

The Truth About the Paterson Strike

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Topics: [manufacturing](#), [USA](#), [IWW](#), [sabotage](#), [strike tactics and analysis](#)

Comrades and Friends:

The reason why I undertake to give this talk at this moment, one year after the Paterson strike was called, is that the flood of criticism about the strike is unabated, becoming more vicious all the time, drifting continually from the actual facts, and involving as a matter of course the policies and strike tactics of the I.W.W. To ensure future success in the city of Paterson it is necessary for the past failure to be understood, and not to be clouded over by a mass of outside criticism. It is rather difficult for me to separate myself from my feelings about the Paterson strike, to speak dispassionately. I feel that many of our critics are people who stayed at home in bed while we were doing the hard work of the strike. Many of our critics are people who never went to Paterson, or who went on a holiday; who did not study the strike as a day-by-day process. Therefore it's rather hard for me to overcome my impatience with them and speak purely theoretically.

What is a labor victory? I maintain that it is a twofold thing. Workers must gain economic advantage, but they must also gain revolutionary spirit, in order to achieve a complete victory. For workers to gain a few cents more a day, a few minutes less a day, and go back to work with the same psychology, the same attitude toward society is to have achieved a temporary gain and not a lasting victory. For workers to go back with a class-conscious spirit, with an organized and a determined attitude toward society means that even if they have made no economic gain they have the possibility of gaining in the future. In other words, a labor victory must be economic and it must be revolutionizing. Otherwise it is not complete. The difference between a strike like Lawrence and a garment workers' strike in New York is that both of them gained certain material advantages, but in Lawrence there has been born such a spirit that even when 10,000 workers were out of employment, the employers did not dare reduce the wages of a single man still in the mills. When the hours were reduced by law in New Hampshire and Connecticut in the midst of the industrial panic prevailing throughout the textile industry it was impossible for those manufacturers to reduce the wages at the same time, knowing full well that to do so would create a spontaneous war. Among the garment workers in New York there has unfortunately been developed an instrument known as the protocol, whereby this spirit is completely crushed, is completely diverted from its main object against the employers. This spirit has now to assert itself against the protocol.

So a labor victory must be twofold, but if it can only be one it is better to gain in spirit than to gain economic advantage. The I.W.W. attitude in conducting a strike, one might say, is pragmatic. We have certain general principles; their application differs as the people, the industry, the time, and the place indicate. It is impossible to conduct a strike among English-speaking people in the same way that you conduct a strike among foreigners, it is impossible to conduct a strike in the steel industry in the same manner you conduct a strike among the textile workers where women and children are involved in large numbers. So we have no ironclad rules. We realize that we are dealing with human beings and not with chemicals. And we realize that our fundamental principles of solidarity and class revolt must be applied in as flexible a manner as the science of pedagogy. The teacher may have as her ultimate ideal to make the child a proficient master of English, but he begins with the alphabet. So in an I.W.W. strike many times we have to begin with the alphabet, where our own ideal would be the mastery of the whole.

The Paterson strike divides itself into two periods. From the 25th of February, when the strike started, to the 7th of June, the date of the pageant in New York City, marks the first period. The second period is from the pageant to the 29th of July, when every man and woman was back at work. But the preparation for the strike had its roots in the past, the development of a four-loom in a union mill organized by the American Federation of Labor. This four-loom irritated the workers and precipitated many small outbreaks. At any rate they sent to Mr. John Golden, the president of the United Textile Workers of America, for relief, and his reply was substantially, "The four-loom system is in progress. You have no right to rebel against it." They

sought some other channel of expressing their revolt, and a year before the historic strike the Lawrence strike occurred. It stimulated their spirit and it focused their attention on the I.W.W. But unfortunately there came into the city a little group of Socialist Labor Party people who conducted a strike ending in disaster under what they were pleased to call the auspices of the "Detroit I.W.W." That put back the entire movement for a year.

But in the beginning of last year, 1913, there was a strike in the Doherty mill against the four-loom system. There had been agitation for three months by the Eight-Hour League of the I.W.W. for the eight-hour day, and it had stimulated a general response from the disheartened workers. So we held a series of mass meetings calling for a general strike, and that strike broke on the 25th of February, 1913. It was responded to mostly by the unorganized workers. We had three elements to deal with in the Paterson strike; the broad silk weavers and the dyers, who were unorganized and who were as you might say, almost virgin material, easily brought forth and easily stimulated to aggressive activity. But on the other hand we had the ribbon weavers, the English-speaking conservative people, who had behind them craft antecedents, individual craft unions that they had worked through for thirty years. These people responded only after three weeks, and then they formed the complicating element in the strike, continually pulling back on the mass through their influence as the English-speaking and their attitude as conservatives. The police action precipitated the strike of many workers. They came out because of the brutal persecution of the strike leaders and not because they themselves were so full of the strike feeling that they could not stay in any longer. This was the calling of the strike.

