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THE MILITANT

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General Silk Strike Sweeps the Industry! Workers Hold Battle Line Firm as the Great Struggle Enters Sixth Week

Union Organizations in the Silk Workers' Strike

The silk workers have not lacked unions that purported to represent and defend their interests. Due to the highly competitive condition of the industry, the relatively high degree of skill required, and the varied division of crafts the workers have been divided into many unions and they have not enjoyed the benefits of an all-embracing union that organized without regard to craft and which included a large number of workers.

The Associated Silk Workers was born in struggle against the reactionary leadership of the U. T. W. in 1919. For winning conditions in the strike of 1919 which the manufacturers and the U. T. W. didn't think they deserved the notorious officials of the A. F. of L. expelled 300 hat band weavers who formed the Associated Silk Workers.

This organization was a fighting militant union from its very inception. In 1924 it again had the honor to incur the wrath of the U. T. W. which advised all A. F. of L. unions not to support the strike conducted by the Associated, calling it an outlaw organization.

Record of the Associated The Associated Silk Workers was permeated with a radical outlook. On its Executive Board the Left wing had a majority. A member of the Communist party was one of the organizers. The officials of the union looked to the militants for leadership and policy. A better field for the Left wing and its class education, a higher type of class struggle union could be found nowhere in the country. In spite of all of these meritorious qualities the stupid Stalinists, in pursuance of their blind and disruptive policy, split the Associated Silk Workers in 1928 and formed the National Textile Workers Union.

toward unity. Instead of cementing the solidarity of the workers, as was their elementary duty, they pulled rabbits out of the hat, such as arbitrarily advancing the date set by the Associated for the strike. The National, as a Left wing, was unable to exert any influence on the then timid leadership of the Associated. It was shortly before this strike that the Associated affiliated with the U. T. W. The National emerged from the strike only a shell of what it had been at the outset.

Decline of the N. T. W. The story of what happened in the N. T. W. from 1931 to date has already been told in the Militant. The lack of freedom of expression for the workers within the union, the selection of officials from above, the formation of craft organizations, the carping criticism of the Associated for not calling the present strike sooner than they did and then the right-about-face proposal to delay the strike after it had been called by the Associated, the formation of a rival national strike committee, the undervalued reports of the offer by the National union of individual strike settlements and a lower wage scale—all of this has made the workers bitter against the N. T. W. Its leading militants in Paterson have left it and joined the Associated where they play a prominent part.

On the other hand, the Associated Silk Workers, barring minor errors here and there, has done itself proud in the present strike situation. Through its militant actions it has enlisted the great majority of the silk workers. It has earned and properly deserves the support of the entire labor movement.

Independent Craft Unions in Strike

The strike in Paterson and throughout the Eastern states includes within its ranks every nationality of workers and every craft in the industry. A strong spirit of solidarity pervades the whole scene of battle. Fighting shoulder to shoulder are the unskilled, low paid dye workers and the highly skilled, relatively well paid warpers, twisters and loomfixers. The situation among the skilled crafts is extremely important for the strike and the silk workers union in the future.

For some time three A. F. of L. craft unions of warpers, loomfixers and twisters have existed in Paterson which failed even to organize an appreciable section of the trade in these unions. As in other categories of the silk industry the workers, tired of the exclusive, overcautious tactics of the U. T. W. (Continued on Page 4)

The Record of McMahon as a Misleader of Labor; Bosses' Agent in the Ranks of the Working Class

Labor can fight the bosses out in the open giving blow for blow. Far more dangerous, however, is the enemy that pretends to be a friend and under the cover of his "friendship" stabs the workers in the back. Such is McMahon, the president of the United Textile Workers of America.

Consider the deeds of this man, the highest officer in an organization that sets out to improve the lot of the worker: McMahon commenced his double-dealing, treacherous tricks even before the strike got under way.

Prior to the outbreak of the silk strike McMahon urged the strike committee of the American Federation of Silk Workers not to strike until the code was settled, promising that if the latter were unsatisfactory he would tie up the whole south. What happened?

