

*Mr. Oscar Elsas*  
*Return to*  
*OS*

Mr. Oscar Elsas, President,  
Office.

April 18, 1918

*Very interesting*  
*report*  
*OS*  
FN-1

Dear Sir:

GENERAL CONDITIONS SURROUNDING ST. LOUIS LABOR TROUBLE.

From all evidences that it was possible to gain by talking to practically all of the employees both before and after the settlement of the labor trouble, there seemed to be no grievances on the part of our people towards the firm or local Management. As our records showed, the wages being paid compared very favorably with our competitors, and while in some instances they were slightly lower, on the whole they were satisfactory to the people.

From the above statement it would appear that the trouble originated from without, and after going into this matter I found that two or three weeks prior to the starting of the strike we had employed in our press room as a straightener a Mrs. Saul. It developed that Mrs. Saul's husband and his brother were the ring leaders in the Bemis' Plant, and were two of the three men who were fired as agitators by Bemis, and who precipitated the strike.

From the time of Mrs. Saul's employment, and her activity during the trouble, the Writer firmly believes she is the party who organized and got together our people in this trouble.

The greatest weakness that our local Management and control showed was the fact that no evidence of this trouble came to the surface, or if it did come to the surface no attention was paid to it until the moment when all of the people left.

While Mr. White contends that the organization was done after our people left the Plant, the Writer is inclined to believe that this would be absolutely impossible, for the factory went out al-

most as a body, and even though people are nervous and easily stampede, I do not believe that such a condition would have been possible without previous organization.

Direct statements by some of the pressmen bring out the fact that they had met at night before and secretly organized, and had come to the agreement that the first Plant that discharged anybody would bring about the result of the rest going out. Hence it is evident that all of this underground work had been done without coming to the attention or notice of the local Management.

When the Writer arrived in St. Louis, as you are aware, the factory was closed down completely in practically all departments, (except the Second Hand Bag,) and <sup>the people were</sup> ~~was~~ away and affilliating with the organizations who were attempting to establish Bag Mill Union #1.

It appeared at once that our press room was the center around which the whole trouble revolved, and the one in which all of the organizing had been done. The number of our men being rather small, they made a closer knit group than any of the others -- hence a greater difficulty in getting the individual men to agree to come back to work. It appeared to the Writer immediately that it will be necessary to break down their resistance and disgust them with the impossibility of gaining any advantage in their affilliations with the organizers.

I went to work immediately on W.E. Fisher, the foreman of the room, who seemed to me was the leader of the whole crowd as far as our people went, and inside of 2 or 3 days had him seeing things from our viewpoint. The whole trouble being that all of our people had had the Union propoganda preached to them for 6 or 8 consecutive days, it became immediately necessary for us to start counteracting

*this influence,*

~~same~~, outlying to them the advantage of sticking by the Fulton Organization. The Writer spread this personally among all of the factory people with whom he came in contact, and put Mr. Hummert and the Sewing Room Forelady in automobiles and had them call on as many of our employees as they could reach, outlying to them the line of talk they should give, and <sup>telling them</sup> ~~trying~~ to impress upon <sup>their people</sup> ~~them~~ the futility of taking up someone else's fight.

In talking with the press room people and all of the main people, we argued that they were taking up Bemis' fight, and that it could come of no good to them, because it was not to their interest in any respect to allow anyone else to tear down the well-working Organization that we had, in order that they might take up a stanger's trouble.

We further, in all conversations, stressed the fact that it could not possibly be to their benefit to affilliate with any Agency that would cause a breach between the Management and the workmen - that all of the progress we had made in the past few months which had enabled them to earn higher wages was solely due to our ability to work together with them, that no outsider could assist in any manner, and that any outside influence would simply cause trouble, as they had in this case, and prevent us from progress. Along these lines in varying ways we attempted to counteract the Union propaganda, and made very fair success, it being our endeavor to influence all of the pressmen in a group, so that they would come back under the conditions which we outlined. XXX

At various times Committees waited on us, in which there were parties other than our employees, and on all occasions we refused to discuss any of our affairs with them, always stating that we would be only too glad to talk to our own people.

Finally the Writer got all of our pressmen together with Mr. White in our factory, and by talking to them for about one hour, made them each and every one agree to come back to work under the conditions of 50 hours per week and equivalent increase in rate. Immediately after this meeting the Union people got hold of our men and persuaded them to stay away for the next day. This promise, however, which we exacted by getting these men together, was probably the main reason for breaking up the Union, as our report shows a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of our men in the Meeting.

The following day a great many of the girls got disgusted, and Fisher became disgusted with his men because of the way they acted. Therefore, six of our feeders, Fisher and two press room assistants reported for work. The next day our pressmen came back to see us, and we told them in a straightforward manner they had deceived us once and we did not feel that we could trust them any more. After considerable meeting on the part of our foreman, Mr. White and myself, we finally made an agreement that they could all come to work the following morning, and they agreed to endeavor to get all of the sewers and other people word that they had decided to come back to work. We made it perfectly clear that we were simply dealing with them and anything we said was not for the benefit of anybody connected with the outside organization, and that if they wanted to come back and work with us in a whole hearted manner, they could do so, but that if they felt they could find better treatment and more satisfactory working conditions anywhere else, we did not want them, under any circumstances, to return to work with us. Each and everyone agreed that they were thoroughly disgusted with the way

they had acted in this matter, and that they were willing and anxious to come back and work with us in the future for our mutual development.