The administering of the strike was in the hands of a strike committee formed of two delegates from each shop. If the strike committee had been full-force there would have been 600 members. The majority of them were not I.W.W.; were non-union strikers. The I.W.W. arranged the meetings, conducted the agitation work. But the policies of the strike were determined by that strike committee of the strikers themselves. And with the strike committee dictating all the policies of the strike, placing the speakers in a purely advisory capacity, there was a continual danger of a break between the conservative element who were in the strike committee and the mass who were being stimulated by the speakers. The socialist element in the strike committee largely represented the ribbon weavers, this conservative element making another complication in the strike. I want if possible to make that clear before leaving it, that the preparation and declaration as well as the stimulation of the strike was all done by the I.W.W., by the militant minority among the silk workers; the administering of the strike was done democratically by the silk workers themselves. We were in the position of generals on a battlefield who had to organize their forces, who had to organize their commissary department while they were in battle but who were being financed and directed by people in the capital. Our plan of battle was very often nullified by the democratic administration of the strike committee.

The industrial outlook in Paterson presented its difficulties and its advantages. No one realized them quicker than we did. There was the difficulty of 300 mills, no trustification, no company that had the balance of power upon whom we could concentrate our attack. In Lawrence we had the American Woolen Company. Once having forced the American Woolen Company to settle, it was an easy matter to gather in the threads of the other mills. No such situation existed in Paterson. 300 manufacturers, but many of them having annexes in Pennsylvania, meant that they had a means whereby they could fill a large percentage of their orders unless we were able to strike Pennsylvania simultaneously. And those mills employed women and children, wives and children of union weavers, who didn't need actually to work for a living wage, but worked simply to add to the family income. We had the difficulty that silk is not an actual necessity. In the strike among coal miners you reached the point eventually where you had the public by the throat, and through the public you were able to bring pressure on the employers. Not so in the silk industry. Silk is a luxury. We had the condition in Paterson, however, that this was the first silk year in about thirty years. In 1913 fortunately silk was stylish. Every woman wanted a silk gown, and the more flimsy it was the more she wanted it. Silk being stylish meant that the employers were mighty anxious to take advantage of this exceptional opportunity. And the fact that there were over 300 of them gave us on the other hand the advantage that some of them were very small, they had great liabilities and not very much reserve capital. Therefore we were sort of playing a game between how much they could get done in Pennsylvania balanced off with how great the demand for silk was and how close they were to bankruptcy. We had no means of telling that, except by guesswork. *They* could always tell when our side was weakening.

The first period of the strike meant for us persecution and propaganda, those two things. Our work was to educate and stimulate. Education is not a conversion, it is a process. One speech to a body of workers does not overcome their prejudices of a lifetime. We had prejudices on the national issues, prejudices between crafts, prejudices between competing men and women — all these to overcome. We had the influence of the minister on the one side, and the respect that they had for government on the other side. We had to stimulate them. Stimulation, in a strike, means to make that strike and through it the class struggle their religion; to make them forget all about the fact that it's for a few cents or a few hours, but to make them feel it is a "religious duty" for them to win that strike. Those two things constituted our work, to create in them a feeling of solidarity and a feeling of class-consciousness — a rather old term, very threadbare among certain elements in the city of New York, but meaning a great deal in a strike. It means, to illustrate, this: the first day of the strike a photographer came on the stage to take a picture, and all over the hall there was a quiver of excitement: "No, no, no. Don't let him take a picture." "Why not?" "Why, our faces might show in the picture. The boss might see it." "Well," I said, "doesn't he know you are here? If he doesn't know now, he will know tomorrow."

From that day, when the strikers were afraid to have their pictures taken for fear they might be spotted, to the day when a thousand of them came to New York to take part in a pageant, with a friendly rivalry among themselves as to which one would get their picture in the paper, was a long process of stimulation, a long process of creating in them class spirit, class respect, class consciousness. That was the work of the agitator. Around this propaganda our critics center their volleys: the kind of propaganda we gave the strikers, the kind of stimulation and education we gave them. Many of our critics presume that the strikers were perfect and the leaders only were human; that we didn't have to deal with their imperfections as well as with our own. And the first big criticism that has been made — of course they all criticize: for the socialists we were too radical, for the anarchists we were too conservative, for everybody else we were impossible — is that we didn't advocate violence. Strange as it may seem, this is the criticism that has come from more sources than any other.

