

sedition conspiracy almost unchanged from the days of the Star Chamber. Men who had known nothing whatever of others until the time they were called into the court were held responsible for actions that had taken place in the lives of those other men years and years before. If anyone cares to read these trials—and I wish I could persuade some of our legal friends to do so—they will find, in all the state trials in Great Britain, going back to the days of Lord Erskine, no more outstanding and fundamental piece of injustice than that which prevailed at the time of this strike. The leader of the opposition referred to the classical idea that justice is blind. Justice, indeed, sometimes is blind to the fundamental issues, blind to the larger affairs and to the most vital things that concern us to-day.

I want to refer for a moment to these charges made by the leader of the opposition. He says that an effort was made to establish the soviet form of government in Winnipeg; he says that the struggle was one between constituted authority and bolshevism; he says that an effort was made to destroy our country and its institutions. I realize that my own word does not go very far, but knowing my friends who were in that movement and knowing the details of the movement, I say that these charges are absolutely false. I wish to state, that fundamentally the strike was one concerning wages and forms of organization. There had been a controversy in the contract shops in Winnipeg; the iron-masters refused to recognize the unions in the form in which the men wished to organize themselves. They said, "We will treat with our own men but not with unions in which are men from the railways." That was the beginning. The right to organize was refused, a right recently conceded by the Peace treaty of Versailles. That was fundamentally the trouble. The machinists involved came to their fellow employees and talked it over indignantly. There might have been mass psychology; I suppose there was. But had we not had mass psychology thousands of people would not have gone to the war; nor should we have very much in the way of political elections unless there were mass psychology; a good many would not be returned to parliament without mass psychology. The men in the trades and labour council discussed affairs and they said: This is a fundamental principle. The right to organize is fundamental. And so they asked: What are we going to do about it? We cannot get help from the government in the matter. There was a government that was quite unsympathetic, so they said that the only thing

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

to do was to make their protest by quitting work together. It was not at that time thought that there would be weeks and weeks of this struggle; that did not enter into the mind of anyone. They said, "We will quit work as a protest against the unjust treatment which we believe our fellows are undergoing". Among those who said they would protest in this manner were the postal workers. I say without any reservation whatever that these men who went out, the majority of them returned soldiers, had not the faintest idea of setting up anything like a soviet government in this country. I am not discussing soviet government to-night, but may I observe by the way, that soviet simply means council. The people of Russia are organized according to the council method instead of being organized and elected geographically as we are. The farmers get together and appoint their group, and the various classes of labour do the same. There is nothing so frightful about the word "soviet" when it is understood; and it has been better understood by some of those who have travelled abroad and even better by some of my own humble labour people than by many of the business and professional ranks who read the Saturday Evening Post or Toronto Saturday Night and literature of that kind, or even by those who read the official reports. Read the official reports presented by our own government about that time: absolutely without any real foundation, the most extravagant statements were put into the official government reports and widely circulated across this country. I am not blaming the majority of the people of the country for not understanding the situation; I say they have been misinformed. Further I go back to that time and note that to a large extent the people were suffering from war hysteria. The business men were talking about reconstruction, and the labour people were doing the same; but their reconstruction was not along similar lines. The labour men were hoping that out of the great turmoil of the war there would arise a better world. When then the business men undertook to refuse the primary rights of organization, can we wonder that the labour people decided to protest? And they did protest and the strike was called.

I am not going to minimize the evils of the strike; it was a serious one to the business community of Winnipeg. But again, a great deal of misrepresentation has been kept up with regard to the details of that strike. One statement I have heard most frequently is that the milk supply was cut off. What happened however, was this: when the workers