

508

ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE WAR EFFORT
9 APRIL 1946

246-66

CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction--Brigadier General Donald Armstrong, Commandant, The Army Industrial College | 1 |
| Guest speaker--Mr. William Green, President, American Federation of Labor | 1 |
| General discussion | 9 |
| General Armstrong | |
| Mr. Green | |
| Students | |

9 APRIL 1946.

599

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have had the opportunity and privilege of talking with Mr. Green for the last twenty minutes. I have told him the purpose of the Industrial College of our intention of greatly stimulating the studies here in the matter of manpower and labor in war. Mr. Green thinks that is a step in the right direction.

It is absolutely unnecessary, I think, to give a biographical sketch of the speaker this morning. He is known to everyone in this country as one of the outstanding leaders in the life of the United States. It is a privilege to present to you this morning Mr. William Green, the President of the American Federation of Labor, who will speak on the important subject of "Organized Labor and the War Effort". Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN:

General Armstrong and my friends, my meeting with you this morning refreshes my memory regarding my attendance at a similar meeting of the Army Industrial College a few years ago. I cannot recall at the moment the year when I met and spoke to a group similar to this group assembled this morning. I enjoyed my visit with you on that occasion and I know I am going to enjoy my visit with you this morning.

I am pleased to speak to you this morning on the subject "Organized Labor and the War Effort". It appears to me to be an interesting subject. I was requested by General Armstrong to speak on this subject.

Events which have taken place since the end of the war have created such urgent and engrossing problems that we have scarcely had the opportunity to analyze organized labor's wartime activities and evaluate them from the detached point of view. Your invitation, to come here this morning and talk about labor's participation in the war effort, therefore, provides a welcome opportunity to sum up one of the most inspiring chapters in America's history.

World War II was a man-sided conflict. To begin with, it was a war of ideologies. It developed into the greatest military struggle of all time. The military conflict, in turn, depended upon the outcome of the battle of production. And in order to win that battle, we had to carry on in an unceasing drive for financial and material resources. To each of these supreme efforts, organized labor and its millions of members here in America made a vital contribution.

The American Federation of Labor enlisted in the war of ideologies long before Pearl Harbor, long before a majority of the American people realized the growing menace of Nazism, Fascism, and Japanese Imperialism. As far back as 1935, the American Federation of Labor sounded clear warnings. We saw Hitler in his true light the moment he came to power and started persecuting the Jews of Germany and destroying the trade union

movement of that country. We protested vigorously and, when that had no effect, we unhesitatingly and unanimously voted, in our convention, a strict boycott against all German goods and services.

Now that was in 1935. The American Federation of Labor and its members knew then, as all Americans know now, that this man Hitler was a blight upon civilization, a menace to democratic freedom, and a curse upon the human race. We despised him and everything for which he stood.

Similarly, the American Federation of Labor was among the first to recognize the danger of Fascism. While some Americans were expressing admiration for the fraudulent efficiency of Mussolini, the American Federation of Labor unanimously voted boycotts against Fascist goods and services.

And while our own country was still shipping military supplies to Japan, the American Federation of Labor, as far back as 1937, spoke its mind about the treacherous aggressors by placing an embargo on Japanese goods and services.

Now that was in 1937. Let me say now, without hesitation or equivocation, that the American Federation of Labor steadfastly opposes all forms of totalitarianism, including communism. We have great admiration for the way Soviet Russia carried on the war against Hitler and for the courage and mighty exploits of the Russian people and the Russian Armies. But, while we acknowledge our indebtedness to Soviet Russia, we do not consider it right or just or contributory to world peace that all Europe be sovietized now that the war has ended. We still believe that each nation should be accorded the right to work out its own peaceful and democratic destiny without being subject to the status of a puppet state. And from our own experience, we know that when communists seize control of a trade union organization, its democratic roots die.

The past has taught us that communism recognizes no principles and that it worships only the god of expediency, a god with many faces. We clearly remember that in 1940, when America's preparedness program began, the Stalin-Hitler pact was still in force, and the communists and fellow travelers in this country were picketing the White House with signs saying, "The Yanks are not coming". It was at that time when the Selective Service Act was adopted and the War Department undertook the gigantic task of training millions of America's young men for national defense.