I contend that there was no use for violence in the Paterson strike; that only where violence is necessary should violence be used. This is not a moral or legal objection but a utilitarian one. I don't say that violence should *not* be used, but where there is no call for it, there is no reason why we should resort to it. In the Paterson strike, for the first four months there wasn't a single scab in the mills. The mills were shut down as tight as a vacuum. They were like empty junk boats along the banks of the river. Now, where any violence could be used against non-existent scabs, passes my understanding. Mass action is far more up-to-date than personal or physical violence. Mass action means that the workers withdraw their labor power, and paralyze the wealth production of the city, cut off the means of life, the breath of life of the employers. Violence may mean just weakness on the part of those workers. Violence occurs in almost every American Federation of Labor strike, because the workers are desperate, because they are losing their strike. In the street car strikes, for instances, every one of them is marked with violence, because the men in the power-house are at work, power is going through the rails and the scabs are able to run the cars. The men and women in desperation, seeing that the work is being done, turn the cars off the track, cut the wires, throw stones, and so on. But the I.W.W. believes that it is far more up to date to call the men in the power house out on strike. Then there won't be any cars running, any scabs to throw stones at or any wires that are worth cutting. Physical violence is dramatic. It's especially dramatic when you talk about it and don't resort to it. But actual violence is an old-fashioned method of conducting a strike. And mass action, paralyzing all industry, is a new-fashioned and a much more feared method of conducting a strike. That does not mean that violence shouldn't be used in self-defense. Everybody believes in violence for self-defense. Strikers don't need to be told that. But the actual fact is that in spite of our theory that the way to win a strike is to put your hands in your pocket and refuse to work, it was only in the Paterson strike of all the strikes in 1913 that a strike leader said what Haywood said: "If the police do not let up in the use of violence against the strikers the strikers are going to arm themselves and fight back." That has, however, not been advertised as extensively as was the "hands in your pockets" theory. Nor has it been advertised by either our enemies or our friends: that in the Paterson strike police persecution did drop off considerably after the open declaration of self-defense was made by the strikers. In that contingency violence is of course a necessity and one would be stupid to say that in either Michigan or West Virginia or Colorado the miners have not a right to take their guns and defend their wives and their babies and themselves.

The statement has been made by Mrs. Sanger in the "Revolutionary Almanac" that we should have stimulated the strikers to do something that would bring the militia in, and the presence of the militia would have forced a settlement of the strike. That is not necessarily true. It was not the presence of the militia that forced a settlement of the Lawrence strike. And today there is militia in Colorado, they have been there for months. There is the militia in Michigan, they have been there for a long period. There was the militia in West Virginia, but *that* did not bring a successful termination of the strike, because coal was being produced — and copper was being produced — in other parts of the world, and the market was not completely cut off from its product. The presence of the militia may play a part in stimulating the strikers or in discouraging the strikers, but it does not affect the industrial outcome of the strike, and I believe to say so is to give entirely too much significance to political or military power. I don't believe that the presence of the militia is going to affect an industrial struggle to any appreciable extent, providing the workers are economically in an advantageous position.

Before I finish with this question of violence I want to ask you men and women here if you realize that there is a certain responsibility about advocating violence. It's very easy to say, "We will give up our own lives in behalf of the workers," but it's another question to ask them to give up their lives; and men and women who go out as strike agitators should only advocate violence when they are absolutely certain that it is going to do some good other than to spill the blood of the innocent workers on the streets of the cities. I know of one man in particular who wrote an article in the "Social War" about how "the blood of the workers should dye the streets in the city of Paterson in protest" but he didn't come to Paterson to let his blood dye the streets, as the baptism of violence. In fact we never saw him in the city of Paterson from the first day of the strike to the last. This responsibility rests heavily upon every man and woman who lives with and works with and loves the people for whom the strike is being conducted.

The second criticism is "Why did we go to Haledon? Why didn't we fight out the free speech fight in Paterson?" One of the humorous features of it is that if Haledon had been a Democratic city instead of a Socialist city, that criticism would probably not have been made at all. It was not that we went to Haledon, it was that we went to a Socialist city, that irritates our critics. I want to point out to you something that you possibly never realized before, and that is that we had "right" to speak in Paterson. There was no conventional free speech fight in Paterson. A conventional free speech fight is where you are not permitted to speak at all, where you are immediately arrested and thrown into jail and not given the right to open your mouth. That is not the kind of free speech fight that existed in Paterson. We had the right to speak in the halls of Paterson, and we would have had the right to the last day of the strike if it had not been for the position of the hallkeepers. It was not the police that closed the halls, it was for the hallkeepers, and for the reason that they could not afford to lose their licenses. And a hallkeeper is usually a saloon-keeper first and a renter of halls afterwards. If there had been any hall in Paterson where a saloon was not attached we would probably have been able to secure that hall with but very little trouble. Some of the hallkeepers in fact, if I may speak from personal experience, were very glad to get rid of us, because we were not paying any rent and we were making a lot of work around their places. We had the right to speak on Lafayette Oval. We hired a piece of land on Water Street and used it during the entire time of the strike. The only time meetings were interfered with was on Sunday, and that involved not a free speech issue but a Sunday issue, the blue law of the State of New Jersey. When you are fighting a strike with 25,000 people and you are focusing your attention on trying to keep those people lined up to win that strike, it is a mighty dangerous procedure to go off at a tangent and dissipate your energies on something that is not important, even though you may have a right to do it. We had a right to speak on Sundays, but it meant to divide our energies and possibly to spend our money in ways that did not seem absolutely advisable at the time. The free speech fight that we have in Paterson is something far more intricate than just having a policeman put his hand over your mouth and tell you you can't speak. They let you talk. Oh yes. If I had invited all of you to come to Paterson and speak they would have let you talk, and the police and the detectives would have stood off at one side and listened to you. Then you [would] have been indicted by the grand jury for what you said, arrested and put under bonds and a long legal process started to convict you for what you said.

