

The Great Lock-Out in New York

Hot-Headed Individuals Striving Against the "Protocol," Have Gained Control, and, for the Time Being, the Old Regime Exists. Public Opinion, according to the Author, Demands the Return of Industrial Peace.

By W. W. SWANSON.

A few weeks ago the cloak manufacturers of New York decided to lock out sixty thousand of their employees and thereby deprive thousands of poor families of their livelihood. Peace has its victims no less than war, and hunger can inflict as much suffering as shot and shell. This great industrial struggle would not, perhaps, give more room for thought and consideration than hundreds of others that have disgraced civilized society these last hundred years were it not for the fact that it has caused a violation of the principles of justice and fair play in a peculiarly flagrant manner. For between manufacturers and work people there existed a Protocol—an instrument especially devised to protect the peace in this corner of the industrial world. The Protocol had been formulated only after years of thought and hard work, and its fruits now appear to have withered overnight. The deliberate and tyrannical action of the manufacturers has demolished a stately edifice that has taken a generation to build, and the excuses offered for this piece of vandalism only serve to make matters worse.

The manufacturers, in a word, seeks to justify the labor war they have provoked by impugning the good faith of the men and women employed in the industry. They charge the union with having been tyrannical and interfering, and with having refused to discipline certain workers who went on strike in several isolated cases. They repeat the out-worn shibboleths of the right of the "boss" to manage his own business without let or hindrance; and declare that they are determined to be masters in their own shops. This, be it noted in passing, is but a recrudescence of the class feeling that obtained during the days when the clothing industry was known as a "sweated" employment, and manufacturing "lofts" as fire-traps. The workers maintained their right to remedy this situation, and their contention was backed by the public. The manufacturers as well as the workers gained by the destruction of this mediaevalism in the clothing business. They might have instituted these reforms themselves, but the fact is that they did not, but were compelled to make them by legislation and the pressure of public opinion. While it may be admitted that the masters would not return to the old regime, even if they could, it yet remains true that they have not, and cannot, make out a case in behalf of unrestricted management of their own affairs without any interference on the part of labor. If one thing more than another has been made clear in the modern industrial world it is that industries are made possible only by co-operation of labor and capital, and that both of these have rights and obligations in the industrial partnership.

While the manufacturers allege that, in addition to the tyranny of the union, the employees were about to precipitate industrial war by going on strike, and that they themselves merely anticipated such action by declaring a lockout, the fact remains that they were tired of the Protocol and wished a return of the old regime of individualism, of every man for himself, of individual wage contracts, and unsupervised working conditions. In other words they were sick of ordered freedom, and wished a return to industrial anarchy. This is the root of the matter, and has been amply proved without the aid of the loud and indignant vociferations of the employees and their spokesmen.

Conditions Before the Protocol.

To understand the present situation in New York—a situation so well worth studying from the Canadian point of view in view of the general inapplicability of the Lemieux Act to private industry—it is necessary to review briefly the condition of the garment industry in that city before the establishment of the Protocol. The cloak industry was, and is, a highly individualistic one. Little or nothing was to be gained by conducting it on a grand scale—it was not, as the economists say, an industry of "increasing returns." Any shrewd adventurer with a few hundred dollars of capital could rent a "loft," hire a few machines, engage a number of green or poorly-paid operatives, and commence business. The

race was to the swift and the battle to the strong.

The business was rendered more intensely competitive and individualistic because it was largely in the hands of Jews. No people has a more elastic standard of living; no race will work so hard or for such long exhausting hours, to succeed in life. The trade is one that appeals to their restless and relentless energy, and high-strung nerves. It requires, as has been said, little capital, and much individual capacity, push and enterprise. The worker may, by care and by the full use of the Jewish saving instinct, readily become an entrepreneur on his own account. This fact has produced a curious state of affairs both in the Association of Manufacturers and among the employees as well. It has made for the most intense competition among employers, and has blunted the feeling of class-conscious solidarity among many of the workers, who look forward to becoming, some day, manufacturers themselves. This selfish and individualistic outlook on life makes itself felt at every conference held between masters and men, for the settling of trade disputes. The representatives of labor are peculiarly independent and self-assertive, and are quite unabashed in the presence of capitalists, large or small, for they rub elbows with bosses who were, but yesterday, journeymen also. It is very difficult, indeed, to bring together for united action either masters or men; for the former are suspicious of one another as relentless business rivals, and the latter have ambitions for the future that are not exactly consonant with the interests of labor.

The inevitable result was anarchy in the cloak business before the adoption of the Protocol in 1910. The aggressive interlopers who entered the industry each year set the pace for even the largest concerns. They had to get results to survive—and they got them. They lived as humbly as Chinese laundrymen, worked incredibly long hours, farmed out their children and their wives to themselves, exploited inexperienced labor, paid low wages and low rents and cut into the business of the larger and old-established firms in every possible direction. They set the pace and gave the tone to the whole trade. The result was that the cloak business was conducted on a cut-throat competitive basis, and manufacturers as well as men suffered. In fact, the condition of the New York clothing trade was in much the same state as box-making, lace-making and chain-making in England prior to the establishment, by Premier Asquith, of minimum wage boards in 1909.

