

# The Lawrence Strike — Impressions

By Richard Hansen

IN the general rush to cut wages the capitalists of Lawrence have kept abreast of their kind in the other towns of the country. The introduction of a 48 hour week—decided upon some time ago, but delayed on account of the war orders—could not be postponed any longer.

Government orders began to dwindle, the business of the Woolen Trust shank somewhat and the stream of boys coming home from "over there" and pouring into the mills made it impossible to retain the 54 hour week. The capitalists themselves proclaimed the 48 hour schedule, carefully representing it as a great and glorious achievement for the 600,000 working men and women of the textile industry throughout the country. But the capitalists meant wages should be cut accordingly and apparently it was agreed with the reactionary labor leader Golden that the workers should not have any say in the matter.

But it was not to be expected that the workers who had lived through the great struggle of 1912 would accept such a deal and they demanded that the present standard of wages be maintained—a standard by no means high, averaging only around \$16 a week. It is obvious that \$16 a week is a starvation wage in the full and sinister meaning of the word. The multimillionaires of the textile junkerdom know it, the city and state governments know it, as do the courts and the Federal government. Nevertheless all the power of the master class, the press and the legal machinery has been directed towards reducing the miserable pay envelopes of the textile slaves by the few cents represented in six hours pay.

The whole affair is piracy. And the industrial barons have acted like pirates. All their local hirelings have been mobilized, but this is not enough. Police squadrons have been imported from Boston, Cambridge, Lowell, Lynn and even across the state boundary from Manchester, N. H. Like the Cossack hordes of Czarist Russia they have been let loose upon the streets and sidewalks of Lawrence, clubbing down defenseless women and men peacefully marching in the picket lines. After being beaten the workers are arrested and dragged into court where the just magistrates impose heavy fines on the most flimsy evidence and framed up testimony.

The city government has refused to allow the strikers to parade in the streets. The other day the

Strike Committee itself was invaded by a half-dozen armed brutes and the secretary, Ime Kaplan, arrested on a trumped up charge, without even the formality of a warrant. It is hard to believe that any feudal despot ever had at his command a more irresponsible horde of mercenaries. No crime is too black for Capitalism, when it is determined upon crushing an "uprising" of the workers, though the demands of the strikers are so extremely modest and their behavior so considerate that no sane person could call it a riot much less an uprising.

Though the strikers' demands are so moderate their masters have determined that they shall not have the right to refuse to work for less than a starvation wage but must be driven back to the mills like sheep. Government experts, in the employ of the War Labor Board, have stated, after a careful and conservative investigation, that \$30 per week is the necessary minimum for a family of three to live in decency and it is generally assumed that an 8 hour day means a 44 hour week. The workers of Lawrence, however, have not asked for this minimum established by Government experts. They are asking scarcely half as much. All they insist upon is that the \$16. shall not be reduced. Nevertheless all the bestiality of Capitalism is turned loose upon them.

Tens of thousands of men and women, who gave their brothers and sons to the army, who bought the so-called Liberty Bonds, who trustfully hoped for and expected a brighter future after the war are now spat upon, are ridden down by men on horseback, are railroaded to prison, are thrown into misery and want by their savage masters.

In the press and even by the elected officials the workers are reviled as foreigners and Bolsheviks. A week ago they resented this, they thought it was an insult, they protested at being called foreigners while thousands of them have citizen papers in their pockets and many are native born citizens. But they are quickly realizing that a citizen in name is often a foreigner in deed. They have started to think and they have discovered that even an American born worker is not a citizen, that they are all foreigners—foreigners in their own country—and that all workers

throughout the world are foreigners where Capitalism rules; the real citizens being only those who own the factories, mills, mines and land—the Woods, Morgans, Rockefellers. . . .

They are discovering that so far there is only one exception—Russia—where everyone who is capable and willing to work is a citizen, without discrimination, where the workers themselves decide how the industries shall be run and the conditions under which they shall work.

They are beginning to see that thus far only the Russian workers have conquered irrevocably, wrested the means of life from the clutches of the greedy capitalists. Germany and England are in process of being freed from the domination of Capitalism. Bolshevism is spreading. The working class has set out to conquer their own countries and make themselves citizens. And the workers of Lawrence are becoming proud of being called Bolsheviks.

The capitalist press has told them what they themselves did not know; that they were foreigners and Bolsheviks. This is the single truth among the thousands of lies that the capitalist press has spread about the Lawrence strike. This is the great lesson that the 30,000 workers are learning from the present struggle—the strike of "48-54." It is a good lesson for the proletariat of America, and the capitalists will be sorry for bringing it home to the workers and for keeping it firmly implanted in their minds by brutality and repression. The lesson will not be forgotten.

The time is not far distant when even "44-\$30" will appear as a modest demand even to the textile workers. The workers are learning to understand that Bolshevism is the only way out of the debacle created by Capitalism. They will ask for all they produce, they will make themselves real citizens of their country. They are becoming tired of being foreigners in their own lands and starving in the face of plenty.

