
Proclamation Concerning the Race Riots by the Chicago Federation of Labor

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The profiteering meat packers of Chicago are responsible for the race riots that have disgraced the city.

It is the outcome of their deliberate attempt to disrupt the union labor movement in the stockyards. Their responsibility is shared by the daily newspapers which are kept subsidized by the extravagant advertising contracts of the packers, particularly *The Tribune* and *The Herald & Examiner*.

The same meat packers can solve the problem if they will and put a stop to the trouble, but it can be done only in one way, if it is not to break out again at a future date more violently than before. The packers know that way. They have been told what it is and they are doing nothing about it.

Ever since organized labor first started to unite the stockyards employees, the packers have fought with every weapon at their command these efforts of the workers.

Discriminating against union men, they have fired them and hired nonunion men in their places. In recent years their principal recruiting points for nonunion workers have been in the South, and nonunion colored workers have been brought here in great numbers just as they are being brought here now by the railroads — or were up to the outbreak of the race riots.

These colored men and women are not brought here for their own improvement, but are

enslaved at low wages and have been used by the packers to undermine union conditions.

Organized labor has no quarrel with the colored worker. Workers, white and black, are fighting the same battle. The unions met the action of the packers by starting to organize the colored workers.

As soon as this work commenced, the packers started to fight the unions with foul tactics. They subsidized negro politicians and negro preachers and sent them out among the colored men and women to induce them not to join the unions. They had a YMCA secretary on their staff, and the two present aldermen of the 2nd Ward participated actively in the campaign of the packers. One of them, Ald. L.B. Anderson, went before Attorney Francis J. Heney, representing the workers, when he was preparing for his appearance before Judge Alschuler and urged that Heney should not ask the judge to order the packers to maintain a preferential union shop.

Their purpose in this, which during the last several weeks has borne bitter fruit, was to play upon race prejudice and create dissension between whites and blacks which would prevent the colored workers from joining the unions and prejudice the white workers against them for that reason. Notwithstanding their efforts, the colored workers came into the union in large numbers.

Some weeks ago the unions redoubled their efforts to get the negroes in. Squads of union or-

ganizers held street corner meetings as the workers left the yards. The packers called on Captain Caughlin of the stockyards section for mounted police to break up these meetings, and Captain Caughlin, tool of the packers, sent his bluecoats there to ride down the men who gathered to listen to the speakers. This caused a strike of stockyards workers until the Federation officials and officials of the Stockyards Labor Council stepped in and secured the transfer of Captain Caughlin away from the yards and the cessation of this Cossack practice.

The union planned a gigantic mass meeting and demonstration to take place Sunday, July 6 [1919], at which white and black workers were to parade together throughout the stockyards district and gather to hear speakers in a public playground.

On the last day before this event, the packers called upon the police and said they had information that the negroes were arming to assault the whites and they wanted the parade permit revoked; at least they wanted the negroes and whites to march separately.

Is not their purpose clear?

They succeeded in having the whites and negroes separated into two parades, instead of letting them march together. This was done, but the marchers in the two parades merged into one audience at the playground to hear the speakers. And there they fraternized peacefully and cordially — united workers.

At every opportunity the packers and their hirelings fanned the flames of race prejudice and the fires of prejudice between strikebreakers and organized workers, hoping for the day to arrive when union white men would refuse to work beside unorganized colored men, so that the union men, white and black, could be discharged and nonunion workers, white and black, put in their places, until the spark came that ignited the tinder piled by the packers and the race riots ensued.

The only thing that saved the city from becoming a shambles was organized labor. Night and

day the officials of the Stockyards Labor Council toiled and fought to hold in check the forces of organized labor — to show them that the situation was the result of exploitation of white and black workers alike by the criminals of big business and to prevent workers from assaulting other workers.

It stands to the credit of the union workers of Chicago that neither black nor white union men participated in the rioting, despite the lying accounts published daily by the kept press, bought body and soul by the advertisements of the packers and other crooks of big business.

The white union men of the city did not fall for the game of the packers. The colored union men also refused to be misled into violence, and cast their influence on the side of curbing those of their race that actively participated in the disorder.

The rioting subsided and then someone fired the homes of hundreds of white workers back of the yards and these homes were burned to the ground. The newspapers and police, jointly tools of the packers, tried to convince the citizens that colored workers had set fire to these homes.

Why?

It is perfectly obvious that the criminals that played race against race until blood flowed in the streets of our city, had carried their work farther and made this last effort to inflame the Polish and Lithuanian white stockyards workers against the colored workers.

At the same moment the superintendents of the packing plants, the police, the militia heads, and Governor Lowden were planning to send the nonunion colored workers back to their tasks in the packing houses on the following Monday under the protection of militiamen with loaded rifles, machine guns, and bayonets.

