

# SPECIAL NEWS FROM FRANCE

## SABOTAGE FAST DEMORALIZING FRANCE—BUSINESS IS STAG- NATED—WILL FORCE THE RAILROADS TO REIN- STATE DISCHARGED MEN.

When, with the aid of the skilful maneuvers of the Socialist Premium Briand, the railroad strike of the middle of October was crushed, illegally, violently and without the least regard for any principle of humanity or justice and the railroaders forced to go back to work in humiliation, the French capitalist press fairly howled with glee. They saw the end of syndicalism in France. A vigorous campaign of repression was launched by the combined employers against the militant workers in all the industries and thousands of them were discharged, blacklisted, or arrested on the slightest pretext. There were 3,300 railroaders alone discharged and over 100 arrested. It was a veritable reign of terror and has culminated in the recent sentencing to death of Durand at Havre for alleged moral complicity in the killing of a scab during the coal heavers' strike.

These measures of repression, far from having the desired effect, have had just the opposite. The C. G. T. is in almost open revolt and threatens the government with a general strike if Durand is not released. The railroaders, supposedly beaten, are demanding the immediate reinstatement of all their discharged fellow workers on pain of a complete demoralization of the R. R. system of France in case of a continued refusal. To add a little force to this threat they have brought business to almost a complete standstill on the two striking roads and the other five non-striking roads are rapidly following suit. They are using passive resistance tactics, or, as it has been lately named, the "pearled" strike. Simply by studied clumsiness, carelessness, deliberate mistakes and general cussedness they so confuse matters that it is impossible to transact business. So serious is the resulting stagnation that it is becoming a "national calamity." It is impossible to get shipments over the roads, whilst the docks and warehouses of Havre and other points are piled mountain high with goods destined for Paris. The cupboard and coal bin of the latter place is empty almost to the point of famine.

The conditions on the Rothschild road (Nor R. R.) are as bad, if not worse, than those on the antiquated State road. The management of the former crack road, the boast of French railroaders, at the close of the strike stated that the normal service would be re-established again in three days. It is now two months since the end of the strike, and, although the working force has been practically doubled, the confusion and congestion is increasing daily. The management states that it will now be impossible to resume the usual service again before March 1. It has been forced to refuse all retail shipments at many points on the line. So serious is the situation becoming that a veritable howl of protest is being raised by many businessmen, who see ruin staring them in the face if the present condition lasts much longer. The topic is the leading one in all the big dailies. "Le Matin" instituted an investigation of the situation and sums the matter up by saying: "To solve the problem there are but two solutions to consider: First, to reinstate the old personnel of the roads; second, to double, triple or even quadruple the present working force." Employers were interviewed and denied entirely that there was any sabotage being practiced. But attention was called to the following proposed remedy: "Let the companies pass the sponge over the past, let them reinstate our discharged comrades, let them give us an increase in wages at once, without the proposed unnecessary delay, and we will put the service on its feet in a few days. Otherwise, even with all possible good will it will take months and months." The extreme humorous nature of this declaration is greatly heightened by the attitude of the companies. The one article in "Le Matin" are contained the two following somewhat contradictory statements emanating from the same source, i. e., the Rothschild railroad directors. "We cannot be held responsible for the ... of things. The blame lies at the door of the sabotage of which we are the victims, special sabotage, "pearled" sabotage, that can't

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be suppressed." A little farther on is a long statement praising the good will of their workers who are working frantically to clear the blockade, only, however, in some inexplicable manner to make it still more confused. By the way, these latter are getting in much "overtime." Behold the humor of the following: "I hope these workers (whose salaries have lately been raised for their good work) will persevere in the effort there is yet to be made in order to re-establish the order and regularity." Doubtless the workers will persevere, though hardly in the manner hoped for by the Hon. R. R. directors.

The methods of causing this confusion are many; one favorite way is for an engineer to surreptitiously hook onto an important car and ditch it somewhere along the line where it may remain for weeks, the car checkers conveniently forgetting it. Meanwhile, some merchant is wondering where his car has disappeared to. Cars are hauled back and forth over the lines indiscriminately and it's only an accident when some business man intercepts his wandering shipments. On "getting over the road" confusion reigns supreme, time tables are valueless, as one writer says they simply inform one of the hours on which the trains don't arrive or depart. Break downs (?) are numerous; dead engines also, and the hauling capacity of the engines has for some strange reason been greatly lessened lately. It is in the freight stations, however, that there is real confusion par excellence. Boxes and bales piled indiscriminately; "fragile," "glass, this side up with care," "use no hooks" signs are meaningless, all is grist that comes to the French freight handlers mill and he makes a general pile of all. To send an employe to look for a shipment is to bid goodby to him for the day. He looks and searches without seeing or finding. So helpless have consignees become of securing their goods by this one time successful process, that they have taken to hunting their own shipments. The following article, taken from "L'Intransigeant," a capitalist paper, gives a fair idea of the situation:

## "OBLIGATORY PITY."

"Yesterday at the Chamber of Deputies if M. Briand has promised nothing definite he has at least hinted that the railroad companies may be induced to forgive and open their doors to their repentant prodigal children (discharged railroaders.)"

The theoreticians, the people who only reason from the absolute, said on the day following the end of the strike: "No quarter." "Let us be unmerciful towards the strikers, towards all the strikers, the leaders and the others." Very strongly said, but let us consider the facts. A proletariat that is today really class conscious has opposed new tactics of this warlike reasoning. "Very well," said the railroaders to the companies; "if you don't want to submit we are going to have recourse to the 'strike of the crossed arms.'" And, in fact, if the strikers on the North and State railroads have returned to work and are all at their posts it is only in the nature of a pretence. To accomplish only the half of their tasks, to purposely multiply errors and faults, to send to Dunkirk the merchandise consigned to Paris, such is the revenge of the railroaders, who have decided to resume their normal manner of working only when the victims of their strike will have been reinstated. The complaints from the commerce suffering from this state of affairs have been so long that they had to be heard. That is why the government and the companies will be obliged to capitulate."

With capitalist papers thus frankly discussing the sabotage and its influence on the government, one would expect that "L'Humanite" (edited by Jean Jaures, an official daily paper of the alleged working class Socialist party) would at least have an encouraging word to say to the saboteurs. But no, this miserable sheet is suppressing the news of the sabotage and in an article signed by Jaures imputes the disorganization of the roads to the fact that many of the best workmen have been discharged. This policy of distorting the truth is all the more disgusting when one considers that many deluded workers, believing to help the working class cause, subscribe for Jaures' paper in preference to the decidedly more truthful capitalist papers. Jaures' reasons for suppressing the truth are very clear. When the government is forced to yield and reinstate the discharged railroaders, Jaures will hail it as a great victory for the "party," as the Socialist deputies have been fooling away their well paid time conferring with Briand on the matter. Then, again, it would be a fatal mistake to recognize the efficiency of direct action tactics.

"La Guerre Sociale," edited by Herve, the "official organ" of the saboteurs, has been boycotted at all the railroad news stands in France.

The situation is an interesting one, and if in the course of a couple of weeks we read of a great victory for the Socialists in the Chamber of Deputies in having the railroaders reinstated, we will know whether to ascribe it to political action or the "pearled" strike.

Yours for an indestructible pie card,  
(Signed) W. Z. FOSTER,

P. S.—It is estimated that the railroad strike and the sabotage following it have already cost France more than \$100,000,000.