To say that our Nation was almost totally unequipped to handle the training of such a large number of troops, at that time, is no exaggeration. There were no camps to house the draftees, no equipment to train them with, and almost complete lack of the necessary facilities. Honorable Robert E. Patterson, then Under Secretary of War, called me in and explained the emergency. He asked me for the cooperation of the American Federation of Labor to help solve the Army's problems. I assured him we would move heaven and earth to do the job.

I sent out a call to our building and construction trade unions; those are highly skilled workers. I told them about the physical magnitude of the War Department's construction program and the serious manpower

problems involved. They pledged themselves to measure up to the emergency. There was not a single one among all that extensive group of highly skilled workers who refused to respond wholeheartedly to the call for extraordinary services at this critical hour.

Then what happened? In record-breaking time, the building and construction trade unions of the American Federation of Labor built the Army training camps, air fields, Naval stations and new factories urgently needed to train and equip the Nation's Armed Forces. This huge construction job was the equivalent of building one hundred great cities from scratch in less than a year's time.

Now that brings home the magnitude of the task. Most of the cities of the projects were far removed from industrial centers. Our unions recruited workers from all parts of the country and sent them, at union expense, to where they were needed. Frequently the workers were forced to live in tents and huts and trailer camps, because no other facilities were available. Old and retired workers toiled on the job, in all kinds of weather, beside young apprentices just out of grade school. Roads had to be carved out of the wilderness; sewers had to be dug; water, electricity, and other utilities had to be piped in from distant sources. Materials ran short. Contractors overreached themselves. Yet despite all these obstacles, the combined determination of the Army and the American Federation of Labor won out and broke all records.

Of course, some mistakes were made, and a few situations developed which caused newspaper headlines and congressional investigations; but, considering the rush and the magnitude of the program, these blots on the record were insignificant. After careful investigation, the Congressional Committee found little to criticize but much to praise. The War Department today is proud of the job it did and so are we of the American Federation of Labor.

To the newly built training camps, the men and women of labor sent more than two million of their sons who fought in uniform side by side with American boys from all of the walks of life and helped win final victory in direct combat against the enemy; more than two million members of organized labor were in the Armed Forces of the Nation; among them were outstanding national heroes such as Commando Joe Kelly and Sergeant Al Schmidt, both members of the American Federation of Labor.

Never for one moment did the members of the American Federation of Labor serving on the home front forget that they were working to support and protect their own flesh and blood. Never for one moment did they forget that the war was labor's own war, a contest between free labor and slave labor.

These spiritual motives added to the intense loyalty of the rank and file of American workers, gave new strength to their muscles and lent greater skill to their hands as they labored day and night, around the clock, seven days a week, in the battle of production. That battle got off to a flying start two days after Pearl Harbor when the Executive Counsel of the American Federation of Labor, summoned by me to a meeting in

Washington, gave an unconditional "no-strike" pledge to the Nation for the duration of the war.

Now that was two days after Pearl Harbor. The following day that pledge was endorsed and ratified by the Executive Officers of all of our affiliated national and international unions--all. So when the late President Roosevelt called a special conference of labor and industrial leaders two weeks later to consider ways and means whereby the war production program could be expedited without interruptions due to strikes or lockouts, the representatives of the American Federation of Labor were ready with a constructive program voluntarily self-imposed. Our recommendations were adopted by the conference and accepted by the President. The "no-strike" pledge became the official policy of embattled America and the National War Labor Board was created for the purpose of settling disputes by peaceful means.

Now I do not propose to assert to you this morning that the "no-strike" pledge was adhered to one hundred percent throughout the war; but the records show that it was faithfully lived up to by more than 99 percent of the Nation's workers. I have no apologies to offer for that record. In an imperfect world made up of human beings prone to error, perfection is a goal to strive for even though it may never be reached. Even in the Armed Forces where military discipline governs, occasionally infractions of the rule occur and soldiers have been known to go AWOL even when they know they may face a court-martial. This is an imperfect world made up of imperfect human beings, and it is too much to expect absolute perfection in an imperfect world.

There were several insignificant factors about the operation of the "no-strike" pledge which I want to call to your attention, especially because for the most part they were overlooked by the press and may be new to you.

