

LETTERS FROM THE MILITANTS

The NEW YORK BUILDING TRADES

New York, N. Y.

Dear Comrades:

Marching the sidewalks of New York looking for employment, one is reminded of the advice by that good fellow known as Prosperity Hoover who suggests that the salvation of the unemployed is to... find employment. Simple as it sounds, it is not quite so simple in its application.

As is known, there is a vast army of workless seeking work not only in New York but throughout the country. It is no exaggeration when we say that the number runs well over 4,000,000 and is still going strong.

Among the industries that have been hard hit is the building trades. In "good" times we always had a few thousands out of work in the industry, but of late the number has soared pretty high. Bricklayers, iron workers, steam fitters, plumbers, painters, tile layers, etc.—about one-third of them are unemployed right now, not to speak of their helpers, laborers, and men who are engaged in the manufacture of building material.

Well, some explanation of this can be found in the report of the Chamber of Commerce that in the year 1929 there was \$360,000,000 less building work done than in the year 1928—a normal year. That is how it looks in general, let us examine the particular trades.

Take the bricklayers, for instance. Today there are concrete buildings coming. It requires less material, less labor to pour in buildings than to lay single bricks. The framework of a building or the iron structure, as we know, is all made and patterned according to the architect's plan. That is also the case with fixtures, window and door frames which are done in shops and put in according to the plans of the building. Such methods have existed in these lines of work for quite some time.

Take the plumbing trade, where practically 100 percent, or at least 90 percent of the pipe work was cut and threaded on the job by union mechanics. It is today cut to sketch, brought on the job and then put together by lead and screwing the fittings together, thus eliminating about 40 percent of the work. Well, if 40 percent of the work is done on the outside, in open shops, how about getting the unemployed plumbers, whose job it is, to demand that this work be given to them? Didn't they get the 40 hour week? What does it matter if union or non-union material comes in?

One of the biggest plumbing bosses in the city, who formerly had about 35 jobs on the go, has now about 10 jobs and not small ones either, but jobs ranging from 48 stories down. On a big job, such as 48 stories, the Durham system is applied or, simply, a screw pipe job. That means that all the piping has to be cut and threaded. In such a structure 12 inch to 3 inch pipe is used. Generally, pipe up to 4 inches or even 6 inches used to be cut on the job, but since 1927, when the plumbers lost their strike, all pipe ranging from 2 inches upward is done to sketch on the outside. This boss has a shop with three machines running two shifts. Employed at this work are young workers or plumbers' helpers who get 50 and 55 cents an hour. One machine alone replaces about 10 sets, that is, ten plumbers and ten helpers. Not only do the labor bureaucrats refrain from getting these machines run by union men but they won't even organize the workers who run them.

In the steamfitting trade it is known that all pipe work ranging from 3-8 inch up is cut to sketch in an open shop. Yet there is new mechanization taking place. The welding of large pipe is beginning to appear in buildings and more and more men are replaced. Where formerly it took 4 sets to do the work, one set can do it more simply and quickly.

That is how it runs in the other trades. The army of unemployed being on the increase, the cutting of wages will take place, hours of work made longer, the unions smashed, etc. However, the building trade proletarian will see all the glorious "prosperity" he enjoyed for a while, gradually fading away. After all it will not be so easy for the building trade worker, after having such a relatively good standard of living, to let it pass by so lightly. He will fight and fight desperately to maintain a standard of living for himself and his family.

The Communists must be on the alert in the growing radicalization of these wor-

struggle. No matter how reactionary the old unions may be, we must get into them and fight with the workers for real militancy, connecting their economic struggle with the political fight for the working class. In the bulk of the building trades today, it is absolutely ridiculous to keep yelling at the workers to break their unions and form new ones at the present time. It is by working as Communist workers with these workers who are not yet conscious of their tasks that we will win them for the cause.

JACK SPRAGUE

TWO KINDS OF CORRUPTED PRESS

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

I was extremely pleased in reading your article in reply to the falsifications published in the *Daily Worker* by Browder that we are in a united front with the Lovetonites. We thought that only the capitalists, with their corrupted press, were capable of misrepresenting and distorting whatever was against their own interests, but we see that these malicious tactics are finding their place in the Stalinist press.

Because they have no concrete arguments to present against us, in the great ideological (?) struggle against Trotskyism, they use such methods only in order to prejudice and blind the members. The only thing they know about Trotskyism is that we are "renegades" and "count-revolutionaries". They willingly accept any discussion with members of the S. P., the S. L. P., the I. W. W. (even with the Fascists!), but not with the Trotskyists. As for the Militant, not only don't they dare to read it, but even do not touch it for fear of being contaminated. And how they dare to call renegades such comrades as Trotsky and Rakovsky! I knew the latter personally in Rumania when he was secretary of the Socialist Party and one of the most prominent figures in the labor movement of that country.

For these reasons, I think it necessary that the Militant not only unmask such calumnies as are published in the *Daily Worker*, but also begin publishing regularly, in a fixed space on the front page, our political platform so that the revolutionary workers will know what is the real position of our Communist group.

