

(March 18th, 1912.)

The Coal Strike in Great Britain.

BY MR. HARRY PHILLIPS.*

AT a regular meeting of the Canadian Club held on March 18th, 1912, Mr. Harry Phillips said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—Forgive me if I say to you, should there be any Americans in this audience, but I feel that to come to Toronto is like coming to one's home after being amidst the cosmopolitan and strange life of New York. I am sure you will pardon the pleasure I feel at again being able to see my King's name on a postage stamp. (Applause.)

You have asked me to speak about the coal strike in Great Britain. Allow me to correct slightly what the chairman has said as to the right I have to speak on this question. I was living in West Ham, that great industrial centre of East London, when the workingmen did me the honor of electing me for nine years as Alderman in the County Council, and also Deputy Mayor; and another honor they conferred upon me, which was very welcome to me, was that the Dock Laborers made me their Honorary Trustee, and I am also Honorary President of the Coal Workers of London. Therefore I speak to you as a business man like yourselves and at the same time as one who has large sympathy with industrial questions.

To me the strike which is raging in England to-day is the outward expression of the evolution and progress of the working people, and underneath it is the unrest which has existed for the past ten or fifteen years in the life of the English workingman. It is the outward expression, the eruption which bespeaks the burning heat of the blood within. But, in England, the press, the public, both sides of the Government whether Conservative or Liberal, public opinion, the Church, have all been educating the workingman. We have given him free education, free libraries, beautiful picture galleries, and in the University settlements the Universities have been seeking to come in touch with him. We have been teaching him that his home should be sanitary, his food healthful. We have been creating a divine discontent, urging him towards

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entering into fuller manhood. And now the workingman is beginning to say: "My education is complete, and I ask for the means to enter into this larger manhood you have been teaching me." Governments, Liberal and Conservative, have gone to the workingmen in the mass, and told them, "You can make or unmake governments, yours is the arm of power to-day." "It is this heaven of the more ideal life I am speaking of," replies the workingman. "You are asking me to enjoy a bigger life, and have more of heaven, and we are now asking for the means to enter into that larger, bigger life, that brotherhood taught us by the churches." People are panic struck, and say, "Oh, we didn't mean it that way." But the workingmen reply, "Well, we do, if you don't."

So I look upon it as an evolution, the evolution of industrial and financial conditions. The great business men have been building up combines and trusts, in America the Steel Trust and others, and so in my own country. Most combines are formed by bringing science to bear upon business. When I stood last week in front of Niagara Falls and looked at that wonderful sight, behind the rush and roar I seemed to hear the whisper of the power that drives the electricity, to heat, and light, and drive your city cars. The workingman sees that, he sees how capital increases its power, and says "I will learn that lesson; I must combine in my millions, because I have no capital to combine at the bank."

The workingmen are combining for what I submit is a fairer and more reasonable share of the wealth they produce. Gentlemen, I am no Socialist. A man was talking with me about the right of workingmen to combine, and he said, "I should disband these unions and shoot the leaders." Well, gentlemen, with the greatest respect, I should say to him, "You are talking out of the back of your head! These men are struggling for a principle; you may shoot the leaders, but you cannot shoot a principle,—that will rise again the third day."

I remember Mr. John Burns telling me a little story. He was standing one day by the dock gates, when he had time more than he has now to stand at the dock gates, and he heard some dockers discussing a limited liability company. He was amused at the definition given by one of the men. He put it this way: "You and me and Bill, us three, we form a limited liability company; and each one of us puts twopence in. Bill, you get six pen'orth of tobacco. This is the property of the limited liability company. You light your pipe, and I'll light up mine." But Bill said, "What about me? I put in a share

too." The other replied, "But Jack an' me are the managing directors, and we smoke. You are the shareholder, you've got to spit." And the thinking workingman to-day declines simply to spit. He asks for a fairer share. He has learned the power of organization, and says: "If I am to succeed I must put the whole of my army into the field at once; there must be no reserves." Believe me, the day of petty, sectional strikes is done forever, the workingmen have seen the power of great combinations, and this has changed their ideas. There is now an army of capital and an army of labor, and the more each is organized, I believe, the more it is for the best, for where trouble arises the people will say, "You two must come to peace, for the country must go on with its business." I believe in a great standing army to enforce the demands of the nation. A few years ago in Germany there was danger of a conflict. On the one side, however, the Rothschilds, who supplied the funds to the Government, said, "If you go to war, we will refuse you the money," and labor on the other hand said, "We refuse to fight, there is no need for it." The result was, Germany did not go to war.

