

The Massacre at Hammond

By H. M. WICKS.

HAMMOND, Indiana, can now be added to the long and ever increasing list of towns the mention of which conjures up in the minds of class conscious workers the spectacle of brutal massacre. There on Tuesday, September 9th, the thugs and gunmen in the employ of the Standard Steel Company, assisted by the police force of the city of Hammond, prepared another page in the blood streaked history of the American labor movement.

The strike in the Standard Steel works dates from July 18th, when the workers who had been recently organized struck for a raise in wages. One of the first acts of the corporation and the petty authorities of the city of Hammond was to bring about a condition which gave them an excuse to call in the state militia. Goodrich, the governor of the state, ordered the militia into the district where it remained until a week ago, as it was apparent there was no desire on the part of the strikers to precipitate violence. Since the withdrawal of the troops the thugs who are employed by the corporation have repeatedly attempted to provoke acts of violence on the part of the strikers, as an excuse to prevent them from picketing. The strikers had secured a federal judicial decision giving them right to picket and resented any infringement upon that right. For many days it had been rumored around Hammond that blood was to be spilled in order to stop the strike. Finally on Monday the police thugs of the corporation announced that on Tuesday morning there would be serious disturbances. The police force of Hammond were ordered to be prepared to assist the corporation thugs, a moving picture machine was placed where the operator could secure a picture of the scene and the drama of bloodshed was produced as per schedule.

There were about two hundred workmen, guarded by the police who had been marching into the plant in a body for a number of days. The strikers would gather within three or four blocks of the works endeavoring to influence the scabs. The police determined to disperse them and on Tuesday morning deliberately started the massacre. The strikers had heard reports of the threat of the police to cause bloodshed, so one of their number, Thos. Skuba, a returned soldier, in full uniform and carrying an American flag, led the strikers. Most of the men were foreigners who had been employed at the plant for two or three years. During the war they, like all the other slaves, had been surfeited with drivel about "democracy" and "freedom" and were told that the American flag symbolized these two abstractions. Hence they considered themselves perfectly safe in carrying on their demonstration under the flag.

As soon as the police arrived upon the scene they attempted to disperse the men and used violent tactics in the attempt. A uniformed policeman tore the flag from the hands of the soldier and threw it upon the ground and then arrested the flag bearer. This act disillusioned the strikers and at that moment they realized the fact that emblems such as the flag exist as subjects of patriotic orators, but are really meaningless when workmen attempt to exercise their so-called constitutional "right" under them. The next act on the part of the police was to draw their revolvers and aim them at the strikers. As some of the men in the front ranks turned to tell the others to disperse the first volley from the revolvers, rifles and sawed-off shot-guns was fired directly into the crowd, rapidly followed by other volleys. This continued for only the short period of two minutes, but after the crowd had dispersed the scene resembled a battlefield. There were twenty two bodies upon the ground, some writhing in agony, others had been killed instantly. Many others, including two women and a number of children were wounded and the strikers could be seen dragging many of their wounded from the field of battle. Ambulances soon arrived and it was learned that three of the victims had been instantly killed. Their bodies were removed to a morgue and the wounded taken to hospitals, where one of them died later in the day. At the morgue it was learned that all the dead had been shot in the back as they turned to disperse. That fact alone gives the lie to the capitalist press, which claimed the strikers had assaulted the police. There was only one policeman injured and his injury was caused by a fall and not in the conflict. If the strikers had been armed, as reported, some of the thugs and the gunmen would have been killed or at least injured.

The scene in the district following the massacre was indescribably horrible. At least fifty men, women and children had received gun shot wounds and were being cared for by strikers and their families. Other women and children who were unable to locate their husbands and fathers attempted to approach the bodies upon the field, but were held back by the police. Dozens of houses in the district show hundreds of marks where bullets and gun shot penetrated.

While the massacre was being perpetrated the moving picture operator, who was stationed on the roof of a nearby hotel calmly took pictures of the whole affair. That fact is significant and lends support to the charge that the slaughter of the strikers was deliberately premeditated by the police thugs.

The corporation owned paper of Hammond and also the daily press of Chicago declared the strike-breakers were Americans who had decided to return to work, while those who remained out on strike were foreigners influenced by the radical agitators. While most of the strikers are people of foreign birth a large number of the strike breakers are also aliens. If it is true that the majority of the scabs were Americans it is certainly a comment on the intelligence of the 'free born American working-man', and again justifies the charge that the American slaves are the most stupid on earth. As most of the population of Hammond is foreign born it is natural the majority of the strikers should also be foreigners. The statement that the scabs are all Americans is simply cheap propaganda on the part of the hirelings of the Standard Steel Car Company for the purpose of intimidating the strikers. Some of the dollar patriots are offering their services free to the Hammond police department and by accident a writer for The Communist, while sitting in the police station trying to get an interview with some of the participants in the murders, overheard a telephone conversation between the sergeant of police and one Dave Emory, who is connected with the principal banking establishment of Hammond. Emory requested to be sworn in as a special policeman, along with a number of his friends, so they could help "clean out the damned foreigners." The patriotic gag is still being employed by the employers in the industries of the country, wherever there are any labor disturbances. There have been threats from the employers that every person who participates in the strike shall be driven from the district.

The strikers at Hammond have been taught the same lesson the ruling class of this country taught the workers in all the industrial struggles of recent years. That lesson is that those who are supposed to uphold law and order have absolutely no respect for so-called constitutional rights, when workingmen attempt to exercise them, and that the police and the armed force of the state are maintained in the interest of the ruling class and against the workers.

The labor question is not a question of "right" or "wrong" but a question of power.

The new organization in Hammond has received its baptism in blood. Let us hope it emerges from this experience with an understanding of the true significance of the struggle, and the members come to realize the necessity for militant organization of the workers for the purpose of destroying the system that makes possible such needless slaughter of the workers.

The Communist Party is now a fact. It calls upon every conscious worker to rally to its support. Our first requirement is to build a solid, disciplined, while organization. Then—the revolutionary struggle. Comrades—act!