Therefore to call in the free speech fighters of the country would have been an absurdity, since every one of them would have been permitted to say their say and afterward would have been indicted for the language they used. There was quite a different situation from Lawrence. In Lawrence the halls were never interfered

with. In Paterson we had this peculiar technicality, that while you had the right to speak they said, "We hold you responsible for what you say, we arrest you for what you say, what you meant, what you didn't say, what we thought you ought to have said, and all the rest of it." Our original reason for going to Haledon, however, was not on account of the Sunday law only, but goes deep into the psychology of a strike. Because Sunday is the day before Monday! Monday is the day that a break comes in every strike, if it is to come at all during the week. If you can bring the people safely over Monday they usually go along for the rest of the week. If on Sunday, however, you let those people stay at home, sit around the stove without any fire in it, sit down at the table where there isn't very much food, see the feet of the children with shoes getting thin, and the bodies of the children where the clothes are getting ragged, they begin to think in terms of "myself" and lose that spirit of the mass and the realization that all are suffering as they are suffering. You have got to keep them busy every day in the week, and particularly on Sunday, in order to keep that spirit from going down to zero. I believe that's one reason why ministers have sermons on Sunday, so that people don't get a chance to think how bad their conditions are the rest of the week. Anyhow, it's a very necessary thing in a strike. And so our original reason for going to Haledon — I remember we discussed it very thoroughly — was to give them novelty, to give them variety, to take them en masse out of the city of Paterson some place else, to a sort of picnic over Sunday that would stimulate them for the rest of the week. In fact that is a necessary process in every strike, to keep the people busy all the time, to keep them active, working, fighting soldiers in the ranks. And this is the agitator's work — to plan and suggest activity, diverse, but concentrated on the strike. That's the reason why the I.W.W. has these great mass meetings, women's meetings, children's meetings; why we have mass picketing and mass funerals. And out of all this continuous mass activity we are able to create that feeling on the part of the workers, "One for all and all for one." We are able to make them realize that an injury to one is an injury to all, we are able to bring them to the point where they will have relief and not strike benefits, to the point where they will go to jail and refuse fines, and go hundreds of them together.

This method of conducting strikes has proved so successful and so remarkable with the I.W.W. that the United Mine Workers have taken it up, and in Michigan they are holding women's meetings, children's meetings, mass picketings, and mass parades, such as never characterized an American Federation of Labor strike before.

This is the agitator's work, this continual activity. And we lay awake many nights trying to think of something more we could give them to do. I remember one night in Lawrence none of us slept. The strike spirit was in danger of waning for lack of action. And I remember Bill Haywood said finally, "Let's get a picket line out in Essex street. Get every striker to put a little red ribbon on and walk up and down and show that the strike is not broken." A few days later the suggestion was carried out, and when they got out of their homes and saw this great body that they were, they had renewed strength and renewed energy which carried them along for many weeks more in the strike. That was the original object in going to Haledon.

It has been asked "Why didn't we advocate short strikes, intermittent strikes? Why didn't we practice sabotage? Why didn't we do everything we didn't do?" It reminds me of the story Tom Mann told. A very pretty young lady, you know how many of them there are around New York of this type, fluttering sentimentalists, came up to him with a sweet smile and said, "Can you tell me, Mr. Mann, why the women and the miners and the railroad people and all these people don't get together in England," and he said, "Can you tell me why you didn't cut your dress on the other side instead of this side?" People are not material, you can't lay them down on the table and cut them according to a pattern. You may have the best principles, but you can't always fit the people to the best principles. And for us to have gone into Paterson for the first three months of the strike and to have advocated a short strike would have said "Aha, they got theirs, didn't they? That's what happens in every strike. They are very revolutionary until the boss gives them theirs, and then say 'Boys, go back to work.'" In other words, we would simply have duplicated what every grafting, corrupt labor leader has done in Paterson and the United States: to tell them "Go back to work, your strike is lost." And so it was necessary for us first to gain the confidence of the people and to make them feel that we were willing to fight just as long as they were; that we were not the first ones to call quits. And why should we? We were not the ones that were making the sacrifices, we were not the ones that were paying the price. It was the strikers that were doing that. But for us to advocate a short strike, on the other hand, would have been directly contrary to our own feelings. We felt that the strike was going to be won. And it may seem to you a very foolish piece of optimism when I say that I believed the Paterson strike was going to

be won up to the Sunday before the Paterson strike was lost. We didn't tell the people to stay out on a long strike knowing in our hearts that they were losing. We couldn't have talked to them if we had felt that way. But every one of us was confident they were going to win that strike. And you all were. Throughout the United States the people were. To successfully advocate an intermittent strike or to go back to work and use sabotage was impossible for the simple reason that the people wanted a long strike, and until they themselves found out by experience that a long strike was a waste of energy it was no use for us to try to dictate to them.

