

## *The Garbage Strike*

**F**or nine days the garbagemen of New York City were out on strike, and the streets were piled high with putrefying mounds of garbage. The press and the public have been infuriated by the strike but, as in so many matters, the fury has been sadly misplaced. Government actions, backed by the public, have been the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time.

In the first place, Mayor John Lindsay stubbornly refused to accept the offer of the state mediation panel, and instead called on the governor to call out the National Guard to take on the duties of hauling and dumping the city's garbage. There are several things very wrong about this procedure. First, the amount of money it takes to call up the National Guard would cost the New York City taxpayers twice as much *per day* (\$500,000) as it would cost *per year* if the mayor accepted the mediation offer as compared to the amount for which the mayor is holding out. Second, the National Guard is not very competent in garbage disposal, especially in operating garbage scows and cranes and incinerators. In short, you can't move garbage with bayonets.

He says it's a matter of "principle." First, the city should not give in to "blackmail," and second, the sanitation union is violating the state's Taylor Law, which outlaws strikes by public employee unions. Because of this law, Lindsay acted swiftly to put the head of the union, John Delury, in jail. But he soon found that jail doesn't move garbage either. And so, the violence

against DeLury having failed abysmally, Lindsay proposed to escalate that violence by putting the National Guard into action — against which labor threatened a general strike throughout the city. The high “principle,” then, turns out to be a despotic law violating everyone’s inalienable right to strike; that is, to quit working — especially since there was no contract in force. Any law invading the right to strike comes close to being a slave-labor law.

So, within the context of the situation, Governor [Nelson] Rockefeller was perfectly sound in looking for mediation and in wanting to end the strike as quickly as possible and to get the garbage moving again. Lindsay’s actions turned out to be petulant, hysterical, and despotic; and yet, Lindsay’s position was backed fully by all the press of New York and by most of the public, which contented themselves with empty vituperation against the sanitation union.

In the broader sense, of course, the main problem is that the entire society has put itself at the mercy of labor unions, by passing laws privileging these unions and making them quasi-compulsory and, further, by accepting as some God-given rule the idea that no strike may be broken; in short, that it is unthinkable to simply fire strikers and hire replacements.

Thus, Mayor Lindsay would much rather jail union leaders than simply fire them and hire others in their place. For the corollary of the right to strike, which should be inviolable, is the right to fire strikers and to hire those who are willing to work at terms offered by the employers.