

Passaic Breaks a New Trail

By Joseph Zack,

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HARDWORKING, emaciated people, earning \$12 to \$18 a week on the average, working 48 to 54 hours per week; mostly women and children—youngsters of foreign-born workers, working for modern feudal barons, under the most miserable conditions—health wrecking and unsanitary—if such misery and brutal exploitation—if such modern hell on earth in the United States can be put into a few words—this is it.

Plenty of pep, full of fight, husky youngsters, peasant women, not yet deteriorated under misery and exploitation, raw energy and courage demanding outlet, restrained from spending itself foolishly, by organized intelligence and direction.

Powerful, industrial barons, organized nationally and internationally, powerfully entrenched in government, coming in conflict with the petty bourgeoisie of the textile mill towns, who are in favor of the workers getting more wages in order to do more business.

Hesitating city governments, influenced by the petty bourgeoisie, trying to unload the trouble on the state government (militia), bidding for a big price (graft), from the mill owners as a price for sacrificing their cowardly political careers.

Of a million workers in the industry only 50,000 are organized with about half in unions outside of the A. F. of L. The United Textile Workers, the A. F. of L. textile union, is dominated by a treacherous bureaucracy, pitting the skilled against the unskilled. Many strikes here and there, mere flashes in the pan, show desperate rebellions of driven slaves.

The same story repeats itself again and again. The O. B.

U., the I. W. W. or just a group of fakers lead the rebellion, and then it peters out until the next outbreak.

First hesitating city governments, then pressure by the big bourgeoisie, then provocation of the strikers thru brutalities, then state militia and federal government—this is the history of most of the strikes. Big mills—500 to 6,000 workers per mill, producing cotton, silk, woolens, and allied lines, mostly employing unskilled—real modern capitalist industry, in the process of trustification, not yet fully trustified.

Lessons of the Struggle.

THESSE many fruitless struggles did not pass by without the workers gaining their lessons and experiences, as a result of which we have a semi-radical militant mass, which falls in line and keeps discipline almost like an organized army, marches from mill to mill, forming a mass picket line—tramp, tramp, tramp, like regiments, marshalled by sergeants and captains—one word would be enough to lead them into most any duty.

Americanized foreign-born and their American-born youngsters, immigrants, almost all understanding English—no more language barriers—become all one mass. The old game of the boss of pitting nationality against nationality has very little chance in this crowd. Many of Polish, Hungarian, and Italian origin, Catholic, but the influence of the priests upon them as far as interfering in the struggle, counts for very little; they all have had their lessons from former struggles. Many soldiers

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that learned their lesson of organization, value of discipline, acting as captains, guards and organizers of their own struggle.

THE old days of haphazard, helter-skelter, anybody-that-happened-to-be around leadership is gone, the mass of workers have an idea thru their experience of what they want.

The Russian revolution had its effect, and contributed in a crude way to their education, Communist inspired leadership which knows where to go and how to get there, hooked up with the left wing in the American labor movement injects itself as a new powerful factor into the situation.

There is system and method to the struggle, action, relief, and politics based upon the proper estimation of class relationships, and utilization of all vantage points. True, the new lead-

ership has also plenty to learn, but it knows a lot more than any other, and what it lacks in experience is more than made up for by the effect of correct policy.

The left wing in the needle trades unions, is as yet on the eve of real power; it has not yet established itself. As soon as it does, it will play a big role in organizing this sister industry. The next step in the textile industry is national strike movements, cleverly led and supported.

We can say, however, with all confidence and certainty that the period of futile struggles and despair is on the wane, and that the next step is effective struggle, victory and unification of the workers in the textile industry. There in the textile industry are all the elements that combine to make our movement win its first spurs in the organization of the unorganized, and it is not utopian to say that soon there is the prospect of having one powerful union of all textile workers.