

WORKERS AGE

A Paper Defending the Interests of the Workers and Farmers

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The Great Dress Strike in New York

Its Background and Its Lessons

by Chas S. Zimmerman

The general strike of the dress-makers of New York City and vicinity, just concluded, will go down in history as one of the most brilliant struggles ever carried thru by a labor union. The dress-makers have a record of many vigorous struggles and are known to be militant strikers; yet never before was there such a tremendous response on the part of scores of thousands of workers in the trade. The industry was completely paralyzed. The strikes of the past were confined chiefly to Manhattan; this time the giant strike wave engulfed the outlying districts, all parts of Brooklyn, Harlem and Bronx, as well as the out-of-town sections, New Jersey, Connecticut and so on. The enthusiasm, militancy and determination of the dressmakers surpassed all previous records and brought about a speedy victory.

It is still too early to make a complete analysis of the strike and to draw all the lessons from it. At this time, only one day after the settlement, I want only to indicate what led up to the strike and the results.

* * *

Why The General Strike

In the last few years, the conditions of the dressmakers sank to such a low level that it was impossible for the workers to exist. Although thousands were unemployed, other thousands slaved as much as

SILK WORKERS IN STRIKE MOVE

Paterson, N. J.

Close to 8,000 silk workers here are determined to wipe out sweatshop conditions in the silk industry. For three years the silk manufacturers have taken advantage of the great unemployment and the disorganization of labor, with the result that wage cut after wage cut was put into effect.

Recently the silk industry again started to run full force and the silk workers realized that this was their chance to improve conditions. A wave of shop strikes set in. The Associated Silk Workers, affiliated with the A. F. of L. immediately started a campaign to organize the unorganized, with the result that about 1,000 workers have joined the union in the broad silk and jacquard departments.

Now the union is in a position to declare a general strike in the industry. The silk workers of Paterson are enthusiastic about the coming struggle. Eli Keller and Frank Schweitzer are in charge of this campaign. The following are the demands put forward: (1) the recognition of the union, (2) the 30-hour week, (3) the \$36 weekly minimum wage, (4) the abolition of night work, (5) the abolition of the two-shift system.

The National Textile Workers Union, the Communist Party-controlled organization, is out of existence altogether. Some of the workers who, until recently followed it, have joined the A. F. of L. union. In Paterson now there will be no dual strike.

It is expected that the strike will be fought militantly and the silk workers will this time improve their conditions.

50 to 60 hours a week for a miserable wage, frequently not even reaching \$10 a week. At the same time the workers were forced to submit to the most inhuman treatment. The sweatshop was rapidly returning, not only out-of-town but even in New York City. The union, the Dressmakers Union of the I. L. G. W. U., was weak, embracing only about 20% of the workers in the trade; it could not therefore protect the workers and enforce union standards.

In view of this situation, we raised the question, during the past two seasons, of the need for a general strike as the only way of unionizing the industry and re-establishing decent standards in the trade. At the beginning of this season (June 1933), when an upturn became noticeable, the union began a campaign in the shops, among the non-union as well as union workers, to increase wages; at the same time, it began preparations for a general strike when the season would be in full swing.

When the Recovery Act was adopted, there were many who thought that this would automatically solve the problem. But the union pointed out that, in our industry especially, the only way to force a favorable code, to get any improvements in wages and working conditions and to unionize the trade, was thru a general strike. The employers in the industry, particularly the big open-shop manufacturers and jobbers, organized the National Association of Dress Manufacturers with the object of maintaining the open shop in the industry and of having a code adopted on the basis of the open shop. The union very successfully exposed the intentions of the sweatshop employers and concentrated its entire fire against this dangerous plan. The union also realized that, in order to frustrate the schemes of the open shoppers, it was necessary to call the general strike before the dress

code hearings began so that it could come to these hearings with an accomplished fact, the agreement.

