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TRADE UNIONS ARE THE BULWARKS OF MODERN DEMOCRACIES.—W. E. GLADSTONE.

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PORTLAND, OREGON, OCTOBER 21, 1904

No. 11

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PORTLAND, OREGON

TELEPHONE SERVICE DEMORALIZED

Strike Continues, With Public Sympathy in Favor of The Operators.

That the telephone service in the City of Portland at the present time is worse than none is attested by the blanched faces and profane countenances of business men hurrying to and fro on the streets carrying their own messages rather than attempt to get a number through the central office.

The truce that was arranged between the girls and the management on Wednesday, October 12, for two days, in which the company promised the girls that no attempt would be made to fill their places until the Pacific Coast manager arrived from San Francisco, was disregarded by the honorable(?) gentlemen who made the promise, and while the girls went back to work in good faith for the two days, operators were engaged in Seattle to come to Portland at once. The conference took place as scheduled at which time the company officials informed the girls that they could either surrender and return to work as individuals or not at all. They chose the latter, and nearly 200 operators are out. Less than a dozen remained at their places or deserted from the ranks. In the meantime the company has attempted to justify its act of perfidy through the daily press, but outside of the Citizens' Alliance, has received little approval from the public. The fact that the telephone service is simply wretched, and the places of Portland girls is taken by nearly one hundred girls whose homes and interests are elsewhere, is not taken kindly by the residents of this city.

That the girls have justifiable grievance no one familiar with the case will deny. The rules and regulations imposed upon them by the company and Miss Cooper had become so intolerable that the girls could restrain themselves no longer. It became apparent to them, and in fact they were informed, the company proposed to get rid of all the older employees who received over \$30 per month, and their places were to be given to cheaper help. The strictest and most unreasonable rules were inaugurated and a system of demerits installed for the least infraction. Spies were employed and the girls harassed in every conceivable manner.

As a result of this shabby treatment the operators concluded they would form an organization, as they knew that it meant dismissal if they went to the officers individually for redress. They were unfamiliar with the mode of forming an organization, and appealed to the district organizer of the American Federation of Labor for advice. His advice was that they proceed cautiously, and they would have done so had the company not discharged two of the girls for alleged participation in the attempt to form the union. Then it was that the operators walked out in a body, the truce arranged, and broken by the company, and the subsequent strike.

While the places of the Portland girls have been taken by outsiders, the latter cannot be wholly blamed. Many of them have declared that they were brought here under misrepresentation, and if they could get their fare paid they would return home. In all probability they were hoodwinked with flattering offers of good positions, and did not know that there was any trouble here.

This was the case four years ago when there was a strike of the operators in Seattle. The company took a number of girls from this city as strike breakers, and the girls were totally ignorant of any trouble until they arrived in Seattle. The most deceptive methods were employed. At that time the manager in Portland was an austere man whom the girls feared. At luncheon one day his lady assistant startled the operators by the following remarks: "Oh, say, girls, Mr. _____ says that there is not another city in the service that has as good and competent operators as there is in the Portland office. In fact he is so pleased with your work that he intends to take about a dozen of you to Seattle, where they are putting in new switchboards, to teach the operators there, and besides getting your wages, your expenses will be paid." This piece of flattery bewildered the girls, and they began to wonder at once who the fortunate operators would be. They were selected without delay and sent to Seattle. Carriages were provided for them at the depot, and the Portland manager was there in person to take charge of them. They were taken to the most fashionable hotel in the city and provided with accommodations. They were fed upon the finest delicacies that the markets of Seattle could afford. The first evening in the city they were given a launch party upon the Sound, and the next evening a theater party was arranged for them. They were then removed from the hotel and given quarters in a stylish boarding house, similar to the Norton and the Hobart-Curtis in this city. Then they were taken to the office and put to work. It was then that they discovered that they were

being used as strike-breakers. They had no money to return home and they were compelled to stay, and were worked 12 and 14 hours a day, as the Seattle girls are being worked here now. These facts which can be substantiated by some of the girls on a strike now who were taken to Seattle four years ago, will make it easier for us to blame the company more and the Seattle girls less. If the antipathy of the members of the Citizens' Alliance to all trades unions is so thoroughly fixed as to excuse this kind of business then we certainly do not begrudge them their uncompromising temper of hate.

The strike of the Portland operators is being conducted in an orderly manner, and the girls purpose that it shall be continued so. Pickets are using moral persuasion upon the imported operators, and committees are canvassing the business center of the city enlisting the sympathy of the business men. They have met with considerable success, and have even had offers of sums of money to aid them in their battle for better conditions. In two days' canvass nearly 1000 names have been secured to the following petition:

"To the Pacific States Telephone Company—We, the undersigned, business men of the City of Portland and subscribers to your telephone lines, would most earnestly and emphatically request that you immediately reinstate all of the exchange girls forced out of your employ by recent action, to the end that our business interests be no longer jeopardized.

If this appeal to the company fails to bring them to time the city will be thoroughly canvassed for the removal of telephones, providing the patrons are not all committed to the insane asylum in the meantime. It was reported yesterday that a well-known business man got central, secured his number without delay, and fell dead.

The grievance of the telephone girls has been taken up with the clergy of Portland, and their case will be presented to the various woman's clubs. A rumor of substantial bearing is also reported that an active effort will be made to secure a franchise for another telephone company in the city. It will be remembered that a year ago a franchise was applied for by another company, which was turned down by the council. It is said that the councilmen who objected to the new company then have about changed their minds, and that the installation of another and better service is a probability in the near future.

The press committee of the striking operators have prepared a communication for the public, setting forth their side of the controversy, which follows:

"In the controversy between the telephone company and its operators there is one significant point that should have due prominence if the public are to be a sharer in the difficulty, which they are to an extent willy-nilly. "That is the proposals made by both sides for a settlement at the outbreak of the strike. The matter is the culmination of a long period of dissatisfaction on the part of the girls, and it has been partly responsible for poor service to the public. "Our switchboards have been increased until we do double or treble what we formerly did. That's all right if the work had not been increased beyond the average operator's capacity and if the pay were just. But our primary grievance is what we regard as rules unnecessarily harsh and nagging. A system of reaching to each other's switchboards and of exciting competition and of blackmarks and classification as to promotion and pay that wears out our spirits and nerves. The pay is not at all commensurate with the amount of work.

"The average operator's pay is \$25 per month for about eight hours of very exhausting work. Thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents is the maximum, and the new rules will reduce this to \$30. Girls that work from 11 a. m. to 1 p. m. and from 5:30 to 10 p. m. get \$20.

"Now this is evidently very poor pay. But it has become evident that the motive of the new rules is to drive the old operators out of the service and replace them with new ones at reduced wages.

"We claim the matter of wages is not the prime factor in the trouble. It is our treatment that we are dissatisfied with, and the object of the harsh treatment is to establish a cheaper pay. We believe that the public should feel that the cause is not sufficient that its service should suffer, and that it should look into the merits of the dispute.

"We believe that the attitude of the company has been unfair. We had quit unpremeditatedly in a state of utter exasperation, after having formed a union in self-defense. We find the organizers of the union listed for

(Continued on page 6)

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