

The Winnipeg Riots.

The expected—almost the inevitable—has happened. There has been riot and bloodshed growing out of the strike in the city of Winnipeg. Whether this marks the end of the strike or is the beginning of a more acute situation it is at the moment impossible to foresee. To the instinct of mankind human blood is sacred. With the shedding of blood the strike situation is seen from new viewpoints on both sides. At a time when the strike seemed about to fail for economic reasons, as had already failed in Toronto, Edmonton and Calgary, first the summary arrests of strike leaders and now the killing and wounding of strikers by the armed forces of constituted authority, shifts the grounds of dispute from economic to governmental questions: the very thing that the revolutionary leaders of the strike have wanted from the start.

That the strike was political rather than economic in its purpose was apparent from the start; so far as the leaders were concerned but it was the economic conditions that made it possible for them to rally such a large proportion of the working forces of the country to their support. As it became apparent that economic conditions were being—and could only be—made worse by the strike, its support on economic grounds dropped away. Then came the arrests of the leaders; deliberately planned and carried out as an act of terrorism—or of provocation. But not justified as to procedure by any of the ordinary processes of civil law. Now, following the arrests comes riot and bloodshed.

If the facts of the rioting are as stated in the Canadian Press despatch which was forwarded from Winnipeg within two hours after the events occurred, there is nothing to be said in favor of the rioters. They destroyed a street car without provocation; they resisted the mounted police in their attempt to clear the street so that traffic could proceed; they were in the act of attempting to take the life of an unhorsed policeman when charged and fired on by his rescuing comrades. The story is perfectly straight and the reasons for the action taken are ample.

The mob had assembled to take part in a parade that had been forbidden by the mayor, the chief magistrate of the city. For the time being his word was law. They had therefore assembled to defy the law. That was a bad start, and seems to be an established fact. Members of the mob had destroyed a street car, the property of the street railway company, when being operated contrary to the orders of the strike committee; that apparently was the first one that had been interfered with by the strikers. It is more than likely that some of the more active spirits of the strike recognized that with a mob of 20,000 assembled to defy the law, and smarting under the recent extraordinary arrest of their leaders, the time was opportune to begin the committing of overt acts—in other words to meet terror by terror—provocation with defiance. There does not seem to be any doubt as to the fact that the street car was held up and partially or totally destroyed by the mob. This was ample justification for the bringing of armed force into the picture for the maintenance of law and order.

From this point forward the accounts vary. The first Canadian press account says the mayor read the riot act after the firing had taken place. He says that he read it before the firing occurred. The

point is that if the shots that killed and wounded certain members of the mob were fired before the riot act was read the killing might be construed as murder by an unsympathetic jury. On the other hand if the riot act was read first, that was notice to all and sundry that military had replaced civil control, and that in fact a state of war existed for the time being between the authorities and the mob. The point would not be material if the facts were actually as stated in the Press despatch. When the mayor is at such pains to explain the exact moment of his reading the act—thereby contradicting the Canadian Press—it leaves room for the suspicion that the Press despatch may have been made to order in some particulars.

The first Press despatch stated specifically that the city was under martial law. Later despatches say that the military are in control but the city is not under martial law.

The contradictions of the Press despatches are no more contradictory than the alternately provocative and suppliant attitude of the authorities towards the strike and the strikers. Two weeks ago, Sunday, General Ketchen in command of the military forces at Winnipeg and Rev. Canon Scott of Quebec addressed the pro-strike returned soldiers in Victoria park, and publicly minimized the military preparations then being made because of the strike. Bray, a returned soldier, subsequently arrested, led in cheers presumably for Gen. Ketchen.

One thing stands out clearly, that the well being of the city and of the law-abiding citizens of Winnipeg have suffered because of the incompetence—or worse—of the man whom they elected as mayor. Given an efficient mayor, with suitable support from the provincial and federal authorities and the conditions now existing would not have arisen. The conditions are bad, but their consequences may be much worse.