

# NEW MASSES

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E. Volsung

## Lettuce on Fire

*Time and a half for overtime, equal pay for equal work, don't sound so revolutionary, but Salinas employers answer these demands with gunfire*

By Robert Holmes

EVERY Red-baiting, vigilante, "patriotic," "law-enforcing" agency has moved into the little town of Salinas, Cal. From Los Angeles came Chester Moore, secretary of the Western Association of Grower-Shippers, to act as dictator for the employers. He took over the entire sixth floor of the main hotel. The Associated Farmers, formed after the cotton strike to prevent agricultural labor from organizing, has set up branch headquarters. Cruse Carriel, ex-Hearst reporter and executive secretary of the Citizens' Association, sits at the phone waiting to be called in as an "impartial arbiter," and in the meantime directs movements of the imported armed thugs and scabs. Colonels Homer Oldfield and Henry R. Sanborn hurried into town. Oldfield represents the Intelligence Division of the U.S. Army engaged in investigating subversive activity; Sanborn is the notorious editor of the *American Citizen*, an anti-labor, anti-Red paper published fortnightly in San Francisco. He acts as "coordinator" of all law-enforcement agencies in the three counties surrounding Salinas. Local authorities abdicated to him—or rather, to his masters, William Randolph Hearst and the San Francisco Industrial Association.

They came to Salinas to break a strike. Four thousand lettuce workers, packers and trimmers, members of the A.F. of L. Fruit & Vegetable Workers' Union have been locked out and have answered by presenting demands. California employers don't like organized agricultural workers. They'll do any-

thing to break them up. Once one section organizes, what is to prevent workers in other counties, in other crops, from setting up a union, which means demands for better living conditions, for higher pay, for reasonable hours? The Salinas lettuce strikers are a menace to the big owners all over the state. The latter lose no time rallying their forces.

WHAT happened was this: For two years the Fruit & Vegetable Workers' Union had an agreement with employers. It terminated September 1. Immediately, the Grower-Shipper Association posted placards in all packing sheds which stated that if employees continued work for three days under conditions listed by the employers, a contract would automatically result, binding on union and non-union men alike. The conditions wiped out all gains made during the past years. Furthermore, the employers would not even consider negotiating. What their new stand amounted to was a lockout.

For two weeks, comparative quiet reigned throughout the fertile Salinas Valley. The lettuce was not ready to cut; the early crop was already safely on ice. For two weeks nothing happened, except that employers constructed barbed-wire barricades round the ice plants and packing sheds, and imported strike-breakers and armed thugs at five dollars and ten dollars a day respectively, not to mention food, living quarters, cigarettes, and other comforts. Agents of the Lake Erie Gas Co. and the Federal Laboratories visited town.

They did a good business; soon shipments of tear and vomiting gas came in, and a good supply of rifles, shotguns, and ammunition. The head of the State Highway Patrol, Raymond Cato, came down with more than a hundred troopers, ostensibly "to keep the highways open."

The union demands don't look so dangerous on paper, but to an employer in California they spell revolution. First of all, the union asked for preferential hiring: union men to be taken on the job so long as they are available. The employers scream "union domination." That's what they've been saying for two years now on the San Francisco waterfront. The truth is, as the union grows strong it can force other concessions. That is the owners' big worry.

The union has other demands. It asks for equal pay for men and women. Heretofore, women have performed the same work as men and have received a lower wage. Also, the union wants time and a half for overtime above eight hours, and on Sundays and holidays. Before the strike, workers stayed in the fields thirteen hours a day, every day, and their pay averaged eight or nine dollars a week. And the union insists that members have the right to refuse to pass through picket lines, and above all, that the union be recognized as the collective-bargaining agent for all shed workers, union or non-union.

On September 15 the employers were ready. The storm broke. The grower-shippers drove lettuce-laden trucks toward the packing plants;

the picket line held fast and stopped the shipments. Then the police and Cato's highway police moved in. They laid down a gas attack that would do credit to any army. They beat and they shot at the fleeing workers, whether they were men or women. They managed to gas children playing on the streets. When the attack was reported truthfully in several San Francisco newspapers, the reporter's life was threatened by employers' thugs.