This great universal suffering is but the birth pang, which will yet bring forth a better condition, a recognition of co-operation, co-partnership between master and man, and sooner or later it must come to that. That, I believe, is the line we are working to.

As to the demands of the miners. The men are asking for a minimum wage, a living wage, not a starvation pittance. People speak of a living wage as if it were just above the line of starvation. It has to be more than that! So far as I understand, from an official letter which I received last Saturday, the men ask one shilling an hour, that is, about twenty-five cents an hour. I submit that demand is fair. For a man working underground, as I have seen the coal men many a time in the north of England and in Wales, half naked, picking away in the darkness, hundreds of feet underground, a shilling an hour is not too high for a minimum wage. Would any of you, or would I, work for eight hours underground for a shilling an hour? The demand is a fairly moderate one. In fact, if I am rightly informed, sixty per cent. of the mine owners have already agreed to that minimum wage. The mine owners are divided, but the men are united. At present the difficulty is the difficulty of the seams; one seam is much easier to get at than another, so there is the difficulty of making the pay of the men correspond to the hardness of their work. Then there is the difficulty of getting water down into the mine, and so on, difficulties the men cannot control at all.

So there they stand, claiming, I submit, a fair wage. The outlook is a new outlook, but it will not be new always. The Government now has to step in, representing the whole nation, and it must say to the two sides: "You are hanging up—no matter who is doing it, the mine-owner or the miner, the capitalist or the workingman—a daily need, an essential of the daily life of the people; and no man in God's England, be he mine-owner or miner, has the right to do that."

Gentlemen, I am no Socialist! Socialism would take over everybody and everything, and say you must nationalize all the wealth. What I say is, "You mine-owners hold a monopoly: there is no great competition in coal; competition does not affect it like the automobile manufacturing business, or the steel works, or a great store like Mr. Eaton's, for the people are in fact all dependent on your mines, you control one of the great necessities of the people. We shall not interfere with you, but you must not corner coal, or put it under bad management, or do anything else that will cause you to say, "We can't go on producing coal." It hangs up the factories, and brings hardship to the people. The poor people in London have to pay \$10 a ton for coal. So because the Government is an elected government, if they can't govern let them quit! They must govern for the whole people, not for a section of the people, not for a few, but for the millions of workingmen as well as for the mine-owners.

So this Government has now reached a time, because it is a Liberal Government, when it will have to step in and say, "You must either come to terms, and set the coal free, and let England get along, or we shall have to interfere, either by nationalization or subsidizing or something." I am not scared of nationalization. I am not a Socialist, but we have nationalized the post office and the telegraph and the telephone. Why should we be scared of the nationalization of another daily need, if either master or man attempt to corner it?

I believe that out of this will come a settlement that will make for progress and peace. When you look at a man, when the man is at work he is just an ordinary workingman; but when the workingman goes on strike, people say "Call out the soldiers, the police." Yet I believe that in the hearts of the great mass of the people justice rules. Seven-eighths of the people believe in industrial peace and concord; nobody believes that the strike, the lock-out, with their attendant hunger and want, are necessary things. At heart we believe in peace, therefore I say, that the majority of the people, consciously or unconsciously, believe in peace. And the time is coming when capital is to see labor as a partner, and labor will look on

capital as a partner. I am not talking wild, burning words, or an impractical dream: for at Cadbury's, and Rowntree's, at the Thames Iron Works, at Levy's Soap Works, and at Livessy's Gas Works in South London, we have co-partnership, and there they have no serious trouble, but by the profit-sharing the man is interested, he realizes that he is no mere machinery. I believe that here in Canada you have some examples of the same method.

Gentlemen, I want that you and I, who form public opinion, who have cast ourselves on the side of industrial peace, shall say to the Government: "Call these men back; this must not go on." If they will not or cannot manage their business in such a way as to prevent this strife, we will find others who will manage it. It may mean less dividends. I believe these men will have to expect less dividends; the day of big dividends has gone forever. This is not Socialism, taking over everything, but affects the essentials that no man has a right to own, these essentials to the daily life of the people. Some people will have to be content with smaller dividends, so that these men who risk life and limb may have a fair living wage. They stand solidly together, making the moderate demand that every man shall have the means to bring up as he ought to his wife and child and to keep his home together. The men are becoming more thinking, and much more temperate, not because of prohibition but because of education. All sorts of things have given him a wider outlook. (Applause.) I close by saying, there is no need for panic. This great war that is raging to-day, if I have any right information, will end this week. Gentlemen, let us learn the lesson!