

Hollywood on Strike

The picket lines of the technicians signify not only bad conditions, but are revealing on the craft-union question

By Edward Newhouse

HOLLYWOOD.—“I have a lot of reasons for being here,” said one of the sound technicians on the picket line in front of the Warner Bros. studio at Burbank. “Listen carefully and I’ll explain some of them. Last night my girl gets a call to report at the Hal Roach studios for work in an evening gown. She’s an extra. So she meets a bunch of the girls and they’re piled into a bus. There some of the other girls tell her they’re really going to a party out at the Hal Roach ranch, two hundred and fifty of them at \$7.50 apiece. The M.G.M. convention was in town and the boys were going to have themselves a stag. So they get out there and the party’s in full swing.

“Plenty of champagne and music and Mexican entertainers. Plenty of Scotch and rough stuff. Now most of those girls are over twenty-one, and somebody who doesn’t know the set-up here would think they knew better. But they’re picture girls and they know what it means not to answer a call, even if it doesn’t come through Central Casting. So there’s girls all over the place, girls drunk and girls crying, fighting off guys or going off into rooms, and pretty soon my girl gets sick of it and phones me to pick her up. So I go out there and force my way in, and a more disgraceful scene I never hope to see. People sprawled all over, clutching bottles. I couldn’t begin to tell you about the place. They must have blown in all of \$20,000 on that party, and all the big shots there, Hal Roach and Joe Cohen and the rest. So on my way out I hit a guy who said something dirty about the strike. My girl kept crying all the way home.

“If only to fight people like that, I’d be out here. But there’s other reasons. Three years ago I was making \$150 a week along with the rest of the skilled sound technicians. Along comes a jurisdictional dispute between the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and we get the old tossing around, and after the razzle-dazzle is over we’re making \$40 a week and working unlimited hours. I’m not picketing here because somebody told me to.”

TO DATE, craft unionism has hamstrung every attempt to organize America’s fourth largest industry. Five international unions—the musicians, teamsters, carpenters, electricians, and the I.A.T.S.E.—operate under basic agreement with producers, but they have fought among themselves and with unions which should have been their close allies.

The I.A.T.S.E. is the International Alli-

ance for Theatrical and Stage Employees. Its initials are locally pronounced Yazi or Nazi. It’s a mushroom grouping of craft-union locals, ostensibly on the industrial-union principle, but run by the corrupt Brown mob with an abandon that would have done honor to Umbrella Mike in his palmiest days. They started as a paper organization, then agreed with the producers on a closed-shop pact which stampeded the workers into signing.

[The author refers to the group of I.A.T.S.E. leaders headed by George A. Brown, who was appointed in October 1936 a member of the Executive Committee of the A.F. of L. replacing David Dubinsky of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. At this time, the I.A.T.S.E. had 5500 members, which made it the biggest A.F. of L. union in the film industry. The present strike-breaking activities of the I.A.T.S.E. are not unprecedented in the history of this union. Some five years ago, it signed an agreement with the movie producers providing that first cameramen should not join the Yazis, but should remain in the American Society of Cinematographers for the duration of their five-year contract. This achieved two purposes for the producers: it divided the skilled technicians into two rival camps, and kept the first cameramen in what is to all intents and purposes a company union. The practical advantages of this arrangement for the producers, as well as the effect of George A. Brown’s policies, became abundantly clear in 1933. The sound men, organized in the I.A.T.S.E., went on strike, and the first cameramen, organized in the Society of Cinematographers, were used to break that strike.—The Editors.]

There hasn’t been a membership meeting since. Then out of a clear sky, Brown slaps a two-percent payroll assessment on all members over and above the regular dues, death assessments, etc. The other day one of a group of reporters asked an official what the Yazis did with this money, the men would like to know. And the officials said, “What’s the difference, what good would it be for them to know?” Nobody was shocked when the local papers ran this.

The Yazis could no more be expected to lead a fight against prevailing conditions than Hutcheson of the carpenters or Tobin of the teamsters, both of whom are backing William Green’s attempt to break the current strike. The plight of the extras has been described often enough, but conditions among other studio workers are almost as bad. Whether you’re a plumber, scenic artist, molder, or cos-

tumer, you’re on tap twenty-four hours a day and you better hug the telephone or someone else will get the call. You can be snatched to work on location for a couple of hours, then not see a paycheck for weeks. And Harry Cohen won’t underwrite your telephone bills, either.

Matters came to a head when the Brown gang made an attempt to chisel the painters’ union away from the Painters’ International, no less. The movement for genuine industrial unionism got irrevocably under way in the studios, and the new Federated Motion Picture Crafts was formed. The call for the present strike was issued on May Day by Charles Lessing, and it pulled eleven unions out of the ten major studios. Production is still under way, since the need for the type of work performed by these 6000 strikers will not assert itself decisively for a while. Picket lines have to patrol an unnaturally large number of entrances and areas. But they’re solid and clicking.

