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The
“Knights of Liberty” Mob
and the
I. W. W. Prisoners at Tulsa, Okla.

(November, 9, 1917)

¶ Whipped, tarred and feathered, as the mob-leaders said, “in the name of the women and children of Belgium”, or as the I. W. W. charge, in the name of the war-profiteers in oil?

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WHY THIS PAMPHLET?

The deliberate kidnapping and horsewhipping of 17 men in custody of the city police of Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the night of Nov. 9, 1917, is an occurrence of national significance for the following reasons:—

1st. The attack on these men was committed "in the name of the women and children of Belgium." It presumed to be an attack against "disloyalty." As a matter of fact the evidence shows it was a straight out-and-out attack upon labor by employing interests—the profiteers in oil.

2nd. It clearly represents the lengths of violence to which business interests will go in their attempt to crush labor organization. No evidence has been produced to prove any violence on the part of the I. W. W. in the Oklahoma oil fields.

3rd. Some public officials of Tulsa and certain state and federal officials in the district as well, knew exactly what was going to happen. Some of them participated in the affair themselves. The local public machinery for law and order seems to have been deliberately used by the interests controlling the oil fields to achieve their lawless purpose.

These facts are set forth by the National Civil Liberties Bureau to make clear to the American public that war profiteers are deliberately using charges of treason and disloyalty to cover attacks on the labor movement. Despite all the charges of violence against the I. W. W. throughout the country there has not yet been (Feb. 10, 1918) one conviction since the war started of any member of the I. W. W. for "disloyalty" in any form or for murder, arson, destruction of property or any other violent act. Much of the violence charged to the I. W. W. is undoubtedly committed by the employers themselves in order to create a state of terror through which they may justify extreme measures to crush labor.

The facts in this pamphlet were secured, first from one of the men who was whipped, second, from an eye witness (a resident of Tulsa) and third, from a former investigator for the Federal Industrial Relations Commission who visited Tulsa within a few weeks after the affair. The names of those furnishing the information are omitted because of the desperate measures threatened by business interests in Tulsa against investigators or informants. We have the names of witnesses, and have taken precautions to satisfy ourselves of the truth of the statements made. The material speaks for itself.

THE FACTS.

The Cause of the Trouble.

A resident of Tulsa has the following to say about the recent industrial struggle in the oil fields. His letter is dated, Tulsa, Dec. 21, 1917.

"I think it only fair to say that the bottom cause of this trouble locally was that a few men, presumably belonging to the I. W. W., came into the oil fields something like a year ago and were meeting with success in getting oil-field workers—especially pipe-line and tank builders—to fight for better wages and shorter hours.

"Not long after the outrage was committed in Butte, Mont., on the crippled I. W. W. leader (Frank Little) the home of J. Edgar Pew in this city was partly destroyed by some kind of an explosion and Mr. and Mrs. Pew narrowly escaped being killed. The news agencies at once published it as a dastardly act of the I. W. W.'s. Mr. Pew is vice-president and active manager of the Carter Oil Co., which by the way is owned and controlled by Standard Oil, and is one of its largest producing subsidiary companies. A few weeks after the Pew home incident an explosion followed by a fire, partially destroyed an oil refinery that is located at Norfolk, Okla. This property was under the Carter Oil Co. management. Two men lost their lives in this accident.* The news agencies, without exception (so far as I know), exploited this as another I. W. W. outrage and predicted that this was but a beginning of what was going to happen as revenge for the treatment accorded their men in Montana and Arizona. The local and state press was full of wild rumors, some even asserting that they had inside information that Oklahoma was to be flooded with I. W. W.'s and a reign of terror was in store for us; U. S. men were making themselves very busy and finally the local police with one or two U. S. men raided the room that had been occupied by the I. W. W. and oil field workers union."

A Victim's Account of the Outrage

Let us tell the story of that raid and the events following, in the words of one of the men in the room, the Secretary of the Tulsa local, who went through the whole affair from be-

*Several men are now reported in the press to be under arrest in Oklahoma for dynamiting the home of Mr. Pew and the oil refinery. As far as we can learn, the men arrested have no connection whatever with the I. W. W.

ginning to end—arrest to whipping. His account is substantiated at every point by the later investigation made by a former employe of the U. S. Industrial Relations Commission.