The Protocol, Resorted to in 1910.

A unique instrument—the Protocol—was resorted to in New York, and its subsequent work has been followed with the deepest interest by students of social reform not only in America but in the leading countries of Europe. It was designed to eliminate anarchy from the clothing trades, to put an end to individualistic action with its concomitants of greed, waste and sweated slavery, and to organize a mediatory body that would harmonize the conflicting claims of capital and labor. It established a board to which all disputes between master and men could be referred; a consultative body representing the claims of capital and labor; and one, moreover, that should have the right to establish right conditions of work and the hours and wages of labor. The adoption of the Protocol meant, therefore, fair wages and humane conditions of labor for the men, and the elimination of remorseless and wasteful competition for the manufacturers. It did not exclude from the industry those who had a legitimate right to be there, and it certainly did not prevent ambitious journeymen from becoming masters. It merely laid down the rules of the game, and insisted that all who might participate therein should, for the mutual benefit of all, live up to them. And last, but not least, it set up machinery for abolishing the wasteful and cruel method of settling wages disputes through the general strike. This achievement in itself was all the more remarkable when it is recalled that it was brought about by spontaneous action on the part of those concerned, without recourse to the power of the State.

In the nature of things this great adventure in

social-welfare work, conceived and executed through private initiative, has not met with unqualified success. It would have been a marvel if it had. But, although for the moment the machinery has been put out of gear, it has achieved great things. For six years it has maintained and enforced order in the most anarchic of industries. It has given the fair employer a chance to conduct his business with profit, and in a fair manner; it has thrown the sweated shop on the scrap-heap with the fire-trap loft; and it has raised the standard of living of sixty thousand employees and more than ten thousand families. These, in themselves, have been great achievements. But it has done more. For the six long years, also, that the Protocol was in force it abolished the general strike, and saved hundreds of thousands of dollars to both employers and employees.

Unfortunately, for the time being at least, the individualists have seized control of the Association of Manufacturers, and the broad-minded, far-seeing leaders, who helped to draw up the Protocol in 1910, have been ousted. This was made possible, in part, by the action in inveterate hot-headed individualists who still lingered in the ranks of the workers, and were able by inflammatory speeches, to precipitate, in some isolated cases, strike by the work people who had local grievances. On the whole, however, the union stands for conciliation and arbitration. The mass of the employees are convinced that the general strike is a relic of the days of barbarism. They realize that only through the mediation of a truly representative body can the conflicting interests of labor and capital be reconciled. And they are determined that the Protocol, which has meant so much for them, their wives and their children, shall not be destroyed.

Even should the Manufacturers' Association, through the power of money, win the present battle they will reap the fruits of only a barren victory. For public opinion has already found against them. A committee formed of professors of the social sciences, from Columbia University, headed by Edwin Seligmann has condemned them. Such men demand to be heard, and will be heard. It is earnestly to be hoped that the manufacturers will see reason, and that this remarkable achievement in industrial peace will not come to naught. The workers of the world need it, and will preserve it.

CANADA'S OPPORTUNITY

"Prepare for the new trade conditions which will arise after the war," was the keynote of much of the discussion that marked the Convention of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association held in Hamilton, Ont., last week. In the opinion of the Association Canada will have a tremendous advantage from the trade entente between the Allies which is sure to follow the war, and an immense avenue for Canadian manufactured products should be opened up in the displacement and readjustment of the two and a half billion dollar trade between the Central Powers and the allied countries in 1913.

A resolution was passed to the effect that: "The Executive Committee of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association places itself on record as being of the opinion that, in order to maintain and increase trade after the war there should be consummated with as little delay as possible:

- (1) A series of preferential tariffs between all parts of the British Empire that will give the greatest practical encouragement to inter-Imperial trading.
- (2) A series of reciprocal tariffs between all nations that are allied against the Central powers in the present struggle, by means of which the trade of the countries concerned will be conserved as far as practicable for their mutual enjoyment.
- (3) An agreement among all the allies to give favorable tariff treatment to neutral countries.
- (4) An agreement among all the allies to subject the products of the Central Empires to such surtaxes and other disabilities as will effectually restrict their competition in the markets of the allies.

The Government elevators at Port Arthur, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon and Calgary are equipped with up-to-date cleaning machinery and facilities for grinding and bagging by-products of grain elevators. The grain dockage is reclaimed to remove the weed seeds, chaff and dust, and then ground to destroy the vitality of all seeds. The results of feeding experiments conducted at Ottawa Experimental Farm have shown this mixed grain meal to be a cheap and valuable feed for live stock. It is now available to Canadian feeders and feed dealers in car lots at moderate prices. Prospective purchasers should apply direct to the General Manager, Government Elevators, Fort William.