Naturally, Tobin, chieftain of the carpenters’ union, and William Green, A.F. of L. president, and the I.A.T.S.E. swung into action. Green wired to say he thought the strike was “unfortunate.” The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers office sent a telegram instructing the Hollywood officials of their union immediately to expel any member who refuses to walk through the picket lines. A similar telegram came from the office of the teamsters’ union. Then other telegrams came through dozens of local organizations, a donation to the strikers from the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild, \$500 from the Screen Actors’ Guild, support from Harry Bridges of the I.L.A. Then came assurance of full support from John Brophy of the C.I.O., and that brought down the house in a five-minute ovation at the strikers’ mass meeting.

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, eighteen pickets I chose at random expressed themselves in favor of joining up with the C.I.O. And the Federated Motion Picture Crafts must do this if it is to survive.

Even Charles Lessing, who told me he favored industrial unionism in principle but thought the C.I.O. premature, has since stated, cautiously enough, that he would “accept aid from those who offered it.” Certainly he did not mean the executive board of the Los Angeles Central Trades Council, whose head, J. W. Buzzell, rushed into the fray with a preposterous offer for settlement immediately accepted by the producers. Buzzell proposed (1) that the workers go back on the job and

(2) that they negotiate demands afterward.

Not even the NEW MASSES can undertake to print the precise wording of Lessing's answer. As far as the newspapers were concerned, the Federation's reply placed the workers in the position of refusing to arbitrate. But an acceptance of Buzzell's proposals would have been worse than the Yazis' current tactic of giving free union cards to strikebreakers.

At this point, it must be said that the rank-and-file movement for democratic control in the I.A.T.S.E. is daily growing, and has already crystallized around the "white rats" group, inappropriately so designated.

At this writing, a great deal but not everything, as has been supposed, depends on the conduct of the Screen Actors' Guild. Individual actors and actresses, such as Elissa Landi, Luise Rainer, Gale Sondergaard, and Lionel Stander have already come out publicly in support of the film strikers, and the gift of \$500 to the strike fund was official.

By the time this appears, more decisive action will have been taken on the hitherto equivocal position of the Guild. That this position has been hesitant and temporizing in the important first days of the strike can only be explained on the basis of the Guild's varied composition and curious constitution. Here is the only incorporated labor union in America. Its membership is divided into junior and senior groups, i. e., those who make less or more than \$250 a week. The junior group is

militant but virtually disfranchised. Any of their proposals or resolutions, unanimous though they might be, can be vetoed by the seniors. Just like that. Since its formation, the Guild's executive board, composed largely of conservatives, has chosen to maneuver with the A.F. of L. leaders who could have forced recognition of the Guild by the producers with a single strike.

The lesson of the longshoremen who refused to work with non-Guild actors seems to have been lost on the Guild's board. It hastened to enter into relations with the reactionary Buzzell machine in the Central Trades Council, but failed in its clear duty to join the Federated Motion Picture Crafts on the day of its formation.

Unfortunately, this is being written before the annual membership meeting of the Guild, where participation in the strike will finally be considered. Right now, however, it is clear that sentiment for such participation is strong even among the seniors. In response to his splendid speech at a special Guild meeting, Lionel Stander has received a telegram that is more than equivalent to the year's Academy award: "May the undersigned organizations express their deep appreciation for your unsurpassable stand in their behalf at the meeting of the Guild. Trade unionists will never forget you nor forsake you. Motion Picture Painters, Make-Up Artists, Scenic Artists, Utility Workers, Stationary Engineers, Machinists, Cooks and Waiters, Plumbers, Molders, Boiler

