

**LAKERIDGE PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS**

# MUSICAL THEATRE WORKSHOP WINTER 2020

**VOLUME 6** **ISSUE 1**

# SEIZE THE MOMENT



**JANUARY 16, 17, 18 @ 7PM**

On July 18, 1899, a group of newsboys in Long Island City turned over a distribution wagon for the New York Journal and declared a strike against the papers of Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the World, and William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the Journal, until prices were rolled back to 50 cents per hundred. The newsboys of Manhattan and Brooklyn were quick to follow the next day. The newsboys' methods were violent in the early days of the strike. Any man or boy found to be selling the two boycotted papers would be mobbed by a group of strikers, beaten, and his papers destroyed. The newspaper owners paid grown men to sell their papers, offering them police protection, but the strikers often found ways to distract the officers so they could get at the "scabs." Women and girls fared a little better because, as union leader Kid Blink put it, "A feller can't soak a lady." The newsboys also distributed flyers and hung signs around the city encouraging people to help them in their cause by not buying the World and Journal. On July 24, 1899, the newsboys held a city-wide rally at Irving Hall sponsored by state senator Timothy D. Sullivan. An estimated five thousand boys from Manhattan attended the rally, along with two thousand boys from Brooklyn and several hundred from other areas of the city. Many local businessmen and politicians addressed the crowd, including lawyer Leonard A. Suitkin, Frank B. Wood, and ex-Assemblyman Phil Wissig. When the adults had finished speaking, union president David Simmons read a list of resolutions saying that the strike was to stand until the papers reduced their prices, and also calling on the news

boys to adopt non-violent methods of resistance. Other speeches were made by "Warhorse" Brennan, Jack Tietjen, "Bob the Indian", union leader "Kid Blink", "Crazy" Arborn, Annie Kelly, and Brooklyn leader "Racetrack" Higgins. The night ended with a song sung by "Hungry Joe" Kernan. A floral horseshoe was offered to Kid Blink as a reward for giving the best speech of the evening. In the days following the rally, the newsboys' tactics changed to be non-violent. Even though they were no longer beating people who sold the World and Journal, the strike was still effective since by then the public was on their side and chose not to buy them even if they were for sale. On July 26, 1899 the newsboys planned a parade where as many as 6,000 boys would march accompanied by a band and fireworks, but this parade never happened due to issues with obtaining a permit. On July 26, 1899, rumors spread among the newsboys that strike leaders Kid Blink and David Simmons had betrayed the strike and agreed to sell the boycotted papers in exchange for a bribe from the newspaper executives. Both boys denied the charges, but some sources note that Kid Blink wore clothes a bit nicer than usual. In response to these suspicions, Kid Blink and David Simmons resigned from their leadership positions, Simmons changing from union president to treasurer, and Kid Blink becoming a walking delegate. That night, Kid Blink was chased through the streets by a group of boys angry about the rumors that he had abandoned the strike. A police officer, seeing the group of running boys, grabbed Kid Blink, assuming he was leading them,

and arrested him for disorderly conduct. Kid Blink was given a fine and let go while a group of newsboys outside the court jeered at him. After the rumors of Kid Blink and David Simmons' desertion of the strike, combined with their failure to obtain a parade permit, the newsboys' faith in centralized leadership was diminished. Other newsboys stepped up to lead the strikers, but none of them had the same level of power and influence as Kid Blink once had. On August 1, 1899, the World and Journal offered the newsboys a compromise: the price of a hundred papers would remain at 60¢, but they would buy back any unsold papers. This meant that boys who had trouble selling all their papers would not be forced to sell late into the night to avoid taking a loss for the day. The newsboys accepted this compromise, ending the strike and disbanding the union on August 2, 1899.

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