
Brutal Officer Attacks Workers' Meeting

by P.S. Kerr

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A picnic held for the benefit of the unemployed by the International Workers' Association on Sunday, August 7th [1921], at Homewood Park in the township of Cheektawaga, a suburb of Buffalo, was a scene of a small riot, the arrest of the principal speaker, and the brutal assault of two workers — one a woman — by the forces of law and order.

The trouble began when a constable stopped the speech of Franklin P. Brill. Several hundred people stood about, listening with rapt attention, when suddenly they were aroused by a volley of vile oaths, and a threat to pump the speaker full of lead if he continued. Ordered from the platform, the speaker was manhandled by the constable and ordered from the grounds. This outrage was too much for several workers, who came to Brill's assistance. Free again, Brill was seated on a bench talking to a woman, when he was pointed out to the constable, who lurched toward him. The woman, fearing for herself as the guardian of justice staggered close to her, raised her arm in an involuntary effort of self-preservation. Angered, the constable seized her fiercely by the throat, shook her violently, and hurled her to the ground. Turning to Brill, he yanked him from the bench and dragged him to an awaiting auto in which was seated the County Sheriff and his assistant. They refused to take Brill away as there was no ground for an arrest.

The woman and Christian Kobble were again

assaulted when they attempted to learn his name from the constable. Kobble was knocked unconscious for a space of 15 minutes by the constable with a pair of brass knuckles or a blackjack.

Meanwhile the crowd closed in on the constable, who pulled a gun, blew his whistle, and several cutthroats like himself came running out. Two of them had shotguns. He shouted out, "Shoot the sons-of-bitches, I give you permission." At this juncture, the sheriff with his men restored order. Brill permitted himself to be led to the home of Dr. Anna Reinstein, wife of Boris Reinstein, on whose property the picnic was being held.

Meanwhile the sheriff addressed the audience, telling them that what had taken place was not the work of his office, nor of the federal officers, some of whom were known to be present. It was plain from his whole demeanor that he realized that a dirty piece of work had been pulled off, responsibility for which he had no desire of sharing.

Names of dozens of witnesses were secured and early the following morning the services of Eustace Reynolds, a labor lawyer who has done yeoman service in protecting the interests of the workers here, was put on the case. He went to the principal county judges in an effort to secure a warrant for the constable's arrest. He was unsuccessful. The question was then taken up with the district attorney's office for the purpose of bringing the matter before the present special grand jury, with no better results. A visit was then made to

the township of Cheektawaga, which supports 4 peace justices all with proper jurisdiction. Three refused to issue a warrant. The fourth one declared that while he would issue a warrant preferred by Kobble, said that “if the evidence showed that a Bolshevik or Soviet speech had been made, the officer would be acquitted,” in spite of the fact that the assault of Kobble had no connection with the speech.

No justice is expected in the case. Had the assault been committed by a working man, how different it would have been. The conviction of a police officer for assaulting a wage-worker is indeed rare in the annals of jurisprudence. The most we can do is to give the matter wide publicity. It has already created quite a stir in labor circles here.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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