He says:—

“On the night of Nov. 5, 1917, while sitting in the hall at No. 6 W. Brady St., Tulsa, Okla. (the room leased and occupied by the Industrial Workers of the World and used as a union meeting room), at about 8.45 P. M. five men entered the hall, to whom I at first paid no attention, as I was busy putting a monthly stamp in a member’s union card book. After I had finished with the member, I walked back to where these five men had congregated at the baggage-room at the back of the hall, and spoke to them, asking if there was anything I could do for them.

“One who appeared to be the leader answered ‘no,’ they were just looking the place over. Two of them went into the baggage-room flashing an electric flash-light around the room; the other three walked toward the front end of the hall. I stayed at the baggage-room door, and one of the men came out and followed the other three up to the front end of the hall. The one who stayed in the baggage-room asked me if I was ‘afraid he would steal something.’ I told him we were paying rent for the hall, and I did not think anyone had a right to search the place without a warrant. He replied he did not give a damn if we were paying rent for four places they would search them whenever they felt like it. Presently he came out and walked toward the front end of the hall, and I followed a few steps behind him.

“In the meantime the other men, who proved to be officers, appeared to be asking some our our members questions. Shortly after, the patrol-wagon came and all the members in the hall—10 men— were ordered into the wagon, I turned out the light in the back end of the hall, closed the desk, put the key in the door and told the long-boy ‘officer’ to turn out the one light. We stepped out, and I locked the door, and at the request of the ‘leader’ of the officers, handed him the keys. He told me to get in the wagon, I being the eleventh man taken from the hall, and we were taken to the police station.

“Nov. 6th, after staying that night in jail, I put up \$100 cash bond so that I could attend to the outside business, and the trial was set for 5 o’clock P. M. Nov. 6th. Our lawyer,

Chas. A. Richardson, asked for a continuance and it was granted. Trial on a charge of vagrancy was set for Nov. 7th at 5 P. M. After some argument on both sides the cases were continued until the next night, Nov. 8th, and the case against Gunnard Johnson, one of our men, was called. After four and a half hours' session the case was again adjourned until Nov. 9th, at 5 P. M., when we agreed to let the decision in Johnson's case stand for all of us.

"Then several witnesses on our side were examined to prove the respectability of the hall. Johnson said he had come into town Saturday, Nov. 3rd, to get his money from the Sinclair Oil & Gas Co. and could not get it until Monday, the 5th, and was shipping out Tuesday, the 6th, and that he had \$7.80 when arrested. He was reprimanded by the judge for not having a Liberty Bond, and as near as anyone could judge from the closing remarks of Judge Eyans he was found guilty and fined \$100 for not having a Liberty Bond.

"Our lawyer made a motion to appeal the case and the bonds were then fixed at \$200 each. I was immediately arrested as were also five spectators in the open court-room for being I. W. W.'s. One arrested was not a member of ours, but a property owner and citizen. I was searched and \$30.87 taken from me as also was the receipt for the \$100 bond, and we then were all placed back in the cells.

"In about forty minutes, as near as we could judge, about 11 P. M., the turnkey came and called, "Get ready to go out you I. W. W. men." We dressed as rapidly as possible, were taken out of the cells, and the officer gave us back our possessions, Ingersoll watches, pocket knives and money, with the exception of \$3 in silver of mine which they kept, giving me back \$27.87. I handed the receipt for the \$100 bond I had put up to the desk sergeant, and he told me he did not know anything about it, and handed the receipt back to me, which I put in my trousers pocket with the 87 cents. Twenty-seven dollars in bills was in my coat pocket. We were immediately ordered into automobiles waiting in the alley. Then we proceeded one block north to First street, west one-half block to Boulder street, north across the Frisco tracks and stopped.

"Then the masked mob came up and ordered everybody to throw up their hands. Just here I wish to state I never thought any man could reach so high as those policemen did. We

were then bound, some with hands in front, some with hands behind, and others bound with arms hanging down their sides, the rope being wrapped around the body. Then the police were ordered to 'beat it' which they did, running, and we started for the place of execution.

