
Call Off Steel Strike, Union Drive Goes On: National Committee Says Men Can Go Back to Mills While New Plans are Perfected.

by Robert M. Buck

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Unsigned news report attributed to editor Robert M. Buck.

The steel strike is off — the campaign to organize the steel industry and enforce recognition of the union is on, with renewed vigor, according to the official declaration of the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers. The decision to call off the strike phase was reached after a conference, Jan. 8 [1920], in Pittsburgh.

Following the issuing of orders calling off the strike, which began Sept. 22 [1919], William Z. Foster tendered his resignation from the national strike committee. It was accepted and Jay G. Brown was chosen to take Foster's place.

Steel strikers in the Chicago district were notified of the new plan of attack against the steel trust by the following message sent to John DeYoung, Secretary:

Pittsburgh, Pa., Jan. 8 [1920].

The steel corporations with the active assistance of the press, the courts, the federal troops, state police, and many public officials have denied steel workers their rights of free speech, free assemblage, and the right to organize, and by this arbitrary and ruthless misuse of power have brought about a condition which compelled the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers to vote today that the active strike phase of the steel campaign is now at an end. A vigorous campaign of education and reorganization will be immediately begun and will not cease until industrial justice in the steel industry has been achieved. All steel strikers are now at liberty to return to work pending preparations for the next big organization movement.

John Fitzpatrick, D.J. Davis, Edward J. Evans,
William Hannon, William Z. Foster.

New Organization Drive.

International executives, secretaries, and organizers for the steel committee were also sent the following message from William Z. Foster, outlining the new program for perfecting the organization in the steel mills.

January 8, 1920.

Dear Sirs and Brothers:

At its regular meeting today the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers voted to end the strike phase of the steel campaign and to begin at once an intensive program of education and reorganization. The strikers are at liberty to return to work in the mills without any stigma being attached to them for so doing.

The overwhelming power of the steel corporations, the wholesale prostitution of the press to the service of the employers, the unparalleled hostility of the courts, the use of federal troops, the brutal suppression of our rights of free speech and free assembly, the clubbing, shooting, and jailing of thousands of our men, the use of city, county, and state political machinery and peace guardians as strikebreaking agencies — these and many more factors utilized on a scale and with an unscrupulousness unknown before in industrial conflicts, had served to break the ranks of the hastily organized steel workers to such an extent that the strike had lost the effectiveness necessary to have it lead to a settlement through negotiation. According to the judgment of practically all the organizers and officials in the field, to keep the strike on longer would have been merely to punish thousands of our own good men needlessly.

In order that the interests of the strikers may be conserved the commissaries in the various towns will not be closed at once. They will be shut down gradually as the

need for them diminishes. The trade unions in the steel industry intend to fulfill their obligations to the letter. They will stick to the strikers to the last ditch.

The end of the strike does not mean the end of the present movement in the steel industry. Not at all. It will merely mark the beginning of a new phase of it. The National Committee has made arrangements to keep a large crew of organizers in the field for an indefinite period. These will serve to maintain the present organizations and to pull together again the scattered forces. But their great function, especially for the next few months, will be to carry on a tremendous campaign of education among the steel workers. The lessons of the strike will be pointed out graphically. The mistakes made and the weaknesses developed will be noted. Every move made by the steel barons will be watched closely and the workers shown how to meet them.

In this educational work a prime factor will be a bulletin printed in several languages. At least 100,000 copies of these will be gotten out each week. Each issue will carry a powerful argument for trade unionism with special reference to conditions in the steel industry. Through this propaganda the crew of organizers will be able to keep the steel workers thinking straight and together. It will not take long for their reorganization.

To this new phase of the work all concerned proceed with enthusiasm. Among the organizers who have carried on this great fight there is no feeling of defeat. They feel proud of the wonderful effort that has been made. The fact that they organized the whole industry in the face of the most desperate opposition fills them with unshakable confidence in the power of trade unionism. The men of the mills share this same optimism, even to those who have gone back to work. They cannot help but see that the unions have made a splendid and clean fight of it. They know that the labor movement has given the lie to every falsification the employers propagated against it. For once the steel workers begin to see a glimmer of hope. Almost to a man they attribute the check of the strike to insufficient organization. They are proud to have dealt the steel corporations such a heavy blow. It will be but a short time until they are ready to give them a heavier one, if justice is not established in the meantime.

In the great steel strike the physical victory (for the time being at least) may be Judge Gary's, but the moral victory belongs to labor. The stocks of the trade union movement are at par value in the steel industry. With the experience of this great struggle to guide them, it will be but shortly until the steel workers find themselves thoroughly organized. Their faith is with the unions. They will never be supine slaves again. In view of their confidence that the labor movement alone can help them, it would be criminal for the unions to quit the steel campaign now.

Fraternally yours,

William Z. Foster,
Secretary-Treasurer.

Kept Press Not Joyous.

The news that the strike phase of the campaign against E.H. Gary and other steel trust barons had been called off brought few joyful comments from the kept press. The information that the campaign of organization was to continue with the strikers back on the job hung like a pall over the editors of big business newspapers, who had been printing for weeks that the strike was over. "The newspapers lied continually about the strike," said John DeYoung, "in fact they only told the truth twice — first, when they said the strike was officially on, secondly, when they said it was officially declared off."

In Buffalo and Lackawanna, it is said that 6,000 strikers had refused to go back to work in spite of the order giving them permission to do so without being classed as scabs.

At many mills the strikebreakers were reported to have quit in large numbers when they heard the union men were coming back to work. At all mills a shortage of labor was reported, thousands of steel workers having secured other positions and stating that the "mills no longer look good to them." In fact, the strike opened the eyes of thousands of mill workers to the enslaving occupation they had been engaged in, and after a few weeks' work at other trades they were done with the steel mills forever.

This has been a large factor, together with the return of aliens to their native lands, in causing considerable alarm in steel trust financial circles.

The men who used to do the dirty work are gone — the men who return to work are not returning because they feel sorry that the steel trust is behind on its orders. They are going back because they stood out as long as possible and not because their spirit to gain a square deal has weakened. In fact it has been strengthened and enlarged by the ordeal.

Predict 8-Hour Day Soon.

The battle which lasted 16 weeks is not without benefit to the organization of the steel industry. It is predicted by members of the organization that as a result of the drive against the un-American industrial policies of E.H. Gary, the 8-hour day in the mills is assured, as soon as it can be gracefully granted by the

bosses. If this comes about, it will be not from a change of heart on the part of the steel barons, but because the strike has compelled such a shortage of men in the mills that concessions must be made in order to carry on operations.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the steel industry is swamped with orders. A shortage of 2 million automobiles is claimed. Machinery and petroleum prices are soaring and prices for certain textiles are becoming almost prohibitive. Paper is as scarce as it was during the war.

Accompanying all this is the greatest deficiency of labor ever known. Shorter hours, a shortage of several million aliens who were held in Europe by the war, and advancing wages are responsible for decreased production and declining efficiency.

Steel, automobile, textile, tire, petroleum, and other industries will operate their mills, furnaces, factories, and refineries as fully as the shortage of labor will permit, with no promise of return to normal for a long time to come. The steel mills are deluged with orders, but production is not much more than 70 percent of maximum capacity. Some manufacturers hope for 85 to 90 percent by spring, but even this is doubtful.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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