

'Direct Action' by Government.

The Dominion Government has at last taken a hand in the Winnipeg strike. The men summarily arrested will get no sympathy from the public at large. They have done what in them lay to put the city of Winnipeg and the country at large to cost and loss without any benefit resulting to any one. They set themselves up as dictators and frankly announced that their purpose was the overthrow of existing governmental organization and authority. Well, the government has taken up the challenge and the dictators whose latest decree, that the babies of Winnipeg should not get milk was still partially in force on Sunday last, are now in Stoney Mountain penitentiary. They advocated a policy of "direct action" instead of action by constitutional means and methods. The government has given them a taste of their own medicine. So far so good.

The difficulty of the situation is that two wrongs do not make a right. "Direct action" by a government is objectionable and as dangerous as "direct action" by the Bolshevik. As the wires give the news the arrest of the Winnipeg agitators was without the usual forms of law. There is no good reason why these forms should not have been observed. If these men have transgressed the law—as probably they have—they should be arrested, tried and punished as provided by law. Perhaps such a course is being followed. But the information coming over the wires indicates the contrary. It argues rather that the government has reverted to the methods by which it enforced its conscription and registration policies in 1918, when the principles and forms of law were set aside and "direct action" taken from time to time as the whim of the authorities or of their underlings suggested.

The reported action of the federal authorities in the case of the Winnipeg strike leaders recalls the action of the Lloyd George government in arresting without charge and holding without trial for a time a number of Irish agitators. The final result is that Ireland is in a more disturbed condition and constitutes a more difficult situation than it has for a hundred years. The conditions in Canada are difficult enough at the present time; the result of disturbances in the public mind. A course of action that must tend to increase these disturbances cannot be for the public good.

There is no doubt that the law-abiding elements of the community have been placed at a serious disadvantage in combating the activities of the strike by the inaction of the several governmental authorities concerned. By making the arrests the Dominion government has at last definitely ranged itself on the side of the public and will thereby give grounds of confidence hitherto sadly lacking. But this could have been done just as effectively without setting aside the rights of personal liberty which belong to every man. It is a fundamental principle of British justice that a man shall not be arrested without charge or held without trial. The government which by its acts of administration denies that principle is a revolutionary not a constitutional government.