

THE PRODUCTION OFFENSIVE

How American labor works for maximum output of war materials in minimum time. Joseph North surveys the status of the battle in our factories. Facts and figures.

THE days have gone forever when the life of the organized American workingman was bounded by the four grimy walls of his shop; today, carrying his CIO or AFL card, one of 10,000,000 strong, he has come to think in terms of billions of dollars, millions of tons, tens of thousands of airplanes and tanks. The horizons of Bill Jones of Canonsburg, Pa., encompass the continents of the world: his life is menaced by an enemy who seeks to conquer the globe. "There is a crisis in the land," Albert J. Fitzgerald, president-elect of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, said last week. "If we fail to defeat Hitler, then all our concern and discussion about wages, hours, business, profits, taxes, prices, and all those things—all will be meaningless." A man named Hitler and his international gangsters "will make the rules, break the rules, and issue the decrees." Though Mr. Fitzgerald spoke only for the 300,000 workingmen in his union, his words typified the resolution, the sense of innumerable meetings all over America today. Isolationism, to Bill Jones at his lathe, is as dead as Jehoshaphat.

Spokesmen for labor are alarmed: they abhor the too leisurely pace of American defense production. Gains have been made, true, but look at Hitler's blitzkrieg schedule. There is as yet no torrent of arms which the President has called for. Labor spokesmen are asking: why? Does the reason lie in the fact that more than seventy-five percent of all defense work went to fifty-six great corporations? Has there been inadequate planning? What is wrong about the defense production setup? What can we do to help remedy matters? These questions are being asked in the shops of a thousand industrial localities. They reflect something big that is happening, something of great meaning to the entire American people; American labor seeks full share of the responsibility in planning this country's effort to beat Hitler. It strives for the full mobilization of all national resources to arrive at maximum output in minimum time. Or else that torrent of arms will be fatally slow in coming. "We warned time and again," Philip Murray, CIO president, said last week, "that the failure to organize in such a way that full production could be established and that supplies of critical materials could be expanded, would result in idle plants and increased unemployment."

THE UE PRESIDENT-ELECT, Mr. Fitzgerald, spoke significantly along the same lines. "Victory," he said, "depends to a decisive extent on the production of defense material which we in the United States are able to achieve.

These defense materials, once we of the shops have turned them out, must be placed speedily and in large quantities in the hands of the men and women who are doing the fighting."

For "we of the shops" know that the United States has "made itself responsible" for the production of \$62,000,000,000 worth of defense materials within three years. But three years these times are as epochs in former days. And "we of the shops" know that so far, through the past fourteen months, only half that amount has been spent, and, as Mr. Fitzgerald pointed out, "only about \$5,000,000,000 represents actual armaments produced." Leon Henderson said the other day that the nation's war effort in 1917-18 reached twenty-five percent of the country's national income within fourteen months. The total today is only twelve to fourteen percent. The reality is that America is giving one hour out of eight for military production today, whereas Hitler is using five out of eight. Mr. Henderson told of OPM production schedules that outline abrupt jumps in October, November, and December. "By January," he said, "we ought to be up to one and a half hours out of every eight and by June at least up to two out of eight for defense." But even if twenty-five percent of production for defense is achieved by June, 1942, that is scarcely enough. "We plan to use thirty-five percent, fifty percent, or even sixty percent."

BILL JONES appreciates the government blueprint of production to lick Hitler: he knows that output for war has increased. It is on its way. But he knows that it moves too damn slow, considering the speed of the panzer divisions. He experiences personally the difficulties, the hardships, that are involved in meeting "production schedules." His daily life from morning to evening whistle brings him into contact with traditional wastage, inefficiencies, with "business-as-usual" attitudes, with monopolistic practices that bar full speed. He knows there are ways of doing things bet-

ter; for years management has encouraged him to slip into the box his ideas for improving efficiency. As a workingman he knows, too, that the change-over from a civilian consumption economy to a war economy is dislocating normal industrial routine. It has brought him the menace of priorities unemployment. Though he is ready to share all necessary hardships victory requires, he feels that the threat of priorities unemployment is largely unnecessary; that proper planning could have obviated it. And still can. Though the government has taken measures to coordinate and speed up the defense output—SPAB, the Special Contracts Distribution Division, and a broadened outlook on the part of the Army and Navy heads are indicative—yet time remains the vital factor. "Too late" is still the bugaboo before all anti-Hitler men. And labor has specific ideas on the best methods to overcome that bugaboo. It wants to tell how.

FOR MONTHS labor spokesmen have been clamoring to improve the efficiency of America's tremendous industrial machine. There is the Murray plan of industrial councils which would work in the direction of complete mobilization of the entire national apparatus for defense—a basic proposal which would help obviate most of the difficulties confronting the country today. There is the Zonarich plan for improvement in aluminum output, one of the principal bottlenecks to date; the United Automobile Workers mapped a program to get tanks and airplanes off the belt instead of pleasure cars; the Steel Workers Organizing Committee suggested the means of stepping up production. The Seattle convention of the AFL went on record for an all-out effort. To date, insufficient use has been made of these excellent rock-bottom proposals.

