

Jas. F. Barrett on the Labor Trouble in Mount Airy

Published at the request of the Mount Airy Branch of the Granite Cutters International Association.

Fellow Citizens:

I cannot say that I am proud to be in this position. I am glad to be in Mount Airy; I am glad to meet and mingle with you men and women; but I assure you it is with fear and trembling that I approach this hour. I would not for all the wealth of the country make a statement in Mount Airy that would widen the existing breach between two of your citizens, much less between two groups of your citizenship.

The question then comes up, can a man say something that will help to eliminate existing misunderstandings, instead of creating new troubles? If you had no trouble here and if this was just a get-together rally labor meeting or community gathering, I would just love to stand here and talk my fool head off, but I realize the responsibility of the hour, and if I do say something here tonight that should not be said, I assure you it is done through ignorance rather than any malicious intent. I don't know what is the best to say. I wish to God I could say something here tonight that would help in solving the problems of this community. This trouble you people in Mount Airy are now experiencing is not a local trouble. On Nov. 11, 1918, when the Armistice was signed that stopped that battle over yonder and allowed your sons to return here, and started the shipment of the bodies of these back here—on that night the Manufacturers Association met in the city of Indianapolis, and it was there, and started that night a warfare against organized labor of this country. The ink was not dry upon that parchment, upon that piece of paper that declared peace among the nations, until the Manufacturers Association started another war, and that movement was to destroy the Labor Union in the country, and from November 11, 1918, to this blessed night that warfare has not been let up, except in those places where they have been thoroughly and completely convinced that it is useless to try to destroy the labor organizations.

Now, my friends, there are many people in Mount Airy who are not conversant, and I am frank to say there are some who are ignorant in the city, some who are not familiar with, who do not know what the principles of the American Federation of Labor are. The American laborer does not want to dictate to anyone of its employers. They want to cooperate with the employers, through mutual understanding. There are only three things that the Labor Union wants—get this now. As I have already said, they want a voice in things—not to dictate, but to simply have the privilege of a voice. Then wages, hours and working conditions. I repeat, the Labor Union does not want to dictate wages, hours or what working conditions shall be. The employees simply want the privilege of having their chosen representatives meet the lawyers or representatives of the employers and across the table arrive at a contract in which the employees have a right to speak on these questions. If there is a man or woman in Mount Airy who says that the laboring man should not have his right I am ready to get off the stump, stop my paper and go back to plowing the old mule in Madison Co.

In considering the rights of the workmen, his income is not a mere matter of dollars and cents to him. I would like to have those boys on the pay-roll, as well as those men who make out that pay-roll, look at it in the light that it does not consist of simply so much money in an envelope. It means every little bit of feed that goes onto the table for his wife and children; it means every little garment that goes on the backs of his family, it means every doctor's bill, drug bill, insurance policy, every church donation, Sunday school contribution, every picture show outing; that is what the pay envelope means to the men who work for wages. That is what wages mean to each one of them. Then let anybody tell me that the man who is working for the wage does not have the right through his representatives to discuss with his employer and decide what that wage should be.

The next question, that of hours, we will consider for a few minutes. There is not but one power in existence that can give life. Your great scientists and all of the learned men of the ages cannot tell you but one reason why man lives, and that is through the Divine gift of God Almighty. That man's life is his, and it is made up of so many years, so many months in a year, so many days in a week, hours in a day, and so on. They belong to him individually by the Divine Gift of Almighty God and not to an industrial organization, and if a man wishes to work and does work, and he gives so many hours of this life to that industry, then who has a better right than that man himself to have a representative speak for him with his employers' representatives in passing on how many hours he shall put into that industry.

Next, working conditions—and this is the most important of all, because if the workman's life is to be kept in danger—and many of the workmen who go in that industry run the risk of losing their health—then he must have plenty of fresh air, pure water, etc. Then who has a more sacred right than the workman to talk with his employer as to what the working conditions shall be in that industry?

Now, here locally the trouble was brought about according to this paper, printed in this city, on account of a contract written by the Company and submitted to the men, and they could "sign it and go to work or they could reject it and starve," according to the reputed statement of one of the officials of that company. Now, that is not settling the question. I wish I could impress upon you this fact, that I would just as willingly and emphatically criticize the actions of the local labor union as I would the actions of the leaders of the local company, if I thought the workers were wrong; but in talking to you business men—and I have talked to some around town—I take it for granted and have been told

by several of the business men, that the question involved in this local affair is the reduction of wages of \$2. per day. Now, that's a pretty big item—I used to work for that. Reduction! According to the published statement, signed by the vice president of one of the big companies here, the main object is to institute the American Plan or open shop.