Tired of waiting for the endless bickerings in Washington to bring results, and fully aware that the hearings in Washington were deliberately intended to paralyze the fighting will of the workers, the strike committee of the Associated called the workers out.

Unofficially McMahon endorsed the strike by sending a telegram to the Port Jervis local of the U. T. W. to walk out together with the A. F. S. W., and by representing that union and its strike demands in conferences with the manufacturers at Washington.

But McMahon quickly revealed where his real sympathies lay. He accepted with open arms the strike-breaking proposal of the manufacturers for a truce, a five week "cooling down" period during which the strikers were to return to work, and tried to ram it down the worker's throats. The workers would have none of it—the strike began in real earnest, spreading over the nation.

Frustrated in this sleek, undercover maneuver to drive the workers back into the mills McMahon stripped the tactics of all camouflage. He called a meeting of the national executive board of the U. T. W. where they voted not to endorse the strike of the silk workers.

In other words, this miserable creature of the manufacturers "outlawed" the greatest strike in the long history of the silk workers struggle by refusing to recognize the walk-out of 50,000 men as "legitimate".

But if McMahon and his no less treacherous lieutenants would not "recognize" the strike officially they proceeded at once to recognize it in reality by trying to herd the workers under the jurisdiction of the U. T. W. back to work. In the Rhode Island shops, in Stroudsburg, Hazleton, Pa. and elsewhere McMahon gave orders that the strike be called off and the workers return to work.

Sabotage at Hazleton In Hazleton, Thomson, a member

of the Executive Board of the U. T. W., working hand in glove with the local police and the state troopers, sabotaged the striking of its largest shop, the Duplant. It was only against his disruption that six shops in that city were pulled down by the A. F. S. W.

Far from making good on his promise to strike the south if the code was unsatisfactory—and that was the opinion of the majority of the silk workers if not of McMahon—he is doing everything in his power to knife the strike at the very time when the silk workers need the most assistance. And on top of it all McMahon is attempting to starve the workers back to the shops by refusing to sanction appeals for strike relief by the Paterson strike committee.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

With this issue the Militant begins to reflect the new course of the Communist League toward the building of a new party of Communism in America. Our aim is to transform the Militant from a propaganda organ intended mainly for Communists into a popular agitation paper appealing directly to the mass of American workers. To facilitate this transformation, and double our circulation as the first step, we are cutting the subscription rates to \$1.00 per year and 50 cents for six months. The prices of single copies are cut to two cents, bundle rates to one cent a copy.

We intended to tell you all about it, and our new action program connected with it, in this issue. But the silk strike material, which represents—as a beginning—what we mean by an agitation paper, crowded out the explanation, so we will have to let it go over till next week.

Meantime, one urgent word: We are undertaking this project solely on our nerve. The new price of the Militant is below the cost of production. It requires a subsidy. We have none, not even the cost of next week's issue. We need your help and count on it. If you see the need of a Communist paper that appeals directly to the mass of American workers, records their struggles, and talks their language, there is a practical way for you to help. Send a donation to

THE MILITANT 126 East 16th Street New York City

Old Friend of the Bosses

The employers could hope for no better friend than McMahon. He is of far more service to the bosses against the strike than all the cops and all the forces of "law and order." But McMahon's services did not begin with yesterday. The treacherous record of the reactionary U. T. W. machine, of which he was long a part, runs back for more than 20 years.

As far back as 1912 the United Textile Workers furnished strikebreakers in an attempt to smash the Lawrence strike led by the I. W. W.

In 1913, one of the greatest strikes in the history of Paterson's struggles, when the strike was solidly conducted by the I. W. W. under Big Bill Haywood, John Golden and Sara Conboy, the then leaders of the U. T. W. made a separate agreement with the bosses without the workers' knowledge and support, deliberately trying in that way to sell-out the workers.