These criticisms are not destructive: all embody proposals for improvement. Consider some of the suggestions. A few days ago at the conference of CIO Unions on Priorities Unemployment, George T. Addes, secretary-treasurer of the UAW, reported that a shortage of tools and dies constituted a major bottleneck. Yet a survey his union made of thirty-four tool and die plants in the automotive industry showed that only thirty-five percent of them were working at capacity. Addes warned that priority orders which curtail basic material to civilian industries might throw two to four million men out of work within the next few months. He showed how this threat would be overcome by speeding defense production which, in turn, requires the adaptation to war production of machinery now making civilian goods. New



tools, new dies, are necessary. These items are also crucial to equip the new armament factories now under construction.

Addes, however, indicated that defense planning is so far behind that the country suffers a great lag in full mobilization of its tool and die capacity. He found 1,577 machines capable of turning out a wide range of tools and dies in the thirty-four plants in question. He ascertained, however, that 337 of these machines were not being used at all. Others were only used part time for automobile tooling work and "a scattering of defense production." Additional vital facts unearthed were these: of forty larger machines used in retooling Keller machines—eighteen stood idle. A third of the forty-nine planers and a fifth of the radial drills were also unused. The survey estimated that the total machine hours a week the machines in the thirty-four plants could be used was 252,320. Actually, the machine hours a week totaled only 87,296.

FURTHERMORE: As far back as last May Clinton S. Golden, northeastern regional director of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, sent a letter to Vice President Robert L. Earle of the Curtiss-Wright Corp., criticizing management errors in the aircraft industry. Mr. Golden informed the Curtiss-Wright executive that twenty-five per cent of the propellers produced at the company's two plants in the Pittsburgh region were being scrapped because of the "inefficiencies and mismanagement that the union can assist in correcting." The loss amounted to 400 to 500 propellers monthly. Curtiss-Wright holds \$309,628,000 in United States defense contracts and its subsidiary, Wright Aeronautical Corp., has an additional \$153,780,000. The SWOC executive pointed out that an alarming percentage of this is being wasted at the Neville Island and Gerard plants near Pittsburgh. Mr. Golden was more than specific in his charges. Let me cite several examples.

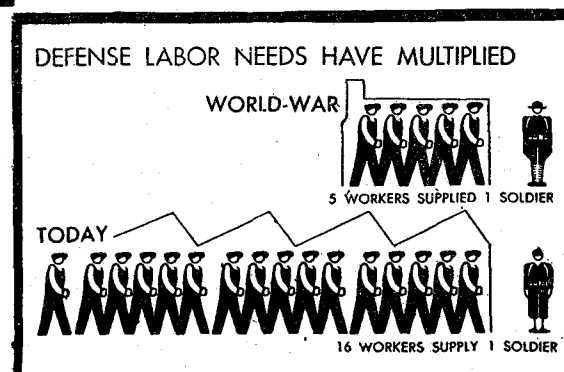
1: "Output in the welding department is being held down at least thirty-three percent, and probably more, by poor quality welding rod. SWOC has had a piece of this bad rod, which costs around \$400 a ton, analyzed and it can be corrected. . . . Sixty welders have signed a petition complaining that 'We are continually forced to use bad rod in the welding of propeller blades.'"

2: Mr. Golden also cited the instance of heat-treating. The union has canvassed the district and found unused heat-treating facilities that could be used to eliminate a bottleneck. The available heat-treating plant was used by a company that occupied the Neville Island plant before Curtiss-Wright moved in.

The letter noted that in January 1941, the workers lifted production sixty-six percent over the previous month, but production had gradually begun to slip back because of mismanagement practices.

Another example: as long ago as July 17 labor offered to show the government how production of aluminum could be stepped

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Pictorial Corporation. From Survey Graphic.

up to 3,000,000,000 pounds a year. The monopoly practices of Alcoa are big hurdles to leap in achieving the vitally important maximum output of this metal. The International Union of Aluminum Workers, after a four months' survey of the industry, proposed an adaptation of the general plan for industrial councils urged by CIO's President Murray. At that time they proposed that full priorities on materials necessary for construction of aluminum plants be granted, that domestic bauxite mining operations should be stepped up, non-defense and luxury uses of power should be rationed, and inter-connecting power-generating station and steam-generating facilities be developed. The plan urged the training of a labor force to operate the projected plants and that industrial harmony be assured through perfection and extension of sound collective bargaining relationships.

THESE ARE TYPICAL, these proposals. There are millions of Bill Joneses who carry around under their caps ideas for improving the production in their own shops. The plans cited have been offered, and labor has waited, perhaps too patiently, for their adoption, for action. Time works for the enemy. Hitler's mechanized men are hammering at the gates of Moscow and menacing the Donets basin. The American workingman has kept pace with the President's fears that the fate of the country is bound up with the destiny of the USSR, of Great Britain. Hence the desire for speed.

