

THE GENTLE ART OF STRIKEBREAKING

(By J. H. Craige, in Collier's).

(The author has been a strikebreaker, a hobo, and a workman, and his judgments are based on experience).

From the principle of organized thuggery, which is at the bottom of it, to the last detail of the way the men are treated, and the character of the men themselves, there is hardly a clean spot to be found in the whole trade of strikebreaking. Of course the term professional strikebreaker does not apply to the legitimate workman who accepts any wage he may think proper regardless of the actions of his fellows. No unprejudiced person blames such a man. So long as he needs the money, gives legitimate work in return for it, and obeys the laws, he can not be criticised justly, despite what his trade union fellow workmen may say about the matter. If strikebreaking were left to such men there could be no objection to strikebreaking—indeed, there would be little strikebreaking done, for if prospective strikers know that plenty of competent men are willing to work under the conditions to which they object, they will naturally think twice before striking.

The professional strikebreaker is entirely different from these men. He is not a competent workman, nor a workman in any respect. He is not even a competent tramp. Good hoboes on the road recognize him by his caste-marks, and will have nothing to do with him. His one asset is the desperate courage of the cornered wolf, born of a realization that he is already sunk to the lowest possible depths and is working upon the last job open to him.

Scattered through the mass of this army is a leavening of men of really great native courage and exceptional fighting ability, who are attracted as much by the dangers of the job as by the high pay accompanying it. Usually, these men are ex-convicts, who have had one taste of prison and are in deadly fear of another. Though they fear prison, they fear nothing else, and join the army of strikebreakers to secure the life of danger, action and blood which their restless, fierce, cat-animal temperaments crave, without the menace of the law.

When the strikebreakers are put to work their one instruction is: "Keep things moving and put up a bluff of being busy." If it is a factory to which they are sent, they are told to keep smoke coming out of the chimneys and the machinery humming. No work is expected from them, and they do none.

If the strikers prove obstinate and form in crowds to make demonstrations, the supreme moment of the strikebreaker's existence is at hand. Sending out two or three stool pigeons with guns, and instructions to shoot over the heads of their comrades, the strike-

breakers' leaders supply the most men with guns and clubs and prepare for action. When the strikers and the strikebreakers come together, the stool pigeons blaze away from the crowd of strikers. Having been shot at, the strikebreakers have a legal right to defend themselves, the guards charge, and the things which happen to the mob of strikers are sad to relate.

The Strike in Philadelphia.

Neither age, sex, nor condition serves to defend the head from the club, and the first sign of resistance brings a shot from the ready revolver to end the argument. I will never forget the sight of a mother with a child in her arms in one of the riots of the Philadelphia strike last year, staggering along, blood pouring from three jagged cuts in her head, the result of a clubbing administered by one of these guards. The man was arrested, but went free, as did all others arrested for similar crimes at that time.

Never before were there such systematic, wilful, brutal, unprovoked assaults upon an unoffending populace in an American city. It did not seem to make any difference whether the victims were strikers or sympathizers or not, they got it just the same, and if they called on the police for aid they got it worse. There has never been such wholesale pilfering and looting. If you gave the strikebreaking conductor a coin you got no change. If you protested, you were thrown off the car and clubbed, and if you resisted, you ran a fine chance of being shot. The strikebreakers made no pretense of turning in any money to the trolley company. "You ought to be thankful to get your cars back," they said.

Once the employes are tamed, the result of a strike depends merely on whether employer or employe can the longer stand a suspension of business. Many a prosperous business has never recovered from the effects of a strike dealt with after this manner. Many a man has been killed by violence, and many a woman and child starved during such strikes. What is perhaps most important of all, thousands of honest men have been forced by such procedures to accept a wage on which they found it impossible to rear their children as good citizens.

Hitting a Rattler for Experience.

I first came into personal contact with a professional strikebreaker a little more than five months ago, when riding a freight train with a chum of mine from Philadelphia to New York. We were supposed by our parents to be riding in the usual way, on a passenger train, but my chum had an inquiring mind, and insisted we should hit a rattler (freight).