The general strike call was issued Wednesday, August 16. The spontaneous and enthusiastic response on the part of the scores of thousands of dressmakers, in the open shops as well as in the union shops, surpassed all expectations. In New York City alone nearly 40,000 came out on the call of the union and the total, including out-of-town, reached 50,000. Thousands of workers, who had never before been union members, Spanish, Italian, Negro, native American, Jewish workers, all streamed down to the halls as one enthusiastic whole. The many strike halls prepared by the union were soon overcrowded and thousands of workers waited outside, unable to get in. The various hall chairmen had to ask the union shops to leave and congregate on the sidewalks so as to give preference to the open-shop workers coming to register. Every picket line was a huge demonstration, in spite of continuous rain. They formed steel rings around the garment buildings, paralyzing any attempt to hinder the course of the strike.

Another new and characteristic feature of the situation was the simultaneous walkout of the truckmen delivering dresses. For the first time these men were organized into a local of the I.L.G.W.U., thus forging the solidarity of the workers all around.

Under these circumstances, it was out of the question for the NRA to attempt to interfere with or stop the strike. There had been talk in the beginning of some sort of "temporary truce" until the code hearings but the inspiring demonstration of the determination of the workers compelled the recognition of the union and the negotiation of a permanent agree-

ment. In all these proceedings the NRA could act only as a mediator.

The Big Issues Of The Strike And The Agreement

The big issues in the strike and in the negotiations were the recognition of the union and the establishment of union standards. The open-shop manufacturers at first declared that with them the open shop and the refusal to recognize the union were questions of principle. But they soon enough came to realize that, if they wanted to resume production during this season, they would have to come to terms with the union even to the point of recognizing it. This they did on the second day of the strike. After continuous conferences, lasting three days and three nights, an agreement was finally reached between the union and the employers organizations.

The agreement that came out of the general strike constitutes one of the biggest achievements made by organized labor in recent years. Besides union recognition, it includes guaranteed minimum wage scales, representing a considerable increase in earnings of the workers, a provision for jobbers responsibility for conditions in contractors shops and the 35-hour maximum working week with no overtime. Thus, the Dressmakers Union was the first union to achieve the 35-hour week thru a strike, even before code hearings.

The significance of the strike is to be measured not only by the favorable character of the settlement. It must be remembered that it was undertaken and carried thru at a time when there was a virtual ban on strikes under orders of the Federal government, with the consent of the leading officials of the A. F. of L. The dressmakers strike is certain to play a big role in inspiring and guiding trade union action in all industries.

A Test Of Policy

It is not yet time to evaluate

fully the role of the various forces in the strike. But it is clear that the strike served as a test on a large scale of the policies and tactics advocated by the Communist Opposition, on the one hand, and the official Communist Party, on the other. The correct course of the Communist Opposition, the policy of working within the mass unions in a constructive manner, to make them better fighting weapons of the workers, made the Communist Opposition into a guiding and leading force in the strike and greatly increased its influence among the workers. On the other hand, the policy of sectarian dualism and the splitting, disruptive activities of the official Communist Party and its auxiliary, the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, turned them into a destructive and demoralizing factor in the situation and made them the object of the hatred and indignation of the masses of the dressmakers. Thus, in a situation in which scores of thousands of workers were involved in struggle, the official Communist Party, instead of playing the role of Communists and becoming the vanguard of the movement, shrivelled up even more into an isolated sect, earning the contempt of the masses. It is to be hoped that this experience will serve as a lesson to the Communist Party members and that they will have

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NRA TO RESTRAIN PICKETING

New York City

The right of labor to picket the establishments of employers who have signed up with the NRA and who have been awarded the Blue Eagle is to be "suspended" under the Recovery Act, according to a statement issued by Grover Whalen, head of the city's NRA forces, on August 26. He has requested Chief Inspector O'Brien to make an arrest so that a test case could take place establishing the power of the NRA to suppress picketing.

When informed of Mr. Whalen's plan, Chief Inspector O'Brien asserted that the police took the view that "any interference with the Recovery Act (including picketing) was in the nature of a conspiracy against the United States government. Wherever evidence is available, arrests will be made."

