

Bruckart's Washington Digest

Blame Absurd Relief Policies For Widespread WPA Strikes

Misguided Effort to Force Government Into Greater Gifts to Them; Yell Radical Accusations When Soft Snap Stops; Honest Distribution Congress' Aim.

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WASHINGTON.—It is sometimes possible, I believe, to find an excuse for violent action on the part of a man who is hungry. Likewise, that individual's desperation may be explained when his children are near starvation. It is a social condition that perhaps merits sympathetic understanding rather than harsh treatment. When those individuals have had the specter of starvation removed by the generous hand of government, however, it strikes me that there can be no justification for revolt against the government or the people which have been responsible for the charity. That is to say, neither the government nor the citizens can be held responsible for the hard luck of any of us, nor does any one individual have a divine right to such generosity.

Yet, there exists in this country today an extraordinarily large number of persons who seem to feel the government must bend its knees to them. They have lately taken the position—largely misguided by the lowest grade of leaders—that they can dictate to their government and their neighbors the terms upon which they will receive government relief. They have gone so far as to use the strike as a weapon to force, to coerce, their government into greater gifts to them, and it is one of the most dangerous trends to be noted on the horizon of our country. It is traceable, of course, to the utterly absurd relief policies that have been practiced, heretofore.

To go back a bit for a review, the relief program enacted recently by congress for the year that is now starting specified that all WPA workers must put in 130 hours per month in order to get the maximum government relief. It was included by congress as a part of the law upon recommendation by WPA Commissioner F. C. Harrington, and no right thinking persons can find reason to disagree. The purpose is most commendatory. The increase in the hours of labor was designed to weed out those who were receiving WPA checks who were satisfied to go on without any thought of ever obtaining a private job again. There is that type, you know.

Congress Sought to Set Up An Honest Distribution

The rules that expired June 30 had made it possible for some workers to receive the maximum pay in as little as two weeks of work. Skilled workers were being paid wages that were equivalent to the rates in private employment in the area where they were. So, some workers stayed on the job two weeks and had their month's pay; others worked longer and were paid much less. Congress, therefore, tried to set up something like an honest distribution and it directed that everybody receiving the WPA checks had to work 130 hours in order to receive the full amount.

There were some other provisions, too, that irked the WPA workers. One of them, for instance, makes it necessary for those who have been on WPA relief jobs for 18 months, to take a layoff of one month. That was designed to give some other unemployed person a chance to get WPA relief.

The third big change from last year and the earlier years of federal relief was a specification as to wages. The legal language is too complex for me to understand, thoroughly, but the intention is to make the rates of WPA wages have some relationship to the cost of living

where the unemployed are given WPA jobs.

These things are in the law, this time. In previous years, congress had been unable to break the grip of the professional relievers, like Harry Hopkins and Aubrey Williams, and the rates of pay and conditions of work were determined largely by such men. Mr. Williams will be recalled as the man who said in a speech to WPA workers they should use their numerical strength politically and support only those officials who turned loose the most money. Under the previous system, the WPA workers could attack rules and regulations laid down by individuals. But now Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Williams are not in the picture, and a hard-boiled army officer heads up the WPA organization.

Strike Against Government Is What Confronts Country

The condition that confronts the country, therefore, is a strike against the national government, because the elected representatives of the people as a whole laid down the rules, this time. Of course, the Constitution guarantees to all citizens the right to petition congress. It does not grant the right, however, to use force or violence to change the action of congress. The WPA workers who went out on strike, therefore, in my opinion, were right close to the border line of a serious offense against the government. It is one thing to strike, as a union does, against an employer; it is quite another thing for a union to be organized to perpetuate government charity and to use that union in a violent fashion as has been done in this instance.

And, speaking of unions, there are two of them—rival organizations—among WPA workers. There is the Workers Alliance of America and the Workers League of the United States. The first named is headed by David Lasscer and the second by Lloyd Leith. I do not know the background of either man, where they came from or what their mission in life may be. Of this, however, I am sure: very few men and women in this world of ours ever work for absolutely no pay.