People learn to do by doing. We haven't a military body in a strike, a body to which you can say "Do this" and "Do that" and "Do the other thing" and they obey unfailingly. Democracy means mistakes, lots of them, mistake after mistake. But it also means experience and that there will be no repetition of those mistakes.

Now, we can talk short strike in Paterson, we can talk intermittent strike, we can talk sabotage, because the people know we are not afraid of a long strike, that we are not cowards, that we haven't sold them out, that we went through the long strike with them and that we all learned together that the long strike was not a success. In other words, by that six months they have gained the experience that will mean it never needs to be repeated.

Sabotage was objected to by the Socialists. In fact they pursued a rather intolerant attitude. It was the Socialist organizer and the Socialist secretary who called the attention of the public to the fact that Frederic Sumner Boyd made a sabotage speech. Why "intolerant"? Because nobody ever objected to anything that the Socialists said. We tried to produce among those strikers this feeling: "Listen to anything, listen to everybody. Ministers come, priests come, lawyers, doctors, politicians, Socialists, anarchists, A. F. of L., I.W.W. — listen to them all and then take what you think is good for yourselves and reject what is bad. If you are not able to do that then no censorship over your meetings is going to do you any good." And so the strikers had a far more tolerant attitude than had the Socialists. The strikers had the attitude: "Listen to everything." The Socialists had the attitude: "You must listen to us but you must not listen to the things we don't agree with, you must not listen to sabotage because we don't agree with sabotage." We had a discussion in the executive committee about it, and one after the other of the members of the executive committee admitted that they used sabotage, why shouldn't they talk about it? It existed in the mills, they said. Therefore there was no reason why it should not be recognized on the platform. It was not the advocacy of sabotage that hurt some of our comrades but denial of their right to dictate the policy of the Paterson strike.

What the workers had to contend with in the first period of this strike was this police persecution that arrested hundreds of strikers, fined hundreds, sentenced men to three years in state's prison for talking; persecutions that meant beating and clubbing and continual opposition every minute they were on the picket line, speakers arrested, Quinlan arrested, Scott convicted and sentenced to 15 years and \$1500 fine. On the other side, what? No money. If all these critics all over the United States had only put their interest in the form of finances the Paterson strike might have been another story. We were out on strike five months. We had \$60,000 and 25,000 strikers. That meant \$60,000 for five months, \$12,000 a month for 25,000 strikers; it meant an average of less than 50 cents a month. And yet they stayed out on strike for six months. In Ireland today there is a wonderful strike going on and they are standing it beautifully. Why? Because they have had half a million dollars since the thirty-first of August (five months) given into the relief fund, and every man that goes on the picket line has food in his stomach and some kind of decent clothes on his back.

(N.B.: Unfortunately future history shows that their pounds were not an adequate substitute for solidarity, which we had and they lacked.)

I saw men go out in Paterson without shoes, in the middle of winter and with bags on their feet. I went into a family to have a picture taken of a mother with eight children who didn't have a crust of bread, didn't have a bowl of milk for the baby in the house — but the father was out on the picket line. Others were just as bad off. Thousands of them that we never heard of at all. This was the difficulty that the workers had to contend with in Paterson: hunger; hunger gnawing at their vitals; hunger tearing them down; and still they had the courage to fight it out for six months.

Then came the pageant. What I say about the pageant tonight may strike you as rather strange, but I consider that the pageant marked the climax in the Paterson strike and started the decline in the Paterson strike, just for the reason that the pageant promised money for the Paterson strikers and it didn't give them

a cent. Yes, it was a beautiful example of realistic art, I admit that. It was splendid propaganda for the workers in New York. I don't minimize its value but am dealing with it here solely as a factor in the strike, with what happened in Paterson before, during, and after the pageant. In preparation for the pageant the workers were distracted for weeks, turning to the stage of the hall, away from the field of life. They were playing pickets on the stage. They were neglecting the picketing around the mill. And the first scabs got into the Paterson mills while the workers were training for the pageant, because the best ones, the most active, the most energetic, the best, the strongest ones of them went into the pageant and they were the ones that were the best pickets around the mills. Distraction from their real work was the first danger in Paterson. And how many times we had to counteract that and work against it!