On the day that most of the people returned to work some 6 or 8 girls, who had been in the Union, were working in the press room. When they heard that the other girls were coming back, they went to the foreman and stated if Mrs. Saul returned they would drag her around the room by her hair and throw her out of the window, indicating to us that Mrs. Saul was the organizer of this trouble, and that the girls who had been taken in by her work were now ready to turn against her.

In analyzing the conditions that would allow such a complete walkout in our plant, the Writer found that our foremen had not been developed to a proper control of the help, and that the old conditions were still existing, wherein the Superintendent would deal direct on individual cases in the press room and other departments. I have been advised that Mr. White would often have pressmen come to his desk at various times to give them a talk, and all of the pressmen stated that they had never gotten a raise through a foreman. Before these men came back to work, after I had an opportunity to confer with Mr. Fisher, we made them understand fully that they would be working under Fisher, and that anything he said regarding them would have to stand, and that we would take his recommendations on the men regarding their increases and regarding the manner in which they performed their work.

It seemed that another thing had been allowed to run along, which had somewhat disgusted the foreman, and that is the fact that his workmen were making as high as \$2.00 or \$3.00 per week more than he was, and no adjustment had been made to overcome this trouble. It

also developed that they endeavored to lay Fisher off at 4 o'clock for a considerable period in which the factory was running dull. Other conditions such as this had not removed Fisher in any respect from the ordinary workman, and the short time in which he had been a foreman made him feel that he was not in any manner removed from the men under him.

This same thing can be said regarding the cutting room foreman, and because of this, our foremen, who should have been of great assistance in holding and influencing the men under them, could not be used in the time of trouble for this purpose, since they had not been used in ordinary times in a similar capacity, working as a foreman.

The Writer spent most of his time, after the factory was started up, in outlying <sup>to</sup> the foremen in the presence of Mr. White and Mr. Hummert their duties, their responsibilities, their method of labor control, and the various points which would assist them in the satisfactory handling of men under them, and gradually give them control over the people in the proper manner.

From all evidences and reports it would seem that charter for Bag Mill Union #1 was never received, Even though leaders claimed they had it, no-one ever saw it.

It was also evident that the Printers' Union, who furnished an organizer for this work, was thoroughly disgusted with the showing made, and the organizer was severely censured for fritting away \$500.00 on a "Bunch of bums", and not accomplishing anything.

Our competitors, as well as ourselves, feel that the attempt to unionize has been thoroughly frustated, and that it will not recur at any early date.

In the conversation with Mr. Allen of Bemis Co., he expressed a very great desire to co-operate with us in ascertaining the exact cause of this labor trouble, and finding out whether it came from within or from without, and taking such steps as will be necessary to prevent a recurrence of it either in St. Louis or other Cities.

Mr. Allen stated to me that he had taken up with Mr. Bemis the subject, and that they had agreed to study the matter carefully, and to put into their Organization any features which the workmen felt would be a distinct advantage to them by joining the Union. To this end the Writer has put out a number of inquiries in various directions to ascertain what the average workman feels is of advantage to them in the Union, provided he is getting satisfactory treatment from his firm, such features as insurance, sick benefits and other social considerations.

Mr. Allen says he wants to collaborate with us at a later date, and exchange any information that is possible.

In discussing the situation with Mr. Allen, the Writer asked him a direct question as to their treatment of foremen, and what consideration they showed them over and above the ordinary workmen, (all of Bemis' foremen stuck by them, and were desperate workers in their cause during their trouble.)

Mr. Allen stated that he felt the foremen were the most important men in his factory, and that they put all of their men, as soon as made foremen, on a straight time basis, paying them so much per week, and never docking them for being away on account of sickness, and allowing them two weeks' vacation each year with full pay.

He also stated that he was endeavoring to have his foremen

placed on a more liberal profit sharing basis than the office people.

And he also stated that the consideration which they have shown their foremen, as far as vacations and paying them for time of sickness is concerned, he felt has been more than repaid in the loyalty and the effort which they have given to the firm.

On asking Mr. Allen to what extent he made the payment of wages in time of sickness, he stated it was indefinite, that he had a foreman who had recently been out for three months, and that they had paid him every week the full time until his return.

In all probability in the very near future we will have to make additional increases in the St. Louis plant due to the additional shortage of ~~male~~ <sup>male</sup> labor, which will be brought about by the next draft, and the fact that there are a number of industries in St. Louis which enable women to make very high wages.

The Writer found out that the large Bevo plant, which is within a few blocks of ours, will start up inside of 60 days, and that they will require 2500 girls.

I took a trip through the Annheuser-Busch plant, which is across the street from the new Bevo plant, and found out that they are paying 25c per hour for 8 hours work. The appearances in this plant is that the girls who are fully unionized work very little, there being four girls at every bottling table throughout the plant, where undoubtedly two girls could have done the work satisfactorily with the proper control and effort. Hence it would seem that very high wages are being paid in this locality, and at the same time are not exacting the performance that we exact. From this it is evident that we will have to enable our girls to earn more money, in view of the exacting conditions with which we surround them.

Respectfully,

Nelly.

*We should discuss the advisability of having some one like Crowden Franklin - General way with factory conditions so as to give Mr. Allen the possibility of consultation on factory matters in which has no confidence in holidays judgment on factory matters Nelly.*