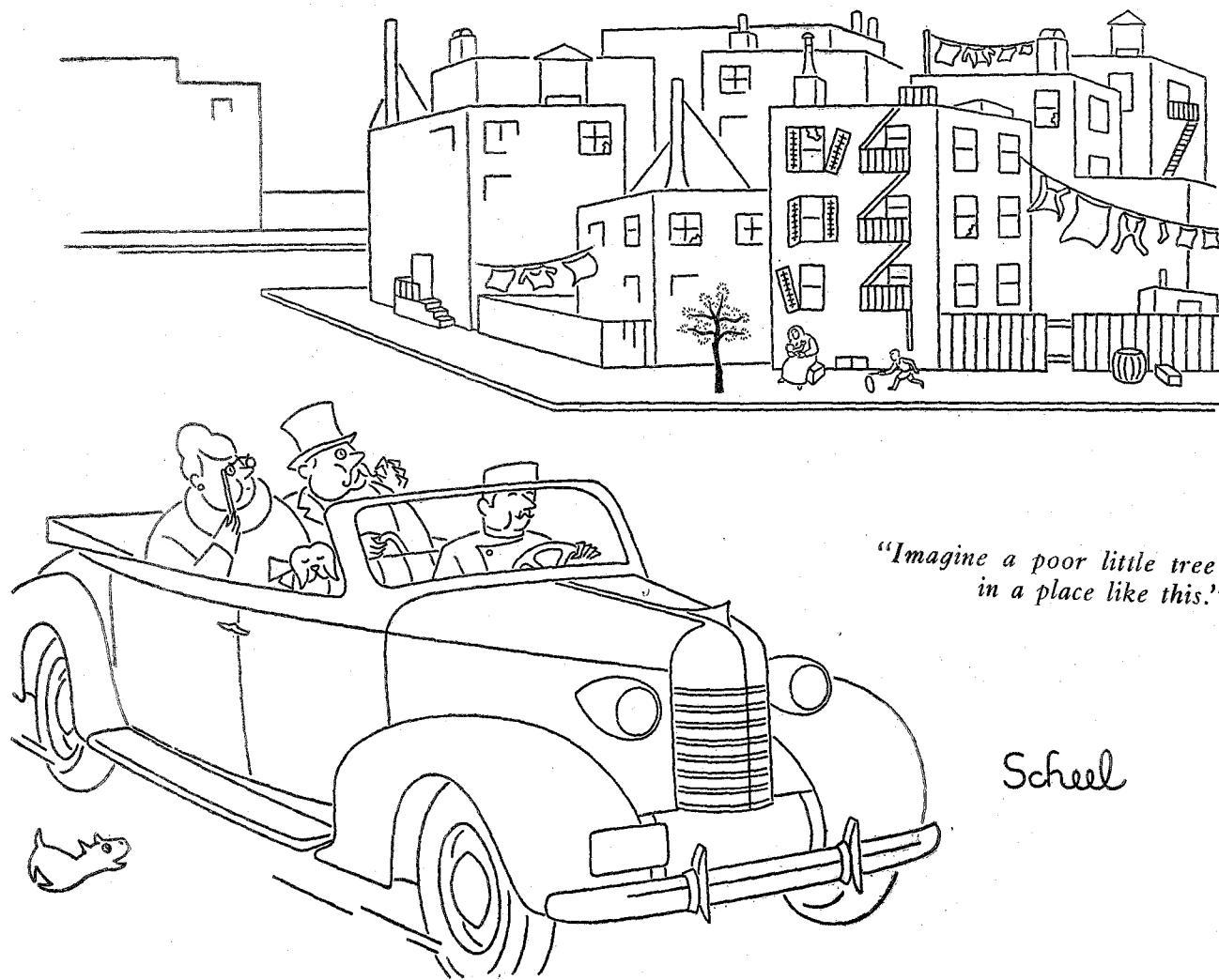
Makers and Welders, Costumers, Federated Motion Picture Crafts."

Clearly it is up to every union man and friend of organized labor to boycott all productions of the ten struck studios, M.G.M., Paramount, Warner's, and the rest, until satisfactory settlement has been made. The loss in revenue caused by every union man's decision to miss but a single show would make Messrs. Casey, Schenck, and Mannix much friendlier at the green table.

[At its annual meeting on Sunday, the Screen Actors' Guild disassociated itself from the strike in order to obtain a closed shop for itself. In doing so, it lined up with the I.A.T.S.E., whose representative spoke from the platform. This action has compelled thousands of rank and filers, sympathetic to the strike, to walk through the established picket lines. Progressives are hoping that the Screen Actors' Guild, having won a closed shop for itself, will now help the strikers win one, too.—THE EDITORS.]

Meantime, Harry Bridges's longshoremen are picketing Grauman's Chinese Theatre; American Student Union members take regular turns in the lines around the studios; and local motion picture houses are reporting a drop in business as high as 60 percent.

Win or lose, this is a strike for industrial unionism, and that's one thing out of which Sam Goldwyn can't buy his way. It's all over Los Angeles now, and in his own words, "It's colossal, but it'll improve."



"Imagine a poor little tree growing in a place like this."

Scheel

Theodore School



Rockwell Kent

THE "AMERICAN" PEACE POLICY

Washington, D. C.—Senator Gerald P. Nye (Dem., N. D.) today attacked the form of the Neutrality measure, pointing out that unless an embargo were imposed on shipments of arms and raw materials for armaments to Germany and Italy, our so-called neutrality amounted in substance to the cutting off from the Spanish loyalists of their means of self-defense, at the same time that it provided the means for Italy and Germany to continue their "war of invasion."—NEWS ITEM.

NEW MASSES

ESTABLISHED 1911

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Barcelona and Bilbao

BETWEEN them, the week's crises in the Basque country and in Catalonia express the complexity of the struggle to maintain democracy in Spain. In Bilbao, the threat is primarily from the enemy without. In Barcelona, the threat was primarily from disunity within. The solution of both problems has already been reached in Madrid, where this two-fold danger was acute at an earlier stage. It remains to be seen whether Bilbao and Barcelona will duplicate the feat of Madrid on both accounts.

