

Editorial

ECHOES OF THE STRIKE

I.—The Division of Wealth

ONE of the good men of Winnipeg settled in the city forty years ago. He was industrious, frugal and cautious. Year by year he added to his savings. His business grew and prospered. He was classed among the leading citizens. No man could reproach him for dishonesty nor sharp practice. His personal life was a model. He was temperate and modest in his expenditures. Many of his neighbors spent their hours in riotous living. They worked only half the time he did and, consequently, had fewer comforts and cramped quarters. Naturally, some of them grew envious. Then they worked out a new system of economics to prove that the less work a man does, the greater should be his remuneration. In the course of time there came to the country from Europe, some men who had known the hardships of those lands. They settled in Winnipeg. They were received into the shops of our prosperous citizens. They were given much higher salaries than they ever received before. Their children were educated in the same schools as the children of the employer. All the comforts and freedom of the new world were at their disposal. Yet, they soon went back to their old practices—drinking, wife-beating and plotting to overthrow constituted authority. They even plotted against their benefactor, claiming that as workers they were entitled to an equal share of the business with the man who had worked for forty years to build it up. Nor was this all. They formed societies whose main work was fomenting strife and discord. In this they were led by British-born agitators, who had been trained to it in the old land and who endeavored to apply their doctrines here. This is not an isolated case. It is the common policy of thousands from mid-Europe and England and Scotland; and the claim they make is damnable unjust and grossly impertinent. Why should a man who has never toiled in the country, claim the fortune of a man who has worked incessantly to make it a country worth living in? As well ask the honey-bee to give up his winter store to a wasp as ask an honest, industrious Canadian to take bread from his own children in order that lazy and turbulent creatures should live without expenditure of effort. There is a good old text in the Bible: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It is the duty of all men to work, first in order to produce and secondly in order to be God-like. That man is unworthy of Canadian citizenship who, in these days of world-need, would limit labor to six hours a day, and he is unworthy to live if in pretending to work for eight hours he does really the work of only four. This is part of the detestable doctrine of non-work—the doctrine of the sluggard and the thief. A man may be quite willing to share the reward of honest toil with all the men who have been earnestly associated with him in his ventures, but he will properly resent with every ounce of his manhood every attempt of plunderers to seize the earnings of himself and his friends. This, then, is one view of the strike in Winnipeg, and it is not a bit more one-sided than the view set forth from day to day in the recognized mouthpiece of the malcontents.

II.—The Constitutional Method

This, however, is only one side to the question. There is a more serious view yet to be taken. Let us assume that all employers are not like the one mentioned—in personal qualities nor in attitude to work and workers. Suppose, indeed, that the wages are far below what they ought to be, and that workmen see for themselves and their children nothing in view but continual poverty. Suppose wealth is flaunted in the face of poverty until human patience is exhausted. What then! Shall there be a resort to armed force, or to that greater force known as the sympathetic strike? With our European element there is no hesitation in this matter. They know nothing of British privilege, and hence nothing of the British Constitution. Yet, that is the one thing which is dearer to a Canadian than wealth or power, dearer than class-connection or religious affiliation. And every Canadian knows that if our system of government, or our social or industrial system is imperfect, there is always a simple way and one only way to remedy it, and that is by the free action of all the people through their representatives in parliament, and it is open to all classes, rich and poor, employers, employees, and the great class in between, to decide who the representatives in parliament shall be. Any attempt to steal a verdict on a national question by a great strike or by terrorism, is the attempt of one class to rule the country. Autocracy—whether religious, military, or of the proletariat, is absolutely unfair, and therefore un-British and un-Canadian. This is the second view of the strike.

III.—The Crime of Profiteering

There is another and even more serious side to the strike in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Such a great movement could not have been engineered by leaders, however cunning, unless there existed in the popular mind a feeling that there was some injustice being done. Workers generally were not concerned very much as to the origin of the strike, nor as to the right or wrong of the original parties to it. They were chiefly interested in making a protest against conditions that were felt by all workers to be unbearable. Of course, the strike-leaders played on this and made reckless generalizations, but their extravagances of utterance would have been unheeded by a contented people. There are no just measures of the feeling which possessed the minds of workers generally. Canadian-born citizens were not Bolsheviks. They were not even extreme socialists. They merely felt that there was injustice somewhere, and they joined in the protest.

What, then, was the thing against which they so violently protested? Let the following clipping be a partial explanation:

Ottawa, June 23.—Net profits on common stock of Ogilvie Flour Milling Company for year ending Aug. 31, 1918, were 72 per cent., and in the previous year 48½ per cent., according to evidence brought out by R. A. Pringle, K.C., before the Cost of Living Committee of the Commons this afternoon.

"These are very abnormal times," said W. A. Black, vice-president of the company.

"These are very abnormal profits," reported Mr. Pringle.