If there has ever been anything misnamed, it is that of the American Plan or open shop. If there has ever been any movement started by politicians, if there has ever been a liar that deserves it—it is the guy that named the open shop the American plan. There is nothing American in it. Taking the folds of the flag your forefathers fought for and for which some of your brothers died before you, and using that flag of freedom, the name for which it stands, Americanism, to cover the plan that drives the workmen of this country back into slavery. Now, the workers of the union of this city made Mount Airy what it is. There is no doubt about it. Four times these men have been out. I have no grudge against the man who has money; I wish I had some of it. No man living today has a greater admiration for the fellow who does things. The old pioneers looked toward the rosy skies of the west, for opportunities. They hewed in the forests; bled with their hands, mind you; builded cities and towns. No man admires the man who has not the grit to back his judgment with his money, and I dearly love to settle a labor trouble with the working side given an equal chance. Today I went out and looked over "The Rock," you call it. Through the courtesy of the superintendent I was permitted to go over it, see the workmen there finishing the work; preparing it for sale. I stood upon a portion of that rock and saw the great derrick taking load after load down to the shed. I admire men who do such as that; but I would have those men remember this, that nature's God put that rock out there. Their company didn't do it. It is not worth one cent of the millions it may represent until the hand of labor goes there, takes that rock out, even to the tiniest block, puts it into buildings and monuments, etc., which all represent the hand of labor. I do not care how much capital the company has, the rock itself out there is not worth this pitcher of water, in any phase of the work out there, from the time the lines are put into the ground on through to the last strokes laid on it, it is useless except that work given to it by labor. I respectfully submit to you people of Mount Airy the fact that your workmen and not your capital invested in the quarry is due your first and most sincere consideration. I want you to think over this, my friends.

There is a plan of co-operation that has existed and should be existing today, and I believe that if the local management of this company was prompted by the views of the National Association of Employers, but instead follow their own wishes, there would not be any trouble here today. You talk to me of foreign agitation? I know some of the members of this company, and they are mighty good men. I do not want you to condemn these helpless workmen, but place the blame where it belongs—on business, if it belongs on business. As to the statements of the manufacturers concerning the workmen who are out, me and Jim Belton will start out in the morning and pension every one of them out, not allowed to come back to work out there. I am told there is a man in your city of a certain company (which company has the men locked out) who said that they would soon starve these fellows into submission. I am here to tell you that there are 175,000 wage workers in this State who stand ready to each give a dollar a week before a workman in Mount Airy starves one minute.

The thing to do is to settle this matter, before it goes any further. If the workmen are wrong, I believe they will admit it; if the manufacturers are wrong, they should admit it. Now, some business men I have talked to here—and you know I have a peculiar idea about this word business! I am in business myself. The two elements of humanity I respect more than any other are these: one is the farmer, who goes out and brings the products out of the soil from the sowing of the seed, and the other is the worker who takes the raw product and makes it into the finished articles for God's children. They are the two essentials.

Now, I have heard another thing that hurt me. I heard this afternoon that it is these foreigners here who are prolonging this trouble. I got into town Saturday night, came straight from the train to the hall, packed with men who had not gone back to work. In that hall were four Italians, an Irishman and something else—I didn't know what it was. The rest of them were North Carolina, Mount Airy, American-born citizens. Please, those of you who have heard these reports, talk to these fellows about it before you accept as gospel truth these things. Now, I take it, there are merchants here and I love them; I belong to the Merchants' Association; I want to bring this point to you: did you ever sit down and figure out what it means in the manner of living of the men and their families, the difference between the \$6 and \$8 wage? These guys who got it haven't been able to save anything out of the \$8. Soon their hands will be cold, paralyzed by the drill they handle; then what? Or his health will be broken by exposure to the dust in that work out there; he must have beef steak and the sweet milk so necessary to offset the effects of the dust of that industry; those of you who have read the statistics on the short lives of the granite workers; you will not go to one of those boys and ask him to take that reduction in wages!

