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By CHARLES DENBY

Many workers in the plant where I work had a feeling that taking strike action against the company was somewhat useless because the union officials in the last several years always line up with the company on disciplining the worker, especially when the issue involves production disputes.

Some weeks ago the company removed a number of workers from an operation and wanted those who remained to put out the same amount of production. The workers continued to work but slowed down and rode the lines the first day. The second day this caused production to pile up in other departments. The company fired eight workers. The department struck. The committeeman tried to insist that those workers continue to work. They were so angry at this that I was told they chased the committeeman out of the department and walked out, closing the plant down.

They went to the union hall. I never witnessed such an angry group of workers before in my life. They would not listen to the local officers. They were booing and cursing them, from a to z.

The third day the company fired four more workers. The department went down again. When I got to the union hall there were many workers standing outside looking in. I was told by some that the union officials would only let workers in who were directly involved in the issue. Not even those who work in the department could come in.

I said, "I have put money in this union for years to buy this hall. It is ours, not the officers'." I went in. My first attention was drawn to the fact that all over the hall were chief stewards and others who are part of the bureaucratic machinery that does not work in the department where those striking workers are. One union official asked me what I was doing there. I pointed to those chief stewards and asked what were they doing there. I said, "This is our union hall. I have as much right as any one else." He said: O.K. Just keep quiet.

The union officials were sitting on opposite sides of the hall from the workers.

They asked for a vote: those who are for the committeeman's agreement and those for time study. This by secret ballot. This was only for the workers on the first operation. The union felt they could railroad it over half of those workers, then they would be in a position to persuade the others to accept.

THE WORKERS MEET ALONE

While they rushed to hand out the ballots, some worker suggested that all who were voting should meet alone in the back of the hall and discuss what they really want to vote for. The official agreed. Those workers arose and went to the back of the hall, not letting a single union leader in, not trusting them at all. The union leaders were all sitting on the platform seeming somewhat pleased, looking as if they were saying: We got them hooked.

When the workers returned, one official jumped to his feet. Say, here is the ballot, let's get it over with.

A worker said: We have someone to make a statement for us before we vote. The worker took the mike and said: We realize fully that you officers have sold us out and are trying to trick us to vote for what we struck against. If there is no other way, we will accept the agreement the committeeman signed with the company if those twelve workers who were fired are back tomorrow. And if they are not back, we are striking again.

Every official jumped as though struck with a hot pin. yelling: Is that why you wanted to meet by yourselves? We cannot promise you that. A worker yelled: You can promise nothing we want, but you want promises from us. You and the company want the shop to roll. But not until we get a guarantee when those fired workers will be back.

TAKING THE MIKE

The officers forgot the voting. Another worker started to the mike. The president ordered him to speak from the floor. He said: I am using the mike, unless it is your personal belonging. If so, you put it in your pocket because I am speaking from this rostrum.

The tension was so stark, we were expecting a violent outbreak. The worker used the mike. Another worker yelled: What good is this union? This president? If it were not for the union you would not be striking. But there were strikes before we had a union and there are strikes where there are no unions now. The official said they would guarantee these workers that the fired workers

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MORE FRIENDS . . . BUT FEWER

Rocky Marciano, heavy-weight champion of the world is a man who suddenly

Yet in many ways his life falls far short of being what he wants it to be.

He has more friends than ever before, but yet has fewer friends than ever before. He is suddenly in a different world. Even his mother feels that she cannot talk to him.

HE FEELS IT

As much as Marciano fights against it, he feels it himself. He says, "When I get together with my old friends in Brockton it isn't the same either. They never start a conversation. They answer my questions quickly and I never do find out how they feel and what they're thinking and we never have the laughs about the little things we used to have before."

He tells on speech that didn't endear him to the manufacturers of shoes. He relates that he told them that in a way they are responsible for his being champion of the world. He said that for years he used to carry his father's lunch box to work. He saw how tough his father got. His father used to tell him to stay out of the shoe shops. "So to keep away from there I became a fighter instead, and therefore I think you men had a part in making me a fighter."



"You can tell the steward is on the ball because he has all these friendly conversations with the supervisors."

Strikes Against Auto Contracts

A production auto worker told NEWS & LETTERS, "Reuther says this new contract is the biggest victory we've won. He says, this is the greatest achievement for the country and proves that labor and management can live side by side. But, even before Reuther closed his mouth there were wildcats in auto. The workers can't live side by side with their own union leaders."

THESE STRIKES ARE NEW

This is what is new in the situation. Never before have the workers, in plant after plant throughout the country, expressed their dissatisfactions in so many wildcats after negotiations had been concluded and before ratification.

No sooner had the Ford agreement been announced than the huge Ford plant at River Rouge was shut by wildcatting workers. Detroit papers openly called this a revolt. Ford workers at Rouge belong to Local 600, the largest local in the UAW and in the world. Local 600's president, Carl Stellato, went down to coax the strikers back on the job. He pleaded and explained the "great gains" won by the agreement. The workers booed him although, as distinguished from Reuther, he has enjoyed wide support among Local 600 members.

When asked, "Wasn't it only the skilled workers who walked out at Rouge?" a production worker exploded, "Hell it was. The skilled workers started it. The papers played that up and tried to make believe the production workers weren't in on it. We don't like that contract and we went out."

WILDCATS BEFORE AND AFTER

At the same time, UAW was carrying on negotiations with General Motors. And GM workers were wildcatting all over the country forcing GM to close 20 plants. These pre-contract, walkouts, no doubt, delayed negotiations. Reuther charged that they were sabotaging the talks.

No sooner did Reuther and GM finally come to agreement than 175,000 workers walked out in more than 40 GM plants throughout the country. The union and the press tried to say that these

post-agreement strikes were simply the result of local conditions. The truth is, these walkouts were explosions resulting from years of accumulated pressure which had been building up during the time the workers were tied down by the previous five-year contracts.

"ONE YEAR IS ENOUGH"

Throughout the industry workers were saying, "Never again. No more five year contracts. One year is enough." They were willing to go along on two years. But they have now been confronted with three-year agreements.

"What's bothering me," said the production worker, "is why the big corporation leaders are praising Reuther. Why are they saying that he's won us a revolutionary gain that means 'peace and prosperity' for auto workers and everybody? In the old days they used to say that old man Ford's 52-day was also revolutionary. That was the time when it was slave conditions at Ford."

The fringe benefits are just so much pie-in-the-sky. The cash raise, widely announced as 6%, actually boils down only to a single penny, since they would automatically have got 5c more under the old contract.

FOR SHORTER WORK DAY

There is no doubt the workers preferred cash to the fringe "gains." So the real issue is a shorter working day and a voice on working conditions. So true is this, that in a GM Fisher Body plant, there was a two-to-one vote against Reuther's slate in local elections. This "no confidence" vote took place in the midst of negotiations.

These are the stirrings in the shops on the eve of ratification. They will not be silenced by the final vote.

NEWS and LETTERS

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