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"SEE CANADA FIRST."

A Trip on the Great Lakes

THE personal inspection of the fore-castle revealed a disgraceful state of affairs. The sleeping quarters were visited and found to be filthy almost beyond belief. Vermin of all sorts was in evidence; the mattresses were filthy, the bunks were of hard boards, the walls and floors apparently had not been cleaned for a long time, ventilation was very bad, and many of the crew were sleeping on the batches. . . . There was no mess room. The articles of food we saw were badly cooked and served in tin dishes none too clean. Flies were in abundance and there was a lot of waste food about, some of which was in the bunks. . . . The men complained of bed bugs. The food is carried from the after end forward by the men themselves. They stated that an attempt had been made to get the local health officer aboard but had failed. . . . The cook complained of a superabundance of cock-roaches. . . . The men complained of not getting enough sleep en route, being for the most part 14 to 18 hours out of twenty-four on duty and sleep being interrupted."

Many will imagine this is more of Russia and will be disappointed when told it is part of a report made by a Board of Conciliation investigating the conditions of men working in the shipping industry here in Canada, with special attention to that God-fearing part known as Ontario and Quebec. Of course, the representative of capital makes a statement to the press, in which he does not refute the findings of the board, but denies ownership of the ship "Corunna": by making this statement the object is to shift responsibility for such conditions on to someone else. The statement reads: "The steamer 'Corunna' is neither owned nor operated by the Canada Steamship Lines and the Department of labor has been notified to this effect."

Many people would naturally think these conditions applied only to this one boat after reading the above statement in the daily press, but "The Board in its investigation have discovered that on many ships there were continual changes in the personnel of the crew, in some cases the crew having changed completely three times up to date (July 28-21), and can only come to the conclusion that the conditions, especially in the fire-hole, are such that the men have thrown up their jobs. . . . As before pointed out, the conditions of the sleeping quarters, sanitation, and hard work have, in the opinion of the Board, been the causes of so much transient employment."

It is not all-important to know who owns this boat, as one gang of parasites is as bad as another, but it is very instructive to see how our masters try to twist any statement made by the workers, and the manner in which they will deliberately lie when making statements in the press. First, regarding ownership, this Board states: "With reference to the ownership of the 'S.S. Corunna' I beg to state that Lloyd's Register for 1920 states that she belongs to the Black Diamond-Line Steamships, which is owned by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company at Sidney, N. S. . . . Since that date the D. I. and S. Co., has been absorbed by the British Empire Steel Company and the Black Diamond Boats were taken along with other assets. . . . Further investigation on the part of the Board revealed the fact that

a number of the directors of the British Empire Steel Company were also directors on the Canada Steamship Lines. . . . This shows a remarkably close association between the two companies."

This resembles a One Big Combine with many names, one part giving orders but acknowledging no identity in the "skin game." The company claimed that only "ten disgruntled employees" had called for a Board of Enquiry, but during the investigation it was found that "after the new schedule of wages had been announced by the Canada Steamship Lines, Limited, there was great dissatisfaction, and the seamen employed by them at Midland, Ontario, being members of the union, had threatened to go on strike, but at a meeting held on the above date (11th April, 1921) at which there was a fair attendance of at least seventy-five representatives of the men it was decided to wait until a Board of Conciliation had been secured in accordance with the Act." And what number of men did this committee represent? "Membership in the union was investigated and it was discovered that there were some twenty-one hundred members (2,100) on the list in good standing." Here is a body of men working under the vilest and most degrading conditions possible, even under capitalism, and when they protest, the acknowledgment from their Christian masters takes the appropriate form of lies and misrepresentation of the actual facts. "We don't acknowledge the existence of a dispute!" As though there was no reason at all for grievance and rebellion among these workers, when we find that they are denied even the common decencies of sanitary accommodation, as was found that "there are no baths or showers on this ship," and "on the passenger steamers a sharp inspection is made daily so far as the passengers' conveniences are concerned, but those of the crew would appear to be sadly neglected." The stinking atmosphere of the fore-castle will to some extent be realized when the Board "recommends that steps be taken to have this grievance remedied without delay. It would appear that the idea seems to prevail on many ships that all the ventilation necessary is a port hole, no intelligent study being made as to the circulation of the air."

Both the "intelligent study" and the labor to ameliorate these conditions would mean the hiring of more men, and this means expenditure, calculated as loss of dividend, therefore the Board's recommendations cannot be complied with. In making profit, the capitalist has very little thought for anything else, and in many cases, if it were not that some laws stand in the way really safeguarding the continuance of the exploitation process, the ravages of capitalism would sweep away many more millions than even the black plague. Here is one gang that ignores everything, as was found, "a ship can clear an inland port with a crew palpably too small to operate without danger." What do they, the owners, care about danger? The smaller the crew the less expenditure for operation. There is no rough weather during summer time, so there is no danger of losing the boat, that is the vital and most important matter—preservation of private property. When they hear "a number of vessels were examined and it was found that the machinery was dangerously exposed and left itself to accidents, in bad weather

especially," they only sit back and say, "we don't acknowledge it." These people know this exists and have known it for years, but the workers have been at their mercy and are at their mercy today. should a man fall sick, it was found that no medicine for first aid could be found on these boats. "The general manager admitted the subject having been neglected." Of course, when a sailor becomes sick he is "sent to a hospital, but unless the sickness has occurred through the fault of the ship, the sailor is obliged to pay his own hospital fee and medical attendance."

When a member of the crew falls a victim to fever, which is the most likely thing he would do, this would not be classified as the fault of the ship, therefore he claims no compensation and pays the hospital bill, providing he has been fortunate enough to save a few dollars. Again, when he happens to be caught in one of the winches and mangled, the Board also finds "several cases where the seaman has met with mishap and apparently through ignorance or neglect of someone has received no redress." Therefore, it is quite evident a case of "heads I win, tails you lose," in any case the worker suffers. The company, not being anxious to report accidents to the Compensation Board, this is considered as not being a dangerous occupation and assessed at a low rate. If all accidents are reported, then the rate per employee would be high and would eat into the general rate of profit. There's not much ignorance attached to this,—just "neglect," but not neglect of dividends.

In order to obtain some idea as to the position these men are in to pay doctor's bills, the Board asks "to take the wages of a wheelsman, for example, in 1915 during eight (8) months of service on the Great Lakes, which is the maximum period of employment in the year, at the scale as submitted to the Board: he would earn \$336.00 and his board for that period. If he were a married man, and a large proportion of these crews are married, he would of necessity have to support a family on this sum. . . . The 'Labor Gazette' for 1915 gives a fair cost of ordinary living for a small family as \$719.16. This means that he would have at that time to deprive his family of what is usually considered as essential. He has nothing to go on with for a supply of clothing for himself and family, as it certainly appears that he was in very bad financial straits and was evidently underpaid. . . . In 1920 the wheelsman's wages have been raised up to \$880.00 for the season. . . . The 'Labor Gazette' for that year shows that the cost of living for a small family was \$1,212.12. It will then be seen that although his condition was improved over 1915 he still is not in a satisfactory financial shape to meet the requirements of his family."

Bad as this is, with hunger staring the men in the face, the company, not satisfied that they have wrung the limit out of the "disgruntled employee" ordered a 30 per cent. reduction in wages, beginning with "the season." The report states: "The heavy reduction in wages at the beginning of the season put the seamen into a pecuniary condition as bad as 1915, which was bad enough. The Board is of the opinion that the reduction was much too sweeping, and after careful consideration believe that a ten

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