And then came jealousy. There were only a thousand that came to New York. I wonder if you ever realized that you left 24,000 disappointed people behind? The women cried and said "Why did *she* go? Why couldn't I go?" The men told about how many times they had been in jail, and asked why couldn't they go as well as somebody else. Between jealousy, unnecessary but very human, and their desire to do something, much discord was created in the ranks.

But whatever credit is due for such a gigantic undertaking comes to the New York silk workers, not the dilettante element who figured so prominently, but who would have abandoned it at the last moment had not the silk workers advanced \$600 to pull it through.

And then comes the grand finale — no money. Nothing. This thing that had been heralded as the salvation of the strike, this thing that was going to bring thousands of dollars to the strike — \$150 came to Paterson, and all kinds of explanations. I don't mean to say that I blame the people who ran the pageant. I know they were amateurs and they gave their time and their energy and their money. They did the best they could and I appreciate their effort. But that doesn't minimize the result that came in Paterson. It did not in any way placate the workers of Paterson, to tell them that people in New York had made sacrifices, in view of the long time that *they* had been making sacrifices. And so with the pageant as a climax, with the papers clamoring that tens of thousands of dollars had been made, and with the committee explaining what was very simple, that nothing *could* have been made with one performance on such a gigantic scale, there came trouble, dissatisfaction, in the Paterson strike.

Bread was the need of the hour, and bread was not forthcoming even from the most beautiful and realistic example of art that has been put on the stage in the last half century.

What was the employers' status during all this time? We saw signs of weakness every day. There was a ministers' committee appointed to settle the strike. There was a businessmen's committee appointed to settle the strike. The governor's intervention, the President's intervention was sought by the manufacturers. Every element was brought to bear to settle the strike. Even the American Federation of Labor; nobody believes that they came in there uninvited and no one can believe that the armory was given to them for a meeting place unless for a purpose. What was this purpose but to settle the strike? The newspapers were clamoring that the strike could and must be settled. And we looked upon all this — the newspapers that were owned by the mill owners, the ministers and the business men who were stimulated by the mill owners — we looked upon all this as a sign that the manufacturers were weakening. Even the socialists admitted it. In the New York *Call* of July 9 we read this: "The workers of Paterson *should* stay with them another round or two after a confession of this kind. What the press had to say about the strike looks very much like a concession of defeat." This was on the 9th of July. Every sign of weakness on the part of the manufacturers was evident.

But there came one of the most peculiar phenomena that I have ever seen in a strike; that the bosses weakened simultaneously with the workers. Both elements weakened together. The workers did not have a chance to see the weaknesses of the employers as clearly, possibly, as we who had witnessed it before, did, which gave us our abiding faith in the workers' chances of success, but the employers had every chance to see the workers weaken. The employers have a full view of your army. You have no view of their army and can only guess at their condition. So a tentative proposition came from the employers of a shop-by-shop settlement. This was the trying-out of the bait, the bait that should have been refused by the strikers without qualification. Absolute surrender, all or nothing, was the necessary slogan. By this we did not mean that 100 per cent of the manufacturers must settle, or that 99 per cent of the workers must stay out till 1 per cent won everything. The I.W.W. advice to the strikers was — an overwhelming majority of the strikers must receive the concession

before a strike is won. This was clearly understood in Paterson, though misrepresented there and elsewhere. Instead, the committee swallowed the bait and said, "We will take a vote on the shop-by-shop proposition, a vote of the committee." The minute they did that, they admitted their own weakness. And the employers immediately reacted to a position of strength. There was no referendum vote proposed by this committee, they were willing to take their own vote to see what they themselves thought of it, and to settle the strike on their own decision alone.

Then it was that the I.W.W. speakers and Executive Committee had to inject themselves in contradistinction to the strike committee. And the odd part of it was that the conservatives on the committee utilized our own position against us. We had always said, "The silk workers must gain their own strike." And so they said, "We are the silk workers. You are simply outside agitators. You can't talk to this strike committee even." I remember one day the door was virtually slammed in my face, until the Italian and Jewish workers made such an uproar, threatening to throw the others out of a three-story building window, that the floor was granted. It was only when we threatened to go to the masses and to get this referendum vote in spite of them that they took the referendum vote. But all this came out in the local press and it all showed that the committee was conservative and the I.W.W. was radical, more correctly the I.W.W. and the masses were radical. And so this vote was taken by the strikers. It resulted in a defeat of the entire proposition. 5,000 dyers in one meeting voted it down unanimously. They said, "We never said we would settle shop by shop. We are going to stick it out together until we win together or until we lose together." But the very fact that they had been willing to discuss it made the manufacturers assume an aggressive position. And then they said, "We never said we would settle shop-by-shop. We never offered you any such proposition. We won't take you back now unless you come under the old conditions."