In the first place, during the entire war, the American Federation of Labor did not sanction, condone, or support a single strike. There was not an official strike that occurred during the war, period. To the best of my knowledge, this is also true of our affiliated national and international units. The strikes that did take place in the A.F.L. were local in character and for the most part wildcat in variety. In every instance, the American Federation of Labor and its responsible union officials stepped in immediately and exerted pressure for a prompt settlement. The reduction in the number of strikes during the war was, perhaps, less significant than the reduction in the duration of such strikes.

Perhaps I could best sum up this phase of labor's participation in the war effort by pointing out that never in the history of organized labor, in this or any other land, has there occurred a period during which such a small percentage of actual working time was lost due to strikes and lockouts. Now the facts speak for themselves. The record has been made; it can be examined in order to face the real facts. In fact, the Labor Department disclosed in an official report that the time lost due to strikes in the final year of the war was more than made up by the extra time put in by labor by working on all holidays.

601

Now this brings me to a related issue which resulted in a sharp cleavage between the points of view of the War Department and organized labor. In the early part of the war, a movement was started, and later renewed, for the adoption of a National Service Act which would have subjected production workers on the home front to a compulsory draft, not for military services but civilian employment. Because the War and Navy Departments and other leaders of the Government supported this legislation, we of labor felt it incumbent upon us to give it careful consideration. We asked ourselves this question: Will such a law accomplish any good or is it likely to effect a great deal of harm?

In the common deliberate judgment of the American Federation of Labor, the proposed National Service Law would not have added a single bullet to the Nations war production totals. On the contrary, we came to the inescapable conclusion that the substitution of involuntary servitude for willing cooperation might so confuse the war production program and upset labor morale as to set back the entire war effort.

From the long experience in the practical operation of American industry, we realize that regimentation does not necessarily bring about greater efficiency. We felt that to deprive American workers of their basic freedom would only deprive our country of one of its main sources of strength. The arguments by proponents of this legislation that it would help prevent strikes was not upheld by the facts that we were able to gather.

In Great Britain a National Service Act had been in effect since Dunkirk, but that law did not prevent strikes in Britain even though its people were under direct enemy fire. In fact, the number of strikes in Britain during the war years was proportionately higher than in America, the one nation operating under a compulsory legislative program and the other under a voluntary free American democratic program.

We called upon our union members to prove by example that a National Service law in America was as unnecessary as it was unwise. They responded in such a wonderful way that Congress refused to adopt the legislation.

Now let us look for a moment at the response of American workers to their country's need for war production. Do you all remember when the late President Roosevelt, at the beginning of the war, set the "fantastic" goal of fifty thousand planes a year for the aircraft industry? "Impossible", said the editorial writers. But industry and labor did not waste time talking about it; they went to work. And during the last year of the war, we were producing bigger and better bombers and fighters at the rate of over a hundred thousand a year, double the goal set by the late President Roosevelt.

Now a great deal of credit for this astounding performance was due to the ingenuity and the "know-how" of the aircraft industry, but no industry is any better than human hands which run it and operate the machines; and the records show that within three years the average output per worker in west coast aircraft plants increased 514 percent. The result of this amazing teamwork between labor and management spelled the end for Hitler,

Mussolini and Hirohito. When the great new fleets of superior American planes reached the fighting fronts, the might of the German Luftwaffe and the Jap Zeros crumbled and the United Nations obtained mastery of the skies.

Let us go back again for a moment. Do you remember when the Army, in prewar maneuvers, was forced to equip trainees with wooden guns and use trucks labeled "tanks" instead of the real thing? When the war production program hit full stride, those dangerous shortages disappeared over night. Tens of billions of dollars worth of guns, tanks, ammunition and military supplies rolled in an unceasing stream from the Nations factories and were speeded to the front of our own forces and our allies. I need not burden you with the statistics on production totals since I know these are available to you; but if there is still any doubt in any American's mind as to the overpoweringly superior volume of this country's war production, all he has to do is to take a look at the surplus supply centers in his neighborhood, at the tremendous fleets of flying fortresses which were never used, at the tanks and guns and jeeps which crammed every storage house. I would not be surprised if we have left even a greater amount of such supplies overseas to be sold as surplus.

