

Ford Labor Policy Faces NRA Probe

**Rejection of Collective
Bargaining Charged
to Company.**

**New Clash Is Revealed
as Firm Refuses to
Attend Hearing.**

The Ford Motor Co. and NRA clashed again yesterday when William H. Davis, NRA compliance director, informed Edsel Ford, president of the company, that he proposes to make a detailed investigation of Ford's alleged refusal to bargain collectively with employees.

The decision to make the investigation, it was announced, was prompted by the Ford company's refusal to participate in a hearing held last Friday, when nearly a score of employees appeared to substantiate charges they had previously made in affidavits.

The employees charged that, following a walkout last September in an effort to force better working conditions, the Ford company refused to reinstate the strikers in a group and that it repulsed all efforts to bargain on the point.

In answer to the charges, the Ford company sent to Davis a long letter detailing its version of the facts surrounding the walkout, but insisting that it reserved the right to reemploy workers on their merits. In the same letter it announced that it would not be represented at the hearing.

Strikers "Blacklisted."

At the hearing a letter from Edsel Ford was put in evidence, telling employees to confer with Neil S. Brown, plant manager. Employees charged that on a previous occasion when employees conferred with Brown they were told to return to their machines within 5 minutes or be discharged and that 511 strikers were "blacklisted" and that none of them had been reemployed.

Charges that the company had violated the automobile code and the National Recovery act were filed with Gen. Hugh S. Johnson, NRA administrator, by William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, and Johnson referred the charges to Davis. Davis asked the company to explain and it replied with the letter of explanation, which Davis believed to be unsatisfactory.

On February 15, Davis informed Ford of the hearing and said that he wished more information about the occurrences at the Edgewater plant.

Ford Firm's Reply.

In reply to this notification, B. J. Craig, secretary of the Ford Company, wrote to Davis:

"Without waiving our legal and constitutional rights in this matter, we hereby respectfully advise you that, in our opinion, the answer and exhibits which have already been sent to you are more than sufficient to disprove, beyond any possibility of doubt, the complaint that this company violated section 7 of the code of the Automobile Manufacturing Industry.

"We, therefore, respectfully in-

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form you that it is not our intention to be represented or to take any part in the hearing on this matter on Friday, February 23, 1934."

Following the hearing, Davis wrote this letter to Ford:

"The purpose of the hearing on Friday was to try to eliminate, by hearing both sides, any dispute about what actually occurred. Your decision not to be represented nor to take any part in the hearing has made it impossible to pursue the investigation in that way or to bring it promptly to a conclusion.

Charges Cited.

"There are before me quite definite charges, in addition to the charges about the Edgewater incident, that the Ford employes at Chester, Pa., were locked out with the effect that attempts they are said to have been making to bargain with the company through their chosen representatives were defeated.

"It would be helpful if you could see your way clear to continue to cooperate with me in the investigation of all these charges, but if not, I shall proceed with my investigation of them without your cooperation."

In the Chester case it was charged that after striking employes had been notified to return to work the plant was closed and that it later reopened, but none of the striking employes was rehired.

Craig wrote to Davis that the company had received no formal complaint about occurrences at the Edgewater plant, but merely a brief from an attorney for the workers, to which it did not "feel under obligation to make any reply."

Denies Violation.

"Let me say, preliminarily," Craig continued, "that the Ford Motor Co. has not violated section 7 of the code or the pertinent provisions of the National recovery act. The company has never questioned or denied the right of its employes to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and it has never attempted by interference, restraint or coercion of any kind, to defeat the purposes of collective bargaining.

"It has never discriminated against any employe or former employe because of his membership or nonmembership in any labor organization, and the Ford Motor Co. has complied in all respects with the maximum hours of labor, minimum rates of pay and other rules of employment provided by such code, as interpreted and administered by the administrator of the National recovery act."

Craig added that at the Edgewater plant the company did meet representatives of the employes and did consider the grievances. He said that striking employes from Chester had picketed the Edgewater plant, persuading some of the employes to quit. He declared that the company never locked out any employes, "but all who left the plant or failed to return to work voluntarily severed their employment with the Ford Motor Co."

Employes' Demands.

The employes, he said, demanded a seven-hour day with minimum wage of \$5, and a maximum working week of 35 hours. They also demanded the right of collective bargaining, freedom to leave the company's premises during the 30-minute lunch period, and that all employes who had participated in the walk-out be permitted to return to work.

Brown, he said, forwarded the demands to the Dearborn office of the company. The company replied, he said, that it recognized the right of collective bargaining, that the company had already granted freedom to leave the premises during the lunch period and that no discrimination will be made against applicants for employment because of their affiliation or nonaffiliation with labor union, "but every applicant will be considered strictly on the basis of individual merit."

The statement continued:

"The request for 'a seven-hour day with compensation at \$5 a day minimum, with no more than 35 hours a week' relates to hours and wages. If the law prohibits men from working more than 35 hours a week, wages for 35 hours will be paid. When the law permits men to work 40 hours a week, wages for 40 hours will be paid, and the company will maintain, as far as the condition of business permits, its five-day week of eight hours a day.

Wages Termed High.

"Our wage rates at the Edgewater plant are now the highest paid for the same class of work in the metropolitan industrial district. It is and always has been the company's policy to pay the highest practicable wages. Our wage rates necessarily are based on the volume of business done. Increases have always been made when possible and have never waited upon demand. It is the company's hope that employes will soon permit not only \$5 a day, or \$7, which was the daily minimum until 1932, but even a higher rate to be paid. But that is neither the company's to grant nor the employes' to expect until the condition of business makes it practicable."

Craig said that the reply was read to the workers and that "it was then and is now, in all respects, the reply of the Ford Motor Co." He said later demands were made directly to Edsel Ford and that employes had asked President Roosevelt to intervene. He said that subsequent to these demands employes asked that the strikers be re-employed. He said they were told that the company was willing to bargain collectively, but that it was impractical to take back men who had been on strike without replacing other men. He said the company had already taken back more than 1,300 men who had been on strike. He said the company would be willing to take back other strikers when business conditions improve and when each "satisfied the company as to his efficiency."

Craig said that about 350 men remain on strike and that of these about 200 have applied for reinstatement and that when conditions warrant they will be reem-

ployed "on the basis of individual merit."

Arguments Submitted.

In conclusion the company submitted:

"1. That it has not violated any provision either of Section 7 (a) of the National recovery act or Section 7 of the automobile code.

"2. That it has at all times, in this controversy, respected the principles of collective bargaining.

"3. That it has never locked out its men, but has dealt with them sympathetically and fairly, and without respect to the grievous harm done to the Edgewater plant and its business by a strike which was not the result of previous grievances but which was due to the coercion of a large number of strikers in another plant, who by violence and threats obstructed the operations of the Edgewater plant to the company's great injury.

"4. It is further submitted that the Ford Co. is informed and believes that even the small number of strikers who have not resumed work, at a meeting held at Edgewater on January 8, 1934, formally called off their strike, and that therefore the question is no longer pending, as the Edgewater plant is operating with more than 2,800 employes (this being more than 700 in excess of the number employed at the beginning of the strike) and the work of the plant is proceeding in harmony and to the mutual advantage and satisfaction of employer and employes.