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## Hanna's Order

**P**RESUMABLY, the recent order of Mr. Hanna, president of the Canadian National Railways, forbidding employees of this system from engaging in any political activities on pain of being discharged, has been widely enough discussed so that its merits and demerits are pretty well known to the working class of Canada by this time. Hence there would be no excuse for this article on this subject except that the writer considers this order of Hanna's an epoch making order. It defines a new status for the working class indicative of new relations growing out of that form of economic enterprise known as national or government ownership. It is true that the employees of the C. N. R. system may entirely disregard the order, and go on taking active part in politics as much as they have hitherto done. They may treat it with both indifference and contempt, in which case it loses its force. But that does not detract from its naive significance as affording a perspective by which one can get a line on the manner in which men of Hanna's walk in life view the political institutions and arrangements. It is all the more important since it comes from a government official, a man of authority, one who is intimately acquainted with all the perplexities involved in managing a capitalist state industry. The order, as such, is therefore, a criticism of present governmental machinery and a suggestion as to the remedy of its defects. The remedy is, of course, not suggested so much as it is implied from the premise of the order. But it is these very implications that give the order its significance, for they point to an economic order which some capitalists would like to see established, and towards which we are probably drifting.

Besides this, the order raises other points which must be tantalizing to those narrow-visioned reformers who shut their eyes to facts and bend all their energy to reviving an economic system that has almost become a fossil. It lays bare the sophistry of such sycophants as Mackenzie King and exposes the hypocrisy of the whole host of political Solons whose greatest wisdom is to mouth the phrases of 18th century political writers. It shows up the hollowness of all those schemes of reform which centre around the point of preserving capitalism just as it is, without any subtractions or additions of a fundamental character. It expresses the sober thought of a manager of a great capitalist industry, who sees some stumbling blocks which prevent the newer form of capitalism from operating smoothly.

What are some of the stumbling blocks expressed and what implications involved in the order? In the first place it restricts the political privileges, curtails the enjoyment of constitutional liberty, (as bourgeois writers would put it), of the employees of the C. N. R. system. The order states the matter openly and plainly. No employee is permitted to take an active part in politics, or to accept a seat in Parliament. The order does not absolutely disenfranchise the employees of the system, though it comes dangerously near to doing it. In this regard it is, therefore, a fact of a pretty general movement to restrict the political privileges of the workers. The same movement is active in the States, as is seen by the troubles in the New York State Legislature. It thus becomes apparent that capitalism is in a phase of its development wherein the political privileges of the working class are glaringly incompatible with its ordinary function within the system. At the same time it would also appear that

the possession of political privileges by the working class hinders the capitalistic management of industry, more particularly of government owned industry.

It will be remembered that the franchise was given to the working class only after a great struggle on the part of the latter, and then really not until it was quite conclusively shown that the working men were willing to accept the political ideals of the bourgeoisie as their own and so were not planning any revolutionary innovations in the bourgeois state. During the time that the ideas of the working class were fettered by bourgeois ideals, the vote in its hands was really an asset to the political power of the various factions within the capitalist class. The franchise was freely extended, as each faction hoped to gain more in strength than its opponents by such extension. Indeed, the franchise began the sport of self-seeking politicians. In the heat of a campaign it became the object of barter, and many a person has received his franchise in exchange for a definite promise that he would vote for a given candidate. But this state of affairs has taken a turn over, more or less complete, due to no other reason than that the working class has shown a less decided inclination to follow the political leadership of capitalist politicians. Hanna's order, therefore, expresses a need, a want, a danger ahead.

Hanna doesn't want any of the employees of the C. N. R. system to sit in parliament. He doesn't want the national railway system to be mixed up in politics. Neither does he want the employees to air their grievances from the floor of the House, nor the conduct of the system to be discussed before this assembly of august personages. On the other hand when Hanna wants the rates of the system he manages raised, he doesn't appeal to parliament to grant the raise, but he lays his case before the Railway Board, evidently because this body is much more capable of examining all the facts relative to such a demand, and of passing a competent judgment on all the arguments put up both for it and against it, than parliament is. It is a more efficient body.