Now another example of the amazing production and achievements of American workers can be found in the fact that the size of the Nations fighting fleets were tripled, during the war, despite losses to enemy action. The Japanese thought they had dealt the American Navy a death blow at Pearl Harbor. When the Navy came back at them, only a few years later, in the Pacific, with a new and far greater supply of warships, the enemy could not believe their eyes and these warships were in addition to a vast number of liberty ships and thousands of landing craft built under rapid pressure to transport supplies and troops to the fighting fronts.

Now make no mistake about it; the invasions which were carried on so brilliantly by our Armed Forces in Africa, Europe and the Pacific started right here in America, in the airplane factories, munition plants, and shipyards of our land.

I wish to reserve special mention for the production of the atomic bomb, because it provides an exceptionally cogent illustration of the extent and the value of the cooperation given to the War Department by the American Federation of Labor. As I recall, it was some time in 1944 when representatives of our highly skilled unions were summoned to Under Secretary of War Patterson's Office in the Pentagon Building for a conference. He told those present that he wanted to discuss with them a war project which was top secret, so secret that he could not give any more explicit information than that production of a new explosive was involved. He said that several new plants, record-breaking in size, would have to be constructed in remote areas in the States of Washington and Tennessee to produce this explosive; it would involve the transportation of many thousands of highly skilled workers, from their homes, into virtual wilderness areas for an indefinite period.

Mr. Patterson expressed the willingness of the War Department to meet union standards of pay, but he asked that the unions waive various working

602

conditions of long standing in order to expedite the completion of the project. He impressed upon me the fact that speed was vital to end the war as soon as possible and save the lives of the Nations's fighting men. It was a race with the enemy as to who would be able to put the new explosive into action first,

All who participated in this historic conference assured Mr. Patterson, in behalf of the American Federation of Labor and those they represented, that they would let nothing stand in the way to win that race. I appealed to our building trade unions and they responded in the manner I expected.

I would like to single out the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for special praise because that union was called upon to supply most of the skilled workers for these jobs.

Now our workers responded; they did the job; they kept the secret. The planes were completed long ahead of schedule--think of that. Then the American Federation of Labor supplied most of the production workers to man the plants and turn out the first atomic bombs which broke the backbone of Japanese resistance and ended the war without the necessity of a bloody and costly invasion.

As I said at the outset, it is still too early to evaluate some of these contributions to the war effort made by organized labor; but I firmly believe that as the years pass and historians begin to chronicle the story in an atmosphere free from passion or prejudice, the role of organized labor in the ultimate victory will be accorded the importance it deserves but has not yet received.

There is the final chapter in the story which must not be overlooked. We have carried on the fighting and production, but our Armed Forces and our allies required tremendous sums of money, more than the United States Government could raise by taxation; it therefore called upon the American people to loan their earnings and their savings to the Government. Our unions took up this call in direct appeals to our membership; they responded wholeheartedly; just as more than 80 percent of the war material produced in America was made by union labor, a similarly large proportion of Series E bonds was purchased by union members. In every plant and factory in the Nation, they enrolled in the payroll savings plan under which ten percent or more of their weekly earnings was deducted for the regular purchase of War bonds.

Such investments by the wealthy showed good judgment, but for most working men and women, heavy purchases of War bonds also called for sacrifices of things they needed for themselves and their families.

At the same time, they gave their blood generously at Red Cross stations and volunteered to serve with civilian defense organizations in their spare time after excessively long hours on their regular jobs.

The whole record is notable not only because of the results accomplished but because they were achieved through the voluntary and eager cooperation of the workers of America and the trade unions that

represent them. No compulsion was required to compel obedience to dictates from on high. The army of production sprang to its assignments and carried them through successfully without any need of orders; the orders these workers took were from within, from an inner compulsion, to defend their freedom and their democracy at any cost. It is this spirit, this high allegiance to the ideals for which America stands, which is the indestructible part of our Nation and the most powerful activating force on earth. I thank you.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Mr. Green, will you answer questions from the floor now?

MR. GREEN:

I will be glad to, General Armstrong.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Mr. Green, I would like to put the first question. We talk a great deal, in this country today, about the need, as we in the Army and Navy see it, of universal military training. I am not going into that question this morning, but I would like to ask you something on the other side of the picture.