"When we arrived there a company of gowned and masked gunmen were there to meet us standing at 'present arms.' We were ordered out of the autos, told to get in line in front of these gunmen and another bunch of men with automatics and pistols, lined up between us. Our hands were still held up, and those who were bound, in front. Then a masked man walked down the line and slashed the ropes that bound us, and we were ordered to strip to the waist, which we did, throwing our clothes in front of us, in individual piles—coats, vests, hats, shirts and undershirts. The boys not having had time to distribute their possessions that were given back to them at the police station, everything was in the coats, everything that we owned in the world.

"Then the whipping began. A double piece of new rope, five-eighth or three-quarters hemp being used. A man, 'the chief' of detectives, stopped the whipping of each man when he thought the victim had enough. After each one was whipped another man applied the tar with a large brush, from the head to the seat. Then a brute smeared feathers over and rubbed them in. (As they did this they said, 'In the name of the women and children of Belgium.')

"After they had satisfied themselves that our bodies were well abused, our clothing was thrown into a pile, gasoline poured on it, and a match applied. By the light of our earthly possessions, we were ordered to leave Tulsa, and leave running and never come back. The night was dark, the road very rough, and as I was one of the last two that was whipped, tarred and feathered, and in the rear when ordered to run, I decided to be shot rather than stumble over the rough road. After going forty or fifty feet I stopped and went into the weeds. I told the man with me to get into the weeds also, as the shots were coming very close over us, and ordered him to lie down flat. We expected to be killed, but after 150 or 200 shots were fired they got in their autos.

"After the last one had left, we went through a barbed-wire fence, across a field, called to the boys, collected them, counted

up, and had all the 16 safe, though sore and nasty with the tar. After wandering around the hills for some time—ages it seemed to me—we struck the railroad track. One man, Jack Sneed, remembered then that he knew a farmer in that vicinity, and he and J. F. Ryan volunteered to find the house. I built a fire to keep us from freezing.

“We stood around the fire expecting to be shot, as we did not know but what some tool of the commercial club had followed us. After a long time Sneed returned and called to us, and we went with him to a cabin and found an I. W. W. friend in the shack and 5 gallons of coal oil or kerosene, with which we cleaned the filthy stuff off of each other, and our troubles were over, as friends sent clothing and money to us that day. It being about 3 or 3.30 A. M. when we reached the cabin.”

The men abused, whipped and tarred were: Tom McCafery, John Myers, John Doyle, Chas. Walsh, W. H. Walton, L. R. Mitchell, Jos. French, J. R. Hill, Gunnard Johnson, Robt. McDonald, John Fitzsimmons, Jos. Fisher, Gordon Dimikson, J. F. Ryan, E. M. Boyd, Jack Sneed, (not an I. W. W.)

This is a copy of my sworn statement and every word is Truth.

(Signed).....

The Police in the Mob

Although this account is evidently a faithful story of just what happened, the connection between the police and the mob was not brought out. In answer to inquiry the writer stated:

“It was very evident that the police force knew what was going to happen when they took us from jail, as there were extra gowns and masks provided which were put on by the Chief of Police and one detective named——, and the number of blows we received were regulated by the Chief of Police himself who was easily recognizable by six of us at least. It was all prearranged. The police knew where we were going, or the extra gowns and masks would not have been ready for the Chief and——. There were other detectives put on rigs, but just those two were in sight of me. Nothing was said to us as to where we were going. We were simply taken out of jail

and delivered to the "Knights of Liberty" and the chief went along to see the sport and whether we were game, which we were."

The Press Incites to Violence

To show what was obviously being planned for the night of the 9th, the following editorial, quoted from the Tulsa daily "World," appearing on the afternoon of that day, seems conclusive.

"Get Out The Hemp"

"The attempt of the I. W. W. or any other organization to decrease by so much as the infinitesimal fraction of a barrel the oil supply of the government should be sternly repressed. More than ever the government needs oil. More than ever the allies of the government need oil. Any man who attempts to stop the supply for one-hundredth part of a second is a traitor and ought to be shot! When oil was bringing less than 40 cents a barrel in the open market, wages were approximately as high as they are today and there was no I. W. W. organization abroad in the land to tell the people that the laborers in the oil country were being discriminated against and oppressed.