The fires were set Saturday morning. The nonunion colored workers were to go back with machine guns surrounding them on Monday morning. What fiend could have devised a more

diabolical plot? These gentlemen said they were trying to quiet the race trouble.

On Saturday morning the superintendents of all the packing plants, Adj.-Gen. Dickson of the militia, and First Deputy Superintendent of Police Alcock met at the plant of Armour & Company. There they made plans for the resumption of work with machine guns on the following Monday.

J.W. Johnstone, John Kikulski, and Martin Murphy of the Stockyards Labor Council went to the meeting place. They were denied admission.

“You are meeting here to plan to resume work and stop the race rioting. We have been on the firing line trying to prevent race rioting. We are here to tell you the only way in which it can be stopped,” said Johnstone.

“You are not invited,” was the reply of the Armour & Company representative.

“Then tell Gen. Dickson we want to see him,” said Johnstone.

They were kept waiting until nearly 11 o’clock. They had an appointment with Federal Judge Alschuler, the referee in stockyards labor matters, at 11:30. They sent word in that they could wait no longer. Instead of Gen. Dickson, Deputy Chief of Police Alcock came out. What Johnstone and Kikulski had to say to him startled him so that he took them into the meeting.

There they were permitted to make their statement, but again they were not permitted to advise with these men on the situation. They had to say their say and get out.

They started by saying:—

“The men responsible for these race riots are seated around this table.”

They told the story that has been told here. Then they added:

“We have worked day and night to keep this situation in hand. Not your police, not your soldiers have stopped this rioting, but the union men and women of the stockyards district.

“The longer it has gone on the harder it has

been to hold. Five days of race riots have got some of our white workers alarmed and even inflamed until we do not know how much longer we can control them.

“But this we know. Union men will not work with machine guns pointed at them. They will not work under the spur of bayonets. If you do the thing you are planning to do there, we will not be responsible for the blood that will be shed. You will be responsible.

“These men will be on the killing floor of the packing plants. They will have cleavers and knives. They know how to use them. The machine guns will not be able to stop what will happen unless they mow down the workers, white and black. You must be insane to attempt such a thing.”

Then Johnstone and Kikulski told the packers the only thing that they could do to solve the problem. They said:

“Bring your workers back to a union shop. All of them are underpaid. Raise their pay so they will have that to think about to take their minds off the race feeling that has been stirred up. Bring your workers back to jobs as fellow union men and women and we will try to hold the situation in hand for you. You will not need machine guns or bayonets. If you do anything else than that, the bloodshed that will follow will be greater than that that has occurred and we will be powerless to prevent it.”

The packers and their police and militia heads dismissed these men without discussion — contemptuously. They would not even talk over the proposal with them.

For 5 days they had been talking about the problems presented by the race riots and in all that time they had neglected to call into conference the men who knew most about it. They had not talked to Dr. Hall, acknowledged leader of honest and intelligent negroes. They had not consulted with Judge Alschuler, who has counseled with the stockyards workers for many months

during the war and since. They did not call in the officers of the [Chicago] Federation of Labor or the Stockyards Labor Council nor any union heads, colored or white.

And so they would not consult with Johnstone, Kikulski, or Murphy on that day. But at least the three union men accomplished this much — what they said alarmed the conspirators and cause them to postpone the bloody day with which they were planning to cap the climax of their plotting.

Organized labor reads these events correctly. It is awake to the thing the packers are trying to do. Labor takes this means of letting the citizens of Chicago know circumstantially where the responsibility rests and of telling the law-abiding and peace loving men and women of Chicago that there is a simple and sure solution and only one — namely, for the packers to quit fighting labor and to end their criminal campaign of playing white against black and black against white to exploit the workers of both races.

And organized labor has more than this to say to Chicago. These bloody race riots are terrible things, but they are only part of the situation that confronts this country today. Throughout the land, with the same contemptuous disregard of the rights of free men and women that the packers display, the organized employers of labor

are conspiring to wreck labor organizations and their prostitute newspapers are helping them.

In and around Chicago we see it at the Crane and Harvester plants, at Argo, at Blue Island, where employees of these same packers are on strike because they get only 22 cents an hour. As in the case of the crooked contractors' ring in Chicago, they control materials and hold the whip hand over other employers who want to deal fairly with the employees, and by withholding materials in violation of the law, compel them — the fair employers — to assist to disrupt organized labor.

Either these men cannot understand what is going on in the minds and hearts of working men, or they are determined to crush out of the workers their new thirst for the cup of life. In either event it is the same. They have their choice between two things. Either to deal with organized labor or persist in their actions and inflame a mob spirit that will engulf us all.

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the Chicago Federation of Labor,*

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