

Congress Considers an Inquiry Into Textile Strikes ^[1]

Move For Textile Inquiry Strengthened

Recent Events At Gastonia Help Inquiry Along

[William Green](#), Of American Federation Of Labor, Brings Out Illuminating Facts About Labor Conditions.

WASHINGTON, MAY 9 -- It may be that the manufacturers committee of the senate, comprised for the most part of conservatives, will take a stand in opposition to the [Wheeler](#) resolution, proposing a senate investigation of the causes that led to the textile strikes in the South, but the disclosures incident to the preliminary investigation held by the committee yesterday were illuminating.

There was present almost the full membership of the committee of which Mr [LaFollette](#) is chairman and the session lasted for a couple of hours with President Green of the American Federation of Labor, occupying the floor the greatest part of the time.

Other witnesses are to be examined today including Frank McGrady, legislative representative of the [American Federation](#), one of the men seized in his hotel at 3 o'clock in the morning at Elizabethton and deported at the point of revolvers after he and others had supposed their peace missions had been successful and that the operatives would return to work. A girl employed at the rayon mills at Elizabethton, was also present and Chairman LaFollette said that without objection, she would be heard today.

Move For Inquiry Strengthened

It was generally admitted yesterday that current events had conspired to strengthen those who were seeking a federal investigation of the labor troubles in the South—the fact that Elizabethton had been converted into an armed camp, the eviction of strikers and their families at Gastonia and the fact that in some of the South Carolina towns the workers had voted 100 per cent to remain out of the mills indefinitely, with the result, as mentioned by [Senator Smith](#), of that state, that the governor of South Carolina was being urged to call a special meeting of the legislature to deal with the strike situation.

Following the session yesterday Senator Smith said that he saw merit in the suggestion that the legislature in his state be called to meet in the near future, that a committee of the legislature could deal with the difficulty legally and authoritatively and this, he insists, a committee of the senate could not do.

The session of the committee yesterday was in harmony with an understanding arrived at recently between President Green and [Senator Overman](#), the latter being of the opinion that the essential facts concerning the labor disturbances in the South could be brought out here, perhaps fully and certainly in much less time than would be required for a senate committee to make a first hand investigation in all the states where the textile industry was of consequence.

Green Makes Peace

Silence and solemnity prevailed on the part of the committee, as President Green, in asking the committee to adopt the Wheeler resolution, made an impassioned plea for social justice and for universal peace and [tranquility](#) ^[2] in the industrial field. The textile strikers in the South were not his people said Mr. Green, they did not belong to the American Federation of Labor but the federation had intervened from human considerations from a desire to help the laboring classes wherever found and because of the hope that a way could be found to restore peace and good will in the strike zones, and thus save the people in the South from [sanguinary](#) ^[3] and costly experiences which the people in the North had lived through before the difference between the employers and the employees had been adjusted. He read letters from secretaries of the commerce and from others in the Carolinas, in his effort to establish the claim that in many instances the workers, men, women and children in southern mills were underpaid and under nourished and were the victims, in some cases, of industrial slavery.

One such letter read before the committee by Green stated that the employees in the furniture factories at High Point were well paid and contented with their lot. Mr. Green informed the committee that running all through the letters received by him from the Carolinas was the refrain that strangely enough, in the cotton mills, the employees men and women, put in longer hours at night than in the day. The workers, he said, were held to their jobs at night for 11 hours without, as a rule, even a break for midnight lunch, that he had been informed that the operatives snatched a bite to eat where they stood.

Says Better Things Wanted

Mr. Green, admitted in reply to Senator Smith, that the cotton mill operatives in the South had been recruited from the farms and their present mode of living was perhaps an improvement over what they once knew; but the president of the American Federation replied that when the people congregated in the mill towns there developed a group of

consciousness and a knowledge of how the rest of the world lived and it was human nature for them to yield, not to greed and [avarice](#) ^[4] but to a yearning for something better in life, and for the American standards of living which they so often heard about from the politicians during campaign years. Instead of receiving these things in many cases, they lived under conditions that did not conform to any sort of standards, not even those set up in the state laws and they scarcely had enough to eat.