The situation in Catalonia loomed ominously for many months, owing to the lack of activity on the Aragon front. Many Anarchists refused to accept a single command, war discipline, submergence of all differences for the duration of the war. The best and most of the Anarchists have gladly embraced these people's-front objectives. The present difficulty was precipitated by the fact that the Trotskyists sought to take advantage of this differentiation within the ranks of the Anarchists to stage a putsch whereby power would be theirs. Their intrigues were made easier by the fact that the Anarchist movement is a strange conglomeration of idealists, gangster elements known as "uncontrollables," and job-holding labor bureaucrats of the Syndicalist unions. The Trotskyists found allies for their plot among the "uncontrollables," but the best representatives of the Anarchist movement, such as Garcia Oliver, called for a speedy end to the putsch.

It now appears that the attempt at a coup, inspired by the Trotskyists in an unholy alliance with the "uncontrollables" and "fifth column" fascists, has been routed, that a firm control is exercised by the government. The Trotskyist paper, *La Batalla*, will no longer call for "war in the rear" while the fascists attack at the front. Such a showdown was inevitable, and its aftermath may bring that unity which Catalonia has hitherto lacked.

As we go to press, the insurgents appear to have made further progress towards

Bilbao though the city itself is not yet under siege. If Bilbao will hold fast against the fascist assault just as Catalonia has trounced the Trotskyist allies of fascism, Madrid may well be proud of the example she has set.

"Fifth Column" in America

WHAT is Congress going to do about disclosures made this week that General Franco's fascists maintain an espionage center in New York which is plotting against the recognized Spanish republic?

These disclosures, made first by the *Daily Worker*, are thoroughly documented by photostats of incriminating letters. They show that Franco's spies infest American ports, operating with diplomatic passports which have no diplomatic standing. Through agents in Mexico, Franco's agents are following shipping from the North American continent. Furthermore, they are conspiring, in violation of American law, to purchase Americans arms and munitions for a fascist "government" in Spain having no official standing with the government of the United States. They are engaged in a criminal plot to conduct military-naval operations against shipping in American waters bound for the Loyalist ports, against which there is no American blockade.

There is a startling similarity between this exposé and another recently made in Great Britain by the British *Daily Worker*. The leader of the American ring of spies is Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, former Spanish ambassador to the United States. His activities are linked to Ogden Hammond, former American ambassador to Spain. The leader of the British agents is the Marquis del Moral, a Spanish monarchist, whose British contact man is Lord Howard of Penrith, former British ambassador to Spain.

Senator Gerald P. Nye has announced that he will introduce a resolution in the Senate calling for a thorough investigation into the activity of Franco agents in the United States. Congressman John T. Bernard has asked for a similar inquiry in the House of Representatives. Under international law, friendly powers cannot permit on their territory subversive conspiracies against each other's recognized governments. Congress owes it to the American people to initiate an investigation which will halt the illegal and criminal activities of Franco's agents in this country.

Either/Or

MONDAY'S primary in Minneapolis was of extraordinary significance for the whole farmer-labor-party movement. The

highlight of the campaign was the vigorous drive by the Farmer-Labor Party to oust the present incumbent, Thomas E. Latimer, and nominate its own candidate, Kenneth Haycraft, Minnesota's old-age pension director. Latimer owed his previous election to farmer-labor backing, but his odious role during recent strikes brought his career in the party to an end.

Enter the Trotskyists. Now operating in the name of the Socialist Party, they threw their support to Latimer simply because that appeared the easiest way to knife the farmer-labor party, the Trotskyist *bête noir* in America. Under the leadership of Vincent R. Dunne, they organized a rump convention in opposition to the regular Farmer-Labor convention and nominated Latimer as their candidate.

This bit of strategy put the Trotskyists very much on the defensive at the recent Socialist Party convention. Although the convention itself passed a white-washing resolution on the Latimer endorsement, discretion dictated that it was time to shake Latimer. There has not been a Socialist candidate for mayor of Minneapolis in twenty years, but Dunne subsequently announced his candidacy for the office.

The strategy of the Minneapolis Trotskyists thus followed a classic pattern. *Either* support reactionaries against progressives—Latimer against Haycraft. *Or* split the progressive vote in favor of the reactionaries. Dunne campaigns for working-class votes against Haycraft so that Latimer is again the ultimate beneficiary.

The Brazilian Dimitrov

THE Brazilian government has finally dared to sentence Luis Carlos Prestes and Arthur Ewert, together with more than thirty others, for the "crime" of challenging the rule of force under dictator Getulio Vargas. The sentence of sixteen years' imprison-



Franco—Invades America