

# The Commercial

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## THE C.P.R. STRIKE.

The strike of the engineers on the C.P.R., now existing, is one of those labor disarrangements from which it might be expected that a new country like Manitoba would for a time be exempt. But it seems that even here capital and labor, whose interests are as mutual as man and wife, can find material for a quarrel, and the youth of the country seems to have taken nothing from the stubbornness and bitterness of the fight now being waged.

In such a contest as is now going on between the managers and engineers, disinterested parties are too apt to take sides without calmly weighing the points at issue. Thus the mass, who like to back the under dog, at once range themselves on the side of the presumably oppressed working man, while a smaller number, from interested motives adopt an opposite view. Very few calmly judge the matter from a purely trade economy point of view, and weigh whether the supply and demand of the labor market will warrant the demands of either side.

People who stand by the under dog theory must in the present struggle feel that their pet is rather a paupered specimen. Had the present strike been one of brakemen, firemen and other railroad men in receipt of comparatively small salaries, the theory might have been a safe one to stand by. But when published and uncontradicted figures show that the men now on strike have been receiving from \$100 to \$200 a month during the past eight months, and could, on the terms offered by the railway company, still earn such incomes, sympathy on the score of oppression is sheer nonsense, and the whole dispute loses its sentimentalism, and falls to the level of a question of business economy.

Whether the managers of the C.P.R. were or were not wise in reducing the salaries, or rather the perquisites, of their engineers is of no consequence, but it is certain that they were only acting in the spirit of retrenchment which has been found so necessary in every other branch of trade, and viewed from that point it seems not altogether unjustifiable. On the other hand the company's engineers,

are perfectly justifiable in refusing to accept the proposed reduction, but in so doing they were opposing a tendency unavoidable in every other branch of business, and the fact that their ultimatum, with the twenty-four hours for consideration, offered to the company, was in reality a demand for advanced salaries, would indicate that their course is an unreasonable one, when the state of trade all over this continent is taken into consideration. During the past six months there has been a heavy decline in the price of almost every class of labor, and especially mechanical labor, all over Canada and the United States, and it is only opposition to the tendency of supply and demand that can make locomotive engineers hope to be exempt from this general decline.

But in this strike, as in most others, and especially in all foolish and unnecessary ones, the strikers have depended upon the power of a workman's union for aid. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers has been brought forward as a scare in their interests, and what has been accomplished in bygone days by that organization is no doubt enough to inflate the hopes of those who believe that united coercion could stem the tide of supply and demand law. But even that hope has proven useless, as the President of the Brotherhood has so far declined to become even an arbitrator in the dispute. Whether this course is dictated by a fear that the cause of the strike is a hopeless one, and the prestige of the Brotherhood might suffer by an interference on their behalf, or that the President is convinced of the untenable position of the engineers, it is best to leave an open question. There is room for congratulation, however, in the fact that the dispute will be settled one way or other between employers and employees directly without the interference of a class of outsiders, who it is to be feared depend too much upon the stirring up of trade discordance for their living, as well as their popularity or notoriety as the case may be. One of the most reprehensible moves on the part of some of the strikers was the endeavor to compel the settlement of their disputes with the officers of the Brotherhood, and the most commendable action on the part of Superintendent Egan was his firm refusal to treat with any parties but the employees of the company who felt aggrieved.

The COMMERCIAL has on several occasions distinctly stated its opinion that

trade combinations for holding up or lowering the price of labor, whether they are composed of employers or employes, are subversive of the best interests of trade, and at best are only badly working pieces of machinery, that may for a time obstruct a natural law; and the effectual crushing of any organization of that class is a stride made in the direction of free and unfettered trade. Luckily no organization of that nature has as yet taken a stand in the present struggle, and the introduction of any would certainly bring injury to its introducers. They might still retain that shallow sympathy which can be had from those whose assistance is valueless if not an encumbrance, but they would certainly lose that of the responsible thinking public who judge such disputes upon grounds of trade economy. That the strikers have not already lost all sympathy of this description is due not to their own wisdom, but to the prudence, caution or justice of the President of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, or perhaps to all these considerations on his part.

As matters now stand the business public have to put up with considerable inconvenience, but signs are not wanting that this is near an end, and indeed the activity of the C.P.R. managers has made this inconvenience much less than it might have been under the circumstances.

## CANADIAN BANKING INTERESTS.

Recently Mr. George Hague, the General Manager of the Merchants' Bank of Canada, delivered a very interesting lecture in Montreal, his subject being "The Banking Interests of Canada." Mr. Hague is a gentleman who has spent a lifetime of intimate practical acquaintance with the banking systems of the Dominion, and has held the highest and most responsible position in some of the largest monetary institutions in the country. His remarks are on that account deserving of more than a passing notice. We regret that limited space prevents us from giving in full the text of the lecture, for any synopsis which can possibly be given, must fall far short of conveying anything like a proper idea of what was said, and we must content ourselves with briefly reviewing a few of its leading features. The growth of the Canadian banking system from very small, in fact almost microscopic proportions, to its present dimensions, must be a matter of surprise to all but those who have made this subject a study