We indeed realize the great difficulties and obstacles which confront us. History teaches us that in every new movement the masses—the multitude, do not think rightly. Their minds are mainly dominated by a certain ruling class. We also know that such great struggles require self-sacrifice and persistence until our final triumph and victory.

Therefore we are determined to work consistently with unshakable confidence in building a movement based on the revolutionary experience of history as taught by Marx and Lenin. Let us then devote all our efforts, energy and honest Leninist determination to our ideological struggle.

JAMES ECONOMOU

MERRY CHRISTMAS IN YOUNGSTOWN

Youngstown, Ohio.

Dear Comrades:

"Merry Christmas and Happy New Year," say the bosses of the mills of this Valley of Iron and Steel. This hackneyed expression, bulging with irony, is nothing less than insult added to injury at a time like this.

The mills have been idle since the first week in November. Some departments are working a few days each week and others are not working at all. Many workers had not a dollar coming on last pay day, which was supposed to be our Christmas pay.

They wish us "Merry Christmas" and invite us to church to sing Glory, Glory, Hall-a-lula, and to commemorate the birth of Jerusalem Slim. But the willingness to sing and the desire to commemorate cannot emanate from the body which carries an empty stomach.

How can we be merry, how can we be happy when we are walking the streets from place to place, begging some master's leave to let us toil for him, while poverty and starvation stare us in the face?

When the mills are going at their best we receive nothing more than a sustenance wage. For this wage we are the victims of a diabolical speed-up system. The speed-up system, the twin baby of capitalism, has filled the bosses' warehouses, has precipitated the present industrial slump and has thrown us out on the streets as slaves without the means of existence.

Our only chance of fighting this speed-up system is through organization. "In union there is strength." A considerable number of the mill workers are ready and hoping for organization, industrially at least. But they cannot so easily see how their working conditions can be improved by joining a political party which issues a bulletin once in a while, telling them lies about the job on which they are working.

These workers cannot be blamed for their views on the "Workers Party". When they attend a public meeting called by the official party, they can see at first glance that the Youngstown branch of the party is not run by workers, but is dominated, steered and warped by second hand shoe peddlers, storekeepers, by the lowest grade of petty bourgeoisie. And of course they go home from such a meeting with feelings of disappointment, disgust and contempt.

We were amused, in addition to being assured of our correct political line, by the *Daily Worker* outburst of Mr. Chiang Kai-Shek Browder, the present day Wolfe. Well, what's the use of a watchdog if he doesn't bark? And how can one play the role of a Wolfe without howling?

We do not forget that Browder was Stalin's Yankee priest in China, and that he carried out the orders of pope Stalin. Even though Chiang Kai-Shek was murdering the workers of China, Browder aided him until such time as Chiang thumbed his nose at Stalin.

It is preposterous; and if one did not know the recent role of the C. I. leadership, it would seem impossible to imagine a character like Browder having cheek enough to open his mouth. He may or may not (I don't know which) be competent to play the role of a Wolfe, but if he had the conscience of a mongrel he would forever see the blood of the Chinese working class looking him in the eyes. He would not consider himself absolved from the sin of helping Chiang Kai-Shek just because he has since done penance by denouncing Chiang, the Chinese hangman, his former idol. If this man Browder had any sense of decency left he would go behind the curtain where he could keep his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut.

With revolutionary greetings,

CHARLIE BYRNE

NATIONALISM vs. INTERNATIONALISM

New York, N. Y.

Dear Comrades:

I think it is pertinent that the Militant give voice to the subject: Nationalism versus Internationalism in the labor movement. The time is ripe for every worker to understand the full meaning of Marx' saying: "Workers of the world, unite!"

We all know that skilled labor, the aristocracy of labor, and its trade unions are essentially nationalistic in their outlook. Their heads are puffed up with nationalistic prejudices. Hence they are enemies of internationalism, enemies of workers' unity.

One reason why the millions of auto workers, textile workers, etc., have not been organized into trade unions is because the average aristocrat of labor looks with contempt upon an unskilled worker. Unskilled laborers to him are "rabble", an "undesirable", "disloyal" element.

But we have arrived at a stage of capitalist development where trade unionism is being sorely tried. Through improved machinery, thousands upon thousands of skilled workers are being pushed down the ladder into the "gutter" among the unskilled. The circle of trade union aristocrats is getting smaller and smaller, while the circle of the unskilled, semi-skilled and those workers who have lost their trade through the machine, grows larger and larger. It falls upon the shoulders of the Communist movement to gather and organize the unskilled, semi-skilled and all those workers disinherited by the machine, under the banner of internationalism. The time is here to bring home to every worker the incomparable words: "Workers of the world, unite!"

PAULINE GUTRINGER

GREETINGS FROM ALABAMA

Birmingham Ala.

Dear Comrades:

Three cheers for the Weekly Militant and the brave boys behind it! Well, here I am again with another little piece of my mite. Put this down for a half-year sub and here's hoping I may be able to come again soon.

Your comrade,

SARAH F. J. LINN

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