

An Afternoon at the Industrial Relations Commission

The writer had an hour or two to spare on Thursday afternoon and, being interested in labor questions, took in the concluding session in Vancouver, of the Industrial Relations Commission which was taking evidence on the problem of industrial unrest.

In passing I might say that one notable feature of the visit of the commission to the West is the ignoring of it, in any official way, by organized labor.

One interesting exhibit to listen to was Mr. Neill, the chairman of the B. C. Manufacturers' Association. He was the last but one to give evidence and cunningly tried to make all the previous testimony appear ineffective because, he said, there was nothing in it but general charges and what we wanted was facts, facts, facts. This, in spite of the fact that all the previous witnesses had dealt specifically with such matters as hours of labor, working conditions, wages, cost of living, number of unemployed, both in individual unions and in general, also the refusal to negotiate and the breaking of contracts by the employers under the Robertson agreement. Documentary proof of such actions was furnished by W. L. Macdonald, the official adjuster appointed by the government. Mr. Neill further asserted that the Labor Gazette's estimate of \$21.50 per week for the upkeep of a family with five children, was too high. Scientific men, said this well-groomed, well-fed-looking gentleman, had shown that it was quite possible to live on considerably less than that. The audience, at this point got quite restless, but this did not faze the expounder of cheap living for the workers a bit. Facts was what he was giving, facts and figures. He gave me the impression that he would make a successful manager of a slave plantation providing there was an unlimited supply of slaves.

All the witnesses from the side of labor gave it, as their view that there was no solution to the problem of unrest under the present order of society, but they easily fell into the trap of the chairman: "But in the transition stage into the new order, would not industrial councils act as a bridge?" Most of them accepted the suggestion, even if somewhat dubiously, as a possibility. It was not until the last five minutes of the sitting when Comrade Charlie Lester took the stand that the proletarian attitude was correctly stated, and stated in no uncertain terms.

He said the causes of social unrest were fundamental in the structure of the present organization of society. Unrest was not peculiar to British Columbia or Canada, but was world wide. In Paris, today, the workers are marching with the red flag flying, in their hundreds of thousands. Nevertheless, though the revolutionary sentiment was very strong in Vancouver, it was probably the quietest town in the world and that was due to the character and the large extent of the educational work carried on by the Socialists for many years. This education had taught the workers in Vancouver to understand what was wrong in society and to build and prepare calmly and confidently for the day of the final struggle for power.

The capitalist class, he continued, had had all power in their hands and were to be held responsible for the mess the world was now in, and he denied that, at this day, it was the business of the working class to co-operate with them in cleaning it up. The business of the workers was to seize control of the powers of the State and to use those powers unscrupulously, against the capitalist class and rub their noses in the mess for which they were responsible. When the workers had power, it was then only that the transition period into the new order of society commenced.

Unfortunately, Lester's time was very limited,

but he spoke more truth, in that three minutes, and contributed more of real constructive thought to the consideration of the commission than all the rest of the afternoon had furnished. And, though the commission was not formed in the expectation of receiving such testimony and will hardly consider it within the scope of the bourgeois government in Ottawa to give Lester's recommendations practical effect, nevertheless, Charlie had the distinction of having the final word in the hearings of the commission in Vancouver and seized upon the opportunity with gusto, in order to voice the aspiration of the revolutionary west.

MAY-DAY HAPPENINGS ABROAD

It is regrettable in the extreme that many paraders on international labor day should have been sacrificed in all parts of the world, to the brutality of constituted authority. But we may be assured that time will bring its reactions. According to the accounts received from Paris the fighting Poilu refused to fire on the workers. That dirty work was done by stool pigeons, gendarme and the hand-fed cavalry pets, most of which cattle dodged the fighting in the trenches.

In Cleveland, Ohio, we read of tanks and motor trucks being set charging through the ranks of the processionists. Verily that is one atrocity the kept press never thought of charging up against the uncultured Bolsheviks.

In Great Britain, May Day appears to have been celebrated without anything untoward happening. How was that, we wonder? Probably due to a more suave and polished way they have of handling such matters.

Comrades! There are more May Days to come, and the future is ours. Let us see to it.