It seems to me that with the new weapons of war and with the assumption that war is going to start with the United States as the attacked country, we are not going to have the time to train men either for the Army or for industry, as we have in the past; what should be the attitude of organized labor towards the question of, say, reserves of the highly skilled men without whom a production program is absolutely impossible and without whom success in another war, I think, could not be counted on.

MR. GREEN:

Well, you have raised a very important question, General Armstrong. I am of the opinion that it is a problem that calls for very thoughtful and serious consideration on the part of labor and management, the Army and the Navy, and representatives of the Government.

Now first of all, I think, we have learned, as a result of the experience of the last war, that we ought to make preparations for the establishment and maintenance of an adequate skilled force, a force that could be called upon to respond very quickly in case of actual war or threat of war. I think that we could do that by developing a more liberal broad apprenticeship training plan. That is one step, I think, which needs to be taken; and I am of the opinion that labor will respond to a call for the establishment of more liberal comprehensive apprenticeship training plans.

Second, we ought to develop all of our vocational training agencies of the Government, wherever they are, in our public schools, our colleges or universities, or where vocational training is carried on to some extent

603

at least. Then we could also develop a broader and more comprehensive apprenticeship training plan by the Government.

First of all, our unions should provide for apprenticeship training needs to be expanded and broadened; second, vocational training; and third, government apprenticeship training. I think that that would contribute very largely to the development of a reserve force that could be called upon to be used for a war emergency.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Would you agree, sir, that such a trained reserve is just as essential for war as a reserve of trained soldiers?

MR. GREEN:

Yes, yes.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

I think we hear so much about trained soldiers and little if anything about trained skilled workers.

MR. GREEN:

I know we are trained to think along that line, General Armstrong. When we consider war, we consider the training of soldiers for war. We have not given the other phase of the matter the thought that we ought to, but I am pleased to note that is developing now and people are calling for consideration of that phase of the problem.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Thank you, Mr. Green.

QUESTION:

Mr. Green, I appreciate very much your argument regarding war service workers, but do you think there is a need for any form of manpower control in wartime, and if so, what are your recommendations as to the nature of these manpower controls?

MR. GREEN:

Do you mean in production?

QUESTION:

Yes, well, the general mobilization of manpower for war purposes.

MR. GREEN:

Well, I think the war has taught us the lesson, that there is really no crying need for a control of manpower. We could not have made a better

record under any circumstances than we made during the last war under the voluntary system. The civilian worker naturally resents compulsion, but he will respond in full measure to the request to give all he has and the best he has. Now he did that during the war and, as I pointed out in my address, they experimented with compulsion in Great Britain and it did not work so well as our voluntary system here in America, not nearly as well.

QUESTION:

Mr. Green, I do not think that is a fair comparison. The average work week over here was 48 hours and the average work week in Great Britain was about 65 hours; they worked seven days a week and we worked six. Would we have had the same number or more strikes--and I agree that it is an academic question--but if we had worked 60 hours a week, would we have obtained the same response without compulsion?

MR. GREEN:

Our people in America worked six or seven days a week and worked overtime, holidays and Sundays; they responded in a very large way to the call of the Government for working overtime.

The one thing that caused strikes was the fact that following VJ-day, they went back to the 40-hour week, and as a result of it, the workers lost take-home pay, as they call it. Of course, they were paid overtime and extra time for working these six and seven days per week and holidays and Sundays. Then when VJ-day was over and we moved back more quickly to a civilian status, the workers, notwithstanding the cost of living, remained up here; the workers' take-home pay, that total income, fell very greatly and it disturbed them; as a result, it inspired these strikes for increases in hourly rates to correspond somewhat at least to the amount of money they were receiving during the war.

I think we worked about as many hours as they did in Great Britain. I do not think the difference is very great.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Mr. Green, is it not an important factor to consider that the productivity of labor suffers from the law of diminishing return; in other words, working too many hours per week is decidedly unproductive; has the American Federation of Labor any information, from any studies it has made, as to the optimum number of hours per week for the greatest productivity?

