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## CABINET BELIEVES BIG FREIGHT RATES MENACE BUSINESS

Harding and Advisers Consider Some Charges Positive Economic Danger.

### RAIL COSTS TOO HIGH

President to Confer With Experts and Shippers in Studying Problem.

### ROADS UNDER EQUIPPED

No Car Shortage Now, but Conditions Next Autumn Are Sure to Be Serious.

Special Despatch to THE NEW YORK HERALD.

New York Herald Bureau, Washington, D. C., March 29. President Harding and his Cabinet have determined to tackle the intricate railroad problems and to find a solution as an absolute essential of normal peace time business and prosperity. After the Cabinet meeting to-day President Harding made it known that he would call to conference with him Chairman Clark and other members of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the chairman and members of the Railroad Labor Board. President Rea of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Senator Penrose of Pennsylvania already have conferred with the President and it is likely that others interested in the railroads will be called to the White House.

At present traffic or sufficiency of transportation is not a problem, but the situation with regard to rates in its effect upon traffic is regarded as dangerous. The railroads are not earning anything in spite of the fact that rates are on a level almost universally regarded as too high.

It has been suggested in many quarters that the falling off in railroad traffic is due to the fact that many commodities cannot move freely on the present level of rates, with other prices on the downward trend, and producers have protested that they could not market their products profitably on the present rate basis.

### Behind Expected Earnings.

Government figures considered by the Cabinet show that the railroads are running \$700,000,000 a year behind the earnings directed by the Eech-Cummins law and expected as a result of the rate advance of last August.

In the face of the situation the President and his advisers are agreed with Senator Cummins and others that rates not only are too high for the good of American business, but that in many instances they threaten the economic structure.

Because of dearth of business at the present high rates there is no car shortage or other transportation difficulty at this time, but the railroads are under equipped, and experts in and out of the government service are looking for a repetition of such difficulties as car shortage and congestion when the heavy movement of the autumn sets in and the crops begin to go to market.

After talking over the matter with the men handling different phases of the transportation problem, it is probable that the President will call in other interests in the railroads, including S. Davies Wardfield, president of the National Association of Railroad Security Owners, and members of the Association of Railway Executives, as well as shippers.

For the security owners Mr. Wardfield already has advanced before the Senate Commerce Committee a plan for effecting railroad economies to reduce costs of operation, and it is likely that hearings will be held on that phase. In the meantime, in view of the serious Cabinet consideration, it is regarded as probable that the President will go into the railroad problem in his message to the next Congress. Whether he does or not the railroad problem is certain to take up much of the time of the session.

Direct methods of reducing railroad operating costs were not discussed by the Cabinet, and there was no discussion of railroad wages, though railroad executives have gone on record on the position that wages and working conditions would have to be changed to meet present conditions if the railroads are to continue operation.

There are two items of agreement by all of those concerned with the emergency. They are: First, that rates are too high; and, second, costs of operation must be reduced.

Railroad executives have moved for abrogation of the national working agreements, which it is declared have put too heavy a load upon the payroll

and in many cases they have moved for direct wage reductions. Mr. Wardfield has advanced a plan for a central railroad organization to effect economies in equipment and operation. Senator Cummins stands for consolidation of existing lines and systems to bring economy and reduce overhead. There is general agreement as to what should be done, but these are the only plans so far advanced for accomplishing the end sought. In this situation it will be necessary for the new Congress to pass further railroad legislation.

In connection with President Harding's plans it is stated that in the last three weeks some fifteen rail executives have received invitations to conferences with the President. The President in his conversations with the managers expressed a willingness to have them discuss the situation frankly and to suggest what seemed to them to be the best thing to be done next. Some have been asked to reduce their views to writing.

It will be months before the Railroad Labor Board can act upon the national agreements and the motions for wage reduction. Senator Cummins has announced that his committee of the Senate will make a detailed investigation into costs of railroad operation and into reasons for the financial failure of the railroads before seeking a remedy. As a result it probably will be necessary for the roads to worry along for several months yet, unless another transportation crisis is precipitated by the factors which apparently have sapped the financial vitality of the roads.

The concern of the President and his Cabinet advisers over the situation is shared fully by officials in Congress, especially by those serving on committees having railroad legislation under their jurisdiction. Senator Cummins, Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, expressed satisfaction with the programme for having the transportation problem made the subject of special attention by the executive branch of the Government. He commented directly upon the White House announcement for conferences between the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Railroad Labor Board beyond saying he was pleased to hear that immediate consideration is to be given to the reduced earnings of the roads, and to possible reductions in railroad rates.

"Rates cannot go higher," Senator Cummins said. "Expenses must come down along the lines, from the highest official down, and from gasoline up. The railroads obtained revenues to the amount of over \$9,000,000,000 during the last year. They spent all of that except about \$10,000,000 in operating expenses, which represents the amount they had left to pay dividends and bond interest. Our inquiry will be with respect to these operating expenses."

"Do you think the coming conference should concern itself with this phase?" Senator Cummins was asked.

"They might well do so," he replied. "It is a matter which vitally affects the entire country and might well occupy the attention of the Cabinet. Our committee intends to find out where the trouble lies if possible. I do not see that we can pass additional legislation to give greater authority to the Interstate Commerce Commission over operating costs. To have the Commission empowered to tell a railroad how much it shall spend for various classes of equipment, such as locomotives, ties and rolling stock, is to take from them their control. In that event the Government would have to become responsible for the result."