Now, when this is multiplied by a hundred and a thousand, and when for those earning salaries or receiving wages, the cost of living is increasing much more rapidly than the weekly payment, is it any wonder that there is anger, resentment, denunciation, not only of profiteers but of a government which permitted the profiteering to go on? Flour, coal, meats, woollens—it is all the same. The few have been living on the many, and it is being said and felt on every hand that a Bolshevik is no more in need of hanging than a man who has grown rich during the war.

The strike was not in reality a strike for higher wages, nor for collective bargaining. On the part of certain leaders it was a bold attempt to upset our constitutional way of doing things, and to put government under the control of a particular class. On the part of the respectable Canadian worker, it was a protest against the aggression of the money-kings. Though before this article goes to press most of the workers will be back at their posts, the trouble will not be settled. Two great wrongs must be righted. Bolshevism in Canada must be destroyed, once and forever, and greed and heartlessness must be scourged and whipped, while wrongfully-exacted profits must be restored to the people who have been so mercilessly plundered.

IV.—Supreme Authority

It is all very well for workers to be sympathetic with their fellows in other callings. Yet there is a limit to sympathy. Never again must employees in the public utilities take dictation from another power than the state, province or municipality which employs them. The civil service stands by itself. It must be loyal. It cannot be endured that a strike committee shall have greater authority over the officials of the government, than the government itself has.

V.—Hasty Generalization

It is unjust for any man to blame all of a class for the actions of a few of its members. For instance, if one manufacturer is a profiteer, it does not follow that all other manufacturers are profiteers, nor that all profiteers are manufacturers. If one workman purposely holds back in his labor, doing only one hour's work in two, thus defrauding his employer, it does not follow that all other workmen are like him, nor that all dishonesty is found in the ranks of workmen. We are all too ready with our generalizations, and our haste in jumping at conclusions accounts very largely for our misunderstandings, and is the cause of half our trouble at the present time.

All profiteers are not among the manufacturers. Indeed, it is probably true that the percentage of plunderers is less among them than among other well-known classes in the community. For instance, one of the second-hand stores in this city was kept by a notorious socialist of the blatant type. His stock-in-trade was berating the manufacturers for their injustice and greed. I envied him his

vocabulary and his choice of epithets. Yet, when he was asked to put a price on a little trinket which was worth certainly not more than a nickel, he looked his customer over before making a reply, and then fixed a price at a dollar. Now, this is no fiction, but it would, perhaps, be unfair to judge all the class of second-hand dealers by this one individual. He was a king among profiteers. It might be well for all of us, whether farmers, merchants or simple day-laborers, to recall to mind that famous utterance: "He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone."

VI.—Wisdom

It is easy for those unconnected with municipal, local and federal administration, to say how the strike should have been handled. That mistakes were made there is no doubt. The chief one was, perhaps, the error of indecision; and, under the circumstances, a little of that may be overlooked. The worst thing of all was the vacillation of the federal authorities. After arresting the strike leaders on the charge of sedition, they allowed them to be released on paltry bail, not on a guarantee that they would cease to utter sedition, but that they would cease to take part in the strike. And this in spite of the fact that, in the minds of everybody, the strike and the attack on the constitution, were two entirely different things. There will be disagreement, of course, as to the wisdom of arresting men at the particular time, as to the wisdom of preventing silent parades, the wisdom of banning the publication of the Labor News, the wisdom of asking the police, during the strike, to sign a declaration of loyalty. It is not necessary to discuss all these points. They are details. We can get busy in order to prevent a repetition of trouble. We can act justly and thus prevent unrest. We can deport undesirables and thus get rid of noisy agitators. We can educate our people through press and platform, and not permit them to get all their information and inspiration from the mouths of disloyal and irresponsible agitators. Above all, we can awake from our civic apathy, and realize that every man has a public duty to perform, that every man's business is a public undertaking, and that every man is his brother's keeper.

THE BIRDS

IT is July, bird month, month of wonder, beauty and love. What could more appropriately describe it than those beautiful words of Lowell:

What so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days.
Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays;
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur and see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And grasping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass or flowers;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Attilike a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives.
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

Now, of course, we have changed this. The mother bird no longer stays at home and the father bird no longer enjoys the liberty that once belonged to his class. Both of them have votes and both live in the sunlight, and we all trust that even under such conditions the little ones will thrive and flourish.

What a blessing these little song birds are. They are a joy to the children, who, like the birds themselves, are full of curiosity and happy in the joy of living. The little fellow who finds a nest in the poplar tree, or in the grass of the meadow comes back to report his great discovery with wonder in his eyes. The little lass who finds the young robin on the doorstep and who shares with it her crust of bread, finds the world a richer place because of the new companionship. And then for all children and for all grown-up people there is a new life on earth, a life of hope and youth and devotion, when the birds begin to sing. Can we do better than make room for these feathered little songsters in our hearts? Can we do better than to teach our children through them to be kind and cheerful and thankful. It would be a cheerless world if there were no love and joy in it. The birds are one of the most precious gifts of the All-wise Father. We shall not fail to show our appreciation.