

The Open Shop Drive in the Needle Trades

By Joseph Zack

THE government dissolved the two Joint Boards of the cloak and dressmakers union and of the furriers, leaders arrested, martial law has been declared in the areas where the needle workers work and congregate. "The union has been reorganized by a committee headed by Sigman, Schachtman, Woll, Grady and Frayne, which has the support of the employers, and the workers were ordered to join the reorganized union under pain of discharge. Deportation, arrests, etc., many of those who refused were threatened with dire consequences.

I am sure it would be a surprise to you to see a few headlines like these appearing in the newspapers, depicting the fight of the A. F. L. bureaucracy against the left wing. You are accustomed to read, "A. F. L. Dissolves Joint Board", "Leaders Arrested on A. F. L. Charges of Advocating Violence Against Property and for Wholesale Bribery", "A. F. L. Appoints Reorganization Committee to Take Charge of the Defunct Joint Board", "Employers Recognize the International, Affiliated with the A. F. L.", "Workers are Registering with the International", etc., etc.

A Fight of the Bosses Against the Union

If the truth were to be told by the capitalist press, describing the support of the local government, employers associations, Civic Federation, etc., as it is in life, the first set of headlines would be a more correct interpretation of events now transpiring in the needle trades. I doubt whether among the 200,000 needle workers in New York the A. F. L. leaders could get 5,000 to voluntarily follow them. I am sure the right wing could not get 200 active unionists to volun-

teer their services for their dirty work. Take away the support of the local government, the Police Department, courts, and the bosses associations, and there would be no fight, because the workers are in the overwhelming majority on one side—against Sigman, Schachtman, Woll, etc.

For all practical purposes this is a fight between the bosses associations supported by the government, the capitalist press, Woll and company, and on the other side the unions represented by the Joint Boards. But the bosses have a big advantage. They are able to use the union label and union auspices and thus fool many workers in their attempt to establish a boss controlled union. To put it pictorially, suppose you see a gigantic capitalist exploitation machine, Matthew Woll, as the A. F. L. priest, is in front and sprinkling the holy water of unionism, and with great ceremonies a tiny paper is pasted on that machine. Then come nearer, and you find it is the A. F. L. union label. This is the role the A. F. L. leadership is playing in this fight: It is riveting the chains of exploitation on the needle workers.

Effects on Working Conditions

The workers, after having won their long struggles the 40 hour week, substantial wage increases, are beginning to understand the game. They feel it in the worsened conditions in the shops. Overtime is not being paid, piece prices are fixed downward. There is plenty of smuggling below the fixed wage scale. The workers do not trust Sigman and Schachtman's business agents. They therefore seek to adjust shop grievances as best they can, as the boss does not recognize the Joint Board business agents (the lefts). As to where the work-

ers stand, well, the Joint Board calls a Madison Square Garden meeting (20,000) and it will be packed full of cloakmakers or furriers. But if Woll and company call one in Bellevue Hall (1,200) they will have hard luck.

There is a crisis in the industry, employment is low, the seasons seem to get shorter and shorter every year. Still, under left wing leadership the workers were able to increase wages appreciably and shorten hours. The bosses could not lick the union in the strike. Now however, assisted by the A. F. L. bureaucracy, they see their opportunity and they are taking advantage of it to establish open shop conditions in the industry. Many of the workers in the shops now feel like after a defeat. They are laying low, exhausted by long struggles. But they are grinding their teeth in resentment against the A. F. L. bureaucracy. The union spirit is there. The workers despite the long struggles and bad conditions, have contributed over \$200,000 to the fight and more of it is coming. This is rank and file money. It represents a tremendous moral strength.

Woll and company, heading the Civic Federation do not leave unused a single weapon of this body of open shop employers, no matter how low and despicable, to defeat the workers and force them under the yoke of this treacherous gang. There was a veritable reign of injunctions against the Joint Board. The police gangsters known as the Industrial Squad led the gangsters of the underworld employed by Woll and company in an onslaught upon the pickets of the Joint Board. The leaders were framed up and thrown into jail; union information given in confidence to Woll and company, as

union officials, was betrayed to the police and lies were added to it in regular provocateur style. This is the unionism of Mathew Woll, Green, Sigman, Schachtman and company; the blackest nightmare that has ever come to reality.

Workers Undefeated

With all this it would be the greatest error to think that the needle workers have been defeated. There never was an army that became so compact as a result of a righteous struggle, and they learned something. A much more class conscious body of union men and women has come out of this battle. Already there are strong indications of the tide turning from despairing resentment and opposition to a counter attack against the employers and their straw men the trade union bureaucracy. Unionism in the needle trades has gotten set back at the hands of the employers in the past.

This time the employers partially succeeded with the assistance of the A. F. L. bureaucracy to wrest from the workers the fruits of their recent strikes.