The threat of the NRA to outlaw picketing is one of the most brazen attacks upon the labor movement that has yet been made under the "New Deal." If an employer signs up under the blanket code, "modified", of course, to suit his taste, the workers are to be prohibited from going on strike and picketing for better conditions! Does this not mean, then, that the starvation minimum wage under the NRA will inevitably become the prevailing wage and even the maximum wage? If Whalen's edict is allowed to go thru, it means not only a serious degradation of the standards of the workers but a veritable death-blow to trade unionism. In the beginning, Whalen may pretend he is aiming only at the "Red" unions but every

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Build and Boost the "AGE"!

Boosting the "Age" during the huge dressmakers strike in New York was not only a fruitful task but a welcome one. Close to one thousand "Ages" were sold and distributed in the strike halls.

* * *

Here's a boost to the boosters of "Workers Age"! Philadelphia and Montreal are tied for first place!

With the election of a new "Workers Age" agent in Philadelphia, things are humming! First we got a check for \$13 for the Summer Sustaining Fund of "Workers Age". Within a few days, we get another \$5 making \$18 in all and a promise of more . . . soon . . . The Philadelphia Branch ran a picnic on August 27 and all proceeds go to "Workers Age"! Philadelphia

went way over the top in fulfilling its quota and to top it all off we get a check paying in full for bundle orders of "Workers Age"!

But Montreal is right on their heels. Eighteen dollars for the Summer Sustaining Fund! An increase in their regular bundle order of the "Age"! Now, how about an affair for "Workers Age".

From Chicago comes \$5 for the Summer Sustaining Fund! A big increase in their bundle order and a report of efforts to get renewals and sell the "Age." In fact, Comrade Lawrence sold all she had at one meeting last week! Keep it up!

From all ends of the country came requests for No. 16 of the "Age", particularly because of the article on the Proletarian Party.

In fact, many Proletarian Party members ask for more than one copy!

* * *

SPECIAL!

Every issue of the "Age" hereafter will contain a photograph of one of the panels of Diego Rivera's murals, which he is painting at the headquarters of the New Workers School!

* * *

Early in September, the "Workers Age" will feature a special series of articles by Jay Lovestone on his personal impressions of the labor and Communist movements of various European countries, Germany, Spain, France, England, etc. Spread the news! The articles will be immensely interesting! You can't afford to miss 'em!

J. Lovestone 'Revolution and Reaction in Europe' SEPTEMBER 16, 1933, IRVING PLAZA.

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September 1, 1933.

THE NRA AND THE TRADE UNIONS

THE "diplomatic" declaration of General Johnson, "clarifying" Section 7a of the Recovery Act, should convince even the most hardened union official that it is neither the object of the N.I.R.A. nor the intention of the administration to encourage trade unionism or even to protect gains already achieved. To grant the employer the right to make "individual agreements with those who choose to act individually" is to grant the employer the right to maintain the open shop under the threadbare pretext of "protecting the freedom of contract of the working man." To recognize the company union on exactly the same level as a real labor union, whether directly or thru the subterfuge of an "impartial" referendum, means to confirm the position of company unionism where it exists and even to stimulate its spread. To "abolish" the terms "closed shop" and "open shop" from the NRA vocabulary, is not a mere shabby evasion to "please both sides"; it is a well calculated move to rule out the union shop (the closed shop) and thereby make the open shop universal, even tho the name may not be uttered in the dread presence of General Johnson. These are facts which the labor movement will have to take into immediate account.

But fortunately not all of General Johnson's deliverances from on high can change the inner logic of the situation. It has been evident for some time that the Recovery Act is having some indirect consequences far from intended by its sponsors and even less welcome to them.

