

How the Steel Strike Was Broken

[A digest of the Interchurch World Movements' 90,000 word report on the steel strike in the United States, by Kennedy Crone in the Canadian Railroader.]

Nothing that the churches have done for years has created such intense interest and satisfaction in the ranks of organized workers on this continent as the report of the Interchurch World Movement on the steel strike in the United States. The report is a repudiation by independent and earnest investigators of the stories of revolutionary plans being behind the strike, and a terrific indictment of the United States Steel Trust in its relation to its workers.

Labor Press Alert

It is a stirring document looked at from any angle, and yet the ordinary press has been silent or extremely quiet about it. It is a fair guess that most Canadian newspaper readers who are not also readers of Labor papers do not know anything about it or have only a vague notion of it, although they doubtless preserve opinions contrary to it, made for them during the steel strike. Amongst organized workers in the United States, and in a lesser extent in Canada, it is probably the most discussed piece of news that has come within their ken as workers for a long time. It is also an illustration of the fact that there are two reading publics, one depending entirely on the daily papers and knowing very little of the news and views animating organized workers, and the other composed of organized workers reading the daily papers but also balancing them with what they read in their own trade journals and other Labor publications.

Efforts were made by spies acting for the Steel Trust to steal the manuscript of the report, and, this failing, efforts were then made to prevent publication. The report in part is as follows:

Causes of the Strike

1.

The causes of the strike lay in grievances which gave the workers just cause for complaint and for action. These unredressed grievances still exist in the steel industry.

2.

These grievances, broadly outlined, included the inhuman 12-hour day (sometimes 13 and 14-hour day) the seven-day week; the low wages of 72 per cent. of the steel workers, which were below the animal subsistence or bare-comfort level;

the denial or suppression of the right of collective bargaining; the autocratic control by the steel interests of the lives and the condition of the lives of the workers.

3.

The steel interests had built up and used a huge system of spying, including the use of agents provocateur, which carried right through into the United States Government. Every man who thought along union lines, who affiliated himself with unions, or who even attended meetings where such questions were discussed, was discharged, although he may have been in the industry from its very inception. Many were beaten, imprisoned and held for deportation as "Reds".

4.

Public officials, the police, the magistrates, the press and the pulpit were either bought up by the steel interests, or through affiliation, interests, or because they were powerless against steel, operated against the strikes and in behalf of the steel interests.

5.

The United States Army, under Gen. Leonard Wood, withdrew from Gary, Ind., only after the steel strike had been broken. The Pennsylvania state police was used to break the strike and to destroy all civil liberties. Agents of the Department of Justice, acting under Attorney General Palmer's orders, co-operated with the steel masters.

6.

The strike was broken because of a number of factors:

(a) The disunity of the 24 international unions of the American Federation of Labor, which through indifference, selfishness or narrow habits, failed to give the necessary support to the strikers, battling for the right to live as human beings.

(b) The steel interests, having control of all channels of publicity, created the impression that the strike was failing. The men became discouraged in the face of possible public non-support.

(c) The United States Steel Corporation was too strong, having ramifications into the "independent" steel companies, into railroads, into mines, into shipbuilding and ships, into general industries, into the pulpit and into the government.

7.

When the strike was broken the workers in the steel industry knew where they stood. They expressed their beliefs with ferocity. They knew that the Federal Department of Justice, the state and Federal officials and the United States Army helped break the strike; they knew that the newspapers and the churches helped to break the strike.

"Many were in dumb, deep-seated suspiciousness of everything and everybody connected with public executives, courts, Federal agents, army officers, reporters or clergy. The steel strike made tens of thousands of citizens believe that our American institutions are not democratic or not democratically administered."

The Commission's Recommendations

After a short, terse summary of the entire volume of 90,000 words, in which the conditions of workers in the steel industry are shown to be almost identical with conditions in England during the Industrial Revolution, the Commission makes a series of recommendations. The recommendations include:

1. That the Federal Government initiate the immediate undertaking of a settlement between the steel interests and the workers, by forcing a conference, which has been refused by Gary.

2. That the Federal Government establish a Commission similar to the Commission resulting from the coal strike, for the elimination of the 12-hour day, the 7-day week, and for free conferences.

3. That the Federal Government make an exhaustive study and a report of the abrogation of civil liberties in Western Pennsylvania, particularly of the activities of "labor detectives", of spies and of agents-provocateur.

4. That the Federal Government publish facts concerning the co-operation of Federal Departments with steel company spies, and that it publish the amount of public money so expended; and that the Government explain why it has suppressed two reports of recent investigations of conditions in the steel industry.

Not Bolshevism

The steel report denied the nation-wide publicity, financed by the steel companies,