But this will be a short lived victory. Morally this body of workers is more solid than ever and already there are conspicuous breaks in the employers ranks as shown by the action of the Fur Trimming Employers Association in their signing with the Joint Board. There are breaks appearing in the right wing ranks. The left wing is preparing for a new offensive with the fur workers in the vanguard. Out of this ordeal unionism will emerge stronger than ever in the needle trades industry and the first big nails in the coffin of the A. F. L. bureaucracy is in Woll and company are being driven by the workers in the needle trades.

The U. S. in Nicaragua

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was obliged to accept the terms laid down by the U. S. representative.

The terms provide for confirmation of Diaz as President, unconditional surrender of the Liberals, new elections at the expiration of Diaz's term of office (the elections to be supervised by the United States), more or less permanent occupation of Nicaragua, by the U. S. marines, who are to become the "Nicaraguan national constabulary".

Thus a new chapter is written in the history of Monroe Doctrine aggression, under the slogan, first expressed by Roosevelt, of exercise of "an international police power" in the western hemisphere.

What has American labor to say to this imperial game of Wall Street and Washington, which reaches not only into Latin America, but into the Far East and to the four corners of the world?

Not only because international labor solidarity demands it, but also because our own interests require it, we must fight the imperialist policy of American Big Business every inch of the way.

In the Nicaraguan outrage, we have a special responsibility because the A. F. of L. is affiliated with the Nicaraguan trade unions through the so-called Pan American Federation of Labor, of which William Green is president. Yet neither Green, nor the executive council of the A. F. of L., nor the executive committee of the P. A. F. of L. (controlled by Green) has had a word to say about it.

Does Mr. Green accept the "Peace of Nicaragua?"

Chicago Building Workers

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appeared in Chicago and signed a new agreement.

This agreement in its essence was to some degree even worse than the notorious Landis Award. It carried one clause reading as follows: "There shall be no restriction of the use of any raw or manufactured material, except prison-made." Naturally, since the signing of this agreement the closed shop practically disappeared and the carpenters were handling non-union made trim. The big non-union mills imported non-union made material from other states and established warehouses in Chicago for storage of such material. Generally, it served only to help break down conditions and particularly to weaken the position of the organized millmen.

Hutchinson Favored Proposed Wage-Cut

In line with this policy, pursued by Wm. Hutchinson and followed by the Harry Jensen administration of the Chicago District Council, an International representative by the name of Orris arrived in Chicago, some time ago. When the employers first proposed the present wage cut he appeared before Local No. 1922, of the carpenters bawling the unfair competition from other states which the local mill owners had to meet and declared himself, therefore, in favor of the wage cut. Since then the determined attitude of the union millmen has compelled him to cease his eager support of the manufacturers.

Following the action of the International Brotherhood disaffiliating from the building trades department, the Chicago Carpenters District Council has remained outside

of the Chicago Building Trades Council. Furthermore, when some attempts were made toward united action by the building trades unions in straightening up the jobs in the city, the Harry Jensen administration refused to lend any assistance. However, despite all the opposition developing within the union, this administration managed to hang on and maintain its rule or ruin policy. Of course, election steals and like methods had to be resorted to. Now the Harry Jensen machine is cracking. For the District Council elections this coming June several of his old supporters are out for his job.

Belated efforts are now being made by the Carpenters District Council to give some assistance to the locked-out millmen. The Council has decided not to handle material from the locked-out mills and a general weekly assessment of \$1.00 per member on the 33,000 carpenters in the city is being proposed. If such support had been maintained in the past the locked-out millmen would today be in an even stronger position.

Progressive Program for District Council

The progressive carpenters in the last year's council elections put forward their own slate and advanced measures to secure closed shop conditions. They won the elections and were kept out only by the steals performed by the Jensen administration. This year the progressive caucus again comes forward with a slate and a progressive platform. Point No. 5 has direct relation to the millmen's situation. It reads as follows: "To work for the organization of all mills. Only union material to be

used on union jobs. No reduction of millmen's wages."

Fred Bobzin, Local Union No. 62, who was last year's candidate for District Council President on the progressive slate, this year also heads their ticket. The candidates of the progressive carpenters are pledged to work for the following program:

1. Affiliation to the Building Trades Council (and the Building Trades Department of the A. F. of L.)
2. A five-day (40-hour week) for the purpose of reducing unemployment.
3. Against arbitration agreements with speed-up clauses, and for the establishment of a form of stewardship that will give full protection to the men on the job.
4. To work for the enactment of provisions and working rules that will enable our aged members to work on a job and earn their living.
5. To work for the organization of all mills. Only union material to be used on union jobs. No reduction of millmen's wages.
6. Salaries of officers not to exceed 40% over the wage scale paid to journeymen carpenters.

The fight now launched by the Millmen Employers' Association against the union is an indication portend of what is going to come. Without any question of a doubt the Building Trades Employers as a whole, backed by the financial and industrial interests, are marking time watching their opportunity to join in the attack. This should be a serious warning to the building trades unions that only a united front of all trades can effectively meet such an attack.