

New York Furriers Go Over The Top

By Joseph Zack



BEN GOLD

Fighting Leader of the Furriers

FRIDAY, June 3 at 8 A. M., as the whistles were blowing, the bulk of the fur workers responded to the strike call of the "outlawed" Furriers' Joint Board. The fur district was bristling with police of all kinds, the notorious police gangster squad (Industrial Squad) was on hand in plain clothes.

Martial law is the only term that could perhaps describe the scene. Finally the gangsters of the A. F. L. re-organization committee picked up some courage, and like ghouls not sure of themselves despite all the police protection, began to swoop furtively around. Even then some of them got walloped. The fur district was honeycombed by pickets, roving squads of militant fur workers marched thru the "war area" and here and there some seabs got "entertained". By 10 o'clock in the morning the six east side halls, engaged to accommodate the strikers, were jammed and there was enough enthusiasm to blow off the roof.

Sabotage of Reactionaries in Vain

This was the most magnificent demonstration of solidarity the workers in this industry have ever shown. Superbly magnificent indeed, considering the preparations the A. F. L. bureaucracy in cooperation with the employers made to demoralize the workers. The workers were ordered to remain on their jobs by the A. F. L. leaders on pain of expulsion and discharge. On the eve of the strike every furrier working in shops of the big bosses' association received a telegram from the A. F. L. leaders instructing him not to obey the strike call of the Joint Board.

The Joint Board was defunct, outlawed, ruled by Moscow, they said. The issue was communism versus Americanism. The Joint Board had no money, the entire strength of the A. F. L. will be used to crush communism. A worker would be a fool to risk his job to bolster the domination of a few communists. Don't follow the union wreckers, disrupters, outlaws, etc. The press of the bureaucracy, headed by the Forward and supported by the capitalist press, kept up a demoralizing propaganda for weeks. The decision to call a strike was belittled,

ridiculed as utopian and foolhardy, as an act of irresponsibility, of adventurers. Matthew Woll, leader of the notorious Civic Federation (association of big open-shop employers) and Vice-President of the A. F. L. held conferences with the police commissioner to make sure that the police will be on the job to suppress the strike. Demoralize and intimidate the fur workers, that was the game.

Needless to say, the fur bosses had for months past utilized to the full the opportunity offered by the union smashing efforts of the A. F. L. reactionary leadership to take back all the gains which the fur workers had won as a result of the last strike. The bosses association ordered a lock-out to force the workers to submit to the reorganization of the A. F. L. The expelled Joint Board advised the workers to register with A. F. L. reorganization committee and wait until the busy season to strike a blow against the employers. Now the time for reckoning has come.

Joint Board Prepared Ground

The Joint Board, under left wing leadership, headed by Ben Gold, the Alex Howat of the needle trades, has not been asleep during all these months. The Joint Board

thru the left wing press, meetings, circulars has been mobilizing the workers. It was one of the finest pieces of work ever done—maneuvers, offensives and retreats and careful working out of policy. These were months crowded in with activity. With all this minute work and mass mobilization for the strike the workers did not know the actual date. But the tension produced by all this mass activity was such that when the signal was given the mass sentiment produced by this work resulted in a great and glorious avalanche.

Despite all the enemy preparations the fur workers emerged in one great magnificent assault. The bosses and the bureaucracy were dumbfounded. The shops emptied. Of course there were some cowards and spineless slaves and former seabs that were shivering in their boots. But these few soon began to feel the iron will of the furriers. Towards the evening remnants of shops began to appear. The walk-out exceeded all expectations. The wrath of Matthew Woll expressed itself in public demands for raids and suppression of what he calls bolshevist activities.

Just Demands of the Joint Board

The Joint Board's demands are

very simple. All it asks is that the bosses live up to the agreement signed with it at the conclusion of the last strike, live up to its provisions as to wages, hours, overtime, working rules, etc. The Joint Board demands that the bosses keep their hands off the internal struggle going on in the union and let the workers choose whatever leadership they want, left or right, without trying to force the workers to join the union the bosses prefer.

Legally the Joint Board is in a very strong position. Despite this it is expected that Matthew Woll, as leader of the Civic Federation, will attempt to procure an injunction in the interests of the bosses prohibiting picketing, etc.

