

# PONTIAC WORKERS FORCED TO QUIT BY MARTIN MACHINE

By Clark

PONTIAC.—The evacuation of the Fisher Body plant marks the beginning of the most critical period in the history of the United Automobile Workers.

The eyes of the automobile workers were turned to Pontiac. General Motors was beginning its new offensive against the union. Faced with the repudiation of its agreement by the rank and file conference of G. M. workers, the corporation decided on a test case: to test the militancy of the men and the mettle of the leadership.

With thousands of Pontiac men already tramping the streets as a result of restricted production and the transference of work to Lindon, N. J., and Southgate, California, the layoff of hundreds of men on Monday, November 15, was the straw that broke the camel's back. The night shift sat down. For months they had suffered indignities at the hands of the plant manager, E. R. Leeder. Speed-up, constant abuses by foremen and sabotaging of the agreement finally drove the desperate Fisher Body men to resistance. Their local was being pounded to pieces. No other road was open.

## Committeemen Fired

2500 men sitting in the Fisher plant constituted a threat to the entire peace fabric in the industry. Immediately upon notification by the local, the International office of the UAW dispatched two of its representatives to Pontiac. After they had promised the workers to resume negotiations with the corporation on their grievances, the men left the plant. Members of the plant's bargaining committee left for Detroit for discussions with the management. On Wednesday morning, just as negotiations were to begin, the company announced the firing of four committeemen: George Method, chairman of the bargaining committee, Otto Rollins, steward, Lester Cizmas, committeeman, and Tom Welch, steward. The committee had no alternative but to break off negotiations, rejecting the reprisals against the leading militants. On Wednesday night the plant was re-occupied and the sit-down was on in earnest. The Pontiac plant, using Fisher bodies, closed down, raising the total of strike-idle to almost 17,000.

The issue of the strike was a crucial one for the entire International. If General Motors could fire stewards and committeemen in Pontiac and get away with it, then they could repeat the performance in Flint, in Detroit, in Lansing, in all of their plants in the country. Chrysler, Hudson and Packard would follow suit. And the drive to organize Ford would be endangered. The Pontiac workers were fighting the battle of every worker in the union.

From the very beginning, the question mark hung over the strikers: would the Executive Board authorize the strike? Martin had already given indications of a hostile attitude. On Thursday, he issued a statement to the press promising General Motors "continuity of production" and "amicable relationships" and denouncing unauthorized strikes. Without mentioning the Pontiac strike, the implication was all too clear.

That same night Fred Pieper, member of the GEB and one of Martin's chief lieutenants, appeared before a meeting of the entire Pontiac local—consisting of Fisher Body, Pontiac Motor and Yellow Coach—and exhorted the men to return to work. His chief argument consisted of the specious economic analysis that the present slump is a conspiracy of big business to break the unions. Therefore, he concluded, the workers must wait until the conspiracy peters out before it is time to strike. As for the discharged committeemen? Give their cases to the Labor Relations Board and cross your fingers. His remarks were seconded by Dorr Mitchell, reactionary President of the local, who gave them emphasis by refusing to turn over local strike funds, maintaining that the sit-down was unauthorized. The answer of the 2000 workers present was quite unambiguous. They turned in an overwhelming vote of confidence in their brothers sitting down in the plant.

Despite the hostility of Pieper and Madden, Pontiac GEB member, the local militants refused to believe that Martin would not authorize the strike. The formula circulating among the militants was something on the following order: "Wait 'til Martin is fully acquainted with the facts of our sit-down, then there can be no question but he will authorize it." As a result, great uncertainty prevailed.

## Aid From Detroit

On Saturday, members of the Detroit Auto Workers Educational League, a group of UAW members organized for the purpose of promoting class struggle policies and rank and file democracy in the union, arrived in Pontiac. They met with the leading committeemen and shop stewards of the strike-bound plant, organized them into a strike committee, setting into motion the machinery for publicity, relief, etc., and hammering out a policy. The A.W.E.L. was the only group which came to Pontiac to offer the strikers its assistance and advice. None of the leaders of the Unity Group, neither Walter Reuther, Wyndham Mortimer nor any of the other self-appointed champions of the rank and file even put in an appearance. The issue was entirely too hot for them.