"The oil country can take care of its own troubles. It does not need the I. W. W. There is not a man in the field who does not know that whatever grievance he may have does not need the arbitrament of a labor union to solve. The oil country has always solved all of its troubles, labor troubles as well as every other kind, and the oil country can be depended upon to solve the present difficulty.

"In the meantime, if the I. W. W. or its twin brother, the Oil Workers Union, gets busy in your neighborhood, kindly take occasion to decrease the supply of hemp. A knowledge of how to tie a knot that will stick might come in handy in a few days. It is no time to dally with the enemies of the country. The unrestricted production of petroleum is as necessary to the winning of the war as the unrestricted production of gunpowder. We are either going to whip Germany or Germany is going to whip us. The first step in the whipping of Germany

is to strangle the I. W. W.'s. Kill them, just as you would kill any other kind of a snake. Don't scotch 'em; kill 'em. And kill 'em dead. It is no time to waste money on trials and continuances and things like that. All that is necessary is the evidence and a firing squad. Probably the carpenters union will contribute the timber for the coffins." (*Boldface type is ours.*)

It may be interesting to note that the editor of the Tulsa World, Glenn Conlin, who personally wrote this, attended all the trials, and that he and his wife were witnesses to the whipping, tarring and feathering, having gone along in an automobile as spectators. This gentleman shortly after was sent to Europe by Governor R. L. Williams to represent the state of Oklahoma on a mission whose purpose has not yet been made clear.

The issue of loyalty and patriotism in the oil fields is well illustrated by the following editorial in the Tulsa World for November 7th, **while the men were in jail**, entitled "Down with the Agitators." Striking sentences from the editorial are:

"The efforts of certain agitators to stir up trouble between the oil field workers and their employers is distinctly disloyal. The world needs every barrel of oil that is produced or can be produced, and any movement that tends to limit production is a help to the Germans. A strike in the oil fields can have no other effect than limitation of production, therefore, a strike or even a momentary cessation of production could benefit nobody but the German emperor." . . .

"For 67 years the oil country workers and their employers have got along peaceably, . . . and a union would but limit their opportunities, making the most ignorant employe in the matter of scale of wages and the matter of opportunities the equal of the educated man." . . .

"The one remedy for the vicious agitator is to ride him on a rail. If he seriously objects to that, he might be used for decoration for a telephone pole that is slightly out of place in the original design. But the workers in the oil country of Oklahoma and Kansas, the boys at the pump and at the tower should realize that now above all other times the country needs them and that their service in the

production of oil goes as far toward making the world safe for democracy as a bullet fired from the trenches in France." (*Boldface type ours.*)

More About the Trial in Court

The investigator sent to Tulsa to get information made a carefully detailed report of the trial, showing the obviously lawless method of dispensing "justice" to those even remotely connected with the I. W. W.

"Judge T. D. Evans, Police Judge, presiding, John B. Meserve, City Attorney, and Chas. Richardson, attorney for defendants, at which eleven men, members of the order of the I. W. W. were charged with vagrancy.

"When they were arraigned, they plead "not guilty," and Mr. Richardson, addressing the court, said, "Your Honor, if the police have any evidence that these men have been guilty of any act of disloyalty to this Government, I will withdraw from the case now." Nothing further was said on this point, and they agreed to proceed with the trial by selecting one of the number and the testimony for and against this one man should apply to all the others as charged.

"The man selected to be tried was a young-man who had been continuously employed by a pipe-line company for several months, and who had been paid off and came to Tulsa to get his check cashed on Saturday. The banks being closed at noon, he was compelled to stay in town until Monday. On Monday he contracted to go to work for another company and was to go out Tuesday morning. He was arrested on a vagrancy charge Monday p. m. and put in jail, and this trial was the following Friday.

"The prosecution put several witnesses on the stand, among them the policemen who made the arrests, two of whom were Ferguson and Lewis who testified they had not seen this man loitering on the streets and that they know nothing of his personal habits, except that he had a card showing he was a member of the I. W. W.

