

Police strike, seeking better work conditions

MASSACHUSETTS governor Calvin Coolidge has expressed his disgust at the actions of Boston police officers who have been on strike for better wages, *writes our labor relations reporter, September 15, 1919.*

“There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime,” he said.

The strike began in Boston about a week ago when three quarters of the city’s police refused to go to work. They were seeking better wages and working conditions as well as union recognition.

But Police Commissioner Edwin Upton Curtis suspended them, and Coolidge called in the Massachusetts National Guard after two nights of rowdy behavior and looting. The Governor’s actions have gained him a national reputation.

Amid a public outcry, the officers have ended the strike but new officers will now be recruited to replace them—on higher wages.

The decade is ending as it began: with a rash of strikes. Newspapers have not been sympathetic to the police strike, adopting a very different attitude to their coverage of the “Bread and Roses” Strike of 1912.

Textile workers in Lawrence went on strike against pay cuts for women, linked to enforced shorter hours. The plight of strikers’ children sent away from Massachusetts to stay with families attracted national attention.

First Lady Helen Taft took a keen interest, as government investigations revealed the shocking working conditions of immigrant labor.

The dispute united workers of different nationalities through nine cold winter weeks. It ended when mill owners agreed to raise workers’ pay.