1. Supplementing the effects of the turn in the economic situation, the N.I.R.A. has undoubtedly helped unleash a wave of strikes and labor struggles thru all parts of the country that has come as a breath of fresh air in the stagnant atmosphere of recent years. The mere wording of Section 7a, fortified by some of the early demagoguery of the NRA, has naturally enough created the impression among the workers and sympathetic elements in the lower middle class that strikes and labor unionism are now "respectable", "legal", "guaranteed by the NRA", "supported by President Roosevelt" and what not. The pent-up resentment of years of bitter crisis is at last breaking thru.

2. For the same reasons the last few weeks have witnessed an almost phenomenal growth on the part of many of the A. F. of L. unions, resulting from vigorous and widespread organization campaigns. The spread of the U.M.W.A. in the non-union fields of Western Pennsylvania and the Southern regions and the spectacular success of the New York dressmakers in organizing the trade are only outstanding examples; perhaps as significant is the sentiment for unionization so keenly felt among large sections of the backward workers.

3. The very vigor of the movement has demonstrated the hopeless bankruptcy of craft unionism in the face of modern mass production industry and the overwhelming advantage, even absolute necessity, of industrial unionism. Not only are those unions that have made the greatest advance, such as the U.M.W.A. and the I.L.G.W.U., either completely or partly industrial union in structure but there is a very strong tendency to industrial unionism even in those fields where craft unionism has reigned supreme to wreak its havoc, in the auto industry and the metal trades, for example. The movement has even proved strong enough to break thru the hide-bound tradition of the A. F. of L. That this tendency is to be heartily greeted and encouraged goes without saying.

4. Most significant of all is the powerful drive towards the A. F. of L. and towards unity in the trade union movement in general. The pact between the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the United Garment Workers and the probability of the former joining the A. F. of L. are important indications; it is even rumored that the railroad brotherhoods are contemplating a similar move. In the barest interests of self-defense under the Blue Eagle unity within the A. F. of L. is vitally necessary; never was dual unionism so dangerous to the interests of labor as today, dual unionism either of the "revolutionary" T.U.U.L. variety or of the conservative type found in the Illinois soft coal and Anthracite fields. Dual unionism is now more than ever, playing the game of the bosses!

WELCOME—THE "ARBETER-KAMF!"

THE reappearance of the "Arbeter-Kamf", the Jewish paper of the Communist Opposition, is an important event in the revolutionary movement of this country, extending its influence far beyond the limits of the so-called Jewish labor movement.

For historical reasons that are clear enough the Jewish workers in the United States, especially those in the larger cities of the East, have for many decades stood in the front ranks of American labor. Under conditions of the most merciless exploitation, they yet proved able to forge powerful trade unions, build up strong fraternal societies, and raise themselves to the level of human beings fighting for a better future. The great class struggles conducted by the Jewish workers more than once served as sources of deep inspiration of the whole labor movement.

It is precisely among these workers that the official Communist Party has discredited itself in the most hopeless manner. Its dualist trade union policy has converted its followers in the needle trade unions into a destructive and sectarian clique, hated and despised by the workers—as the recent dressmakers strike so strikingly proved. In the Workmen's Circle its mad course of splits has isolated it most completely from large masses of progressive workers. Its paper, the "Freiheit", has become a by-word for partisan lying and factional distortion.

The Communist Opposition, on the other hand, has been gaining prestige and influence in precisely the same circumstances. Its generally correct course repeatedly confirmed by experience, its determined policy of unity and constructive work in the unions and labor organizations, have not been without result. All the more therefore did there begin to be felt the pressing need of a Communist Opposition paper that could most effectively reach these sections of the working class, while at the same time the basis for the support of such a paper was constantly broadening. The new Jewish "Arbeter-Kamf" will have a great role to play from very first day of its appearance.

With great enthusiasm does the "Workers Age" welcome its brother paper in the struggle for the rehabilitation of the Communist movement in the United States and thruout the world—the "Arbeter-Kamf!"

