

NOTES OF LABOR AND LEFT WING ACTIVITIES IN THE EAST

By JOSEPH ZACK & CHARLES KRUMBEIN.

AN outstanding achievement of the left wing leadership in the Furriers' Union in New York was the organization campaign carried on among the Greek workers engaged in the industry here. Immediately after taking control of the union, the left wing officials, with the support of the rank and file, launched a drive to organize the bloc of Greeks who, unorganized, constituted a menace to the organized workers. The result was that, after a very short strike, they organized about 1,000 or 1,100 workers and won almost all the Greeks in the fur industry.

The left wing leadership in the I. L. G. W. U. also carried on an organization campaign thru which some 4,000 new members were added to the union.

THE organization campaigns in both these unions were carried on in a manner very different from that which had been used by the reactionary bureaucracy in the past. The left wing leadership drew the membership of the unions into the campaign, and rank and file, organizing on the job, were to a large extent responsible for the success of the drives.

Organizing Textile Workers in Passaic.

THE organization methods employed in Passaic were very different from those used in the organized needle trades. In Passaic there was no organization, not even the semblance of a union. The objective conditions, however, were ripe for organization and struggle. A number of militant workers employed there proceeded to organize councils in the textile mills. These councils were later organized on a mass basis—in one instance involving eight or nine hundred members. They began to propagate demands for the improvement of the workers' conditions, with the result that strikes took place.

THE procedure followed was this:

One strike was called—in the Botany mills, and then these workers were used to picket other mills, with the result that within a few days mill after mill came out. The first day forty or fifty would come out, the second day half of the entire mill would follow suit; by the third day all the workers in the mill would be out.

The United Front Committee was then formed, consisting of representatives of the various councils. In this way thousands of workers were organized in a completely unorganized textile city.

In the Building Trades.

THE building trades are more or less well organized; that is, insofar as new work or buildings is concerned. There are a number of crafts, however, that have no organization.

One of them is the plumbers' helpers. The policy followed by the militant workers, there was to organize clubs of plumbers' helpers. A mass meeting was called and a committee elected to go to the plumbers' union and demand that the helpers be organized. As a result of the propaganda and agitation carried on by the helpers the plumbers have been forced to take some action. They called a meeting of the helpers and the prospects are that steps will soon be taken to organize them into the union.

ANOTHER unorganized craft in the building trades is that of the hardware setters. The hardware setters come under the jurisdiction of the carpenters. But while they work with carpenters they work piece work, are driven at top speed, and receive less wages for longer hours than do the carpenters, who are organized, on the same job. These hardware setters have organized themselves into a club and demanded better conditions. When these demands were turned down they went out on strike. The policy being followed by the militants among them is to prevail upon the carpenters' union to take them into the organization, and methods are being employed similar to those used by the plumbers' helpers.

AFURTHER organizational step was undertaken in the case of the mill men—inside carpenters, glaziers, etc.—who went out on strike for better conditions.

Organizing Clubs.

THIS policy of organizing clubs as a means of exerting pressure on the existing trade unions to take in unorganized workers was followed also in the case of a strike of mill men—inside carpenters, glaziers, etc. There are four international unions existing to which these mill men are eligible. Had the strikers depended only on the internationals to carry on their struggle, or had they gone into the different unions individually, the result would have been either neglect of the situation by one or the other of the internationals for their own particular craft, thus demoralizing the strikers. The decision, therefore, was to form a club, and that this club act as an organization to negotiate with the bosses. Victory was obtained and the bosses recognized the club. The plan then was to strengthen and increase the membership of the clubs so as to force consideration from the unions thru the pressure of numbers, and thus compel the international to organize these workers. This plan is being carried out.

Thus the unorganized workers in the building trades, thru the action of the militants among them, are gradually compelling the existing unions to take them in and conduct organization campaigns.

THERE is a drive now going on to organize the unskilled workers in Greek restaurants in Newark. The situation in these restaurants has

tion by the internationals or else a been most deplorable, especially because of the employment system used. The owner of the restaurant, in most cases a Greek, brings some of his countrymen over, pays their expenses, and then ties them down to 12 or 15 hours of work to meet this outlay. They get the worst kind of food to eat. Naturally these conditions made organization possible.

Clubs of unskilled workers were established and strikes called. This had to be done since the A. F. of L. local of food workers in Newark takes in only skilled workers—cooks and waiters—giving no consideration to the unskilled. This union, however, has been giving the clubs whatever aid they could, giving them office space, speakers and other moral support which is essential in the situation.

THE striking workers attempted to put economic pressure on the restaurant owners by prevailing upon organized workers not to patronize these restaurants. The result was a series of injunctions against the strikers. As each injunction involved an expense of \$400 to \$500 the owners sustained considerable financial loss. Several of the smaller restaurant owners yielded the strikers' demands. The big restaurant owners, however, are backing the drive against the strikers, and now the bosses have organized an association. At the present time the strike is still going on. About 250 workers have joined the clubs.

In the Metal Trades.

IN the metal industry of New York and vicinity we find that about 80,000 metal workers are unorganized. There are two unions existing in this country—the International Association of Machinists, with a few thousand members, and the Amalgamated Metal Workers, with a few hundred members. The existence of these two competing organizations, small tho they both are, is a hindrance to unionization. The problem is one of amalgamation of the two unions. Steps are being taken now to this end. The fight for amalgamation in the metal industry is being strongly pushed by the T. U. E. L.

Among the Bakers.

HERE we have also two organizations in the field—bakers' locals of the Amalgamated Food Workers and of the American Federation of Labor. Both are mass organizations. The conflicts that take place between these organizations, however, even when they carry on joint campaigns, makes amalgamation of the two unions essential. The question is now being taken up with good prospects for success.

Shoe Industry.

A CAMPAIGN for the amalgamation of the American Shoe Workers' Union and the Shoe Workers' Protective Union has been carried on by active militants of the T. U. E. L. The Protective Union has about 2,000 members, the American has about 5,000 members. The latter is a bosses' union, but thru the activity of the militants in the industry the rank and file members are being gradually won over and we are beginning to see the company union gradually transforming into a union for struggle. This will give considerable aid to the move for amalgamation. These two unions are now on the verge of amalgamation.

Expulsions.

WHILE the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union was the first to start the policy of expulsion of members of the T. U. E. L. and active militants generally, it was the last. The same policy has been tried by other unions than those in the needle trades.

The Association of Machinists decided on the expulsion policy. It proved so unsuccessful, however, that they tried to back out. An opposite bloc formed in the union with a program which had as one of its plank opposition to the expulsion policy. The result was that the policy was stopped.

THE painters at a recent convention decided to put a clause in their constitution to expel all Communists, all members of the workers' party, all members of the T. U. E. L. This policy, however, cannot be put into effect until it is approved of by a referendum vote of the membership. Meanwhile an active campaign is being carried on against this policy.

Boston Waitresses Get Average Wages of \$8 Beside Tips

BOSTON, Sept. 14.—Waitresses' conditions in Boston are among the worst in the country, reports Bee Tumber, international organizer for the hotel and restaurant employes' union. There are 3,000 waitresses in Boston, she said, and the average gets only \$8 a week in wages and has to depend on tips. This side money sometimes amounts to only \$6, \$7 or \$8 extra. Where wages are better the extra sometimes forbid acceptance of tips and girls are compelled to pay for their own meals.

Boot and Shoe Holds Convention Sept. 20

ROCHESTER, N. Y., Sept. 14.—The Boot and Shoe Workers' Union holds its biennial convention in Rochester September 20.

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