One of the peculiar things about this whole situation was the attitude of the socialists on that committee. I want to make myself clearly understood. I don't hold the socialist party officially responsible, only insofar as they have not repudiated these particular individuals. The socialist element in the committee represented the ribbon weavers, the most conservative, the ones who were in favor of the shop-by-shop settlement. They were led by a man named Magnet, conservative, Irish, Catholic, Socialist. His desire was to wipe the strike off the slate in order to leave the stage free for a political campaign. He had aspirations to be the mayoralty candidate, which did not however come to fruition. This man and the element that were behind him, the socialist element, were willing to sacrifice, to betray a strike in order to make an argument, the argument given out in the "Weekly Issue" a few days before election: "Industrial action has failed. Now try political action." It was very much like the man who made a prophecy that he was going to die on a certain date, and then he committed suicide. He died, all right. Industrial action failed, all right. But they forgot to say that they contributed more than any other element in the strike committee to the failure of the strike. They were the conservatives, they were the ones who wanted to get rid of the strike as quickly as possible. And through these ribbon weavers the break came.

On the 18th of July the ribbon weavers notified the strike committee, "We have drawn out of your committee. We are going to settle our strike to suit ourselves. We are going to settle it shop by shop. That's the way they have settled it in New York at Smith and Kauffmann." But a visit had been made by interested parties to the Smith and Kauffmann boys prior to their settlement, at which they were informed that the Paterson strike was practically lost: "These outside agitators don't know anything about it, because they are fooled in this matter. You had better go back to work." When they went back to work on the nine-hour day and the shop-by-shop settlement, then it was used by the same people who had told them that, as an argument to settle in the same way in Paterson. And the ribbon weavers stayed out till the very last. Oh yes. They have all the glory throughout the United States of being the last ones to return to work, but the fact is that they were the first ones that broke the strike, because they broke the solidarity, they precipitated a position that was virtually a stampede. The strike committee decided, "Well, with the ribbon weavers drawing out, what are we going to do? We might as well accept;" and the shop-by-shop proposition was put through by the strike committee without a referendum vote, stampeded by the action of the English-speaking, conservative ribbon weavers.

So that was the tragedy of the Paterson strike, the tragedy of a stampede, the tragedy of an army, a solid phalanx being cut up into 300 pieces, each shop-piece trying to settle as best for themselves. It was absolutely in violation of the I.W.W. principles and the I.W.W. advice to the strikers. No strike should ever be settled

without a referendum vote, and no shop settlement should ever have been suggested in the city of Paterson, because that was the very thing that had broken the strike the year before. So this stampede came, and the weaker ones went back to work and the stronger ones were left outside, to be made the target of the enemy, blacklisted for weeks and weeks after the strike was over, many of them on the blacklist yet. It produced discord among the officers in the strike. I remember one day at Haledon, the chairman said to Tresca and myself, "If you are going to talk about the eight-hour day and about a general strike, then you had better not talk at all." And we had to go out and ask the people, "Are we expected here today and can we say what we think, or have we got to say what the strike committee has decided?" We were unanimously welcomed. But it was too late. Just as soon as the people saw that there was a break between the agitators and the strike committee, that the ribbon weavers wanted this and others wanted that, the stampede had started and no human being could have held it back.

It was the stampede of hungry people, people who could no longer think clearly. The bosses made beautiful promises to the ribbon weavers and to everybody else, but practically every promise made before the settlement of the Paterson strike was violated, and the better conditions have only been won through the organized strikes since the big strike. Not one promise that was made by the employers previous to breakup on account of the shop-by-shop settlement was ever lived up to. Other places were stranded. New York, Hoboken, College Point were left stranded by this action. And on the 28th of July everybody was back at work, back to work in spite of the fact that the general conviction had been that we were on the eve of victory. I believe that if the strikers had been able to hold out a little longer by any means, by money if possible, which was refused to us, we could have won the Paterson strike. We could have won it because the bosses had lost their spring orders, they had lost their summer orders, they had lost their fall orders, and they were in danger of losing their winter orders, one year's work; and the mills in Pennsylvania, while they could give the bosses endurance for a period, could not fill all the orders and could not keep up their business for the year round.

I say we were refused money. I wish to tell you that is the absolute truth. The New York *Call* was approached by fellow-worker Haywood, when we were desperate for money, when the kitchens were closed and the people were going out on the picket line on bread and water, and asked to publish a full page advertisement begging for money, pleading for money. They refused to accept the advertisement. They said, "We can't take your money." "Well, can you *give* us the space?" "Oh, no, we can't afford to give you the space. We couldn't take money from strikers, but we couldn't give space either." And so in the end there was no appeal, either paid for or not, but a little bit of a piece that did not amount to a candle of light, lost in the space of the newspaper. However, on the 26th of July, while the ribbon weavers and some of the broad silk weavers were still out, the *Call* had published a criticism by Mr. Jacob Panken of the Paterson strike. Lots of space for criticism, but no space to ask bread for hungry men and women. And this was true not only of the *Call*, but of the other socialist papers. So, between these two forces, we were helpless. And then we had to meet our critics. First came the socialist critic who said, "But the I.W.W. didn't do enough for the socialist party. Look at all the money we gave you. And you don't say anything about it." Dr. Korshet had a long article in the New York *Call*. Anyone may read it who likes to refresh his memory. Just this: "We gave you money and you didn't thank us." Well, I would like to know why we *should* thank them. Aren't the socialists supposed to be workingmen, members of the working class, just the same as we are? And if they do something for their own class we have got to thank them the next ten years for it. They are like the charity organization that gives the poor working woman a little charity and then expects her to write recommendations to the end of the end of the earth. We felt that there was no need to thank the socialist party for what they had done, because they had only done their duty and they had done very little in comparison with what they have done in A. F. of L. strikes, in the McNamara cases.