For adventure seekers we had

a slow time of it until the train stopped for some reason at Bound Brook, New Jersey, the coal gondola in which we were riding coming to a halt just in front of the station building. As we were starting again, a husky person with a large, prosperous looking leather grip and an alcoholic air climbed into our car, (where we were laying low. When he saw us he started visibly, but, apparently reassured on further inspection, sat down, and informed us with considerable profanity that nothing was going to pull out of that burg without taking him along.

We told him if he was in a hurry to get anywhere it would pay him to wait for a passenger train, but in answer to this he merely reiterated his determination to blow the town. Scenting an adventure my chum offered him one of our treasured cigars, under the influence of which he became exceedingly communicative.

In answer to my chum's question as to why he was so anxious to get out of the town, he replied that he was a strikebreaker. That conveyed nothing to our minds, but, fascinated by the man's reckless air and melodramatic manner, we pressed him to tell us all about it, which he did, swaying as he spoke with the emotion of the train and the effects of the liquor he had imbibed.

"We just wound up a job near New Brunswick," he said. "Oh, nothing much, just a little factory, but it was pretty soft. They only sent one carload of us down from New York. When we gets there the super he says: 'Now, boys, you got a nice thing here; all you got to do is to be good. You get your four dollars a day, and there's good quarters for you and you get your grub and liquor regular. All you got to do is to keep the smoke coming out of the chimneys, and if one o' them ginks gets fresh hand it to them good and plenty. They're all Americans, and there ain't any ugly fighters among 'em.'

"So we kept the chimneys smoking, and I tell you we lived fine. There wasn't anything at all doing for about a month. About that time the men got to coming to the factory gates every day at noon and begging us to come out and join them, telling us that their wives and kids were starving. Pretty hard on the poor ginks it was at that, but we was getting our four a day regular, and if we hadn't done it somebody else would.

"Then they began to throw rocks. One day they smashed a window in the super's office. 'You're a nice lot of gooks,' he says, 'standing up and letting that bunch rock you. They're getting too fresh. We'll have to teach 'em manners.'

"Next day when noon comes about twenty guards with clubs and guns is lined up at the back

of the factory. Pretty soon the mob comes and begins to get fresh. Then somebody throws a rock and the super gives us the orders to tear into 'em. We comes around the corner on the dead run. Biff! Bang! we gives it to 'em, and a man drops at every wallop. Chee, dat was a great scrap! They didn't stop to fight, just took it on the run, and us after 'em. We left a trail of 'em lying all over the road right back to the town.

"They never came near the factory any more, and the strike sorter petered out. I did pretty good, though. I was wise to the 'forny' gamblers, and I ducked the sure-thing game, so I came through with a hundred and fifty cold plunks right in my pocket.

"I'm heading for New York now. They say there's a strike on in the cloak makers' union. Girls, they are. That's the best game a guy in my biz can get up against. When a guy asks for a job they say: 'Well, go get a girl.' Does she have to be a girl that can make cloaks? Not on your tintype. You go out on the street and you pick up any old bum. You say to her: 'Kid, do you want a job for three and a half a day?' Then you fix it up with her and you go back and you say: 'This is my wife. She wants a job sewing and I want a job as a guard.'

"She gets her three and a half a day and you get four. All you have to do is to keep your eye on her all the time to see that she don't fly the coop. Every day you take her to work and guard her on the way. She don't do no work any more than you do, but while she is in the factory, putting up a bluff, you hang around and beat up any of the strikers or their pickets or any of their women friends that get fresh.

"After the strike is over, you get your own wages and take as much of the girl's as you think you can get away with and beat it. Oh, it's a skinch. I got plenty of money now and I don't have to work, but if there's a garment strike on I'll get in on it just for the pleasure of holding down a job like that."

My chum and I did not greet the strikebreaker's tale with anything like the enthusiasm he seemed to think it merited, and he appeared a trifle miffed and got off the train when it stopped at the Elizabeth yards. The yarn made an impression on me that I never forgot.

That impression has been constantly widened and deepened. No one who associates much with men and women who earn their living with their hands and is at all susceptible to sympathy with their trials and suffering can help being impressed by the evils wrought by the strikebreaker and the wreck and ruin he leaves in his trail.

I have seen many tough men,