MR. GREEN:

Yes. That is a very important point, General Armstrong, as has been pointed out. There is a limit to human endurance and service. Within that limit, the worker can rise to his highest point of efficiency and can maintain that high point of efficiency over that period. But the records clearly shows, and we have studied it carefully, that when you call upon the workers to go beyond that limited time, their efficiency

602

drops immediately. They cannot maintain it; it is physically impossible to do so and that has a destroying and destructive effect.

We have plans for a complete supply of manpower so that the shifts could be worked for the number of hours that the physical strength of each worker would enable him to give his best during that limited time; in that way we would get better production than by working these long hours overtime.

QUESTION:

Mr. Green, what is the attitude of the A.F.L. in regard to its assumption of financial and moral responsibility for losses sustained as a result of its or its members' breach of contract or violation of law?

MR. GREEN:

Well, in a number of our contracts negotiated by older, trained self-disciplined unions with employers, there is a clause which provides that, in the event of a stoppage of work in violation of the contract, the worker shall be penalized.

For instance, one contract that I am thinking of now provides that where the worker is subject to the provisions of that contract and engages in a strike in violation of the terms of the agreement, the employer is authorized to deduct from his earnings a fine--a penalty--amounting to one dollar per day for each day he is idle, or each day as long as the strike lasts, and that the amount of money--that is the total amount of money collected--shall be given to some charitable organization like the Red Cross or the Community Chest Fund. None of this money can be used for selfish purposes to enrich anyone.

In like manner the contract provides that if the employer locks out the worker, in violation of the contract, he too is subject to a penalty of, say, several hundred dollars. And he is required to pay that money over to some charitable organization.

Now, of course, the newer untrained members of unions have not yet reached the point where they accept such provisions in the contract, so they present a problem. And while we recognize the fact that there is a moral responsibility on the part of every worker to carry out the terms of a contract and maintain them, inviolate, we feel that it would be probably destructive both of good human relations between an employer and employee and the morale of the workers, if an attempt was made to make them legally responsible for these erratic illegal strikes that occur from time to time.

I tried to refer to that in my address briefly, that after all, we are living in an imperfect world and we cannot accept men into the membership of unions like fraternal organizations; but we must organize workers whom the employers employ, good, bad and indifferent, and many times they employ men who exercise a very destructive and illegal influence upon the workers with whom they mingle. Their purpose is to promote strikes and the violation of contracts; and many times such occurrences are directly

traceable to that evil influence which has crept into these unions made up of workers employed by employers. It is clearly a violation of the rules and traditional policies of our well-established unions. That is the best answer I can give.

QUESTION:

Mr. Green, recognizing that as true, what does the union do with the situation? Realizing that situation is true, as the head of the union and being considered as the head of the union throughout the country, what action does the union take itself to appease that and stop it instead of make management appease it for the union; does the union take any steps to appease that itself, stop strikes, illegal stoppages and illegal harring in certain plants?

MR. GREEN:

Yes, our union has taken steps to prevent strikes, and I always want you to draw the line between the better trained unions, the older well-established unions, and the newer unions. There is a difference. For instance, in our American Federation of Labor, we have a section in our law which provides that where strikes take place legally after exhausting every resource that can be utilized in order to prevent a strike through collective bargaining and conference, before they can go on strike, they must apply to the Headquarters of our American Federation of Labor for what we call strike sanction or strike approval. And they are not permitted to go on strike legally until strike sanction is accorded. Then if they go on strike illegally, what we call a wildcat strike, then they lose their strike benefits that would be paid if they were on strike legally. They suffer to that extent. That is the provision of the American Federation of Labor law.

QUESTION:

During the war we had about thirty-six and a half percent of our strikes charged against wage differences while four percent were charged against jurisdictional differences. Can you tell us what the A.F.L. plans to do to eliminate jurisdictional strikes?

MR. GREEN:

Well, yes, we are concentrating our efforts on the reduction of jurisdictional differences to a minimum. Now most of our organizations are setting up tribunals, arbitration tribunals that would pass upon jurisdictional disputes and make settlements of jurisdictional disputes. We are rapidly passing from the old method of one union going on strike against another union, passing from that to a point where after they exhausted all effort to settle their jurisdictional dispute, they agreed to submit it before a tribunal for final settlement; and that is our objective, to eliminate jurisdictional disputes.

QUESTION:

Can you comment on the effect of war labor agencies and how they might be improved in a future emergency?