THE UNITED STATES

George P. West, formerly connected with the United States Commission on Industrial Relations and later special assistant to Joint Chairman Manly of the War Labor Board and one of the best informed students of American labor politics, has an article in the April 19 issue of the New York "Nation." In it he discusses the growing power of the insurgent movement in the United States amongst the working class against the political machine in the A. F. of L., controlled by Gompers and his crew. The A. F. of L. meets in convention in June at Atlantic city and he predicts a strong assault on the Gompers' machine. Nevertheless he says because of the machine running so perfectly, "the strongest and most promising men in the labor movement refuse to concern themselves with federation politics. They let Mr. Gompers go his way while they go theirs. In consequence, the failure of the insurgent movement to make headway at Atlantic city would not mean stagnation in the labor movement. It would more probably mean that vitality was definitely departing from the federation leadership and flowing instead into local, economic and political movements. These movements for the time being are sporadic and unrelatedly but they must eventually form in the national field on orientation that will be the end of Gompersism." He relates how local labor men stepped in and organized the meat packing and steel industries in the face of the opposition of Gompers and his lieutenants who were satisfied that only the skilled sections of the employees should be organized.

Propaganda meetings every Sunday evening, Empress Theatre, Hastings and Gore.

MAKOVSKI TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS. HA! HA!

The committee on industrial relations opened up in the blue room in the Vancouver Hotel. An ex-missionary and ex-Methodist preacher, head of the "Khaki Union," which he said was 400 strong and which he characterized as "one big allied union" gave evidence. Asked if his union was a strike-breaking organization and according to the Vancouver Province, he said it was not, but if a strike would occur and bloodshed and suffering might be the outcome, then the Khaki Union might take a hand. He also said "that the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council had classed the Khaki Union as 'undesirable.' His union did not take in employers but believed it would if they were willing to subscribe to the constitution of the union." . . . Asked to what he attributed the present industrial unrest, he replied that it was due to lack of employment and the high cost of living. He did not know how many men were unemployed, but he could put them into three groups—out of work through their own choice, a class which was a menace to society: physically unfit, and those who could not find work." His remedies to cope with the situation were that first, industry be stabilized and also that capital and labor sit at a round table in a friendly spirit. After such sound and business-like and startlingly original advice we fail to see why the commission is lingering on its way. It ought to beat it hot-foot, to Ottawa and begin "stabilizing" industry, taking that prodigious economist, the ex-missioner, along with them as a guide and councillor. However, it stayed to listen to another "exhibit," also an expert on the problems of the laboring masses, L. W. Makovski, sometimes hack journalist, sometimes anti-Bolshevik lecturer to west end audiences and all the time secretary for the War Savings Stamp Committee, a good-enough-job. In the opinion of this "expert," with the English public school Johnny accent don't cher know and the Polish name, the unrest was due to four things and there were, war, propaganda, economic conditions and—prohibition. We believe if he had been given more time to think, he could have thought of other things. Indeed, later on in the profound observations which adorned his tremendously enlightening testimony, he said the New York "Nation" was also a cause, but at the head and front of all the offenders, he seemed to place the lack of beer. Instead of the work beast going and getting fuddled with beer now, on Sunday nights, he went and listened to Socialist lecturers, ergo, fuddle the working class with beer and the social problem is solved, or as good as solved, which is a good-enough-job for the exploiter and his parasites. He said he had attended a meeting of Bolshevik propagandists where there were about two thousand men. We remember that meeting. Makovski was on the platform. W. A. Pritchard was on the platform. Makovski remembers that meeting, the two thousand men remember that meeting. Ha! Ha!—but that is another story. Anyway he says it is certain that Germany sent in the Bolshevik propaganda and the New York "Nation." Bolshevism here, was I.W.W.ism built up on Socialism and the "one big union" was the name as I.W.W.ism and the I. W. W. had got control of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council and Bolshevism was the cause of prohibition and prohibition was the cause of unrest, when it wasn't the war or unemployment, or the high cost of living or I.W.W.ism built up on Socialism or—Oh! what's the use. What is the use of even a public school education when all that a man has inside his ivory dome is the "brain-pan of a bird."

Next week we shall deal more fully with the proceedings of the Industrial Relations Committee.

Labor produces geological hammers, pestles and mortars, sink shafts, makes machinery, apparatus, performs all work, and risks its life. Nature produces the gold and the donkeys!