

New York Furriers Go Over The Top

By Joseph Zack



BEN GOLD

Fighting Leader of the Furriers

FRIDAY, June 3 at 8 A. M., as the whistles were blowing, the bulk of the fur workers responded to the strike call of the "outlawed" Furriers' Joint Board. The fur district was bristling with police of all kinds, the notorious police gangster squad (Industrial Squad) was on hand in plain clothes.

Martial law is the only term that could perhaps describe the scene. Finally the gangsters of the A. F. L. re-organization committee picked up some courage, and like ghouls not sure of themselves despite all the police protection, began to swoop furtively around. Even then some of them got walloped. The fur district was honeycombed by pickets, roving squads of militant fur workers marched thru the "war area" and here and there some seats got "entertained". By 10 o'clock in the morning the six east side halls, engaged to accommodate the strikers, were jammed and there was enough enthusiasm to blow off the roof.

Sabotage of Reactionaries in Vain

This was the most magnificent demonstration of solidarity the workers in this industry have ever shown. Superbly magnificent indeed, considering the preparations the A. F. L. bureaucracy in cooperation with the employers made to demoralize the workers. The workers were ordered to remain on their jobs by the A. F. L. leaders on pain of expulsion and discharge. On the eve of the strike every furrier working in shops of the big bosses' association received a telegram from the A. F. L. leaders instructing him not to obey the strike call of the Joint Board.

The Joint Board was defunct, outlawed, ruled by Moscow, they said. The issue was communism versus Americanism. The Joint Board had no money, the entire strength of the A. F. L. will be used to crush communism. A worker would be a fool to risk his job to bolster the domination of a few communists. Don't follow the union wreckers, disrupters, outlaws, etc. The press of the bureaucracy, headed by the Forward and supported by the capitalist press, kept up a demoralizing propaganda for weeks. The decision to call a strike was belittled,

ridiculed as utopian and foolhardy, as an act of irresponsibility, of adventurers. Matthew Woll, leader of the notorious Civic Federation (association of big open-shop employers) and Vice-President of the A. F. L. held conferences with the police commissioner to make sure that the police will be on the job to suppress the strike. Demoralize and intimidate the fur workers, that was the game.

Needless to say, the fur bosses had for months past utilized to the full the opportunity offered by the union smashing efforts of the A. F. L. reactionary leadership to take back all the gains which the fur workers had won as a result of the last strike. The bosses association ordered a lock-out to force the workers to submit to the reorganization of the A. F. L. The expelled Joint Board advised the workers to register with A. F. L. reorganization committee and wait until the busy season to strike a blow against the employers. Now the time for reckoning has come.

Joint Board Prepared Ground

The Joint Board, under left wing leadership, headed by Ben Gold, the Alex Howat of the needle trades, has not been asleep during all these months. The Joint Board

thru the left wing press, meetings, circulars has been mobilizing the workers. It was one of the finest pieces of work ever done—maneuvers, offensives and retreats and careful working out of policy. These were months crowded in with activity. With all this minute work and mass mobilization for the strike the workers did not know the actual date. But the tension produced by all this mass activity was such that when the signal was given the mass sentiment produced by this work resulted in a great and glorious avalanche.

Despite all the enemy preparations the fur workers emerged in one great magnificent assault. The bosses and the bureaucracy were dumbfounded. The shops emptied. Of course there were some cowards and spineless slaves and former scabs that were shivering in their boots. But these few soon began to feel the iron will of the furriers. Towards the evening remnants of shops began to appear. The walk-out exceeded all expectations. The wrath of Matthew Woll expressed itself in public demands for raids and suppression of what he calls bolshevist activities.

Just Demands of the Joint Board

The Joint Board's demands are

very simple. All it asks is that the bosses live up to the agreement signed with it at the conclusion of the last strike, live up to its provisions as to wages, hours, overtime, working rules, etc. The Joint Board demands that the bosses keep their hands off the internal struggle going on in the union and let the workers choose whatever leadership they want, left or right, without trying to force the workers to join the union the bosses prefer.

Legally the Joint Board is in a very strong position. Despite this it is expected that Matthew Woll, as leader of the Civic Federation, will attempt to procure an injunction in the interests of the bosses prohibiting picketing, etc.

