

The Winnipeg Strike

In Many Aspects Most Serious Labor Situation in the History of Canada—General Calling Out of All Unionists Under Way.

By INTERNATIONAL TRADES UNIONIST.

"The right to strike," is evidently at the root of the industrial dispute in Winnipeg. The trouble started by a demand presented to the City Council by the electrical and water-works employees, who followed it up by striking, after refusing an offer of arbitration. A special committee of the City Council investigated the matter, and made a report satisfactory to the men. The Council, however, rejected this report, substituting one which called for a settlement by a Board of Conciliation and Investigation, and requesting the employees to forego the right to strike. In the meantime the employees had formed a federation agreeing that no individual union would settle without the other. The firemen announced their intention of striking if the report of the committee to the City Council was not accepted.

According to reports one organization after another has voted to cease work at the call of the Trades and Labor Council, or "Central Body" in Winnipeg. It is possible that this is the first situation of its kind which has occurred in Canada. The employees of the telephone company, the employees of the C. P. R., G. T. R., the Transcona Shops, and the C. N. R. have walked out, and the street railway men have decided to cease work, which is to take effect to-day. The Typographical Union it is reported has placed the power in the hands of the Central Body to call out its members. The Typographical Unions in Canada are among the most moderate and level-headed in the trade union movement.

A Refusal in Toronto.

It is rather remarkable that recently civic employees in Toronto were refused a Board of Conciliation and investigation under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, unless the City Council consented to it, as the Minister of Justice stated they were not covered by the legislation.

Taking into consideration the history of the unions in Winnipeg whose members have embarked on a sympathetic strike, and others who are ready to do so, there must be a very serious base to the trouble. Because many of the unions involved must have agreements with the employers.

The trouble undoubtedly is the proposed interference with the right to strike. The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act doesn't prevent workers from striking; it does delay the time for action until after a Board of Conciliation and Investigation has gone into the dispute and tried to bring the parties together. If it fails to do this, then an award is made which can be accepted by either party or rejected by either party. If it is rejected by one of the parties, the situation is the same as before the board was established, except in this feature—which has been dwelt on by opponents of the legislation—that the firm involved has had all the intervening time to prepare for a strike.

It is this delay, when an adjustment fails, which has aroused the violent opposition of the trade unionists in the U. S. A. to the introduction of the legislation there, and also might explain why the British Government has not touched the legislation, although Sir George Askwith came to Canada to investigate it, and reported it is understood, favorably toward it. British trade unionists have studied it in Canada also.

City Council Lacked Foresight.

The trade unionists in the U. S. A. oppose the legislation because in their opinion "it interferes with the right to strike." This objection refers to the delay experienced if no adjustment is made. Workmen well know that there are times in the year when a strike may be called to advantage if necessary. The building trades fix the 1st of May, when the building season is opening. It would be folly for them to call a strike or start negotiations in the fall, with winter looming ahead. There is a general agreement everywhere where trade unionists are banded together that the only weapon which the workers have in the trade unions is the strike. With this removed, unless they have a strong political arm to use, they are helpless. It is because of this that trade unionists the world over will fight to the last against the interference of the right to strike. It may be that the City Council of Winnipeg didn't foresee the trouble in suggesting that the employees forego the right to strike. Trade unionists point out that any arbitration for the workers is no use, unless the economic power of the workers to strike lies behind the representatives on any board of arbitration.

Power For Local Council.

It is certain that this is what lies behind the almost unprecedented action of the trade unions in Winnipeg in deciding to strike, and placing the power to call out the members in the hands of the Trades and Labor Council.

The Trades and Labor Council is a legislative body. It cannot call members of various international unions out on strike. That power rests with the rank and file of the unions themselves, and their international officers. But the members of the unions may place in the hands of the Trades Councils the power to call out the members of the unions. It would be a daring Trades Council which would use that power without the international sanction of the unions involved. Yet it seems as if this is what the Trades Council of Winnipeg has done, unless they have received international sanction, which is doubtful.

The only explanation which suggests itself is that the unions in Winnipeg feel that an emergency has arisen which threatens the life of the trade unions in Winnipeg. The interference of the right to strike would be considered that by unions almost the world over.

Another feature of the situation is that "Dick" Riggs, who for many

years was a business manager of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council, enlisted about six weeks ago, and is now overseas. He was a former member of the Manitoba Legislature, and a power in the labor movement of Winnipeg and Canada, being vice-president of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada. "Dick" resigned his office in the Trades Council some time before enlisting. It is quite likely that Riggs' well balanced advice in trades disputes and his powerful influence is very much missed in this crisis. Despite outside critics who declared he was "too radical," it is well known that he had very bitter critics on "the inside" who fought him for being "moderate and conciliatory."

A Serious Situation.

The situation in Winnipeg is a serious one, because of the fact that the action taken by the unions suggests that the crisis is considered by them to indicate a threat at the very life of the trade union movement. It is also significant that the labor paper published in Winnipeg pronounced against the strikers on the grounds that they had refused arbitration. It is hard to conceive a situation unless a grave emergency where trade unionists would refuse conciliation and arbitration, providing that the award was not compulsory, and after it was all over their right to strike was not interfered with except by the delay. Such is the spirit of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act.

One Winnipeg newspaper, while admitting the right of unionists to strike as a final resort, describes the attitude of some of the strikers as Bolshevism.

FINLAND IS WARNED.

Allies Will Consider Action Against Railway as Breach of Neutrality.

London, May 22.—Any measures directed by Finland against the Mourmansk railway will be regarded by Great Britain, France, and the United States, as a breach of neutrality, the Dagblad of Stockholm says. The Mourmansk railway was built after the war began, primarily for the purpose of giving Russia another port of entry for war supplies.

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