
Senate Passes Measure Aimed at IWW: Outlaws the Use and Advocacy of Violence [Event of May 6, 1918]

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WASHINGTON, May 9 [1918].— The bill declared frankly to be aimed against the IWW, outlawing organizations which use or advocate violence to bring about “any governmental, social, industrial or economic change,” during the war, was passed Monday [May 6, 1918] by the Senate after brief debate and went to the House.

The bill provides that “any association, organization, society or corporation, one of whose purposes or professed purposes is to bring about any governmental, social, industrial or economic change within the United States by the use, without the authority of law, of force, violence, or physical injury to person or property, or by threats of such injury, or which teaches, advocates, defends or advises the use, without authority of law, of force, violence, or physical injury to person or property, or threats of such injury, to accomplish such change or for any other purpose, and which, during any war in which the United States is engaged, shall by any means prosecute or pursue such purpose or professed purpose, or shall so teach, advocate, advise, or defend, is hereby declared to be an ‘unlawful association.’”

It also make it a felony, punishable by 10 years’ imprisonment and \$5,000 fine, for anyone to continue to be a member or agent of such an “unlawful association,” or who shall defend its acts.

As soon as a test case has been brought into court, the court must decide whether the IWW does teach or practice “force, violence or physical injury to persons or property.” It may hold that physical injury to property is practiced by the IWW. And then the IWW will become an outlawed organization. Its members must quit their mem-

bership and their activities on behalf of the outlawed methods of the organization. Otherwise they will be arrested by the hundreds, tried as rapidly as possible, and when convicted will be put away in federal prisons.

What About Unskilled Labor?

There arises at once the problem of the causal and unskilled labor from which the “wabblied” [*sic.*] have drawn their support. What will become of these men? The president’s mediation commission, in its recent report, says: “The IWW has exercised its strongest hold in those industries and communities where employers have most resisted the trade union movement, and where some form of protest against unjust treatment was inevitable.”

Can the trade union movement now go in and organize the lumberjacks, the copper miners, the longshoremen at various points, and the farm laborers in the Northwest and West?

Suppose they come into the regular unions, by the thousands: will they prove an extremely radical element, and will they control the local unions and even central labor bodies at various points?

Whether legitimate strikes of organized labor would be penalized by the bill was a question raised by Senator [James A.] Reed of Missouri, and Senator [Thomas J.] Walsh [D-MT] said there is no purpose to prohibit peaceful labor strikes.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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