The present strike in Lawrence will end in victory for the workers. The spirit of solidarity is admirable, the sympathy for them is general. And the victory will mean something more to the workers of Lawrence than "48-54." It will mean a lot of experience and the development of class consciousness which are so important for the final deliverance of the workers from the exploitation and oppression of Capitalism.

## Three Socialist Strike Leaflets

### "General Strike, Or?"

Leaflet issued by the Seattle Young People's Socialist League

THE profiteers have made millions out of the ships the workers built. Now they refuse these workers a living wage. They have forced thirty-thousand men to go on strike.

All the profiteering employers of Seattle are banded together in their Employers' Association. All have a common interest in driving the shipyard workers back to slave conditions and smashing their labor organization, the Metal Trades.

The allied bosses want to smash the shipyard workers now so that they can have free hand to smash the rest of the union men of Seattle later on.

These profiteers hate all unionism. They hate the longshoremen, the street car men, the electrical workers, the men of the building trades, the restaurant workers and all others as much as they hate the Metal Trades organization that is conducting this strike.

They want to eat labor piece meal. First the shipyard workers, then the others. So they can make this an open shop town and cut wages.

*Divide and conquer* is the motto of the bosses. . . .

But we have a better motto. It is *together we win!*

If sixty thousand union men and women of Seattle go out on a general strike the bosses will cry for mercy. Capital is helpless without labor. The business interests cannot afford a general strike. And we cannot afford to see our shipyard brothers beaten, because our turn would come next.

A million workers on the Pacific Coast are ready to fall in line behind Seattle. We will show them a magnificent example of solidarity.

All together in the *General Strike*.

*Together we win—By Solidarity.*

### "Strike."

Leaflet issued by the Y. P. S. L. of Seattle

It was you who made the wheels of industry hum. When the owners of the shipyards went away on pleasure tours the ships were produced just the same. But now that you have left the yards the wheels are

silent, the steel is rusting in the winter rain, spiders spin their webs from girder to girder, and no ships slide down the ways to carry the commerce of the world. All is silent in the yards. Your labor power has been withdrawn and a portion of the world stands still. Does not this make you realize your strength? Can you not see that it is the workers who produce the wealth of the world and it is to the workers that the wealth should belong? Then why not prepare to take that which is yours by right?

Strikers! The shipyard employers have confessed that they cannot properly manage industry. They say that they cannot conduct the yards efficiently enough to provide the workers with necessary food, clothing and shelter. They are failures. They admit it. But you strikers know you could properly run the yards because you have always run the yards. You know that you could shorten the hours, use more safeguards against accident and death, have more sanitary arrangements, give to every worker employed more of the necessities and luxuries of life, and still produce the ships that the world so sorely needs. You could manage the shipyards through an industrial organization. You could discipline yourselves by your own unions. You could select your own managers by competitive test from your own members. You could control your jobs and your own lives. You could work as free men instead of slaves. And you could produce the ships at far less expenditure of human labor energy than under the wasteful rule of the inefficient industrial masters. Accept the employers' apology. They have failed. Prepare to take and control the industries, workers.

Strikers! The world is the workers for the taking, and the workers are the vast majority in society. Your interests are paramount to those of a small handful of useless, idle parasites who have the nerve to claim a title to the shipyards. When a majority of the workers stand together their mind, muscles and skill will create all the good things of life, and their class-conscious solidarity will allow them to keep all the good things for themselves. You have nothing to lose but your chains and you have a world to gain. Let this be your demand, strikers: *The world for the workers!*

### "Russia Did It."

Leaflet issued by Local Seattle of the Socialist Party

*Shipyard Workers*—You left the shipyards to enforce your demands for higher wages. Without you your employers are helpless. Without you they cannot make one cent of profit—their whole system of robbery has collapsed.

The shipyards are idle; the toilers have withdrawn even though the owners of the yards are still there. Are your masters building ships? No. Without your labor power it would take all the shipyard employers of Seattle and Tacoma working eight hours a day the next thousand years to turn out one ship. Of what use are they in the shipyards?

It is you and you alone who build the ships; you create all the wealth of society today; you make possible the \$75,000 sable coats for millionaires' wives. It is you alone who can build the ships.

They can't build the ships. You can. Why don't you?

There are the shipyards; more ships are urgently needed; you alone can build them. If the masters continue their dog-in-the-manger attitude, not able to build the ships themselves and not allowing the workers to, there is only one thing left for you to do.

Take over the management of the shipyards yourselves; make the shipyards your own; make the jobs your own; decide the working conditions yourselves; decide your wages yourselves.

In Russia the masters refused to give their slaves a living wage too. The Russian workers put aside the bosses and their tool, the Russian government, and took over industry in their own interests.

There is only one way out; a nation-wide general strike with its object the overthrow of the present rotten system which produces thousands of millionaires and millions of paupers each year.

The Russians have shown you the way out. What are you going to do about it? You are doomed to wage slavery till you die unless you wake up, realize that you and the boss have not one thing in common, that the employing class must be overthrown, and that you, the workers, must take over the control of your jobs, and through them, the control over your lives instead of offering yourselves up to the masters as a sacrifice six day a week, so that they may coin profits out of your sweat and toil.