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Free Speech is Now Denied

FOR centuries the right of free speech has been demanded and fought for by the common people of all civilized countries. For centuries its granting has been opposed by all reactionary forces in all backward nations. In British communities it was won long since chiefly through the efforts and sacrifices of the working classes. Since it was won it has been the chief safeguard of those who advocated reforms and the general betterment of conditions under which the working classes found it necessary to earn their living.

Last evening in Winnipeg a minority of those assembled in a public place to hear a specific discussion of a matter of most vital public importance, undertook to challenge the right of free speech and to prevent law-abiding citizens from indulging in this peculiarly sacred British privilege.

A meeting was called by the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand to discuss the business of that committee—the business being the business of every citizen who desires the safeguarding of British institutions and law and order. A minority—a small minority composed of strikers and sympathizers with the strikers—successfully undertook to prevent the discussion. They conducted themselves in such a disorderly manner that it was found necessary to dismiss the meeting before the matter which it was called to discuss could be disposed of.

Now, these disorderly persons may think that it was a smart trick to undertake to pack this meeting and by rowdyism—that is to say, by rowdy interruptions—to bring it to naught—but if they only realized what a precedent they are establishing they would understand that they only succeeded in doing a grave injury to their own cause by inviting the revival of a disbelief in the justice and propriety of the right of free speech, the right to congregate for public discussion and the right to agitate in a public manner, the exercise of all of which rights has given to the very class that the interrupters think they represent the dearest privileges and the freest opportunities that they enjoy in British communities to-day.

A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

It is but a step from the interruption of one public meeting to the interruption of all public meetings—and if all public meetings should be interrupted, or prevented, how could the laboring classes ever hope to avert a relapse into the former conditions of labor, which made the working man of former generations rightly protest that his lot was little better than that of a slave?

If there is any one class more than another that should zealously guard the right of free speech, it is the class that fought for it. Any man that is classed as reactionary might be expected to welcome such a reversion. No good citizen, however, to whatever class he may belong, can do anything but deplore the spectacle of men who profess to clamor for liberty in the highest degree, at the same time undertaking to prevent the operation of the greatest safeguard that liberty possesses.

The Citizens' Committee gave no provocation for interruption. No constitutional authority in Winnipeg, in the Province of Manitoba, or in the Dominion of Canada, gave provocation for such interruptions. The meetings of the Strike Committee, the meetings of Labor Unionists, even the most violent meetings of the Red Socialists, have been uninterrupted. The most violent appeals to the basest passions have been permitted in public places, because even although their prevention or punishment might be eminently desirable in the public interests, it was feared that such interruption might be misunderstood as a veiled attack upon free speech.

The interrupters of last night's meeting, those who made the first resort to rowdyism, will eventually bring down upon their own heads the curses of those whom they misguidedly seek to serve if they should succeed by such provocation in clamping down upon Winnipeg, or even upon a wider sphere, a form of prohibition of radical discussion. Last night's rowdyism was an open invitation to vigorous retaliation. It will not be to the credit of the rowdies if the invitation should not be accepted. It will be due solely to the fact that greater toleration and moderation are to be found in constituted authority and law-abiding citizenship than in those who seek to advance the interests of Bolshevism, revolution, anarchy and treason.

Strikers Break Up Meeting

EVEN the right of free speech, another bulwark of British freedom, was swept away last night, when the strikers packed a meeting of the Committee of One Thousand—a meeting called by the executive to lay before the whole committee a report on what had been accomplished since the strike began. A. L. Crossin, the chairman, Major McIvor and A. J. Andrews, K.C., were the only speakers to attempt to take the platform. Though Major McIvor received the best hearing of the three, the hearings accorded all three were uproarious.

Mayor Gray was on the platform and there were repeated calls from the strikers for him to speak. His Worship appealed for order and British fair play several times for other speakers, but did not get a chance before the disturbers caused the chairman to dissolve the audience, to make any address. Below is a fair report on the meeting, illustrating the frequency of the interruptions.

The gallery over the platform, the floor of the hall, and the side-galleries were packed with strikers who yelled and jeered whenever they heard anything they did not like—which was quite often. The climax came when in the middle of A. J. Andrews' speech the strikers rose and gave three cheers and a tiger for the "One Big Union," the frankly-acknowledged revolutionary organization. After this, Mr. Andrews asked all who thought that Senator Robertson was to have addressed the meeting to raise their hands—and the showing was so great that it was quite plain that a misunderstanding had been caused by somebody. Between the misapprehension and the disturbance which continued, the meeting was broken up.

At the opening A. L. Crossin (chairman) stated that this was a meeting called of those in sympathy with the objects for which the Committee of a Thousand stands. (Roars of derision.)

THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

"I have endeavored to describe the purposes of this meeting. We invited those in sympathy with our objects and there are a large number present who are not in sympathy with those objects." (Ironical cheering.) Mr. Crossin again attempted to continue, but was drowned out by roars and interruptions. When this partly subsided Mr. Crossin resumed: "I would like to tell you the purposes of our committee." (Cries of "No" and noise all over the hall.) At this stage Mayor Gray entered and made his way to the platform, where he was greeted by a tremendous ovation lasting for some minutes. Mr. Crossin, on turning again to the audience, was greeted with insulting jeers and yells such as "Let a man speak" and "Give us a song," followed by calls for Mayor Gray, and cheers and catcalls. In the midst of an absolute pandemonium Mayor Gray demanded that the chairman be heard. "That's British fair play," he added, amid applause.

Mr. Crossin again was heard to speak for a second or two. "There are three different purposes for which we were organized," he said. "The first was—" (Yells of "To smash the strike" and cheers.) Mr. Crossin struck to his guns, but was again interrupted by demands for his name. "My name does not matter, but I was born in a log cabin down in the Province of Ontario." This was greeted with a yell, "You ought to go back."

"We are organized in the first place to join with the constituted authorities in this city in maintaining law and order," was his next remark, which immediately drew down a chorus of booing, and a striker arose in the gallery and remarked, "This is the most speechless city in Canada." There were more calls for the Mayor, and the Mayor's rising to ask for order served as the excuse for another minute or two of cheering.

"Men," he said, "there are always two sides to a question." (Cries of "No.") "There are always two sides to everything, no matter which one is being heard," continued the Mayor. "Let us give these gentlemen a hearing—a fair chance to state their case. Criticism is the foundation of good government. Give him a chance to state the committee's case." (Cries of "They've got no case" and "We're fighting for a living.") The Mayor added, "Now, free speech is an essential of the British constitution, and criticism is always a proper thing to hear. I appeal for the chairman. Hear him—hear any man who

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