

MEMORIAL DAY MASSACRE

Ten years have passed since that blood-stained date, May 30, 1937. Many have forgotten; millions more have joined the labor and progressive movement since that time and do not know this story. But it is well that all of us remember—and in remembering, act. For this is what is meant by today's headlines, by today's sessions of Congress: this is what will happen again if the Taft-Hartley anti-labor bill is enacted. This is the program of the NAM and the Chamber of Commerce. This is what they want to do to America—to you. They're moving fast—are you?—The Editors.

MEMORIAL DAY in Chicago in 1937 was hot, humid and sunny; it was the right kind of a day for the parade and the holiday, the kind of a day that takes the soreness out of a Civil War veteran's back and makes him feel like stepping out with the youngsters a quarter his age. It was a day for picnics, for boating, for the beach or a long ride into the country. It was a day when patriotic sentiments could be washed down comfortably with Coca-Cola or a Tom Collins, as you preferred. And there's no doubt but that a good deal of that holiday feeling was present in the strikers who gathered on the prairie outside and around Republic Steel's Chicago plant.

Most of the strikers felt good. Tom Girdler, who ran Republic, had said that he would go back to hoeing potatoes before he met the strikers' demands, and word went around that old Tom could do worse than earn an honest living hoeing potatoes. The strike was less than a week old; the strikers had not yet felt the pinch of hunger, and there was a good sense of solidarity everywhere. Because it was such a fine summer day, many of the strikers brought their children out onto the prairie to attend the first big mass meeting; and wherever you looked, you saw two-year-olds and three-year-olds riding pick-a-back on the shoulders of steel-workers. And because it was in the way of being their special occasion as well as a patriotic holiday, the women wore their best and brightest.

In knots and clusters, the younger

**It was a day for parades,
picnics and boat-rides—and
tear-gas, bullets and death.**

By HOWARD FAST

folks two by two, the older people in family groups, they drifted toward Sam's place on South Green Bay Avenue. Once, Sam's place had been a ten-cent-a-dance hall; now it was strike headquarters, which meant, in terms of the strike, just about everything. There the women had set up their soup kitchen, and there the union strategy board planned the day-to-day work; food was collected at Sam's place, and pickets used it as their barracks and headquarters.

Today, several thousand people gathered around the improvised platform set up at Sam's place, to listen to the speakers and to take part in the mass demonstration. How serious an occasion it was they knew well enough; rumors circulated that the police were going to attempt something special, something out of the run of clubbing and gassing which had marked the strike from the very first day; rumors too that a mass picket line was going to be established today. It was a serious occasion, but somehow something in the day, the holiday, the sunshine and the warm summer weather made the festive air persist. Vendors wheeled wagons of cold pop, and brick ice cream, three flavors in one, was to be had at a nickel a cake.

For the young folks, it was the first strike; they sat under the trees with the girls, grinning at the way the strike committee worked and poured sweat; and the women, cooking inside the hall, reflected, as a hundred generations of women had reflected before, that man's work is from sun to sun, but woman's work. . . .

A group of girls sang. Strike songs were around, a new turn in the folk literature of the nation. First shyly, hesitantly, then with more vigor, with a rising volume augmented by the deep

bass and rich baritone of the men, they sang the deathless tale of Joe Hill, the song-maker and organizer whom the cops had killed; they sang, "Solidarity forever, the union makes us strong . . ." They sang of the nameless IWW worker, tortured into treason, who pleaded, "Comrades, slay me, for the coppers took my soul; close my eyes, good comrades, for I played a traitor's role."

THE meeting started and came down to business. The chairman was Joe Weber, who represented the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee. Outlining the purpose of the mass meeting, he flung an arm at the Republic plant, a third of a mile down the road. Twenty-five thousand men were on strike; their purpose was to picket peacefully, to win a decent raise in wages so that they might exist like human beings. But there had been constant, brutal provocation by the police. Well, they were gathered here, as was their constitutional right, to protest that interference.

Dozens of strikers had been arrested, beaten, waylaid; strikers' property, as for example a sound truck, had been smashed and destroyed. Even women had been beaten, dragged off to jail, treated obscenely. The National Labor Relations Act guaranteed them their rights; today they were going to demonstrate in support of those rights.

Other speakers backed up Weber. When the audience cheered some point, the children present gurgled with delight and clapped their hands. As soon as the meeting had finished the strikers and their wives and children began to form their picketline. After all, this was Memorial Day; the thing took on a parade air. Some of the strikers had made their own placards; also, a whole forest of them appeared from inside the union hall, made by committees. The slogans were simple, direct and non-violent: "REPUBLIC STEEL VIOLATES LABOR DISPUTES ACT." "WIN WITH THE CIO." "NO FASCISM IN AMERICA." "REPUBLIC STEEL SHALL SIGN A UNION CONTRACT."

