
Congress, Pinkertons, and Organized Labor

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The Senate of the United States appointed a select committee to investigate and report to the senate the facts in relation to the employment, for private purposes, of armed bodies of men or detectives in connection with differences between employers and employees.

This select committee has made its report, which shows that the committee examined fourteen different witnesses on the thug side of the question, including the Pinkertons themselves, and with regard to the Homestead infamy, the part played by the thugs, H. C. Frick, the murderous monster and pimp of Carnegie, and Bob Pinkerton, were examined, and eight other witnesses. The committee, in examining questions directly bearing upon labor and labor strikes, called in 17 witnesses. Four witnesses were examined upon questions relating to the power of the courts to interfere to prevent labor strikes, and fifteen witnesses were examined upon the subject of arbitration and other matters of inquiry proper for the committee to pursue.

The investigation led' to the admission, on the part of the Pinkerton brothers, who hire, organize, arm and equip the thugs, and then supply Carnegie, Frick, and others of their ilk, with as many murderers as they demand to kill workingmen, that the presence of these thugs served to unduly inflame the passions of the men who strike against oppression and degradation. There are, it was ascertained, in the ranks of the thugs, trained spies, who, assuming to be mechanics, enter the ranks of the strikers, and, obtaining information, report to employers and thereby enable them to spot and discharge certain men who dare protest against outrages, and thus make it possible for scabs to obtain the places of honest workingmen.

Having obtained such information from the two brother Pinkertons, whose names stand for as much infamy as fell to the lot of Judas

Iscariot or Benedict Arnold, or any other villains our corrupt civilization has spread upon society, the committee reached the conclusion that if corporations would discontinue the employment of Pinkerton thugs on occasions of threatened or existing strikes, their interests would be better subserved.

The committee also reached the conclusion that the employment of the Pinkerton thugs at Homestead was “unnecessary.” Prior to the introduction of the thugs by Frick, the committee found that “not the slightest damage was done nor attempted to be done to property on the part of the strikers.” Hence, it may be inferred that the passions of the strikers were inflamed by the introduction of a gang of armed thugs, ready and willing to murder the strikers at the word of command, and that they did not murder hundreds of them in the interest of Carnegie and Frick, is a mystery, unless it is explained by the heroic determination on the part of the strikers to sell their lives as dearly as possible; a resolution that brought the thugs to terms, and sent them, for the first and only time, defeated and crushed, without having accomplished their murderous mission.

The committee, in its deliberations, reached the following conclusions:

1. Rights of employers and workmen are equal.
2. Employers have an undoubted right, provided they fulfill their agreements, to employ and dismiss men at pleasure.
3. Workmen can legally organize for mutual protection and improvement.
4. When dissatisfied with wages or hours, they should attempt to arbitrate.
5. Falling in this, they have a right to discontinue work, either singly or in a body.
6. Having discontinued, they have no right, legal or moral, by force or intimidation, to keep others from taking their places, or to attempt to occupy, injure, or destroy the property of their employers.
7. In all controversies, arbitration having failed, reliance should be placed upon the power and adequacy of the law.
8. Whether assumedly legal or not, the employment of armed bodies of men for private purposes, either by employers or employees, should not be resorted to, and such use is an assumption of the state's authority by private citizens.
9. States have undoubted authority to legislate against the employment of armed bodies of men for private purposes; but the power of Congress to so legislate is not clear, although it

would seem that Congress ought not to be powerless to prevent the movement of such bodies from one state to another.

In the foregoing conclusions, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are those which will attract the most attention. The equality stated in No. 1, as matters stand, is totally misleading — the rights of employers and employes, only in a restricted sense, are equal — and this is seen in conclusion No. 2, in which it is glaringly shown that the employe has no rights whatever; the right to hire and the right to discharge an employe is placed absolutely in the hands of the employer, the employe is not consulted at all. He may be discharged for any cause which the whim or malignity of the employer may suggest, and according to this Senate committee, he has no redress; his work, his means of living, are taken from him, and he is forthwith remanded to the ranks of the idle, and he may go to the devil for aught the employer knows or cares; hence, we ask what becomes of conclusion No. 1?

Does some one say that conclusion No. 3, which asserts that “workmen can legally organize for mutual protection and improvement,” provide any remedy against conclusion No. 2? We answer, none whatever, because, conceding the absolute right of the employer to discharge an employe, any protest on the part of organized labor to remedy the outrage, would be interfering with a conceded right of the employer.

To illustrate, A. has a legal right to join a labor organization, but for the exercise of this legal right, B., the employer, according to conclusion No. 2, may discharge A. “at pleasure,” and thus it is seen that while the equality of “employers and employees” is asserted, the equality is a sham and deception, having no practical existence, so far as the conclusions of the committee are concerned.

To establish conditions in some measure approaching equality, has been the earnest effort of organized labor. As for instance, A., an employe, is discharged. Just here organized labor comes in and asks of the employer, Why? and insists that A. shall not be discharged without a hearing, something in the form of a trial; that he shall not be set adrift to gratify the spleen of some parasite, and made to suffer penalties innocently. If the committee had suggested something of this sort, something to check the meanness or venom of underlings, it would have been far more creditable than the one-sided conclusions the committee reported. The other conclusions are a series of old chestnuts, which it were a waste of time and paper to discuss. There is

just one way out of the woods for organized labor to pursue, and that is to go forward pleading the cause of union, federation, united and compact organization and action, to create a bond of union so strong that unity will be secured when there is a conflict between right and wrong, truth and error, and to force the fight into legislative halls and to never cease the struggle until there shall be, in fact, in reality, truth in the declaration, that the “Rights of employers and employees are equal.”

Edited by Tim Davenport

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