In 1919 a strike was called by the Paterson ribbon weavers for the 44 hour week. This was sabotaged by the U. T. W. The U. T. W. was for compromising on the 48 hour week even while the War Labor Board was for giving the men the 42 1/2 hour week. In a short time they sold out completely, agreeing with the manufacturers to postpone (indefinitely) the shortening of hours. But the ribbon weavers remained stubbornly on strike and won the strike. And for this 300 were expelled from the U. T. W.

During the 1924 strike of the Associated in Paterson, Sara Conboy of the U. T. W. sent a letter to the A. F. L. unions telling them that the Associated was an outlaw organization and advising them not to support the strike.

The U. T. W. under McMahon publicly denounced and attacked the great Passaic strike of 1926. Its local leaders tried to call off the strike and force the workers back into mills and urged all A. F. of L. unions to refuse to give relief to this strike.

McMahon's real philosophy is expressed in a statement made during the "campaign" of the A. F. of L. to organize the south in 1929:

"We aren't talking higher wages. We aren't talking shorter hours. You can't express our objectives in those terms. We want to sit down with the mill owners, we want to take up their problems as our problems, we want the mill owners, ourselves, and the general public to sit down and diagnose the industry's ills and seek mutually a means to heal them."

There stands McMahon, revealed by his own statement as well as by his actions as an agent of the bosses, serving as president of a labor organization only to be in a better position to betray and sell-out the workers.

Solidarity Welds Ranks; N. R. A. Truce Rejected

Fifty thousand silk workers are entering their sixth week of strike with their ranks bigger and more solid than ever. The mills remain closed, the looms idle and every attempt of the bosses to reopen has been frustrated by huge picket lines of angry workers.

The strike is spreading with seven league boots to every silk mill, large or small in the United States. Strikers travel hundreds of miles to pull down shops that have not yet joined the ranks. The National Strike Committee of the American Federation of Silk Workers voted at its last meeting to close every U. T. W. shop that is still at work—to bring the New England sector of the silk industry to a complete standstill.

As testimony to the fighting spirit that is catching on everywhere under the impetus of the silk strike is the decision of the silk truck drivers not to handle scab silk.

The monster demonstration of more than 20,000 silk dye workers on Monday, October 2, in the Hinchliffe City Stadium marks the high point of the great textile battle. By their enthusiastic singing and cheering the embattled silk and dye workers gave an unassailable evidence to the bosses that they had clenched their fists and gritted their teeth in firm determination to remain out until their demands are won. By this great demonstration the silk workers of Paterson and vicinity have given heart and hope to the workers everywhere. The silk workers are showing the way.

The American Federation of Silk

Historic Strike of 20 Years Ago

Never-to-be-forgotten by those who took part in it, or those who have heard its story told, the tradition of the great silk strike of 1913 in Paterson is the inspiration behind the powerful struggle that has brought the fabric of the industry to a standstill today.

Those were stirring days. For 22 long weeks the silk workers of Paterson maintained the battle lines unbroken. Workers were clubbed and shot by policemen and detectives. Upwards of 800 strikers were thrown into jails unfit for dogs. The organizers were prosecuted. The strike was vilified by a lying press which screamed with rage at the revolting slaves, and demanded that the leaders be tarred and feathered and driven out of town. The pulpit thundered denunciation at the men and women who wanted a better life in this world. But with grim determination (Continued on Page 4)

Workers has become a great magnet of attraction for the independent, scattered and craft unions that are flocking to its banner from every silk center in the nation. The Allentown workers have affiliated to the national strike committee of the A. F. S. W. The United Warpers League of Paterson and vicinity have followed their lead. The A. F. S. W. has come forward as a unifying force consolidating the energies of all the silk workers under one common direction.

Again the A. F. S. W. has affirmed its unshakable will not to return to work under anything but a national agreement. The disruptive role of the N. T. W., which had issued a public statement declaring its readiness to sign separate shop agreements on a lower scale than the one demanded by the A. F. S. W., has so discredited this organization that it was compelled to issue a "denial" in an evasive statement issued by John J. Hallam.