To quote UE's president-elect, labor has been urging a partnership "to protect the security of the United States by defeating Hitler — a partnership where each partner makes his contribution toward that one objective." The electrical workers' union has already taken specific measures to show what kind of partnership this should be. They pointed out that they do not seek to take over the functions of management or of government. They wish, however, to have an equal share in the planning of production. Consider the scene in Chicago last month when 1,500 delegates convened as a result of the UE's Emergency Program Against Lay-Offs. Here, in microcosm was the picture of the national front against Hitler. Both AFL and CIO unions as well as UE were represented. Management was on hand, so were the mayors or representatives from more than 500 communities in eleven midwestern states. This was a beginning. It laid the basis for action. In Newark, N. J., employers, mayors, UE delegates met at the city hall some three weeks back. The result: a functioning Northern New Jersey Defense Committee. Engineers sent by the government are working with the group. Similar actions took place in Brooklyn where a functioning "partnership" operates. Similar results can be recorded in other UE areas; St. Louis, Mansfield, and Dayton, O., Evansville, Ind., and many other cities.

Labor has welcomed the fact that President Roosevelt recently set up a special Defense Contracts Distribution Division under Floyd

B. Odum, the purpose of which is to achieve a wider distribution of defense work, particularly in the smaller plants, through sub-contracting. Odum himself has registered the necessity of harnessing a substantial, still untapped part of the nation's capacity to produce arms. Consider a moment the extent of the unused part of the nation's machine: something over four percent of the plants in the country operate with less than 250 men. Over sixty percent are manned by less than 500. These relatively small plants, however, contain nearly one-half of the country's standard type machine tools, the type that could be turned to all around metal work, such as stamping, planing, drilling, lathe and screw work. These shops have skilled mechanics along with vital machines. Yet the overwhelming majority of these factories have been out in the cold so far as defense contracts are concerned. The recent joint labor-management-government conferences and "defense clinics" have begun to tackle this crucial question.

One of the practical results of these conferences is afforded by the example of the washing machine industries. The UE had organized a number of firms which normally produce these machines. The production of the machines was recently curtailed as a product non-essential to national defense. Many workingmen were threatened with unemployment. The UE got on the job. A total of thirty-four washing machine firms, including some which were not "UE" companies, organized in such a manner that four of their number are taking primary defense contracts from the government, and meantime agreements have been reached whereby the primary contractors are obligated to subcontract and spread the work to the other thirty companies. Today the workers in these plants are turning out .50 calibre anti-aircraft gun mounts, \$12,000,000 worth. As the OPM bulletin puts it: "The case involved the first industry-wide certification under procurement policies worked out recently by the OPM and the armed services to increase defense production and prevent dislocations, wherever practicable, by spreading armament orders into plants whose non-defense production must be curtailed." It indicated that the industry was capable of producing seventeen different defense items, ranging from the anti-aircraft machine gun mounts to bomb fin assemblies.

This was achieved by the acumen and anti-Hitler will of some forward-looking government officials, through the cooperation of the

management, and through the initiative of UE. Therefore, today, these plants which faced a shutdown several weeks ago are today producing machine gun mounts and other defense materials. What was achieved on a small scale in this industry, labor spokesmen feel, can be reproduced on a large scale nationally, in all industries.

Again to quote the UE head: "These steps we have taken and these methods we have worked out are not confined to the UE. It is the same in all the basic industries of the nation. The same thinking is going on in every segment of the labor movement—the unions in every industry are trying to apply this partnership idea to their problems."

This is farsighted, plain American thinking. "I have just said," Mr. Fitzgerald continued, "that the UE does not intend to exploit the national emergency for short-time, narrow gains."

This attitude is typical of the overwhelming majority of labor that sees the crisis in its reality. There may be exceptions. But labor as a whole does not intend to make its full-hearted support of the program to defeat Hitler conditional upon anything except the totality of American national interest. It does intend to safeguard all its prerogatives, all its rights to organize and to bargain collectively; that goes without saying. It will never abrogate its right to strike, a right which it believes the government should safeguard by guaranteeing the enforcement of labor and social legislation, a right which labor affirms shall not be used against the interests of national defense and maximum production.

This is evidenced by the AFL appeal that industrial disputes be ironed out by the Defense Mediation Board and other such agencies. Harry Bridges made a similar statement before the California CIO. Both the AFL convention and CIO leaders favored workers' staying on the job while mediation and negotiation proceed.

Labor, too, is veering away from the ancient conflicts over jurisdictional rights. The CIO United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union has entered into an agreement with the AFL Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in Brooklyn, pledging to end raids on each other's memberships.

These are but a few instances of labor's approach to the question of stepping up war production. For first on its agenda is the battle to retain America's sovereignty as a nation. Mr. Fitzgerald put it well when he said: "All concern and discussion about wages, hours, business, profits, taxes, prices . . . will be meaningless unless Hitler is defeated." The Bill Joneses of America are committed to that premise. They are ready to make all sacrifices necessary to gain the military destruction of the Nazi beast—to produce arms and to use them for victory. They are shaping their lives accordingly and expect all other categories of the country to do likewise. Anything else is a betrayal of our patriotism, of our birthright.

JOSEPH NORTH.

