

SAYS CROWN'S CHARGES ARE RELIC OF TYRANNY

E. J. McMurray States Seditious Conspiracy Law Has Gone Out of Use.

PLEA FOR STRIKERS

Crown Assaulting Freedom of Speech Declares Lawyer to Winnipeg Jury.

Special to The Star.

Winnipeg, Man., March 22.—The law of seditious conspiracy, under which the charges were brought against the Winnipeg strike leaders, was characterized as a "relic of the days of tyranny," by E. J. McMurray, counsel for George Armstrong, in his address to the jury Saturday afternoon.

"It is awful to contemplate," he said, "that this tyrannical old weapon should be dragged out in Winnipeg in the year 1920. Seditious conspiracy is a very rare charge, in fact, after exhaustive search I can't find a previous case under that charge in Canada. The statute has gone out of use. It is a very ancient and antiquated machine, very much like the old-fashioned blunderbuss that you filled with scraps of iron, slugs, glass, bolts, and anything you could lay your hands on. The idea was, if you aimed it at someone, you would at least hit him with one slug."

"Why didn't they prefer the charge against any one of these men alone? Because it wouldn't work. But if they could link up a lot of meetings and a bunch of publications, they thought they might get them if they took in the whole crowd."

McMurray attacked Crown counsel unmercifully, saying: "If these men had been at the trial of Christ they would have charged him with seditious conspiracy and cited the Sermon on the Mount as an overt act. When He said: 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth,' they would have cited it as evidence that he was preaching the seizure of industries."

Flays Profiteers.

McMurray paid his respects to the profiteers, who, he said, were guilty of causing unrest in Canada, in the following terms: "These diamond-ringed, fur-coated, jewel-bespeckled scoundrels—these heartless profiteers, are the real menace to Canada. They poison legislation at its source. They are the ones who should be prosecuted. Do you ever hear of them being tried for **sedition**? No, commissions deal with them and you know what commissions are. Did our sons go overseas to lay down their lives to make the world safe for the profiteer? No."

"At this late date in the history of the British Empire, the Crown has committed a deliberate assault on the freedom of speech and liberty of opinion," he said. "Crown counsel actually has brought into this court the question of right to debate the conscription issue. Did it have any court value, or was it put forward to affect your feelings? Surely we have not lost the right to debate great issues such as conscription, on public platform. Look at Australia! It voted down conscription. Was that whole nation guilty of seditious conspiracy?"

"If conditions were proper, this strike never would have occurred. The labor man, when he strikes, pays a terrific price. When he goes on strike in sympathy with a fellow-worker who isn't getting a square deal, the Crown dares to call that noble attribute, sympathy, conspiracy."

Likens C. M. A. to O. B. U.

Turning to the One Big Union, he said: "These men who oppose the One Big Union are hypocritical when they say they are standing on principle. They're standing for dollars and cents. Isn't the Manufacturers Association the O.B.U. of manufacturers? All down through the ages prosecutors have prosecuted reformers and Governments have prosecuted reforms for benefit of interests."

"If Premier Norris and Mayor Gray thought the strike illegal would they have tried to settle it. Capital had attacked the unions, and they fought back with the only weapon they had in self-defense."

"Crown says the O.B.U. fought this strike. That is ridiculous, as the O.B.U. at that time was a babe in swaddling clothes. Internationals fought for the strike. They saw organized labor in danger and came to its defense. Do you admire the colossal nerve of a man who will brand 35,000 fellow-citizens as revolutionists for doing what they considered right?"

McMurray will complete his address to-day.