The demands of the strikers, refusing to compromise, have remained the same as at the outset of the strike—\$36 for weavers, the thirty hour week and the two loom system. A test of the strikers' militancy in obtaining these demands took place at the Crew Dye plant where the strikers clashed with the strikebreakers. Several workers were arrested.

N. R. A. "Truce" Senator Wagner, of the N.R.A., has come to bring "industrial peace" to the strike-bound silk areas. Not so long ago the silk workers learned what the industrial peace of the N.R.A. meant for them in reality—calling off the strike in a five weeks "truce" during which time the government and the bosses would impose the slave silk code on the workers. In spite of the treacherous agreement of McMahon to this "truce" the strikers voted it down as a man. They must be just as wary of the new maneuvers of the N.R.A. and any of his agents in labor's ranks.

The answer of the strikers to every attempt to lure them back into the mills under promises of "adjustments" under N.R.A. protection has been to strengthen the picket lines and to spread the strike to other silk centers.

The silk workers' strike started after the N.R.A. machinery had already shown how it functioned in other strikes, in collusion with the reactionary labor leaders, to muffle the revolt of the workers and break their fighting ranks with deceitful promises and threats. The tragic experience of the Pennsylvania miners has not been lost on the silk workers.

With such vigilance as the strikers have exhibited to date, with the mass picketing and the sterling militancy that has animated the silk workers they are bound straight for victory!

One Hundred Years of Trade Union Struggles in the Silk Industry

Paterson was the cradle of the class struggle in the United States just as Lyons a great silk center, was in France. Paterson has been the storm center in the battles of the silk workers for more than 100 years. Innumerable strikes, some that ended in victory, and some in utter rout, some that were bloody, and others that were peaceful, some by crafts and others by the entire industry, have been fought by the Paterson workers. These battles were the road-pavers for the great conflict that shakes the textile industry today.

THE PATERSON STRIKE OF 1828 The first strike of factory workers in this country occurred in Paterson in 1826 among the men, women and children cotton operatives. (Silk as a fabric did not make its appearance till twelve years later). These slaves had been toiling from sunrise to sunset. They lived in company-owned tenements. They were striking against the attempt of the bosses to change the lunch hour from twelve o'clock to one and for the ten hour day. Marking the first act of solidarity, the building trades and machinists struck in sympathy. Marking the first act of government terror against striking workers, the militia was called out to drive the workers back to the shops. The

strike was lost and the leaders discharged. However the bosses later conceded on the noon-hour dispute. PATERSON—1835

The next strike in Paterson did not come until 1835 when 2,000 cotton mill workers struck for the eleven hour day, the abolition of the store-order system and excessive fines. The workers were led by an organization called the Paterson Association for the Protection of the Laboring Class, etc." They were aided by the Newark working-men who sent in \$20. for relief and the New York workers who appointed committees for the same purpose. The workers of Paterson held out for six long weeks and then their ranks were broken through a compromise offered by the bosses in which two-thirds of the workers returned under a working day of twelve hours for five days in the week and nine hours on Sunday. The merciful bosses had yielded one and one-half hours. The workers remaining out for the 11 hour day were blacklisted as were the children of the leaders.

"ORGANIZE THE UNSKILLED" In 1879 the International Labor Union waged an eight months battle in Paterson against a reduction in wages. The workers were starved

back into submission. Significant about this strike was the appearance of an outstanding leader, P. J. McDonnell who was a staunch advocate of industrial unionism and whose slogan was "organize the unskilled". Under his guidance huge strikes of many months took place in Fall River in 1879 and again in 1884. Strikebreakers smashed the strikes in both these cases.