But gassing and violence doesn't necessarily break a strike. And so the police, under orders from the employers, went further. They arrested over sixty workers, many on no charges, and held them incommunicado. A picket standing alone on a street corner was pounced upon, thrown into jail, and held there—for rioting. Another worker, Granville Bell, signed an affidavit that he had been "taken for a ride by four highway patrol men, beaten up, and thrown out on the highway." Local doctors, many fearful of the vigilantes, refused to give medical aid to strikers. Nor could workers buy medicines or bandages in many drug stores.

Life inside the barricades is hardly pleasant. Armed guards patrol the enclosure. A man who tries to leave is kept on the job at the point of a gun. Filipino field workers attempted to walk out in support of the strike. They were "persuaded" to stay in the fields by armed guards.

One firm made the mistake of wanting to settle the strike. The Tracy-Waldron Co. signed an agreement with the union. But the firm soon found that it could not buy ice—

Ralph Meyers's Salinas Ice Co. refused to do business. The Tracy-Waldron Co. abandoned its plan to deal with the union.

The strike has settled into a long siege: a showdown between violence—employers willing to use any fascist terror to break the union—and the strength of the workers. The sheriff has called for volunteers: if a man refuses to join up with the army of deputized strike-breakers, he is liable to arrest. Hoodlums, idlers in pool halls, high-school boys, are deputized and handed hickory riot sticks—cut in the workshop of the local high school. The vigilantes roam the city, endanger the lives not only of union members but of any person who might cross their path. But conscription was necessary, it seems. A previous call by the American Legion brought out twenty men. Most of the legionnaires proved to be union members or sympathizers.

THE RED SCARE plays a large part. Chief Cato was so disturbed at the danger of revolution that he discovered a mysterious plot. Red flags with peculiar numbers painted on them hung on power poles. "Ah!" said Mr. Cato, "secret signs that tell the number and date of Red troop movements." Valiantly he seized the flags and dispatched them to Governor Merriam in Sacramento. Next day, A. D. White, director of the state traffic court, appeared in Salinas, furious at the heroic Cato. It seems the little red flags had been tacked up not by Communists but with much labor and expense as markers indicating the number of automobiles using the highways.

The shippers and growers are frantic. They have talked themselves into fear of an approaching Red army, bombs from Red airplanes. They tell each other horrific tales and manage to scare themselves completely out of reason. Four blasts of the fire siren the other day brought out a "citizen's" militia of several thousand to combat a reported march of 2500 San Francisco longshoremen who were supposedly coming to Salinas to "mop up" the grower-shippers. Airplanes were dispatched to scout the highways. It cost a good deal of money, but the longshoremen failed to appear. As the sheriff said, "We can take no chances. This is a serious matter."

As THIS is written, Governor Frank Merriam, who sent troops on to the San Francisco waterfront two years ago to break the maritime strike, has backed down from his former openly Red-baiting position. The state federation of labor, in convention at the capital, pledged full support to the Salinas strike, and threatened Merriam with recall if he did not see to it that a rapid settlement was made and violence by vigilantes, employers, and state police halted immediately.

In Salinas, fifty carloads of lettuce move each day. At this season, the normal output is 300 carloads a day. California organized labor backs the Fruit & Vegetable Workers. Longshoremen have declared lettuce "hot cargo." No lettuce can be moved into San Francisco. If it can be tied up in New York, Chicago, and other cities, the workers will win their strike. They must win if agricultural labor is to go forward in California.



Maurice Becker



# In the Citadel of Steel

*Pouring down the Allegheny and Monongahela valleys, the molten metal of the unionizing drive is firing the region with enthusiasm*

By William F. Dunne

**N**O ONE who knows the American labor movement and its struggles in steel can travel up and down the two sides of the triangle, with Pittsburgh at its apex, made by the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers flowing to form the Ohio, can stop in the steel, glass, aluminum manufacturing and coal mining towns that are stretched continuously along their banks, without realizing the magnitude of the task set for itself by the Steel Workers Organizing Committee of the Committee for Industrial Organization.

If, in addition, one thinks of the organic connection between these mighty industries and Wall Street, and their dominating influence in the political life of this nation, even the organized strength of the 1,250,000 workers in the C.I.O. unions and the hundreds of thousands in other unions who have made known their support for the industrial-union drive in steel and allied industries will at first seem puny.