605

MR. GREEN:

There is room for improvement on the part of the work of war labor agencies through the development of a closer relationship with industrial management and the representatives of labor. It occurs to me that there should be periodic meetings held as often as would be convenient for the purpose of entering into a frank discussion of developing problems as well as continuous problems; and discussions across the table as to how this can be done better, how it ought to be done better and ask for discussions from both sides; and finally after that has been passed through, arrive at an understanding that will serve to develop teamwork and cooperation. I have that in mind as one way by which we can strengthen the influence and standing of our war agencies.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Mr. Green, in my own experience, individual absenteeism was, I think, more destructive to production than strikes in the late war; have you any constructive suggestions as to the ways and means for reducing that absenteeism, that never could be foretold, and the effect of which on the production line was always extremely disastrous; would you think that a greater number of holidays, for example, where everybody would quit their work, instead of an individual taking a day off here and there without plan, would have some effect on the absenteeisms in factories?

MR. GREEN:

Well, we have studied that problem too, General Armstrong. It has been one that has lived with us. During an emergency, such as the war emergency, when the workers are working every day, they have very little time to attend to anything outside of their work. So many times something pressing will arise that they must attend to in some way, shape, or form, and as a result of it, they will lay off to attend to it. Now I think myself that it grew largely out of the continuous employment plan that they were called upon to adjust themselves to; and, if there could be, in these emergencies, say, a half day off or a day off occasionally, when all could lay off and attend to shopping or some business or this or that, whatever it may be, it would tend to solve the problem of absenteeism. That is my own judgment. You can hardly keep going continually and continually and keep the record up, everybody working, because they have to attend to other things.

QUESTION:

Mr. Green, American labor has made very great progress in the past 40 years, and I am sure that nobody would like to see the day come when the balloon of labor would be punctured and see the American laborer start over from where he was 40 years ago. Now it is my opinion that the future of labor depends not so much upon legislation which may or may not be passed here in Washington as it does upon the verdict of the American people. There are millions and millions of average Americans in this country and only a small percentage of them, relatively small, are incorporated in unions, yet the masses are affected by the small percentage. It seems to me that the American people are not going to base their judgment upon

the right or wrong of the various arguments that they are bombasted with every day--one day in favor of labor and the next day in favor of management. They are going to base their verdict on the small and knowing things that touch them in their daily lives.

A few weeks ago an incident happened right here in the Pentagon where a telephone had to be installed on someone's desk. Six men were required to make that installation--an electrician had to bring the wire; a carpenter plus an assistant had to be called to drill a little hole in the wall so the wire could be brought through; then a lineman was necessary and they were finally able to connect the telephone with the wire.

Now I am just wondering whether or not the major unions have committees that are designated especially to keep their ear to the ground to sound out the temper of the American public on matters that would affect their future

MR. GREEN:

Well, I am glad you brought that out. Those are annoying things; I appreciate they are. How they develop I do not know. I am so far remote from an incident of that kind that I cannot go into it myself. But I want to tell you that we are conscious of the state of mind of the people of the country, pretty generally, and I do know that because of strikes, jurisdictional strikes as well as strikes for higher wages, actual conditions of employment have been played up heavily on the front lines of newspapers; the people out in the remote section of the country, farmers, professional people and others living in the towns and villages of our country have developed a hostile state of mind towards this action of organized labor.

I am thoroughly conscious of that. The trouble is that the virtues of organized labor scarcely ever appear on the front page of a newspaper; it is usually the faults to which I have referred.

Those things that you referred to, however, are annoying situations that we are attempting to correct. There does not seem to be any good reason why such a situation as you have just described should exist; but we are very hopeful that we may be able to meet this growing and increasing demand on the part of the public for a more constructive policy of reduction of strikes to a minimum, preservation of industrial peace and the development of cooperation and the settlement of differences around the conference table rather than on the strike field. That is our objective.

GENERAL ARMSTRONG:

Mr. Green, I think that we had better have mercy on you and the questions I think that the brass hats of the Army and the Navy can sympathize with what you just said about the labor unions.

We want to thank you very much, Mr. Green, for your presentation; I know it will be a very helpful doctrine to this present class as well as to classes in the future.

Thank you very much, sir.

(9 May 1946--200.)S