Significance of the Struggle

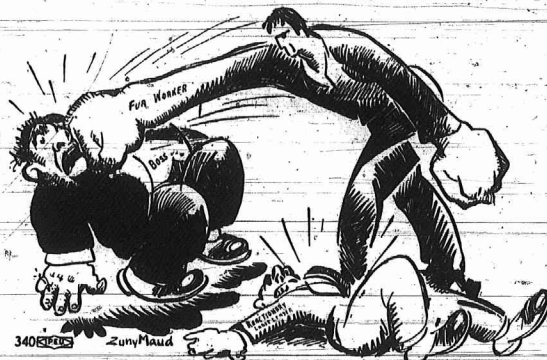
For months past a bitter struggle has been going on in the needle trades between the right wing, the bosses and the city government on one side and the workers led by the left wing on the other. Previous to that these very same workers went through a strike of several months duration to win the forty-hour week and wage increases. First they licked the bosses, then they had a fight on their hands against both the bosses and the A. F. L. leaders supported by all the enemies of labor. For months the right wing thus supported had been on the offensive in an attempt to subjugate the workers. Quite often they thought they had the left wing licked.

The bosses by taking advantage of the situation, made it finally clear to the workers that the right wing bureaucracy is merely being used by the bosses to destroy union conditions in the industry. The attention of the workers began to turn towards the main enemy, the boss, realizing that the boss is trying to dictate as to what sort of union and leaders they should belong to and follow. And after all these months of struggle the needle workers have flung the challenge right into the teeth of the bosses by following the strike call of the Joint Board. The left wing has taken the offensive.

The workers in the entire needle industry will follow in the wake of this movement. The success of furriers is of importance indeed beyond the confines of the needle industry. A defeat of the A. F. L. bureaucracy here will invigorate a general offensive on the part of the workers to make the unions progressive, clean fighting organizations. It will be the signal to the workers to rally behind a militant leadership against the oncoming new open shop drive. A victory of the needle workers will facilitate a victory for the miners against the Lewis bureaucracy; and with redoubled strength militant labor will be able to meet the great task of organizing the unorganized, the struggle for the forty-hour five-day week, higher wages and a general forward movement of labor.

The struggle of the furriers is the cause of the entire militant labor movement. Support the furriers.

STRIKING THE ENEMIES



Notes on the Furriers Strike

By JACK HARVEY

JUNE 3.—The furriers strike is on today following an enthusiastic mobilization meeting held last night at Cooper Union, with an overflow meeting at Manhattan Lyceum. The enthusiasm reached the highest pitch when the striking furriers of the Newark local, led by their business agent Morris Langer, one of the militants expelled by the reactionaries, marched into the hall singing "Solidarity Forever".

The picket demonstration held this morning was very successful. Over 5,000 furriers were in the picket lines. It is estimated that from the shops of the Associated Fur Manufacturers, who have refused to recognize the Joint Board and forced their workers to register with the A. F. L. "reorganization committee", about 60 per cent of the workers have come down and this is expected to mount to 75 per cent by Monday.

After the picket demonstration mass meetings were held in Webster Hall and Manhattan Lyceum with both of which were jammed with about 4,000 enthusiastic fur workers. Both meetings unanimously adopted resolutions calling for a 10 per cent weekly assessment on

those going back to work in settled shops. This includes the furriers working for the trimming bosses and independents, who were called down for a demonstration of solidarity but who are going back to work on Monday.

Successful Mass Picketing

JUNE 6.—I was on the furriers market this morning, and my impression, corroborated by every one else that I spoke to, is that the mass picketing was a tremendous success, over 5,000 participating and being concentrated in two square blocks. The uniformed police, Industrial squad and bomb squad were well represented and on the job. Many fights took place. I witnessed four of them myself, each one gathering crowds of about a thousand. At one moment the captain of the Industrial squad became nervous and while the police was dispersing the pickets, fired a shot in the air. A number of arrests took place. Accidentally among those arrested was a prominent right winger, who displayed a gun while attempting to intimidate the pickets. This is the gentleman who several years ago split open Gold's head at a meeting of the Furriers union.

AFL Reactionaries Demand Severe Sentences for Pickets

JUNE 8.—According to both the New York Times and the Women's Wear, the clothing trades daily, about 500 uniformed and plain clothes policemen are "taking care" of the fur market. The bosses and the reactionary union smashers have made claims that less than 500 furriers have left the shops. This means more than one armed cop for each striker. Not so bad for the furriers.

But the bosses and the A. F. L. reactionaries are not satisfied. A delegation from the "reorganization committee", headed by the state organizer of the A. F. L. Frayne, visited the police commissioner and asked him for more police "protection". Edward McGrady, A. F. L. organizer and member of the "reorganization committee", in an interview complained that the police courts are "too easy" on the arrested pickets and demanded that severe sentences be imposed on them. What leaders of labor these reactionaries are!