That same afternoon, word came through that Martin would be in Pontiac at 5 P. M. to consult with the strike committee. The committee waited in vain for the President in an appointed hotel for over four hours. Martin had been in Pontiac, but in his brazen bureaucratic manner had consulted with the reactionary local officialdom while the strike committee cooled its heels in the hotel. As the strike committee returned to the plant, enervated by doubt and anxiety, an ominous press statement of Martin's came over the radio to the effect that UAW would show the corporation that the union could discipline recalcitrant workers and unauthorized strikers unassisted. "There must be no unauthorized

strikes", Martin declared in another speech to Lansing workers, that same day, preventing the Lansing Auto workers, with his usual demagoguery, from following the Pontiac example.

## Calls for G.E.B. Support

Yet Martin felt none too certain in his treacherous position. The next morning, Sunday, all members of the International Executive Board were summoned to Detroit to act on the Pontiac situation. It was clear that Martin refused to take sole responsibility—the Executive Board was also to be put on record. The members of the Fisher Body bargaining committee were called to this meeting to explain their actions before the Executive Board. Facing these workers with their just grievances, no one of the officers dared to express open opposition to their strike action. It is even reported that Walter Reuther and Wyndham Mortimer were in favor of authorizing the strike. Once again the committee returned to Pontiac without a decision from their International leadership. An answer had been promised them that same evening. Meanwhile, a meeting of 600 shop stewards in the Westside local, Detroit, answered an appeal of a Pontiac militant, with a promise of support.

At five o'clock the entire International Executive Board was transported from Detroit to the Hildenbrand Hotel in Pontiac where they went into executive session in order to prepare a decision for the membership meeting of the Pontiac local to be held that night. No reports were available at the time on the threats Martin used to intimidate the strike leaders present. But on the next day, Monday, the New York Times carried the story under a Pontiac dateline by its well-informed correspondent, Louis Stark, that uncovered part of the secret. Under the headline: "Murphy Threatens to End GM Strike with State Troops; Governor and Washington Urge Auto Union to Stop Outlaw Sit-Down at Pontiac" the article read:

## Act Under Government Threat

"That Governor Murphy may have to take drastic action and order out the militia to oust the sit-downers in the Fisher Body plant was the message sent by the chief Executive to Mr. Martin. "At the same time a representative of the Administration at Washington indicated to the union its extreme interest in the situation and said that, in view of the economic recession, a further uncertain element in the business picture would be embarrassing".

The Executive board outlawed the strike with the following statement:

"...we unhesitatingly declare that the strike in Fisher Body plant is unauthorized and unsanctioned and is therefore contrary to the constitution and by-laws of the international union and is destructive of the best interests of the union. This illegal and unsanctioned strike jeopardizes the position of the international union."

With this statement in his pocket, Martin proceeded to the Pontiac local meeting to bludgeon the workers into submission. But the task was not an easy one. Before he was through he had run the gamut of all the demagogue's tricks in which he is so adept. He threatened, he cajoled, he pleaded, he denounced.

The workers were stunned. The sentiment of the unionists was unmistakable. A plea from Martin for a vote to sustain the action of the GEB brought Charles Souter, one of the strike leaders, to his feet demanding discussion. He got the floor. Souter declared that if the International refused to back the strike the job of every

# Akron General Strike Planned Against Nat'l Guard Tactics

By B. J. Widick

AKRON, Ohio.—Behind the press reports of the "settlement" of the Goodyear sit-down by the acceptance of a betrayal compromise, are some facts which deserve and need wide-spread publication.

The hope of Goodyear and of the official union leadership that the difficulties in the plants over lay-offs and other grievances were settled by the eight-point agreement received a rude shattering last week.

A group of unionists circulated petitions in the plants calling on the executive board of Goodyear Local Union to hold a special union meeting to take a strike vote. The response to the petitions was good and indicated that the rank and file won't take any more blows from Goodyear without striking back.