Significance of the Struggle

For months past a bitter struggle has been going on in the needle trades between the right wing, the bosses and the city government on one side and the workers led by the left wing on the other. Previous to that these very same workers went through a strike of several months duration to win the forty-hour week and wage increases. First they licked the bosses, then they had a fight on their hands against both the bosses and the A. F. L. leaders supported by all the enemies of labor. For months the right wing thus supported had been on the offensive in an attempt to subjugate the workers. Quite often they thought they had the left wing licked.

The bosses by taking advantage of the situation, made it finally clear to the workers that the right wing bureaucracy is merely being used by the bosses to destroy union conditions in the industry. The attention of the workers began to turn towards the main enemy, the boss, realizing that the boss is trying to dictate as to what sort of union and leaders they should belong to and follow. And after all these months of struggle the needle workers have flung the challenge right into the teeth of the bosses by following the strike call of the Joint Board. The left wing has taken the offensive.

The workers in the entire needle industry will follow in the wake of this movement. The success of furriers is of importance indeed beyond the confines of the needle industry. A defeat of the A. F. L. bureaucracy here will invigorate a general offensive on the part of the workers to make the unions progressive, clean fighting organizations. It will be the signal to the workers to rally behind a militant leadership against the oncoming new open shop drive. A victory of the needle workers will facilitate a victory for the miners against the Lewis bureaucracy; and with redoubled strength militant labor will be able to meet the great task of organizing the unorganized, the struggle for the forty-hour five-day week, higher wages and a general forward movement of labor.

The struggle of the furriers is the cause of the entire militant labor movement. Support the furriers.

STRIKING THE ENEMIES



Notes on the Furriers Strike

By JACK HARVEY

JUNE 3.—The furriers strike is on today following an enthusiastic mobilization meeting held last night at Cooper Union, with an overflow meeting at Manhattan Lyceum. The enthusiasm reached the highest pitch when the striking furriers of the Newark local, led by their business agent Morris Langer, one of the militants expelled by the reactionaries, marched into the hall singing "Solidarity Forever".

The picket demonstration held this morning was very successful. Over 5,000 furriers were in the picket lines. It is estimated that from the shops of the Associated Fur Manufacturers, who have refused to recognize the Joint Board and forced their workers to register with the A. F. L. "reorganization committee", about 60 per cent of the workers have come down and this is expected to mount to 75 per cent by Monday.

After the picket, demonstration mass meetings were held in Webster Hall and Manhattan Lyceum with both of which were jammed with about 4,000 enthusiastic fur workers. Both meetings unanimously adopted resolutions calling for a 10 per cent weekly assessment on

those going back to work in settled shops. This includes the furriers working for the trimming bosses and independents, who were called down for a demonstration of solidarity but who are going back to work on Monday.

Successful Mass Picketing

JUNE 6.—I was on the furriers market this morning, and my impression, corroborated by every one else that I spoke to, is that the mass picketing was a tremendous success, over 5,000 participating and being concentrated in two square blocks. The uniformed police, Industrial squad and bomb squad were well represented and on the job. Many fights took place. I witnessed four of them myself, each one gathering crowds of about a thousand. At one moment the captain of the Industrial squad became nervous and while the police was dispersing the pickets, fired a shot in the air. A number of arrests took place. Accidentally among those arrested was a prominent right winger, who displayed a gun while attempting to intimidate the pickets. This is the gentleman who several years ago split open Gold's head at a meeting of the Furriers union.

AFL Reactionaries Demand Severe Sentences for Pickets

JUNE 8.—According to both the New York Times and the Women's Wear, the clothing trades daily, about 500 uniformed and plain clothes policemen are "taking care" of the fur market. The bosses and the reactionary union smashers have made claims that less than 500 furriers have left the shops. This means more than one armed cop for each striker. Not so bad for the furriers.

But the bosses and the A. F. L. reactionaries are not satisfied. A delegation from the "reorganization committee", headed by the state organizer of the A. F. L. Frayne, visited the police commissioner and asked him for more police "protection". Edward McGrady, A. F. L. organizer and member of the "reorganization committee", in an interview complained that the police courts are "too easy" on the arrested pickets and demanded that severe sentences be imposed on them. What leaders of labor these reactionaries are!

Mass picketing is still being carried on very effectively, with the result that more workers are con-

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