Mass picketing is still being carried on very effectively, with the result that more workers are con-

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Strike Versus Arbitration on the Pere Marquette

By Arthur C. Johnson

UNITED action of eight railway organizations and the threat of a strike forced immediate concessions from the labor-hating Pere Marquette Ry., while some of the workers demands are submitted to arbitration. What arbitration will bring to these workers will be shown by the developments in the next few weeks.

Anti-Union Management

Notoriously anti-union, and having broken the shop workers organizations during the 1922 strike, the management of this road since then has been attempting to establish a system of "open shop" relations with the rest of its employees. Consistently working to this end, it has consistently flouted long established standard rules of the transportation brotherhoods, which have been in effect for many years on most all railways in the United States. Grievances of the workers have been ignored, and in recent months when other lines in this locality were granting small wage increases to their employees, this company has repeatedly refused to meet the workers to discuss the question of wages and has treated their representatives with contempt.

Long Standing Grievances

The present dispute on the Pere Marquette represents an accumulation of long standing grievances, numerous violations by the company of the ordinary application of working rules, and the question of wage increases. Eight of the railway organizations comprising about 5,000 members, which are practically all of the organized workers on the road, were involved. Confronted with this bitter hostility

of the management, it was a question for the unions either to utilize their forces and fight, or to be crushed by the company.

Overwhelmingly Favor Strike

Following the failure of the unions and road officials to effect a settlement and smarting under the oppression of the union-hating management, a strike vote was taken during the early part of May which revealed that the workers were overwhelmingly in favor of a walkout. The actual percentages of the strike vote taken by the different organizations were as follows:

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, 96.5 per cent.

Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, 99 per cent.

Order of Railway Conductors, 94.2 per cent.

Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, 99.05 per cent.

Order of Railway Telegraphers, 94.6 per cent.

Int'l. Longshoremen's Ass'n, 100 per cent.

Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, 82 per cent.

The strike was set for May 19th, but was averted through last minute negotiations when a "working agreement" was reached by the federal board of mediation, and a number of matters in dispute were settled in a manner mutually satisfactory to both sides, while others are to be submitted to arbitration.

Terms of Agreement

The memorandum of agreement reached with the company contains the following provisions:

All existing rules in dispute shall be adjusted as interpreted by the

several employe organizations involved. In accordance with such interpretation, the railroad shall pay not later than June 30, 1927, 114 claims by employes now filed with the railroad and all similar claims which may be filed within 72 hours after 2:30 o'clock, A. M., May 19, 1927.

Standard rules will hereafter be enforced on the Pere Marquette as on other railways in this territory. Conductors, trainmen, yard foremen, switchmen, firemen, hostlers and hostlers' helpers are to receive the rates of pay in effect on May 1, 1927, which means that those employes on the Pere Marquette will have the same wage schedule now in effect on other eastern lines.

So far as the engineers are concerned, they are to continue to receive the 7 1/2 per cent increase which was granted on April 6, last, by the Pere Marquette to all train-service employes without consultation with the organizations. In addition the carrier agrees that in case the pending wage negotiations with the eastern carriers should result in the engineers getting more than a 7 1/2 per cent increase, the same will be effective on the Pere Marquette.

The memorandum included a clause agreeing to submit the question of wage increases of the Clerks and Telegraphers to arbitration. The Longshoremen are to receive the same wage increases as are granted the Clerks.

The agreement contains finally that:

All chairmen, general or local, or any other employe who may have been active in the prolonged negotiations incident to proceedings leading up to or involved in the

mediation to which this agreement refers, shall not be discriminated against in any manner.

Power of Joint Action

The controversy on the Pere Marquette contains a valuable lesson to railroad labor. The important thing is that joint action by all trades was brought about to the point of a strike, and that the workers held tremendous power in their hands when this solidarity was achieved. This was the first essential step to win. And it was not only sufficient to compel the company to back down from its position of not treating with the unions, but the opportunity presented itself to get far greater results. In this instance, had the strike been put into effect, the workers were in a position to completely shut down the road, force the company to its knees, and themselves dictate the terms of settlement. However, as it was, their united strength was used merely to bring the company to an understanding with them and to negotiate an adjustment of the questions at issue through arbitration.

By failure to utilize the power of the united workers a golden opportunity was passed up to deal the Pere Marquette "open shop" management a staggering blow. Had it been used in its full effect, not only could the immediate demands of the different unions have been won, but much greater concessions could have been forced from the company than the workers will receive from arbitration, judging from the awards granted by these boards during the past six months.

Notes on Furriers Strike

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tinuously joining the ranks of the strikers. Several important shops have closed down in the last two days. In one of the most important shops in the trade the outworkers joined the strike, with the result that the shop closed down.

