

# The Building Trades Situation

A sharp decline in building totals for the first quarter of 1929 in the metropolitan area of New York and the 37 states east of the Rocky Mountains is reported by Thomas S. Holden, vice-president of the F. W. Dodge Corporation. This is a report of the building condition committee of the New York Building Congress and constitutes a survey of building construction for the periods of the first three months of 1928 and 1929. The comparative figures are \$254,933,000 for the 1929 quarter and \$378,280,800 for the 1928 quarter.

While the fakers of the building trades unions say everything is yet "jake" in the building industry, building is on the increase, unemployment is nominal, etc., the cold figures of this report show something else. Building totals declined for the period given a total of 33% for the New York Metropolitan area and a decline of 15% is noted for the 37 states. This in fact means a decline of such proportions for the entire United States, since 91% of building in the United States is carried on in these Eastern states.

## Reasons for Decline

To an extent this decline for the first quarter is explained by the increase in money rates in this period thru the orgy of gambling or speculation in recent weeks in the stock market when call money reached astounding proportions. The building trades industry requires large outlays of ready money for wages, materials, etc., and swift and large credit facilities. But the tightening of cash and credit facilities for this period does not explain away such a sharp slump in the first quarter of 1929 over the same period a year ago. The report of the committee attributes the slump to "slackened demand and unsettled credit conditions." In this time, industrial and commercial building gained, while public works and utilities contracts decreased over the whole country, except in New York where educational buildings increased. The report notes the trend of decreasing residential building throughout the country.

The decline reflects itself in the increase of unemployment or part time work among the building trades workers generally with isolated exceptions in some localities. The officials of the building trades unions hide their heads in the sands and content themselves with the prospects of huge projects of public utilities and governmental building on national, state and local scales. They accept "Hooverian prosperity" and promises, but take no steps to strengthen the fighting qualities of the unions for the time now approaching when the building contractors will push systematically and in a concerted manner for lower wage scales, longer hours and speeded production. The reactionary union officialdom is contenting itself with day-to-day adjustments. Still, they know that the building corporations and contractors will not stop at efforts to "adjust credit facilities", but will intensify even more the rationalization process in the building industry. Machine methods are being introduced with precision and speed into all trades of the industry, bringing with them the concomitant of unemployment first, and next, demands by the employers for wage reductions, longer hours, etc.

Building trades workers are especially affected with the illusions of public works and utilities construction by the government when times are hard. There is need for these to be broken down among them and all workers, and instead preparations made for forthcoming struggles: strikes, lockouts, etc.

## The Public Works Illusion

"Prosperity reserve" is the name given to the illusion of public works construction in times of depression. On occasion capitalism utilizes such and similar projects as "stop-gaps". They offer no permanent solution to the unemployment problem which grows constantly and maintains its permanent character.

Capitalism cannot ever stop unemployment, but only increase and aggravate the situation. The federal or state governments may provide

for such works through taxation. But the practical result usually is that capital is merely shifted from other capital investments, industries and manufacture, and other groups feel the sharp whip of unemployment. Under such conditions, capital often holds off from going industries or does not develop new enterprises.

The building trades workers yet retain these illusions and many more, and pride themselves as aristocrats of labor. But if they will not learn from other workers in America and other countries, they will nevertheless have to concern themselves with growing problems arising out of their industry. The building trade employers are certain to attempt to

# Fight for Mooney and Billings

Recent months have seen exposure piled on exposure of all the sordid details of the frame-up which sent Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings to the Penitentiary for Life terms. From the perjury of the notorious "cattleman" Frank Oxman to the lying evidence of Estelle Smith, the long list of witnesses who passed through the court to put a noose around the necks of the two California labor fighters have been revealed as a troop of bribed characters among whom prostitutes, pimps, gamblers, dope fiends, and forgers whose tongues moved in court in tune with the money paid them out of the funds of California's business men. Rarely, if ever at all, has there been so bald and outrageous an instance of class "justice" inflicted upon workers.

## Twelve Years in Prison

Mooney and Billings have been imprisoned now for almost twelve years. Their case has served not only to blacken the already reactionary nature of the capitalist courts and the whole machinery of "justice" in this country. It has also served as a black mark against the labor movement of the United States. The labor misleaders at the head of the trade union movement in this country, had they been moved by any genuine desires to obtain the release of the prisoners, could have accomplished this aim long ago. But their only intervention in the fight for liberation has always been to attack and seek to discredit every serious working class movement organized to free the victims of the frame-up system. From the days of the fight of the International Workers Defense League, organized on the Pacific Coast by the radicals, to the time—last year—when the International Labor Defense reopened the national agitation for the two men, the role of the A. F. of L. bureaucrats has been that of persistent sabotage.

For our part, we are for the release of Mooney and Billings in the interests of the working class, and NOT for the purpose of whitewashing the corrupt judicial institutions of capitalism WHOSE BASIC PURPOSE is the frame-up and imprisonment of the Moonneys, Billingses, Barnetts, Lambs, McInerneys, Malkins, MacNamaras, and the scores of other class war prisoners: WHOSE BASIC PURPOSE is the legal murder of the Joe Hills, the Saccos and the Vanzettis. The Mooney-Billings case is part and parcel of the essential and inevitable work of the capitalist courts, and those who seek to free Mooney and Billings by erasing the "discredit on the whole system of justice"—that is, capitalist justice—are preparing the ground for the commission of new Mooney-Billings frame-ups, new Sacco-Vanzetti murders.

## Only the Workers Can Free Them

When Mooney and Billings are liberated it will be due only to the organized demand of the American workers and the labor movement of the rest of the world. It is good that numerous public men not associated with the labor movement have demanded their release. This demonstrates further the obviousness of the prisoners' innocence. But to leave the liberation movement in their hands alone would

hammer down the wages of the workers, to increase their hours, despite the fact that the profits are the largest ever. The conscious rank and file in the building trades must endeavor more systematically and patiently than ever to draw the mass of the building trades workers to fight for a program to include among other points, the following: A six hour day and a five day week, with no reduction in wages. Amalgamation of the building trades into one industrial union to effect a stronger fighting front against the bosses; establishment of unemployment insurance to be paid by the employers and the government and administered by local trade union committees elected by the membership; And, then, the membership must begin to think in terms of struggle as a working class against the capitalist class in a struggle for political power.—

M. A.

serve to weaken the movement. It was these same "respectable gentlemen" who split the Sacco-Vanzetti movement, who turned back to their own class when the working class began to move into the streets and demand the liberation of the Massachusetts martyrs in plain language.

The opportunity is still at hand for the working class elements, particularly its advanced section, to organize, strengthen and lead the liberation movement. The International Labor Defense, which began the campaign under such good auspices last year, has fumbled the opportunity for the moment. The faction agents of Stalin who were recently foisted upon the I. L. D. are interested primarily in their revolting factional jockeying, and only secondarily in the class war fighters in prison. The reestablishment of the basic principles upon which the I. L. D. was organized and built up is immediately necessary. The defense work of the movement cannot be a hunting preserve of Party factionalists.

The movement for Mooney and Billings must be revived on a national scale, with the support of every worker and every working class organization in the country. The prison gates must be forced open and the two fighters be returned to the ranks of the working class from which they were torn by our class enemies.

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