

RAILROAD STRIKE DEEMED UNLIKELY AT PRESENT TIME

By Norman Hapgood
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Washington, July 6.—Things are about to happen in the railroad situation. The decision about the wage awards at Chicago will, I think, be against a strike. To strike now against wage reduction would be the poorest strategy. The diplomatic procedure would be to protest against a policy of making labor pay for the stupidity of the railroads, but to express a generous willingness to save the public from the disaster of a strike at this critical time.

There might well be reservation about the future, an explicit pointing out that labor does not permanently give up its just claims, and means to return to them as soon as the emergency is past.

TO CALL RAIL HEADS
With more statesmanlike leadership the opportunity could be used to lay down a constructive program.

At the Washington end things will also see a lively beginning next week. The railroad employees are to put in their case before the Cummins committee. The brotherhoods are expected to occupy about five days and the shop crafts to follow them, probably the following week.

The promise of Senator Cummins to recall the railroad officials for cross-examination if the promise is carried out will furnish the most interesting feature of the hearings. It will show just how little officials know about the actual costs in their own business. It will show what a hopelessly meaningless system of accounting they carry on.

INEFFICIENCY IS CLAIMED

The noisiest claim being made by the railroads is something that seems to total about \$1,200,000,000 for alleged inefficiency of labor during the period of government operation and the period of government guarantees. They are trying to interpret the word "cost" not in the simple sense of money paid out but in the subtle and wholly guesswork sense of money paid out in relation to a dogmatic surmise about the quality of the work done.

The falsity of this attempted interpretation of the contract with the government is shown by the fact of record that roads, when Mr. McAdoo was director general, tried to get such a provision put in the contract and the government rejected it, on the simple ground that it was unworkable and would be the basis for wild and unsupported claims.

ADMINISTRATION FEARLESS

The railroad administration, which is one department of the government that does not seem afraid of the propaganda carried on by the roads, points out that when President Wilson's roads took over the roads he took 280,000 miles of main track, 2,500,000 freight cars, 66,000 locomotives, 55,000 passenger cars and all kinds of complex equipment.

There were 188 separate large organizations and from six to eight hundred small organizations. No comprehensive or detailed survey of its condition was in existence. Some was in poor condition. Some was in very bad condition. Labor was of many different kinds in different parts of the country. In one place track labor would be native, in another negro, in another Mexican, Italian, Japanese.

Therefore the government agreed with the railroads on a straight money test, closed to wild claims, and it is that test that the railroads are now trying to confuse, so as to rush in endless fake claims.

FIGURES GUESSED AT

They try, as the railroad administration shows, to support their sweeping claims "merely by offering figures which are themselves pure assertions, as to the time required for certain operations at a particular shop on a single road at some time during the test period and at some time during federal control."

The railroad attorneys, as the government says, do "not try to show, even as to these figures, by what method they were produced or how the comparison attempted is proposed to be justified."

It is considerable nerve. As the railroad administration says, the railroads have no records on which to base their guesses. They gaily reduce the work done by the government by about 40 per cent.

With equal gaudy they trifle with the few real records there are.

For example, in one case an increase is shown of 12.4 per cent. They juggle the figures to try to show an increase of 142.2 per cent.

The rest of this tale of infinite nerve I shall tell tomorrow.

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at 9 A. M.



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