"From this point the testimony took the form of trying all the eleven men charged, and the police said none of them had a police record. They testified that they had heard nothing seditious in their utterances either in their hall or elsewhere. They testified they had not known of them visiting any kind

of illegal or bad resorts, nor in any other way did they attempt to show they were guilty of any law violations whatsoever. They seemed to rest their entire case on the fact that they were members of the I. W. W.

"After the prosecution had failed utterly to prove any part of their charge of vagrancy, the defense introduced the Constitution of the I. W. W., and called the attention of the Court to the requirement that no one was eligible to membership "who is not a bona-fide wage earner." The defense put on eight witnesses, some of whom were defendants, who testified as to where they worked and how long and the amount of pay they received; one of whom drew \$18.00 a week, and had not lost a day in ten months and worked a great deal overtime; and all the time in Tulsa where he had lived for six years. One had lived there eighteen years, was the father of ten children and owned his home free from incumbrance.

"On cross examination, the City Attorney (Meserve) asked each witness what was his attitude toward the government, toward the state and toward the city, and to each received about the same answer, expressing loyalty. Every time any of these questions were asked by the prosecution, Richardson would say, "if there is any evidence against these men or any one of them showing their disloyalty to the government, I want to know it and I demand that it be produced and I will withdraw from representing them." And each time there was no response to his request.

"One of the eight witnesses for the defence told about the 'condition existing at the copper mines' and what the trouble was at Bisbee, Ariz., (which was forced on unwilling ears). This witness afterwards made a speech to the court in defense of the I. W. W.'s, which was clear and forceful, in which he discussed wages and the cost of living increase. He said privately he did this because he knew they were being tried for being members of the I. W. W. Richardson thinks this was a mistake, as he wanted to stick strictly to the charge of "vagrancy," because he knew they could not sustain that charge.

"The trial ended about 10:40 o'clock on Friday night, Nov. 9th, and Judge Evans rendered a decision finding all the men

guilty as charged and assessing their fines at \$100 each, stating, 'These are no ordinary times.'

Getting Ready for the Mob.

"The police rushed the eleven men who had been tried into the jail and into one room just off the court room. One of the men said to the police, 'I have a \$100 cash bond.' The policeman said, 'That does not matter, get in here.' The man said, 'I can put up more if necessary.' But no attention was paid to this. Another one of the convicted men had up a bond. **The police also arrested six others, spectators in the court room, some of whom were not members of the I. W. W., and crowded them into the same room and the door was locked.** They were in this room about thirty minutes, during which time they discussed what was going to happen to them. Most of them expressed the opinion that they were going to meet with some violence, and all believed they were going to get "beat up," because they had learned that there had been posters printed—a large yellow card with the words in black letters—'Mr. I. W. W., DON'T LET THE SUN SHINE ON YOU IN TULSA. (Signed) Vigilance Committee.' This evidence was brought out in the trial, although the posters were printed the same day of the trial.

"During these few minutes in jail, the victims secreted more securely the money they had on them, in the linings of their coats and in their sleeves (which were afterwards burned up by the mob when they saturated their coats, vests, shirts and hats with gasoline and set fire to them. The best estimate that can be made is, that something more than five hundred dollars in greenbacks was burned)."

Who Were in the Mob?

The report of the investigator about the taking of the men from jail and the details of the whipping, tarring and feathering are much more circumstantial than in the story quoted, because drawn from a large number of witnesses. But for the purpose of accuracy, the account given suffices. The investigator names directly nine leaders of the mob, including five members of the police force.

He says further: "Several men who were invited to join the mob refused. Among these was the Secretary of the

Chamber of Commerce. A lieutenant in the Home Guard said he would not say that none of the Home Guard were in the mob, but the 'Home Guard did not do it.' He said they were ordered to bring down their arms and stack them in the Arsenal, which was done after they had their drill." (It was at the arsenal that the "Knights" made up and secured their guns.)

"John Moran, Deputy U. S. Marshal in charge of the Tulsa office said, 'I am opposed to that kind of business, and I tried to get them not to do it.' He also said, 'You would be surprised at the prominent men in town who were in this mob.' He also said, 'I have in my possession two large packages of the I. W. W. literature and correspondence, and there is not one word of disloyalty in it.'"

