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All Power To The Workers!

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Five Cents

The Steel Strike

THE strike of the steel workers is a revolt against intolerable conditions, a revolt the explosive forces of which have been accumulating for 27 years.

Since the ruthless, bloody crushing of the Homestead strike in 1892, and particularly since the organization of the Steel Trust in 1902, the workers in the steel industry have been the most abject of slaves.

All efforts of the steel workers to organize unions in the past have been baffled by espionage and discharges. All the most modern methods of fleecing the workers, such as "the task and bonus" system, have been adopted in the steel industry. Wages have been frightfully low, and the workers have been robbed by various company schemes bordering on actual peonage. Steel mill towns are a sort of baronial estate, where church and government are in the pay of the steel barons. Protest was crushed by the triple power of the company secret service, the church and the local governments.

Much capital is being made concerning increases in the steel workers' wages during the war. The figures used are shamelessly garbled. But even these figures tell a terrible story. They try to prove that the steel workers' wages during the past five years have increased 20 per cent more than the cost of living. These figures are not accurate; but let us accept them. In five years the workers' conditions have improved 20 per cent—but these workers five years ago were, according to bourgeois investigators such as John A. Fitch, living in sub-human conditions. Splendid improvement, indeed!

The final answer to all these garbled statements of "improvements" is the workers' revolt itself. The workers are determined to conquer real improvements; and as they struggle for this lesser objective they will develop the consciousness of the larger objective—the conquest of Capitalism.

For the steel strike is much more than an ordinary strike. It is, in the first place, a strike in the basic industry of the nation; and, in the second place, it is a strike of the unskilled, who have not been corrupted by craft unionism and petty bourgeois aspirations, as have the dominating elements of the railway unions. This strike thrusts directly at the heart of Capitalism; and Capitalism realizes the menace.

The general sentiment in the capitalist press, among the employers and government officials is: "It has come to a test. We must crush this strike, in order to assure the submission of the workers in other industries." The strike, according to Senator Thomas, is a "national menace."

The strike is a national menace—a menace to the Capitalism of our nation. There are more than 300,000 men on strike, involving about 20 states—the scope of this strike is unprecedented. In 1912, a strike of 25,000 workers in Lawrence made Capitalism tremble; what might not come of this strike of 300,000, in a basic industry

and among workers the most oppressed in the country?

The steel strike comes as the climax of a series of aggressive strikes that have convulsed the country since the armistice. Every strike has contributed to the general unrest and developed a new spirit of proletarian aggression. The steel strike is the mightiest and most potential of them all—it is not alone a challenge to the most powerful industrial empire in the United States, it is equally a challenge to the government. Victory in this strike means

NO MUNITIONS TO RUSSIA!

The Seattle longshoremen, backed by the Labor Council in their determination to share no responsibility for shipping munitions to kill our Russian brothers, have refused to unload twenty-one cars, approximately 65,000 rifles and machine guns, aboard ship Waterhouse. Stevedoring company turned materials back to government and will not handle.

This action is interpreted by the Seattle Union Record:

"Cases believed to contain ammunition, rifles and machine guns consigned to Russia are sitting unmoved on Pier 5, the Frank Waterhouse & Co. dock, Thursday as the result of a car gang of twelve men walking off the job following their demands to know what the cases contained.

"This action follows the passage of a resolution by the Central Labor Council indorsing the action of waterfront workers in their planned refusal to ship munitions to kill Russian workers.

"According to the men, they reported for work Thursday morning as usual and began loading the cases when the question was asked as to their contents. After some further questioning a customs officer was called and opened some of the cases, one of the workers declared, displaying their war-like contents. The men immediately got together and refused to continue the loading.

"Longshoremen on the waterfront have been warned to keep a careful watch for rifles concealed in innocent appearing packages."

weakening the prestige of Capitalism and the state, and correspondingly increasing the aggressive spirit of the workers.

Capitalism and the state realize the vast issues involved; and they are acting. They are acting according to the good old plan—the use of armed force.

From the first armed force was used against the steel workers during the organization period. Thousands were discharged; dozens of union men and organizers were killed. The strike started peacefully, but the Trust and its government agents immediately resorted to armed force. The armed force mobilized against the strike is enormous; each company has its own guards, consisting of thugs; then scabs are being sworn in as deputy sheriffs; in McKeesport and other cities thousands of "citizens" are being formed into guards, much as the bourgeois White Guards in Russia, Finland, Germany and Hungary. That is not all. These are simply extra-legal armed forces; the legal armed forces consist of the Coal and Iron Police, the Municipal Police and the State Constabulary. It is no exaggeration to say that about 50,000 armed persons have

been mobilized against the strike, and behind it all lurks the army.

But the strikers are not frightened. They are firm, inspired by the struggle and by the spirit of solidarity. Their determination is magnificent, and their numbers daily grow larger.

Officially, it is an A. F. of L. strike, and that is a real danger. The temper of the men and women is uncompromising, they are determined on a struggle to the end. But at any moment the A. F. of L. officials may become cowed by the state, may begin to seek compromise, may break the spirit of the strike and disorganize its forces. They may try to avoid struggle and seek compromise. Gompers is not very enthusiastic about the strike; at least one International Union of the A. F. of L. has threatened to expel any local union that joins the strike; while John Fitzpatrick, chairman of the Strike Committee, declares that the strike will end if an Arbitration Commission meets to decide the issues.

The workers in other industries must realize that this steel strike is their strike, that its issues affect them all. Affiliated trades must join the strike, particularly the railroad workers; the steel strike must become a general strike, forcing Capitalism to its knees. Already some railway unions in the Middle West have refused to transport ore, while three marine unions, 80 per cent of the ships on the lakes transporting ore, have decided for a sympathetic strike, also presenting their own demands.

But the A. F. of L. will discourage making the steel strike general. Warren S. Stone, grand chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, speaking on behalf of the Railway Brotherhoods who are favoring the Plumb Plan (which certain half-baked radicals hail as "revolutionary"), declares that the railway unions will under no circumstances engage in a sympathetic strike. That is to say, union railway workers will transport ore and steel for the scabs, thereby directly contributing to break the strike.

The steel workers must watch out for A. F. of L. betrayals. Other workers must realize their duty to the steel strikers. There must be a general strike, solidarity of action.

This strike is of the utmost importance. What may happen is still in the future, but big things may come. This challenge to Capitalism must not end in defeat—a defeat for the whole working class. This gigantic struggle may become the turning point of the American working class movement; the forces of Capitalism may convert the strike into the 1905 of the American proletarian revolution. Who knows?

But this we know, the American workers are preparing to act—are acting. Our task is to participate in this action, to make the strike general, to make it conscious of its larger purposes, to develop the general political strike that will break the power of Capitalism and initiate the dictatorship of the proletariat—all power to the workers!