Looked at from this standpoint, Hanna's order is a veiled thrust at the efficacy of parliament. In this respect the order confirms the statement so often made by Socialists, that capitalist parliaments are nothing but gas houses. They are the rendezvous where loquacious politicians meet to display their oratorical powers, or, if the politician is not gifted with a pleasing power of speech, then parliament is the market on which he peddles his chances of getting in with the powerful and the mighty, so that he might advance his own interests in respect to winning a prize in the game of life. Parliaments are essentially the arenas in which ambitious individuals play for the stakes attached to success in politics. The real work of government is but slightly connected with parliament, and the discussion relative to the enactment of the laws is but formally staged before the legislative body. Very few take parliaments seriously except those who have careers at stake. The deliberations of this body is looked at with more contempt than reverence by those who are in the least acquainted with parliamentary procedure. It is only the most ignorant who look upon the decisions of the parliamentary body as being arrived at after calm and conscientious thought. The debates are often mere squabbles about petty party affairs, which have as their issue the advantage one vote gathering ma-

chine has taken over another. As often as not the members are persuaded to vote one way or the other by promising chances of some individual gain, than by the persuasive eloquence of an oratorical star or a sense of their duty towards their fellowmen.

There was a time when parliaments led the forces of human progress. That was when the rising commercial and industrial classes assailed the powers and privileges of the feudal landlords. But parliaments are no longer the battle ground of the huge conflict of classes. On the contrary they have demoralized into political clearing houses where political parties cancel obligations against each other, the balances being settled by a brisk interchange of calumniating denunciations which are couched in the proverbial elegant parliamentary language.

As such bodies, parliaments can not be used to advantage even by the class of which they are, historically, the representative. They are not only inefficient as regards handling questions concerning the public weal, but they are an extremely expensive piece of machinery to keep up, considering the work they perform. Indeed, they have become fetters on the development of industry. Capitalist promoters of industry do not want their affairs mixed up with politics, for the publicity secured through this channel has a poisoned sting to it which cripples, though it does not kill. The establishment, during recent years, of boards, committees and commissions which discuss and decide upon the real economic and industrial questions affecting industrial relations, is sufficient comment on the social value of capitalist parliaments.

The C. N. R. employees have been denied a constitutional right which is theoretically guaranteed by the political sanction of the powers that be, by the moral sanction of the bourgeois class as expressive of their political ideals, and by the fundamental law of the land. It would hardly seem possible that a right which is fenced around by such an array of bona-fide guarantees would be revoked. Still this has been practically accomplished by a few pen strokes of a man, who has no legal powers either to restrict, rescind or to interpret the laws, a man who is, in fact, but the head of an industrial concern, though this concern, it is true, is one of the largest government owned corporations in the world. In view of the drastic nature of this act, one would naturally expect to see the whole bourgeois class, that extolled the virtues of constitutional government so insistently last year during the trial of the Winnipeg strikers, rise up as a man to indignantly protest against such a flagrant violation of their constitutionally guaranteed rights. But very few protests have been heard. The press, generally, condones the action on the ground that the national railways should not be mixed up in politics. To be consistent, the press should add that neither should the slaves be mixed up in politics, for a slave who has the privilege of haranguing to the public on public matters is not as easily managed as the one who has a locker on his mouth. But the silence of the bourgeois in face of this travesty on their constitution is a scathing comment on their inherent hypocrisy. At the same time the worth of their constitutional guarantees is laid bare. For it is very evident that though the political status of the worker cannot be attacked on legal grounds, yet the same end can easily be accomplished by a slight manipulation at the source of his bread and butter.

In the final analysis, Hanna's order has its roots deep down in the class-struggle. It is the attempt

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