They make the criticism that we didn't give them any credit. How about the 5,000 votes that the I.W.W. membership gave the party in Paterson for a candidate who was a member of the A. F. of L. and who did not get a single vote from his own union? All his votes came from the I.W.W. If they wanted to invest money, the money that they invested for each vote in Paterson was well spent, on a purely business basis.

And then Mr. Panken's criticism was that we should have settled the strike shop by shop. A humorous criticism, a cynical, sarcastic criticism, when you consider that's exactly what was done, and that's exactly why we lost the Paterson strike. But a few days before the strike was over, before this collapse came, we received a little piece of paper through the delegates to the New York-Paterson Relief Committee, and on this

little piece of paper it said, "The following gentlemen are willing to bring about a settlement of the Paterson strike if the strike committee will send them a letter requesting them to do it." And on this piece of paper were the names of Jacob Panken, Meyer London, Abe Cahan, Charles Edward Russell, and two others. In other words, a few days before the Paterson strike collapsed there was a committee of six socialists in New York who had such faith that the strike was going to be won, including the man who criticized us for not settling shop by shop, that they were willing to settle it for us on this condition that they incidentally take all the glory of the settlement if we asked them to do it. We didn't ask them. We said, "If there is anybody that thinks he can settle the Paterson strike and he calls himself a socialist or a friend of labor he will do it without being asked to do it in an official manner. They did not do it. They criticized.

Our position to the strikers was "If the I.W.W. conception had been followed out you would have won all together, or you would have lost all together, but you would still have had your army a continuing whole." Every general knows it is far better for an army to retreat en masse than it is to scatter and be shot to pieces. And so it is better to lose all together than to have some win at the expense of the rest, because losing all together you have the chance within a few months of recovering and going back to the battle again, your army still centralized, and winning in the second attempt.

What lessons has the Paterson strike given to the I.W.W. and to the strikers? One of the lessons it has given to me is that when the I.W.W. assumes the responsibility of a strike the I.W.W. should control the strike absolutely through a union strike committee; that there should be no outside interference, no outside non-union domination accepted or permitted, no Magnet permitted to pose as "representing the non-union element." That direct action and solidarity are the only keys to a worker's success or the workers' success. That the spirit throughout this long weary propaganda has remained unbroken, and I will give you just three brief examples.

The 5,000 votes for the socialist party was because the workers had this in mind: "Maybe we will strike again, and the next time we strike we want all this political machinery on our side." They would not have done that if their spirit had been crushed and they had no hope for another strike. The free speech fight for **Emma Goldman** that was recently successfully waged in Paterson was made because the strikers have an unbroken spirit still. Many of them did not know Emma Goldman. I say this with no disrespect to her. Many of them are foreigners and did not know anything about her speeches and lectures. But they knew somebody wanted to speak there and their constitutional enemies, the police, were trying to prevent it, and so they turned out en masse and free speech was maintained in Paterson. And just around Christmas time there was an agitation for a strike, and then instead of stimulation we had to give them a sort of sedative, to keep them quiet. Why, they were so anxious to go out on strike that they had great mass meetings: "now is the time, eight-hour day, nine-hour day, anything at all; but — we want to strike again!" Every time I go to Paterson some people get around and say, "Say, Miss Flynn, when is there going to be another strike?" They have that certain feeling that the strike has been postponed, but they are going to take it up again and fight it out again. That spirit is the result of the I.W.W. agitation in Paterson.

And so, I feel that we have been vindicated in spite of our defeat. We have won further toleration for the workers. We have given them a class feeling, a trust in themselves and a distrust for everybody else. They are not giving any more faith to the ministers, even though we didn't carry any "No God, no master" banners floating through the streets of Paterson. You know, you may put a thing on a banner and it makes no impression at all; but you let a minister show himself up, let all the ministers show themselves against the workers and that makes more impression than all the "No God, no master" banners from Maine to California. That is the difference between education and sensationalism.

And they have no more use for the state. To them the statue of liberty is personified by the policeman and his club.

Additional Information

Taken from *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, edited by Joyce L. Kornbluh (1964), which used the manuscript of Flynn's talk from the **Labadie Collection**.