The petitions were a "feeler" of the mood of the rank and file and were hailed as such by genuine progressive militants and revolutionary socialists, who pointed out, however, that a strike over lay-offs already consummated would be incorrect and bring defeat. New issues will arise shortly that can pose the question of strike action.

## Role of Stalinists

The Daily Worker is striving to paint the betrayal in glowing terms of victory: "They (the rubber workers) went back grinning as the company had been forced to compromise on the union's demands protesting last Thursday's lay-offs of 1,600 workers." (D. W. Nov. 23.)

Unfortunately, 1,600 workers didn't go back grinning. They didn't go back to work at all. The betrayal agreement sent them into the army of unemployed.

And the circumstances under which the other workers returned to the shop were without precedent here. Although the entire city knew that the sit-down was called off, the city police force and Goodyear's thugs made a show of force that rankled in the heart of every worker punching his clock card that morning.

Over 150 cops, armed with tear gas and riot guns, stood lined up as the Goodyear workers marched into the plant. It was the most flagrant attempt to terrorize and intimidate the workers Akron has ever seen.

And the rubber workers were boiling mad at this insolence and

contempt with which they were being treated. Convicts in a state prison never went to work with such a huge armed force watching them.

To top the insults, the bourgeois press carried pictures of the armed cops with the headline over the photos saying, "They were not needed!" But the implication was clear. Brute force is the only language which the rubber barons are going to speak.

Neither the bourgeois press nor the Daily Worker printed the very significant action of the CIO industrial union council during the Sunday when the National Guards were preparing to march into Akron.

Under progressive leadership, a general strike was planned against the use of the National Guard or any armed force in the Goodyear sit-down. The C.I.O. council met to plan this action.

Workers throughout the city anxiously awaited the decision of Goodyear Local at the Sunday meeting when they were voting on the proposals sponsored by the federal conciliator and the union leadership. The signal for beginning the general strike would have been the announcement of Goodyear Local's vote to strike.

The National Guard would not be facing inexperienced and leaderless workers as they did in the "Little Steel" strike last spring.

Three years of militant strike struggle, three years of developing class-consciousness; three years of a growing militant and progressive leadership among the rank and file would have made Akron quite a different story than Youngstown.

Machinery and plans for a general strike have been developed by a permanent committee elected in the Central Labor Union. Although the labor split has ended this committee formally, its members are still active in the CIO council and the CLU.

A new chapter in labor history appears in the offing as company plans to announce more lay-offs will again pose the question of a strike, the use of the National Guard, and the workers' defense against military terror.

shop steward was in jeopardy and vigilantes would take hold of Pontiac. But the shop worker was no match for the trained orator. And when Martin interrupted him, spreading the oily promise of protection for the stewards, Souter could not regain the thread of his opening remarks. A weak speech by George Method and then another hammer blow by Martin brought the meeting to an end. The workers left the hall disillusioned and beaten. For all practical purposes the strike was over.

## Those Responsible

For the first time since the Milwaukee convention last Aug., the lines were sharply drawn. Sitting on the fence had become impossible. It should be clear Martin alone does not bear responsibility for the smashing of the Fisher Body sit-down. The Pontiac Auto Workers (Nov. 24th) reporting the speeches of members of the Executive Board, at a meeting of Fisher Body men after the evacuation of the plant, quotes Wyndham Mortimer, lead-

er of the Unity Group: "Pointing out that the decision of the board was unanimous in declaring that unauthorized strikes must be stopped, Wyndham Mortimer, vice president of the International, declared, 'We are faced with an exceptionally difficult problem. But we were one in deciding for the only possible solution.'"

Rumors were rife that the vote of the Executive Board was split on authorizing the strike. But whatever the vote was, Mortimer's statement makes it clear that he takes full responsibility for the action of the Board. Moreover either Mortimer or Reuther or both had it in their power to stay the hand of Martin even after the vote had been taken in the Board. If instead of hiding in the hotel room they had gone to the local meeting and spoken in favor of the strike, there is no doubt that Martin would have received a crushing defeat and the sit-down continued. But they too were concerned with "respectability" before the capitalist class and the good-will of John L. Lewis, an old hand at outlawing strikes.