What Happened to the Victims Afterward?

Commenting on the developments following the outrage, the investigator says:

"Two of the victims of the mob outrage on Nov. 9th returned to Tulsa because they owned their homes and their families were there. They were both arrested and thrown in jail four and six weeks respectively; they were released on habeas corpus proceedings through the efforts of their friends and lawyer, Chas. Richardson. One of them went away with his wife on a visit, the other was rearrested before he left the court room on a charge of carrying concealed weapons. He was tried and fined \$100 on the evidence of eight policemen who surrounded his house and swore they saw him coming down the stairs with a pistol in his hand. He is now working out his fine on the streets of Tulsa. The report is that he will be arrested for vagrancy again as soon as this fine is paid, and this practice will be continued until he leaves the city. He is not a member of the I. W. W. He is a carpenter by trade and has made his home in Tulsa many years.

"When the Judge (the same T. D. Evans, Police Judge) assessed the fine of \$100 for carrying concealed weapons (in his own house) he said, 'You are not guilty, but I will have to fine you one hundred dollars. These are no ordinary times.'

"The other fifteen of the seventeen victims have scattered to different parts of the country and most of them have obtained work but they have suffered all sorts of privations and

hardships, both physical and mental. Some of them were in ill health at the time of the outrage, and others are not strong physically and they have been living in constant fear of another brutal assault by the tools of the employers."

"Justice" in Tulsa.

The investigator's report concludes:

"After as thorough an investigation as was possible, and a careful and impartial study of every phase of the Tulsa affair, your investigator states without hesitancy (1) that there was not one iota of evidence to sustain the charge of vagrancy against the eleven men fined, nor against the seventeen victims of the mob outrage, and (2) that the outrage was arranged for before the trial, that the plans were made with the knowledge, consent and assistance of the police and city officials.

"Your investigator states freely that there has not been any attempt to learn who composed the mob, either will there be any attempt made to bring any of these law violators to justice under the present regime. And your investigator does not recommend that any legal proceedings be undertaken until such time as there can be some show of obtaining justice.

"Justice to the people of Oklahoma demands that this report attempt to correct another newspaper falsehood; that is, that this mob violence met with general approval. Your investigator talked with more than 200 citizens both women and men, none of whom approved the mob outrage.

Respectfully submitted,

"January 30th, 1918.

(Signed) _____

Public Opinion About the Outrage.

It is almost superfluous to dwell upon the attitude of the public press and the public officials in Oklahoma following the outrage. So far as we can learn (and we have clippings from scores of newspapers in Oklahoma and the West) not one editorial condemning the mob outrage appeared in Oklahoma and it was almost universally condoned throughout the country. The Tulsa "World" of Nov. 16th says:

"The only criticism of their action (referring to the 'Knights of Liberty') that we have seen in any of the hundred newspaper comments that have come to our attention is by way of

berating them for not having gone a bit stronger." Then the "World" approvingly quotes a newspaper which said, "Along with tars and feathers there are trees and poles in this state, and rope in plenty, and the will to use them."

The Tulsa "Democrat" of Nov. 16th in an editorial headed "General Approval Is Given," said, "If those determined men who larruped the 17 members of the industrial disturbers of the world and then applied the tar and feathers, were fearful that they would be given the condemnation of the country, they need have no such fear, now that the comments have been voiced by the newspapers of the country. The criminal press of the U. S. actually approves of this unlawful act."

The New York "Evening Post," the Louisville "Courier-Journal," the Minneapolis "News," the St. Louis "Post-Dispatch" and a few other liberal-minded papers voiced a protest, but they were lone voices in a wilderness of condonation.

CONCLUSION

This case illustrates once again the fact that the processes of law and the constitutional guarantees of personal liberty are absolutely dead letters in the United States where private business interests control city governments, city police and the courts. In Oklahoma their influence over state officials as well, indicates a thoroughly finished job in the private ownership of the government.

The newspaper distortion of facts in the Oklahoma oil-fields makes justice to the I. W. W. impossible, even though the names of many of the men committing this crime are known. There can be no justice for the workers in the oil fields until the control of big business over the government and the press is broken.