Gross, Militant Fur Leader, Seriously Injured

JUNE 10.—Yesterday, Gross, next to Ben Gold the most influential leader of the fur workers and Vice-President of the Furriers International, while leading the picket line was attacked by gangsters. He was hit on the head by a beer bottle and was seriously injured. Today's report is that he had a restful night and shows some improvement. But he is still in a dangerous condition, since it is feared that a blood clot might form on the brain. The crisis will not be over for two days.

Despite the frenzied agitation and intimidation against the strike by the labor reactionaries, the Jewish Daily Forward and the bosses, about 70 per cent of the furriers employed in the Associated shops just before the strike are already in the ranks of the strikers. This really means more than the percentage figures would seem to indicate, since in a number of large shops the most strategic workers, such as cutters, are down crippling the operations of these shops.

The Joint Board reports that more than 300 out of the existing 450 shops have been seriously affected, naming 33 shops in the press and stating that the other shops will be named in subsequent reports. A report in "Women's Wear" states that an investigation was made in these 38 shops, and in those shops where the bosses did not refuse to give information the Joint

Board report was substantiated.

Today two strike meetings were held. I was present at the meeting in Webster Hall, which was packed to capacity notwithstanding an extremely hot day. The spirit of the strikers is splendid.

Bosses and Reactionaries Howl at Effectiveness of Strike

JUNE 11.—Both the bosses and the A. F. of L. reactionaries have let out a howl which is an admission of the effectiveness of the furriers' strike. Today's papers carry reports of complaints by these gentry against the police for "permitting" mass picketing and for insufficient protection to the seabs which give the lie to their previous statements that only a few hundred furriers answered the call of the Joint Board.

In a letter to the Mayor in regard to the mass picketing the acting president of the Associated Fur Manufacturers, admits that "the respective businesses of our members are being seriously affected, hampered and injured". Another protest against the mass picketing was made by Matthew Wolf, Vice-President of both the A. F. of L. and the notorious, open-shop outfit known as the Civic Federation, in a letter to the Police Commissioner.

Wolf threatens to start a kind of mass picketing of his own. In a letter sent to the unions he appeals for volunteers to participate in counter-demonstrations on the fur market. This will no doubt have the same fate as the appeal he had once sent out for financial contributions to help fight the militant furriers, which even in most conservative unions was thrown into the waste baskets whenever it came before rank and file meetings. Wolf's threat really means that the reactionaries intend to increase their

Seattle Building Workers Settle with Little Gained

By JOHN HENRY

SEATTLE, WASH.—The controversy between the building trades workers and the contractors here has ended without any gain for the majority of the workers, due to the class-collaboration tactics of the union officials.

Of the eight crafts that negotiated for the five day week only the bricklayers secured this demand, and even they only for the summer months of May, June, July and August. The building laborers will receive an increase of 60 cents per day and the hoisting engineers an increase of \$1.00. For all other crafts the wages and working hours remain unchanged. These include the carpenters, sheet metal workers and a number of small crafts.

Building trade officials hail it as a great victory that they were able to secure a written agreement with the contractors organization for the term of one year, even though with the exception of the building laborers and the hoisting engineers (and the bricklayers who are not affiliated with the Building Trades Council), there is no change as to wages and hours per week. Heretofore there has only been a "gentlemen's agreement". Now, in

hired force of sluggers to intimidate the strikers. But the furriers have proven themselves able to take care of the sluggers in the past and they will no doubt stand their ground against Wolf's additional "mass pickets".

At yesterday's mass meetings of the strikers Gold announced that more than thirty manufacturers, members of the Associated, have applied to the Joint Board for settlements.

addition to the signed contract, machinery is set up to adjust differences which may arise during the year without strikes.

Progressive members of the Carpenters' union, which is the largest organization in the building trades, are especially incensed at the outcome of the negotiations. They declare that the action of the building unions' representatives is nothing less than a betrayal of the membership.

Workers Unprepared for Fight

It is pointed out that from the very beginning of the negotiations with the contractors association every effort on the part of the progressives to make the five-day week a vital issue by mass meetings, discussions in the union and general propaganda was sat upon by the union officialdom. They said, "Trust us to work things out." As a consequence when just prior to May 1st all agreements expired and the contractors, backed by the Chamber of Commerce, the Associated Industries, Real Estate Board, and other business organizations refused point blank to concede the five-day week, the workers were totally unprepared to fight for this demand.

There was some talk of a strike, but with no unity of action or preparation, even psychologically, it was out of the question. The fact that the business agents of the carpenters pay very little attention to residence building, leaving this field largely unorganized, and specialize on the large contractors engaged in business block building has depleted the strength and weakened the morale of the union.

Officials Betray Demands

Now it is admitted by officials

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