

1917 Railway Waitresses Join the Strikers – Sydney Morning Herald 14 August 1917

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15754800>



The waitresses and the kitchen hands at the Central Railway Station refreshment rooms joined the strikers yesterday morning.

Mr. Doig, stationmaster, informed a reporter yesterday afternoon that besides the waitresses and the kitchen hands the driver of the engine which cooked the meals had ceased work.

The strikers were promptly replaced by volunteers, and dinner was served to time, and everything passed off smoothly in conclusion, he said "We experienced no difficulty in replacing them, and, further, there was no inconvenience to the public or to us."

It was officially pointed out, in explanation of the position, that the refreshment room staff were informed that they were not to discriminate, but were to serve anyone, irrespective of his position, who might wish to be served. The members of the union refused to stay, pointing out that they would not serve railway volunteers. The whole of the staff, excepting 30 loyal members, left, and the business was now carried on with outside hands, including volunteers, numerous applications having been received for employment. The cooks were amongst those who had left, but their places in common with those of the others, had been filled, and a full staff was at work as usual.

Another report in the Sydney Morning Herald puts it this way:

"For the past few days the girls had been rather out of hand. They were inclined to laugh and jeer at those over them, and discipline was being seriously affected. Acting under instructions, I called them all together this morning. I explained to them that they were there in the public interest, to serve anyone who should come along. I then asked those who were willing to abide by that course to stand to one side, and those that were prepared to leave to do so. Thereupon they all put on their hats and coats and marched off, amidst laughter and cheers."

The Editorial of the same issue carried this jingoistic headline and exasperated comments:

WAR UPON THE STATE

As the strike develops it is clear that the leaders are more and more impressed with the attitude of the public towards them. They have not justified their attack upon the State as employer; and the majority of people now realise that the war has been brought to New South Wales as truly as if German guns were trained upon the metropolis. To meet this difficult situation a desperate effort is still being made by the strike leaders to discuss the card system as though everything must turn upon proving it unreasonable in form and cruelly unjust in application. We do not, however, propose to enter upon the supposed cause of the strike. The public does not take the matter seriously, and the Government has offered the fullest possible inquiry under a Judge of the Supreme Court or by the President of the Arbitration Court. All that is required as a preliminary is that the men shall return to work. The inquiry will then follow as a natural corollary. But this, of course, would acknowledge the right of the State as employer to order its business in its own way. The Commissioners as servants of the State are charged with running the railways as a business proposition; and as deficit has followed deficit they have been forced to scrutinise costs and to bring expenditure within the limits of their spending powers. This is quite fair in any circumstances. Tacitly as much is acknowledged by the strikers in the attack now being made upon the management and upon the personnel of railway supervision lower down. The card system is being discussed to the accompaniment of gross personal abuse, and again the public is unresponsive.

The Workman's Square Deal

What does the workman want?

He wants his own,
The honest share of what his hands produce,
He craves no charity and begs no bone,
But only asks for freedom from abuse.

He wants goodwill,
But not at cost of justice and of life,
Not if it means that he must needs be still,
While others rob his baby and his wife.

He wants fair play and equal rights
And equal chance for all,
And privilege for none to steal or slay
Or force his weaker brother to the wall.

What does the workman want?

He wants his right,
Against the vain traditions of the law,
Against the sophistries of age and might,
Against religion's oft mistaken awe.

The workman wants the reign of commonsense,
He wants the true democracy of man,
Not any patronage nor all pretence,
Will hold him long to any other plan.

The common welfare is the workman's goal,
The common use of all the commonwealth,
The common rights of every common soul.

And common access to the springs of health.
And everyone a worker by and by,
His own employer, his own king and priest,
Nor any rich nor poor, nor low nor high,
When all the world monopolies have ceased.

Anonymous poem published in 1924 by the Australian Railways Union in the "Railway Union Gazette"