The signs were handed out, many of them to boys and girls who carried

them proudly. At the head of the column that was forming, two men took their place with American flags. The news reporters, who had come up by car only a short while before, were hopping about now, snapping everything. For some reason that has never been analyzed, news photographers and strikers get along very well, even when the photographers come from McCormick's Chicago *Tribune*. There

was a lot of good-natured give and take. When the column began to march, down the road from Sam's place first, and then across the prairie toward the Republic Steel plant, the news photographers moved with it, some walking, some by car. This fact later turned into a vital part of American labor history.

Republic Steel stood abrupt out of the flat prairie. Snake-like, the line of

pickets crossed the meadowland, singing at first: "Solidarity forever, the union makes us strong . . ."; but then sound died as the sun-drenched plain turned ominous, as five hundred blue-coated policemen took up stations between the strikers and the plant. The strikers' march slowed—but they came on. The police ranks closed and tightened. It brought to mind how other Americans had faced the uniformed

Camel Caravan

Winston-Salem, N. C.

FROM the heights of the rolling city of Winston-Salem, overlooking the town and the sprawling plants of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., a huge sign proclaims that "Camels Lead the World." But under that very sign, and under the giant smokestacks of the world's largest tobacco plant, 10,000 singing, marching, determined Negro and white pickets are proving, in their strike against this powerful company, that it's the CIO which is leading the workers in their fight for decent wages and a better life.

This strike against the makers of Camels, Prince Albert pipe tobacco and other tobacco products has become the major battlefront of "Operation Dixie," the CIO organizing drive. It began at midnight, April 30, when—after weeks of negotiations—the Reynolds Company refused FTA-CIO Local 22's demands for a union contract and a fifteen-cent-an-hour wage increase, instead offering 5½ cents and a cut in overtime pay for 1,200 seasonal workers. This is a city whose food prices are the second highest in the United States.

Union negotiating committee members, reporting to the membership of the union, disclosed that when they bluntly asked the company "Do you mean to tell us that you can't afford to pay the workers a fifteen-cent increase?" company representatives replied: "No, we just won't do it."

Reynolds' profits in 1946, after all costs including wages were paid but before taxes, were \$49,309,000. For each dollar they paid a worker in wages, they made three dollars in profits—the highest rate of any company in the country.

Strike committees, rapidly organized, are functioning like clockwork. The role of Local 22 in developing Negro and white unity and Negro working-class leadership is flattening out the hoary myths about the South's working people. Since the strike began more white workers have joined FTA-CIO than ever before.

FTA pickets like to sing. They put their feelings into words, and their words into a song, and pretty soon every line at each of the seventy-three plant gates swells the chorus. Behind the scenes, Ruth Davenport, chairman of the singing committee, and a picket captain during the day, works with her committee to put these new songs in writing. A glee club has been formed under her direction which carries the story of their fight to the people of Winston-Salem.

The veterans' committee of Local 22, under the chairmanship of John Henry Minor and C. C. Anderson, has also done a job in rallying Local 22's vets, of whom there are close to 700. The thirteenth day of the strike witnessed a demonstration of 400 Negro and white veterans in uniform such as Winston-Salem had never seen. They marched from the union hall in squads of twenty-five and broke ranks outside the plant to relieve regular pickets. News of the demonstration spread and soon thousands of citizens were lining the sidewalks, singing and cheering for "our boys."

"We ate Spam over there, now we want good food and the money to buy it," was the way the veterans' picket signs told their story.

COMMUNITY support for the strikers has come from merchants, farmers, ministers and citizens from every walk of life who recognize the battle of R. J. Reynolds strikers as their own—to improve the living conditions in the community, to overcome the race-hate spread by the bosses in the South, and to win the FDR program of security and peace for all.

A Negro Citizens' Committee to Aid Camels Strikers, headed by Rev. R. L. Pitts, has called nation-wide attention to the strike as a turning point for the people of the South. "A new pattern for the South is being set here," they said, pointing to the growing "political emancipation of the Negro people, and their acceptance by the white community . . . as leaders and allies in the common fight to free the South from economic exploitation and poverty."

Five days after the strike began Rev. Kenneth Williams, young Negro and war veteran, backed by a United Labor Committee of AFL and CIO unions, was swept into office by the highest vote in the city, to become the first Negro alderman in Winston-Salem since Reconstruction days.

Yes, there's a new South being born, and the old masters are fighting desperately to strangle it. Here in Winston-Salem big business has launched its first major counter-attack against the CIO Southern drive. The strikers have the spirit and everything it takes to win—everything but food, medicine and rent for themselves and their families. For these things they count on help from progressive people in all parts of the country.

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