But as facts come to light, as the record of union organization in one concern after another in the last three months—since the S.W.O.C. campaign got under way—is unfolded by organizers, paid and unpaid, in the valley strongholds of the dynasties which divide the power to rule and rob the American working class, it becomes apparent that this campaign has tapped, as nothing else has since the organization drive of 1919 headed by William Z. Foster, the reservoir of resentment of oppression, the will to unite all steel workers in one union, and the heroic determination to batter through all obstacles to reach this objective. This cement has begun to flow strongly down the Monongahela and Allegheny valleys.

This is the major guarantee for the success of the campaign.

A number of recent developments, picked not for their spectacular character but as instances of the extremely varied form in which the effect of the S.W.O.C. campaign is shown among the numerous categories of workers involved, will prove the validity of this premise:

The size, militancy, and significance of the Labor Day demonstrations in the steel and metal centers under the auspices of the S.W.O.C., Central Labor Councils—and even in some instances Building Trades Councils, the international officers of whose affiliated unions are opposed to the C.I.O.—have been appraised already in the *Daily Worker* of September 17. It is enough to say here that in this respect, with some local exceptions the

reasons for which are known, they far surpassed any similar demonstrations in the labor history of steel. The Pittsburgh meeting, for instance, brought out more than twice the crowd that heard Governor Landon at his carefully staged "homecoming" in Middlesex. Mass parades were a new feature—as in Aliquippa, Ambridge, Mansfield, O., New Kensington, Bethlehem, and elsewhere. For the time being, the outright terror in Aliquippa (Jones & Laughlin company town) and in Ambridge (American Bridge Co.) with which such demonstrations have been met, was absent. The companies did not dare to challenge forcibly the right—and the determination—of the steel workers to assemble.

In Bethlehem, home plant of Bethlehem Steel, there was a Labor Day parade for the first time. The only previous union demonstration in that city was broken up by the state police. A survey of these Labor Day celebrations shows that where there was capable and conscientious organization, the working class responded in an unmistakable fashion.

The organization of the Women's Auxiliaries of the Amalgamated Association and other unions has lagged behind the organizational work in general. Nevertheless, their activities can be seen and felt. In Mansfield, O., the women practically took charge of the Labor Day parade. One of their floats, "Before and After the Union Came," would have stood out in any pageant.

In McKeesport, the Women's Auxiliary went into action against the proposed publication of a series of anti-union advertisements in

the local press. The merchants were canvassed and advised of the possibility of a housewives' boycott if they signed such advertisements or continued to advertise in papers carrying them.

In some other steel towns these advertisements appeared over the signatures of citizens' committees, American legion officials, etc., but none appeared in the McKeesport press.

BUT IT is the organization of new unions, the increase in membership of unions already established, and the improvement in wages and working conditions; the growth of the spirit of independence among workers in the basic industries; the general tightening of the lines between the corporation forces and the labor movement in all its branches, that best show the potentialities of the mass movement given impetus by the S.W.O.C. campaign. These developments are all the more important since, like the Labor Day demonstrations, they have occurred after only some two and one half months of activity.

Even the company unions and their employee representatives are not running true to form. Councils, committees, and conferences representing the 90,000 workers in the Carnegie-Illinois tin, plate, and strip plants of the corporation in the Pittsburgh-Chicago area have made demands for flat wage increases of more than a dollar per day. The demands also include two weeks' vacations with pay, seniority rights, improvements in the pension and insurance systems.

A number of members of these company-union councils who have urged support of the S.W.O.C., joining the Amalgamated Association, and converting the company unions into genuine unions have been discharged, among them the chairman of the Pittsburgh-Chicago Employees Council. But these arbitrary dismissals of employees with long service records have not stopped the wage movement in the plants. The last demand from the Carnegie-Illinois tin and plate divisions, agreed to by a conference of thirty-six company-union representatives meeting in the Frick Building, Pittsburgh, was made a week after the discharges were publicly announced.

It is obvious that the wide network of S.W.O.C. headquarters in the steel industry centers could not be without effect on the general labor movement even though activities had been confined to the distribution of literature. The C.I.O. campaign for industrial unionism, reaching into Central Labor Coun-



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