

A. F. of L. and Paterson

by Ben Gitlow

The Paterson strike of the A. F. of L. amalgamated unions was one of the first strikes of importance against wage-cuts. It could have been developed into one of the mightiest labor struggles against the wage-cut campaign of the bosses. It was confined, however, strictly to Paterson. Why? Because the reactionary officialdom of William Green and the Executive Council of the A. F. of L., who were then issuing statements against wage-cuts, did not look favorably upon any extension of the Paterson tactics, a fight against the wage-cutting campaign of the bosses. In my opinion for three main reasons:

1. It would involve a united front movement of all elements in the labor movement, giving the militant revolutionary forces contact with and leadership over the large numbers of trade union masses, thus threatening the security and power of the reactionary leadership in the A. F. of L.

2. The A. F. of L. reactionary leadership, especially Wm. Green, its president, and the Executive Council of the A. F. of L., in spite of all their protestations against wage-cuts, were agreed that wage-cuts had to take place, that a fight against wage-cuts was out of the question, the only thing left for the labor unions being to negotiate the percentage of the cuts. We see today with what readiness the officialdom of the railroad unions and the other large unions are accepting wage-cuts.

3. A fight against wage-cuts would involve militant strike action in opposition to the policy of Green and

Company, the policy of no strikes, peace in industry and collaboration with the bosses.

The writer of this article proposed that a committee of the General Strike Committee appear before the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. at its meeting on August 17, 1931, at Atlantic City.

All that the committee got was a luke-warm endorsement of the strike, an interrogation as to the strike leadership, followed up by a statement that the strike had nothing to do with "Communistic elements."

No definite appeal to the labor movement was made to back up the strike and support it in every way possible.

Mr. Green promised the committee to send a letter endorsing the strike which could be used in the trade unions of the A. F. of L. for enlisting support but no such letter was ever forthcoming tho Mr. Green was written to, reminded of his promise and asked to forward the letter. Mr. Green, president of the A. F. of L., saw fit not even to acknowledge the receipt of the letter.

The Paterson Strikers Relief Committee of the A. F. of L. amalgamated unions sent a letter to the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. asking the Executive Council to endorse the relief and to call upon the trade unions to help the Paterson strikers. So concerned were these reactionary officials with the bitter struggle the textile workers were conducting, that, when these latter sent a letter to the

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Executive Council to help them line up the trade unions to fight off starvation so that they could fight the bosses, these smug officials of the Executive Council did not even have the common decency to write a letter and affix a two cent postage stamp.

How about the officials of the United Textile Workers of America? It was a strike of their organization. They adopted a policy of standing by, at the same time fixing their fences to get a secure grip on the Paterson organization after the strike.

The U. T. W. organizers and officials did not look with favor upon the calling of a strike. They went along with the action of the masses, however. They repeatedly came to the General Strike Committee with all kinds of proposals and propositions to permit the other crafts to return to work while weavers were striking. They always were for compromise and opposed any action for the extension of the strike. Instead of uniting the Allentown strike with the Paterson strike they took no steps for united action and so conducted the Allentown strike, of which they had complete leadership, that the

strike fell a prey to the disruptive activities of the National Textile Workers Union and the incompetence and defeatist policies of the U.T.W. officials in charge. The course taken to end the Allentown strike, sending the workers back defeated, with no union organization and the acceptance of the most flagrant discrimination against active union men and strikers was made at the height of the Paterson strike and was a very bad blow to it.

The calling of the Paterson strike was the result of an amalgamation of the U. T. W. silk workers locals in Paterson and the independent union of silk workers, the Associated Silk Workers of America. The amalgamation was carried thru upon the express understanding and written agreement that the amalgamation was not to be confined locally to Paterson but should be considered a step in the constitution of a national silk workers federation of the U. T. W. with autonomy over the silk industry, making possible united action on a national scale on behalf of the silk industry. It was provided that there should also take place a national or-

ganization campaign for the national silk workers federation. It was understood that this would take place immediately, that during the course of the strike the organization would be constituted and the organization campaign started.

However, this was not done. McMahon, president of the U. T. W., formed an amalgamation committee of the old officials of the Associated and the U. T. W. locals, outside of the General Strike Committee and independent of it, protracted the organization of the national federation so that up until today the national federation has not yet been constituted and the organization campaign of the silk workers has not been started.

The reason for this delay is that McMahon wants a situation where he can organize a silk workers federation of the existing officials of the few unions in existence, that will not develop militant strike policies and give rise to a militant progressive leadership.

The Communist Party (Majority Group) proposed early in the strike that the amalgamation should be on a national scale and take place during the strike, that it should be tied up with an aggressive organization campaign, that it should be used to tie up the Allentown strike with the Paterson strike, that the amalgamation conference should be held in Paterson and should be a rank and file mass conference from as many shop representatives as possible.

This was not done. The actions of the A. F. of L. officialdom were very costly to unionism in Paterson and the silk industry as a whole. The actions of Green and Company prevented a mighty campaign against wage-cuts developing out of the Paterson strike.

What is the answer? Build new dual unions? It is the path to isolation and death. The thing to do is to build up a progressive, militant rank and file force in the A. F. of L. Had we such a force in the unions during the Paterson strike, then the Paterson strike would have been of tremendous national importance and significance. One thing is certain, the reactionary officialdom would not have been able to ignore and to pursue their treacherous policies of stabbing labor in the back without stubborn and effective resistance on the part of the trade unionists.

Culture In The Soviet Union

THE LIQUIDATION OF ILLITERACY

by N. K. Krupskaya

Nadezhda Constantinovna Krupskaya addressed a large audience of American and English workers and specialists at the Dzershinsky Club on December 5. The lecture was devoted to the question of education in the U. S. S. R. and dealt particularly with the liquidation of illiteracy. Comrade Krupskaya pictured the gigantic strides made by the working class since the October revolution in liquidating this terrible heritage of the tsarist regime.

Illiteracy was widespread in the pre-revolutionary period. Even after extensive educational work carried out from 1917 to 1920, one-third of the male population and two-thirds of the women were deeply illiterate.

working energetically in the widespread educational activities. The masses are set into motion and the last remnants of illiteracy are being destroyed.

In the days before the revolution, the boys and girls in the schools were taught separately. Education was very limited, confined in elementary schools mainly to religion. The children were trained in the spirit of national and race hatred and taught loyalty to the tsarist regime. The school was detached from life. Children received no conception of production, of economy, of labor, or any technical knowledge.

The Soviet power has unified the school. The boys and girls study to-