When President Green told how the present strikes had been spontaneous, that the people were without leadership but were simply crying out against the hardships and the evils that [beset](#) ^[5] them, some of the senators, even those from the South, expressed the opinion that it would be part of wisdom if southern mill owners would extend the American Federation a welcome into their territory and allow the operatives to be organized under the supervision of this conservative and constructive body. At this point Mr. Green read an editorial from the Greensboro Daily News in which large employers of labor were reminded that there were other labor unions and another leadership which they would do well to consider. Editorials, convincing the degree of sympathy with the operatives were also read from the Raleigh News and Observer and other papers, including northern journals.

Tennessee Situation Deplored

It is when the events at Elizabethton were recounted that the pent-up emotions of the Federation of Labor people were most in evidence. They were the innocent bystanders, bent upon a mission of peace, who were all but shot up, and just managed to escape being ridden out of town on a rail by the town's "best people." There were more than 5,000 people on strike in the Tennessee city, said Green, and not one of these thousands had committed a single lawless or overt act to justify the governor of Tennessee in sending troops and armed deputies to awe and threaten the people on strike. He said that he had just received a telegram telling how, even with the aid of the military, the mill managers at the rayon plants had been unable to prevail upon the employees to return to work, because the people were laboring under a deep sense of injustice.

The spokesman for the American federation remarked that the governor of Tennessee was probably a pacifist who would not even favor preparedness for a fight against the people of Europe and was opposed to taxing the people to maintain troops; but he had not hesitated to send military to shoot and bayonet the natives of his own state should the troop commanders feel that they were justified in the use of arms. And the people of this country had supposed that we had progressed a long way from [Homestead](#), that terrible tragedy, that had followed Carnegie to his grave. We had supposed that we had left Homestead far behind and now look at Elizabethton!

Did such a spectacle, he asked, lead us in the direction of peace and good will among men of our common country? It was at this point that, at the instance of some of the senators, Mr. Green told more about the kidnapping episode and Frank McGrady, a strong executive, and intellectual type of man, to all appearances, related his somewhat [harrowing](#) ^[6] experience.

He pointed a dramatic finger at his heart and said it was the place the mob threatened to plant a number of bullets if he did not get out of town pronto and remain out. The revolver was placed against his heart, he declared, and he said the names of all the men who threatened him and his associates, and drove them away from their peaceful mission, were known to the authorities.

McGrady Tells of Kidnapping

President Alexander of the First National Bank, and Republican leader in that section, led the mob, he explained. Others in the mob were Presbyterian elders and assorted business men. Some of them were directly or indirectly connected with the mill management. Green added as McGrady concluded the story of his experience at Elizabethton, that the Tennessee town now looked like a camp on the front in the World War and all because after peace had apparently been restored, the mill managers refused to take back some of the men who had been active in the strike.

Rational human beings should be able to adjust such a difficulty in five minutes, asserted Green, but the mill owners and managers were continuing the lock-out on such a slight provocation and the governor of Tennessee had gone through all the motions of waging war to repel a foreign invasion when no lawless or unseemly conduct had even been alleged against the workers, the only mob, and the only kidnappers having been recruited from professional business and religious circles.

[Senator Tyson](#) of Tennessee was asked whether he knew, personally, the banker who led the mob of best citizens who ran the American Federation officers out of Elizabethton. He replied in the [affirmative](#) ^[7] but added nothing to disapproval of the act. Tyson has been listed against the Wheeler resolution but Green today reminded the senator that the Tennessee branch of American Federation was to meet next Monday and he understood some very strong resolutions would be adopted at that time and passage of the Wheeler resolution would be urged. This may give Mr. Tyson something to mull over, if he proposes to vote against the resolution designed to bring about a federal investigation of the events that have transpired at Elizabethton.

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