SLAVE WAGES—1894 The silk operatives of Paterson, driven to desperation by the wretchedly low wages, which, according to the Daily Guardian of the time, were "insufficient to buy the commonest kind of food and purchase coal and wood", walked from mill to mill pulling down the shops. The New York ribbon weavers joined the strike and the Paterson strikers trudged all the way to New York to visit their fellow strikers. The workers returned the visit. But if the strikers were united, so were the bosses of Paterson and New York who had a binding compact to break the strike. Many a striker received a free permanent wave from a policeman's nightstick. The strike was neither won nor lost—some of the mills granted the raise in pay and others did not.

Out of this strike emerged three craft unions—the Horizontal Warpers Association, the Ribbon Weavers Union, the Loomfixers and Twistlers Union and also two unions that cut across craft lines—the Broad Silk Weavers Union and the Silk Workers Union.

INCH BY INCH For a while things simmered in Paterson, only for hell to break loose again around the period of 1899, 1900 and 1902. Picketing, police clubbing, arrests, denunciation from the press and the pulpit ran through the last years of the last century and the opening of this one. In 1899 after an eight months siege during which time strikers were jailed for calling strikebreakers "scabs", the United Ribbon Weavers Union won a one-cent-a-yard increase on the piece rate.

The United Textile Workers began its career in 1901. Soon after the Paterson craft unions affiliated to it.

Picket lines again in 1902. Led by the Ribbon Weavers Union against which an injunction was invoked, standing the union \$5,000 for fines in picketing cases, the broad silk weavers and the dyers won an increase of one and one-half cents on a yard.

LIVING CONDITIONS The wretched conditions of the years following the turbulent opening of the twentieth century prepared the way for the great battles of 1912, 1913. According to the Silk Association the average wage of the worker was less than \$10 weekly and in that period the cost of living rose by 60%.

I. W. W. — 1912 The Detroit faction of the I. W. W. headed by Rudolf Katz conducted an unsuccessful struggle against the four loom system. This strike proved to the sceptics that the English speaking and the foreign born workers could stand together and fight side by side. The story of the 1913 strike is told in another column of the Militant, as is the Associated Silk Workers strike of 1919.

AMALGAMATED TEXTILE WORKERS UNION From May 1919 to November 1922 a militant, class struggle union, whose creed was "one big union for the textile industry" swept the field, winning big battles in Lawrence, Paterson, Allentown, Pawtucket Valley, West Hoboken. It had 50,000 members. This was the Amalgamated Textile Workers. A leadership, adverse conditions, a

few lost strikes were the cause of its disbanding in 1923.

The crisis of 1921 hit the Paterson broad silk workers local of the United Textile Workers a mortal blow and it passed out of existence.

8 HOUR DAY SLOGAN IN 1924 In 1924 the Associated Silk Workers led 13,000 broad silk workers of Paterson in a strike for the 8 hour day, to offset the 3-4 loom system, a 15% wage increase and union recognition. They won a partial victory, many of the shops recognizing the union and granting wage increases.

THE PASSAIC STRIKE — 1926 Clubbed and tear-gassed by cops, slugged by gunmen the silk dye workers of Passaic, Garfield, and Lodi, New Jersey held out valiantly against a 10% wage cut and for union recognition under the Left wing United Front Committee of Textile Workers. They log the strike after a long and memorable struggle.

SOLD OUT The U. T. W. betrayers of New Bedford sold out many silk workers after a stubborn battle of 22

weeks, in 1928. In the same year the Associated conducted a strike for a wage increase and union recognition. But the strike was not solid. Many crafts remained at work, the union was split in the midst of the strike and it was lost. The 1931 strike is also reported in another column.

IN CONCLUSION A great tradition belongs to the silk workers, and great lessons are to be learned from it. In the silk workers' struggles stretching over one hundred years many unions have come and gone. The silk workers have had to cope with betrayers on the one hand and craft division on the other. Sometimes they have won and many times they had to return to the mills—vanquished. But the amazing vitality of the struggle of the working class is attested by the present strike—the greatest in the history of the silk workers. This struggle will not cease with the conclusion of the present strike. It will become fiercer and more relentless until that day comes when the working class by its united strength will build a new system where strikes will become memories of a past age of slavery and oppression.