It is what connection this wage question has with the man entering the pearly gates that I am unable to understand. But I want to tell you people of Mount Airy this, your granite workers union men have made this town what it is. They have made your business what it is. Your granite workers' union men builded nice homes for your workers to live in. Your granite workers, if you please, have builded beautiful and magnificent mansions in which the men at the head of this business live in. And

this is only an attempt to break that union and the manufacturers will agree with me, I am sure, if you will consider the labor union during the past forty-two years in this industry, to have contributed more to the advancement of society than all the fraternal organizations or any other organization, even that of the church not excepted, because this is the only organization that has gone into the home and made life brighter there and the burdens easier for the women and little children.

And before you people of Mount Airy take sides against the men who are locked out, in justice to them, you should consider their position here; you should take into full and complete consideration the fight and remember that the reduction of wages is the last consideration of this fight that is being made against these boys, but that it is the elimination and complete breaking up of their organization that is being attempted, and I am appealing to you in the name of the men who saw the industry in the time of need make its guns sacred during the war because of the American Federation of Labor, and helped these workers keep their organization. In the name of the children in the homes of these workmen I am appealing to you to help these boys maintain their organization.

Before you condemn the foreigners of this organization, I want you to come with me to Europe, where I was sent by the A. F. of L. to study conditions there. I saw splendid bill-board pictures of beautiful homes the American workmen lived in, which were posted by the Manufacturers' Association. They were advertising, and trying to induce laborers to come to this country, and these foreigners are here, and because the union took them in, and helped them to keep from lowering the standard of living in America; then we are criticized because of the foreigners. We have a movement that will take you and raise you up, instead of pulling down, as the Manufacturers' Association want to do.

I want you to think on these things. Study them out, and I leave this for a parting thought: it is not for the men who are locked out here now, not Jim Belton and the older men who are almost ready to pass on; some whose hands are already chilled and paralyzed by the drill, who have seen the middle stone of life; I have a very sick mother at home, and a little business I am engaged in; I do not get one penny from anybody on God's green earth for coming here to speak to you; I love these men and would lend them money if I had it; would not be here to work for them if I didn't; but I wanted to show you what the granite workers' union is; I want you to think of what the labor union means to this little child I am holding up before you, whose future we want to guarantee, and give these children a better opportunity of advancement and enable them to maintain a higher standard of living than we have attained in our lives.

R. T. Joyce, a former resident of this city, was a visitor here Monday returning to Westfield, where he is putting in an electric mill and power plant, after spending Sunday with relatives in Greensboro.

BUSINESS BUILDERS

CABBAGE PLANTS—for sale, fine stalks from American grown seed. Early Jersey Wakefield, Early All-head, Charleston Wakefield, Winnigstuddt, Copenhagen Market. Delivered by parcel post, per thousand \$1.60. E. B. Harrel, Prop'r. High Knoll Truck Farm, Kernersville, N. C. Route 4 box 31. 3-31p.

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LOST—Silver fountain pen Monday afternoon engraved F. J. Finder please return to Mrs. Greely Jones for reward. 3-17-p.

FRESH TURNIP SALAD—for sale by T. S. Ashburn. Phone 895. 4-2-p.

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LOST—Package of dry goods, containing shirts, hose, etc. Friday night between Pilot Mountain and Bannertown. D. F. Love, R. 1 1tp.

MILK COW wanted—must be good one. Mrs. W. A. Bolt, city. 1tc

FOR SALE—Team of good mules and fresh milk cow. J. W. Simmons, Mt. Airy, R. 1. 4-14-p.

FOR SALE—Brown Leghorn eggs postpaid at \$1.10 for 15 or three sittings for \$2.60. Mrs. M. E. V. Hines, R. 5. Mount Airy N. C. 3-17-p.

EGGS—Hatching eggs, from those Prize winning Barred Plymouth Rocks. They won every 1st prize offered at the Fair. They do it every time, now is the time to hatch your chicks to get your show birds for next fall. Stock and eggs for sale. Eggs \$1.50 and \$2.50 per sitting. Stock from \$2.50 up. If you want something nice I am sure I can please you. Ora Roberts, Mount Airy, N. C. 3-31-c

FOR SALE—Seven thoroughbred white leghorn pullets. First prize winners. \$1.50 each. White Plymouth Rock eggs, from first pen and best hen in fair 1921. \$2.50 per fifteen. Mrs. E. J. France, R. F. D. 5 Mount Airy, N. C. 3-17p

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