

Staff Series

Shea, Cornelius P.

1909

[1909, ca. Nov. ?]

AN APPEAL FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE DEFENSE AND THE COSTS OF AN APPEAL IN THE CASE OF CORNELIUS P. SHEA, WHO HAS BEEN SENTENCED TO A LONG TERM IN SING SING FOR LABOR'S CAUSE, RATHER THAN THE CRIME HE COMMITTED DURING A PERIOD WHEN HE WAS MENTALLY IRRESPONSIBLE.

TO ALL LOCAL UNIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA.

SIRS AND BROTHERS:

The intense strain consequent upon an earnest and faithful discharge of his duties to our organization, and the various trials, tribulations and attacks he was subjected to by opponents of organized labor and others, seriously affected the nervous system of our valued friend and leader, Cornelius P. Shea; and his experience at Indianapolis, in the early part of May, added the last straw to the weight of all and his nervous system was completely wrecked. Partly to forget and partly to restore himself he drank very heavily for some time and thus temporarily got into a condition of mind rendering him utterly irresponsible and deprived him of the mental power to know his acts or to distinguish right from wrong; and while in that condition and without knowing what he was doing he is alleged on the 21st of May, 1909, to have stabbed a Miss Walsh who acted as his house-keeper, twenty-seven times, none of which stabs was dangerous. The act itself, if done by him (and we have no means of knowing, as he was out of his mind and no witness present other than the house-keeper who was injured and testified against him) in our judgment proved him to have been deprived of his reason at the time; for if he intended to injure her the result of twenty-seven stabs would necessarily have been different.

He was indicted for attempted murder and was very ably defended.

The proof of his not being in possession of his right senses, in other words temporarily out of his mind and suffering from mania apotu, was complete, throwing the burden upon the State to prove him sane, a burden which the State failed to meet and could not meet and thus under the laws of the State of New York he was entitled to an acquittal which he would have been even entitled to in case of reasonable doubt and as before stated the proof on the question as to his irresponsibility was not only such as would create a reasonable doubt but was conclusive as to his irresponsibility.

The prejudice against Mr. Shea consequent to his faithful discharge of his duties and the self-sacrifices he always made and was always ready to make on behalf of our cause had, however, created an intense prejudice against him—former charges, accusations and indictments resulting from his connection with labor troubles in various cities and which could not have been legally inquired into in this case were made the basis of a lengthy cross-examination of Mr. Shea and other causes; and a number of his enemies who beleaguered the District Attorney's office, among whom Rankin and Jackson and various influences which cannot well be discussed here caused him to be found guilty when he should have been acquitted of the charge.

On the trial a large number of medical experts were called in his defense, two of whom had to attend for about five or six days, and the expense incurred was heavy.

The sentence imposed upon him was for a long term of years. He, as well as we, are confident that the judgment against him will be reversed on appeal and he asks his friends to assist in defraying the expense of his defense and of the appeal, and so do we.

He is poor, and he suffers in consequence of the prejudice of narrow minds and narrow hearts against him for his acts in the service of our cause.

We are men, all of us, and will not let any one who has done what is right by us suffer or be punished or persecuted on that account without coming to his aid.

No man representing our cause now or hereafter should be able to think or feel that doing his duty by us and standing by the cause of organized labor, the noblest cause, the most worthy cause and the most just cause to defend, and who goes bravely forward in its behalf must be left by us like a General who turns around and finds there are no soldiers behind him.

Every leader and every member will find that he will never be abandoned to persecutions for the sake of his honest efforts in that direction. We are all men and we are all brothers whether we live in New York, Chicago, Boston, New Orleans or elsewhere and Mr. Shea was persecuted for his services to all of us; and all of us we know will come to his assistance as the New York Teamsters have done and are going to do and all of our brethren are appealed to to contribute as much as they deem proper and reasonable to the expense of his defense and the appeal from the judgment of conviction and every one whom it may concern, interest or affect will know that the cause of labor stands on a rock, is a rock which cannot be shaken or successfully assailed, that it is the cause of the people and they will protect their own.

This is labor's cause, not only Mr. Shea's, for he is persecuted because of his activity in the cause. So far as he personally is concerned you know he has his failings; but you also know he has merits and devoted his life and all that that implies to the cause and his merits outweigh his demerits.

He certainly at all times was at the head of the line in every contest. He did not stay at home and permit our men to be without organization or leadership—he at all times did his duty without regard to personal danger, attack, persecution and what not.

We ask you men of Chicago, we ask you men of Boston, we ask you men of New Orleans; we ask you men of San Francisco whether that is not so—if it is, now is the time to prove that you valued loyalty, fidelity and courage and are ready to reward when the opportunity is presented and to come to the assistance of one as deserving as he.

A committee has been appointed to receive contributions. The committee consists of

JOSEPH FORKEY
LARRY FARNHAM
JAMES WOODS
HARRY McCORMACK
S. SIMPSON

Fraternally yours,

LARRY FARNHAM, Secretary

111 West 100th Street

*P. S.—All contributions should be sent to
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