THE THIRD RIVERA MURAL AT THE NEW WORKERS SCHOOL



N. Y. METAL WORKERS ON STRIKE

New York City.
A hundred and seventy five workers walked out of the Sagamore metal plant on Thursday, August 17, on strike for a 35-hour week and a minimum wage of \$15 for the unskilled workers and a raise of 25% in wages for all other workers in the plant.

The solidarity, militancy and 100% response of the workers are the best guarantee that the strike will be successful. Despite rain, almost the entire shop turned out on the picket line, organized a march before the building to show the boss their determination to keep out scabs and to fight for their jobs at a wage and under conditions that will at least provide them with their most elementary necessities.

The Metal Trades Council of the American Federation of Labor has agreed to the organization of a plant union which will function as a section of the Metal Trades Council.

The workers of the Sagamore are determined to stay out until the boss recognizes their union and grants their demands

* * *

A number of other metal shops have gone on strike in recent weeks, under the leadership of the Metal Trades Workers Industrial Union, the T.U.U.L. organization. Some of the settlements that have been made are positively shameful. The M. T. W. I. U. has, according to reports in the "Daily Worker", permitted shops to go back without recognition of the union, with clauses in the agreement excluding those workers "who have violated law and order during the strike" which of course means the exclusion of all the militant workers. The T.U.U.L. union has settled on a \$12 minimum wage. The setting up of a dual union to the Metal Trades Council of the A. F. of L. is creating division and rifts in the ranks of the workers which helps only the bosses.

The workers in the metal trades are ready and anxious for strike action. The necessity of unionizing the shops and building up a strong union is of the utmost im-

portance at this time. The best service that the members of the T. U.U.L. can render metal trades workers is to get into the A. F. of L. union and help in building up this union and developing a strong progressive group within it. That is the only guarantee that conditions will be improved and maintained.

THE GREAT DRESSMAKERS STRIKE IN NEW YORK

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the courage to recognize facts as they are and make an end to the policies that are doing such untold harm to the Communist movement.

The general strike of the dressmakers, just because of its success, has brought great problems to the union, primarily the problem of consolidating the ranks of the newly organized workers, strengthening the union to make it a real, living and militant weapon in the hands of the workers to enforce the gains of the strike. It is particularly the duty of the progressive elements to see that these problems facing the union are successfully solved!

THE CIGAR MAKERS STRIKE

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strike committee and a relief committee were elected as many of them are starving. This Paul Jones brought in another politician, Pat Viola, who led the right wing section of the veterans to Washington last year. These two came and offered their assistance to the union. At present, our group, altho not in control, is still very influential with the union.

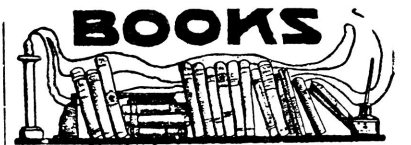
NRA TO BAR PICKETING

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worker knows that, once he is successful there, all unions, even the most conservative, will become his victims.

Labor must tolerate not the slightest restriction of the right to strike and to picket. Now is the time to unite all forces to fight for the class independence and fighting power of the trade unions!

BOOKS



ATOMS AND COSMOS, by L. Reichenbach. The Macmillan Co. New York, 1933.

This book is to be recommended as a clear and simple introduction to the involved mysteries of modern science. The author has an instinct for realistic materialist formulation and approaches the idealist interpretations of modern science (i.e., in regard to the theory of indeterminacy and related questions) with commendable caution. Nevertheless, in trying to steer a middle course, it is to be expected that the author does not come off quite unscathed. Idealist formulations crop up here and there inevitably, and willy-nilly the author gives objective support to the idealists. However, he never descends to the crass formulations of a Jeans. All that notwithstanding, and in spite of a decided superficiality in philosophical questions this book is decidedly better for the most part (in so far as its treatment of the empirical advances of modern physics is concerned) than most books in the field, giving the layman an insight, as far as possible without the language of mathematics, into the modern conception of space - time - motion - energy - light - atom - molecule - electron - proton. JIM CORK.

DELICIOUS FOOD?
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