"In short, it would mean the loss would be shifted from railroad stockholders to all the taxpayers. In my opinion it is impossible to materially increase these powers of the Commission without bringing about government instead of private operation."

### APPEALS TO LABOR BOARD.

PHILADELPHIA, March 29.—After a long conference here to-day between forty representatives of 3,500 common laborers employed on the Philadelphia and Reading Railway and company officials it was decided to submit to the Railroad Labor Board the question of reducing the wages of this class of workers.

## GOMPERS WARNS OF LABOR UNREST

Urges Passage of Measure to Prevent Spying on Unions by Detective Agencies.

Special Despatch to THE NEW YORK HERALD.

New York Herald Bureau, Albany, March 29. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, gave the warning here to-day that the workers of the country will rise up to "defeat the antagonism that seeks to crush the labor movement." He appeared before the Assembly Ways and Means Committee in favor of the resolution of Assemblyman Samuel Orr, Socialist, providing for a legislative investigation of the alleged practices of private detective agencies in spying on labor unions.

Mr. Gompers charged that these detective agencies and the corporations which hire them are part of forces "which are trying to destroy the unions and break the hearts of the workers."

"Few people know the discontent and disgust felt because of the prevailing conditions," he said, "and I want to tell you that the only element that stands between the masses and deterioration is the much misunderstood American labor movement. And those who would crush it had better halt. I have an abiding faith in the patriotism of the American workers and that they will come out all right."

Mr. Gompers said the activities of the detective agencies formed one of the greatest causes of dissent in the industrial world. Hugh Frayne, general organizer of the American Federation of Labor, told how detective agencies offered their services to corporations to prevent strikes and break up unions by having their operatives become members and sow the seeds of conflict.

Mr. Gompers also appeared before the Assembly General Laws Committee against the Brady anti-strike bill, which he declared to be a vicious piece of legislation. He said it would drive workers back to slavery. Other labor leaders said that it was un-American and unpatriotic.

### UNIONS IN COURT FIGHT OVER WAR ASSESSMENT

Kentucky Pressmen Accuse Their International.

LEXINGTON, Ky., March 29.—Oral arguments were heard to-day by Federal Judge A. M. J. Cochran in the case of the Chicago Printing Pressmen's Union, No. 5, complainant, vs. the officers and board of directors of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants Union of North America.

The complaint claims a breach of trust on the part of the officers and attacks the validity of what is called a war emergency fund assessment, which was put in force by a referendum vote of the membership taken in November, 1918.

It is sought also to have the officers removed from office, in addition to recovering money which the complainant claims to have been illegally diverted by the officers of the International Union.

The suit was started in Federal Court at Greenville, Tenn., in June, 1919, and was tried before Judge Cochran at Knoxville, Tenn., in February last. At the end of the trial Judge Cochran fixed to-day as the date for hearing oral arguments in the action.

### STRIKERS WIN THEIR RAISE.

ST. LOUIS, March 29.—Union paperhangers who have been on strike since March 1 returned to work to-day, when their demand for a wage increase from \$1 to \$1.25 an hour was granted.

## RAIL UNIONS INSIST ON NATIONAL SCALE

Such Agreements Uphold Peace in Business, Lauck Tells Labor Board.

CHICAGO, March 29.—Applying the conditions in other industries which led to national agreements to the railroad industry, W. Jett Lauck, consulting economist for the railway unions, to-day presented voluminous arguments in favor of national agreements on railroads.

Mr. Lauck presented his testimony before the Railroad Labor Board as part of the evidence in support of the unions' contention that the national agreements should be continued.

"Organization of employees as well as organization of unions has become nationwide, because the industries themselves have become nationwide," Mr. Lauck said in presenting an exhibit on the movement toward national agreements.

Mr. Lauck declared that when both employers and employees were organized into bodies of national scope the way to industrial peace was through national agreements.

"In no industry is it more important than in transportation that a sound basis for national unity be laid," Mr. Lauck declared. "That the individual railroads should be consolidated into coordinated systems is clearly recognized in the transportation act by its provisions for combinations, the permission to pool purchases and the establishment of a national labor board."

Statistics and data covering the origin and operation of national agreements in the stove industry, glass bottle industry, pottery, clothing manufacturing and coal mining industries and in typographical and electrical workers' unions were presented by Mr. Lauck.

### ERIE DISPUTE IS FIRST PASSED TO U. S. BOARD

Both Sides Agree to Accept Federal Decision.

Agreement of unskilled workmen of the Erie Railroad with its officials to refer their wage dispute to the United States Railroad Labor Board, an agreement which was signed yesterday afternoon, marks the first in which the roads and men have agreed formally to permit the Railroad Labor Board to become the umpire of the case.

Heretofore unskilled as well as skilled railroad employees, in refusing to accept amicably the cuts proposed, have also refused to join the companies in certifying the dispute to the board, and in every other case the disputes have gone to the board on the application of the railroad alone.

F. W. McLaughlin signed the agreement for the men and Robert S. Parsons for the railroad.

### THREE KILLED ON CROSSING.

WARSAW, Ind., March 29.—John Heighway, a farmer living near Akron, his wife, and daughter, Mrs. Worth Long, were killed instantly this afternoon when an automobile in which they were riding was struck by a Winona interurban car at a crossing about three miles north of Akron.


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