

LABOR WILL URGE EARLY CONFERENCE WITH PRESIDENT

By Norman Hagood
Universal Service Editorial Correspondent.

Washington, April 4.—A new move will be made in the labor situation today or tomorrow. The 16 craft unions, plus the maintenance men, will send a sizzling hot telegram from Chicago to President Harding most urgently requesting that he see a committee representing the men. If he accedes to the request the committee will reach Washington Thursday. The purpose is to get the point of view of men before the president so far as possible ahead of the meeting of congress, and before any further steps are taken toward committing the administration to the railroad policy to be favored.

Unless the situation changes suddenly, which does not seem likely, this telegram will foreshadow the line of argument to be taken at the meeting, if the meeting is granted. The men feel that the administration is seeking many representatives of capital and fewer or none of labor. They feel that a great deal of thought is given to the predicament of the roads and no thought whatever to the predicament of the men.

DECENT WAGE DEMANDED

Their proposition will be a flat argument that unskilled labor has a right to a wage that means a decent American standard of living. They challenge any statement that the present wage does more than give such a standard. They accept as the figures of the department of labor and they welcome any investigation to show that the lower grades of labor, which they believe are particularly aimed at by the railroad managers at present, are able to live on the department of labor standard or any less wages than they have.

The refusal of the president to bring about a meeting between the road managers and the men on a national scale was not responsible for this decision, although it had a tendency to confirm it. It has been in process of formation for several days. It is based simply on an appeal to figures, including a denial that the cost of living has shown essential increase, and it drives straight at the question of what is an American standard of living.

GREAT LOSS AFTER WAR

Perhaps a fair way to get down to what the laborers are really thinking is to cite from a recent speech by a scholar of nationwide fame, Prof. Frederick A. Cleveland, known everywhere as a student of economics.

He says:

"The losses to 'capital' in the period immediately following the Civil war were greater than the cost of the war. The loss and waste to the non-members, the workers, has far exceeded the losses to the dollar aristocracy. The loss in working force, due to lack of good will, the cost of the human turnover, in attention, disloyalty, opposition to discipline, and sabotage in industries managed on a basis which has ignored good will, cannot be estimated."

But its results can be stated. Professor Cleveland states them thus: "Sixty-five per cent of all the wealth in the hands of 2 per cent of the people. Only 25 per cent of the people who have a ratable share, and those largely farmers. Sixty-five million people in this, the most productive of all countries, are within a few days of the breadline."

The argument behind the appeal of the workers is that capital has got to find an answer to the give up some of the key industries. As a matter of fact the answer cannot be found in the railroads alone. It is impossible to separate the railroad problems from the coal mining problem. An attempted solution that does not include them both is not more than skin deep.

COAL IS BASE OF TRAFFIC

Look at some of the figures. On the roads north of the Potomac and the Ohio and east of Chicago, 40 per cent of the business of the roads is coal. It is the most profitable part of the traffic. It is almost the only part where efficiency prevails. One derrick sometimes picks up 100 tons and drops it into the hold of a steamer.

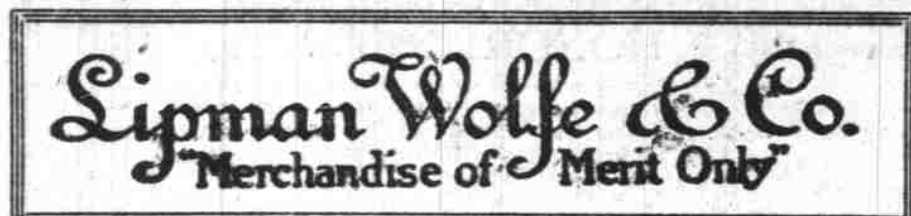
One train sometimes carries 2500 tons. Who uses the coal? The householders very little of it. The railroads themselves use from 25 to 35 per cent of it. Therefore, the coal situation hits them both ways. Coal at the mouth of the bit today costs only two or three times as much as it did before the war. That hits the roads. Coal is not moving and that hits them still harder.

It is a bad joke on supply and demand and though coal is not moving, the prices remain two or three times the pre-war price. It remains a first mortgage on the welfare of us all.

A good deal of the time lately the miners have been working less than 20 hours a week. That idleness ruins the railroads and ruins the rest of us. It ruins the railroad employees. There is one answer to the railroad problem and the rest is charity. Wages per day mean nothing. It is earnings per year that count. Until the mines and railroads guarantee regularity of employment their troubles will remain, the cost of living will still stay up. Only regularity of employment can insure regularity of production. The mine owners and the railroad managers do not like the idea of government ownership. Very well. Let them give another if they can. Somebody has to take the lead toward making production even and employment continuous.

For the railroads to pretend they are giving an answer by taking a slash in the day wages of their employees, while showing absolute blockheadedness in face of underlying social problem is a little too old a story. The country is tiring of it.

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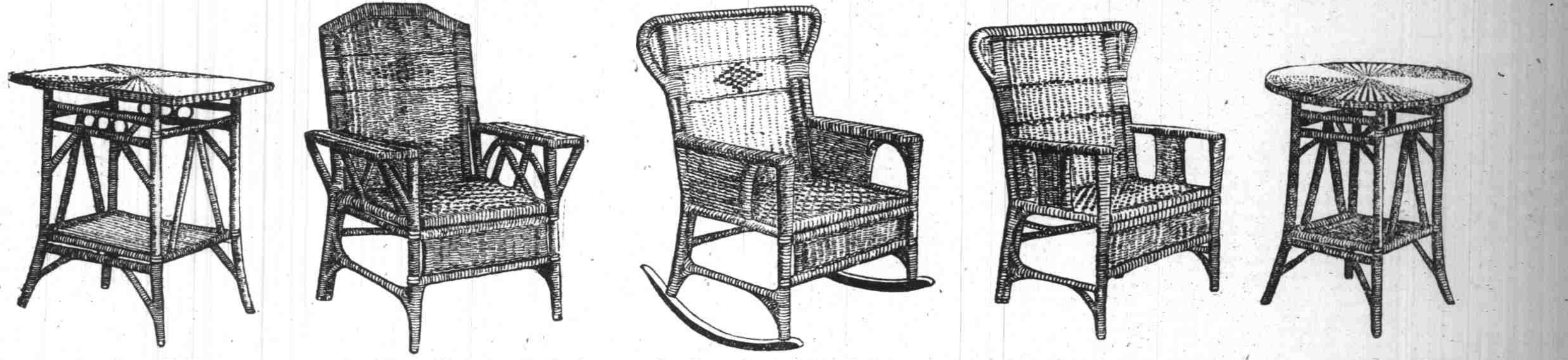
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