I wish that congress would dig into those two organizations and see how much these "leaders" are paid and find out where the money comes from. It is difficult for me to believe that either one of them or the several dozen "field men" and secretaries and others with titles are such lovers of humanity that they are not being well paid for their work. To believe that these men are emulating Our Lord to that extent is stretching my credulity too far.

Why Is a Union Necessary Among These Workers?

One might also inquire quite properly, I think, why it is necessary to have a union among these workers. I fail to see why they should spare any of the meager funds that the government gives them for living purposes to be used by union leaders. Those fellows cannot do anything to make congress change its mind. Oh! They can come to Washington—and they do—and issue statements and shout threats before congressional committees and see their names in the newspapers, and accomplish nothing. That is, they get nowhere except that they are able to show the poor, wretched souls on relief that their "leaders" are great "fighters" in the cause.

While there never was a chance of congress amending the law and

A Barrel of Joy



Life begins in a barrel. Here's the latest in furniture for the newborn baby. A St. Louis hospital is displaying the low-cost crib pictured above. It's made from an ordinary barrel and costs only 60 cents plus a little work.

anyone with a grain of sense must recognize it, these self-appointed, self-anointed saviors of the WPA workers did succeed in calling something like 40,000 workers off of their jobs in various parts of the country. The result was that those workers lost just that much money. They also ran afoul of the Harrington determination, which many of them did not realize was not a Hopkins or Williams chin. Colonel Harrington promptly issued orders that those who stayed away five days would be replaced, because there were thousands willing to work and had no jobs. Obviously, that brought a good many back to their jobs. Some others, however, let their passion and unwise leadership of their unions put them in a position of cutting off their nose to spite their face.

It is to be noted, in passing, that conditions now are somewhat different than when the policies of the professional relievers were operative throughout the country. There were numerous instances, it will be recalled, when Hopkins and Miss Perkins, secretary of labor, advised that sit-down strikers should be fed off of relief funds. State relief directors and state charity leaders seem generally to have taken a different view of the current situation.

Seems There Are Some Very Stupid Local Labor Leaders

The national labor unions, like the American Federation of Labor and the Lewis organization, the C. I. O., came close to getting involved in this picture. I do not know whether the heads of those great unions were responsible for the general aloofness, but they were quick to explain that strikes by any of their member-organizations in behalf of the WPA workers were "entirely local." If this be true, the explanation lies in the fact that there must be some very stupid local labor leaders. Surely, with union labor's prestige at its lowest ebb in many years, respectable labor unions could hardly expect to gain in public esteem by participating in such ludicrous proceedings as a strike against the government of the United States.

Notwithstanding the gloomy phases of the story told above, attention should be drawn the meanwhile to the healthy aspect that can be found upon examination of the circumstance. Consider the courage that congress showed in taking a position which admits the existence of certain parasitic elements. That is to say, congress has taken a positive step toward placing relief on a basis that will reduce waste, to some extent. It has made some gains in the direction of sweeping out a small part—very small, it is true—of the political influences that hitherto operated. And, more important than the rest, the congress over President Roosevelt's opposition, has acted to compel greater local responsibility for use of public money.

AROUND the HOUSE Items of Interest to the Housewife

To Brighten Aluminum.—To keep aluminum bright rub it with any of the acid fruit juices such as lemon or rhubarb, or let it stand in a rather strong solution for one-half hour.

Use Underripe Fruit.—When making jellies do not forget to use fruits and berries underripe rather than overripe, for better consistency and flavor.

Rustproofing Tinware.—Tinware will never rust when put in water if, when it is new, it is well rubbed with lard and thoroughly heated in the oven.

Keeping Meat Fresh.—Vinegar rubbed over raw meat will keep it fresh.

Treating Tile Floors.—Abrasives or bleaches have a tendency to roughen the surface of a tiled floor to the point where it becomes dirty sooner. For glazed tile on floors, use plain soap and water. Unglazed tile may be waxed and polished.



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