the race called for a bona-fide fishing vessel, and hence the Mayflower could not compete. Blue blood has done somewhat to make New England famous, but not in the fishing fleet, and perhaps the committee ought to have been stiffer than it was last year. Real fishing boats do not go down in their infancy the way the Esperanto did off Sable Island last Spring. The true Gloucester craft is built to last ten years in fresh fishing on Georges Banks, twenty years in salt fishing on the Grand Banks, ten years carrying lumber and coal, and ten years as a stone barge. Then, at the respectable age of fifty, it may sink if it feels like it, upon giving thirty days' notice. James B. Connolly tells of a schooner anchored on the fishing banks which turned clean over in a storm one night, coming up on the other side smiling and unchanged except for a turn of the anchor cable around the bow. For this kind of a career blue blood is worth less than heart of oak.

So the Mayflower was disqualified and the little Elsie had to be slicked up at the last moment as a defender. She was beaten by the Bluenose, and thus in its second year the fishermen's cup becomes a real international prize and not a hopeless stay-at-home like the beaker won by the schooner America. The only hope for the latter trophy is that it will be condemned as an unsanitary and illegal public drinking cup by the New York Board of Health. Then we can substitute individual paper yacnting cups at a penny apiece—and possibly stimulate more formidable competition.