

OTTAWA INTERESTED IN LABOR QUESTION

Attitude of Calgary Conference Causes Amount of Apprehension.

By Our Parliamentary Correspondent.

Ottawa, March 17.—Ottawa, or that part of it which pays any attention at all to labor and its relation to society, is keenly interested in the reported developments from the West and wants more details as to actual decisions and tendencies of the Calgary conference. Ottawa is at least acquainted with the origin of this Western Canada Labor Conference, which included delegates from all four of the Western Provinces.

This origin is to be found in the annual meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress in Quebec City last autumn. There Western delegates raised the issue of industrial versus craft unionism, strongly advocated the former and divided the conference on the question. They were defeated, finding their views in a minority amounting to about thirty per cent. of the congress.

Radical Resolutions Rejected.

Other resolutions of a radical tendency were also rejected, and the Westerners threatened to hold a "show" of their own. This Calgary gathering is the result, and the Westerners in their old field have now adopted most of the resolutions they failed to carry at the Quebec congress.

The Star asked the Minister of Labor, Senator Gideon Robertson, if he or his department had anything to say about the matter, but the answer was: "In the meantime, nothing."

The Star also asked the Minister if the department would be thoroughly informed on the Calgary conference. He said the department had official correspondents throughout the country, including one in Calgary, and that a full report of events there would be forthcoming.

Such a review had not yet arrived.

P. M. Draper, Secretary of Trades and Labor Congress, would not discuss the question publicly, but said it would be a subject of consultation and enquiry between him and President Tom Moore, together with the executive, this week.

Not Majority Opinion.

Both the Calgary members, Redman and Tweedie, are barristers, and there are no Labor members from the West. Redman and Tweedie are naturally interested in this development, however, and are awaiting further particulars.

A certain section of opinion here inclines to the view that the Western conference shouldn't be taken too seriously and that it doesn't represent majority Labor opinion in the West. Others feel that such an estimate is wrong and dangerous in that it makes people neglect or minimize movements of profound significance.

Not only is this "industrial versus craft" in itself a most serious divergence of opinion, but it raises at once the spectre of revolutionary methods to destroy the present order of society. Whether justly or not, industrial unionism is associated in many minds with the "violent" school. At least, it is associated with the radical groups, whether or not these do go as far as direct action.

In England it is associated with the Guilds Movement, which if not violently revolutionary does tend towards a basis of society different from the present.

In the United States it is associated popularly with the I. W. W., the rival of the American Federation of Labor and a body of ultra radical and revolutionary aspirations.

Australian Program.

In Australia it is linked up with the "One Big Union" movement. This brings us directly to Calgary again for the announcements say that the conference decided for industrial unionism, and that it will also take a referendum on the formation of "one big union."

Although, perhaps, a logical and final development of industrial unionism, this is not necessary an integral part of the scheme at any rate in its early stages.

The program of the One Big Union movement in Australia is said to be as follows:

"To build up such a powerful industrial organization that we shall be able to make repeated assaults upon the citadel of capitalism, choosing our own time and our own battlefields, culminating in one gigantic struggle between the organized forces of capital and labor; when, if successful, we will be able to take control of industry and establish a Socialist commonwealth."

What of Unskilled Labor?

As for the East, radical groups, especially from Toronto and Montreal, voted with the Western "extremists" at Quebec, but they are said to have represented only a fraction of Eastern votes.

In this whole situation it must be remembered that at both Quebec and Calgary, skilled labor was by far in the majority. What about the unskilled labor of the country? Whose lead is it likely to follow, the Conservative tendencies of the Trades and Labor Congress or the greater radicalism of the Western men?

The same problem besets the United States to-day.

The American Federation of Labor represents skilled labor, and with the exception of insurgents is Conservative.

See Conditions Improved.

The I. W. W. operates among the great mass of unskilled labor and is frankly revolutionary. It is the openly expressed opinion here that Western Canada labor, in its Calgary decisions, is tending towards the I. W. W. rather than co-operating with the Trades and Labor Congress, which in Canada is the mouth-piece of organized international unions, represented in the United

States by the American Federation of Labor.

Orthodox "congress" people will tell you that they don't want to see the present system of society overthrown, although they do want to see the workmen, through craft unions, improve their standards of life and their powers. Between this and the recent movements in Great Britain the radical tendencies in the United States and the viewpoint of the Calgary Congress, there is a sharp issue, fraught with the gravest significance to society. It is because this issue now threatens to become practical in Canada too, rather than remain far off and academic, that the western developments are being watched so clearly.

Unrest in West.

Those who are nervous about the West justify their fear by references to the report of Director of Safety Cahan, who before his office was terminated on December 31, 1918, issued a pessimistic report. Among other things, he said that not only was there Bolshevism in Canada, but that it was of a particularly vicious kind. The accuracy as well as the wisdom of this statement has been criticized, for, compared with the United States, Canada's difficulties are surely less.

At the same time, Government reports, as well as private advices, have shown an undoubted state of unrest in Western Canada. Vancouver is said to be one of the areas where disaffection is pronounced.

The Star was speaking to-day with a business man from the coast, who said that at the time of the recent Seattle strike Vancouver people were decidedly uneasy. They felt that if the strikers in Seattle, who were represented as "revolutionists," succeeded encouragement would be given also to British Columbia malcontents. This man was loud in his praise of Ole Hanson, Mayor of Seattle, who, he said, aided by a strong committee, had "stood up to the disorder" and squelched it.

Vancouver was relieved, but unrest still exists. Similar stories keep filtering down from the prairie West.

Would Abolish Office.

As to the Government's attitude, the appointment of a director of public safety is thought by many to have been a provocation rather than a deterrent and abolition of the office is generally hailed with satisfaction. At the same time it is understood that the Government is keeping thoroughly well informed as to Western conditions, and that everything that can or should be done to preserve public order and prevent violence is being undertaken.

In the United States, the Overman Senate Committee, which has been investigating Bolshevist activities in that country, and which has been informing itself from witnesses and documentary evidence, is convinced of an organized conspiracy to overthrow the Government by force. It feels that this is the gravest danger that has faced the republic since its inception. Its chairman declares the agitation against the existing social order has increased in violence and volume since the signing of the armistice, and will recommend that the Espionage law enacted for the period of the war, be immediately replaced on the statute books.

Will Await Facts.

On the other hand there is an opinion among Liberal as well as radical elements in the States that the picture thus being drawn is too black that innocent wellwishers of humanity are being persecuted and that capitalism is being bolstered up because these attacks in what is conveniently called "Bolshevism," but much of which, these critics say, is legitimate striving towards social amelioration, a process which "capitalists" fear for it means the yielding of some of their power.

There are already signs of emergency here too of conflicting groups. Some would stamp out all social heterodoxy without shrinking because they believe it means violent destruction if not suppressed. Others feel the inequalities of the present civilization to be so pronounced and unwarranted by any standards of equalitarianism that they don't like to see ameliorating movements crushed or dispirited by the taunt of Bolshevism.

As for this specific situation which appears to be developing in Western Canada, wise counsel seems to be first to get the facts and then to judge in view of these facts, and of the personalities behind them.