

# Bread upon the Waters

Rose Pesotta

1945

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# Acknowledgement

When I went back to work in a dress factory early in 1942 I set out to write a book on my years afield as a labor organizer. During that period I had accumulated a great mass of memoranda — letters, articles written for the labor press, leaflets, pamphlets, copies of special publications used in organization drives, statistical reports, diaries. I had the material and the urge, but soon realized that I was not equal to the task before me.

Fortunately, at that stage, my friend John Nicholas Beffel came to my aid. Though he has kept modestly in the background, claiming credit only as editor on the title page, it was largely his collaboration that made this book possible. Mere words cannot express my deep appreciation for his energy and endurance, his ability to get at first-hand sources of data, and his painstaking accuracy with regard to names, dates, and historical facts.

In developing my narrative we had occasion to seek critical opinions from various other friends and co-workers of mine in both the A F of L and the CIO. The first draft was read to my advantage by McAlister Coleman, Myriam Sieve Wohl, Helen Norton Starr, and Samuel H. Friedman. Extensive portions of the manuscript also were scanned by four professors of economics and labor problems — Drs. Theresa Wolfson, Amy Hewes, Harry W. Laidler, and Broadus Mitchell — whose suggestions were exceedingly helpful. Thomas F. Burns, Powers Hapgood, and Frank Winn read some of the CIO chapters; Elias Lieberman and Abraham Katovsky went over the Cleveland section; Sue Adams and William J. Sheehan the California and Pacific Northwest parts; Yvette Cadieux Blonin the Canada chapters; and Abraham Desser the pages on Puerto Rico. Other portions were weighed, from the viewpoint of the general reader, by Adelaide Schulkind, Lillian Weinberg, Fannie Breslaw, Rae Brandstein, Ada Rose, Nat Weinberg, and Evelyn Casey. And Grace and Morris Milgram thoughtfully paralleled our reading of the galley proofs.

Special thanks are due to all those named, for constructive criticism and invaluable encouragement.

Because of wartime dislocations manuscript typists were at a premium. Hence I am particularly indebted to four friends who assisted nobly on that end — Alicia Lloyd, Betty Flohr, Frances Davis, and Rita Herling Weissman. They worked with us Sundays, holidays, and evenings, often after doing a day's labor on their own jobs.

I alone assume responsibility for all statements in this book.

# Foreward

Rose Pesotta is many things, but I think of her chiefly as possessing built-in energy. Her vitality is not induced by regimen, nor summoned by an act of will. It is in her *genes*. Talk with her a few minutes as casually as you may, and strength is poured into you, as when a depleted battery is connected to a generator.

If this is true in a chance meeting with an individual, what do you suppose happens when she sets out to rouse and direct a throng of her fellow-workers? You will find out in this book. She draws on rich resources of training, travel, and experience. What is a crisis to another is to her a gleeful adventure.

But you must not think that she has a permanent elation. A person who is never fatigued exhausts others. She tells you that sometimes after long and hard exertion she was tired. That is the physical counterpart of a saving spiritual let-down. Her magnetism is more than mere bodily electricity. It is pity and sympathy and ever-present personal modesty. She puts herself in your place, and knows your difficulties better, somehow, than you can yourself.

My appreciation of Rose Pesotta goes back more than two decades to the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women in Industry, when I was in the role of one of her instructors. Of course a teacher who is worth his salt is first of all a student, and I am thankful that I learned from her. She brought a knowledge of Russia, whose Revolution filled all our minds, and of clothing factories over here that were being transformed, by workers' organized struggles, from sweatshops. She had the indispensable rebellion, yes, but even then she quickly followed protest with plan. Enough of us stopped with indignation. She had the reserve of strength, and of self-confidence, that went on to cure. She could be partisan, but refused to be partial. She had in her mind a solution, a restored whole.

As the years have passed, her native power has taken on added precision. Hers is a controlled vigor. Once a workman in a drop forge gave me a demonstration of his skill. Poised high above his anvil was a hammer of steel weighing tons. He put his watch on the anvil and, with a pedal, played that smashing block only fractions of an inch above the crystal. It was the beauty of mastery. Rose Pesotta's anvil is the promise of a great free America. Her hammer is moral force joined with affection. And when she has heated the obstinate iron to glowing, she knows how to tap as well as to pound.

Her story reveals, with the self-effacement of day-to-day fact, how she has helped to shape the lot of workers in many cities and industries where she has gone as a union organizer. She has moved as a creator through changing scenes the loyalty of our unions in the First World War, followed by assaults from without and from within, until the great depression sank them to impotence; then a fresh start when the New Deal sanctioned the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively, and the mixed blessing of industrial as against craft resurgence.

Rose Pesotta was born within the Pale, vast Russian ghetto of Tsarist days, but found her way out of it in her teens. She wanted freedom for herself and for others. And in succeeding years a host of troubled people engaged her compassion and her fighting ingenuity. Confused scores of thousands needing to be supported against associations of employers allied with the police, wretched Mexicans exploited as only Southern California knows how, Puerto Ricans in the mud of poverty from which colonial dependency has not lifted them. She has not quit with the needle trades, but has rallied rubber and auto workers, pick-and-shovel men, and more. Her democracy has embraced chambers of commerce, judges, and Governors, for she knows how to persuade and reprove them too. She has the faculty of seeing a problem complete.

When she brought me the manuscript of this narrative she was in a hurry to get back to the shop where, after a decade as a general, she elects to be a private, operating a sewing machine. A thousand upturned faces or a single swift seam, the pattern of America's social future or the fashion of a dress, they claim her equal zestful fidelity.

Broadus Mitchell

To the memory of my father, who died as he had lived, unafraid; to my mother, for her infinite loyalty and patience ...

To the pioneer builders of our union, whose vision and idealism inspired me; to the victims of the Triangle fire, whose martyrdom aroused me; to the shirtwaist makers and dressmakers, whose unselfish devotion lighted my path; and to those organized working men and women in America who battle for a place in the sun for all their kind

This book is dedicated



# Chapter 1. Flight to the West

My mother waved farewell as the TWA plane took off from Newark airport. In a moment I lost sight of her. The big winged ship taxied to the end of the field, and swung around. Another few seconds and the plane had lifted clear of earth, and was gliding smoothly through space.

Looking eastward as we climbed, I could see the Statue of Liberty, ships moving in New York Bay, the skyscrapers of Manhattan with their lights just beginning to stab the gathering dusk. Between were railroad yards and the smoke-stacks of countless industrial plants. Below, as the plane straightened its course, was the city of Newark, with a shimmering streak of illumination recognizable as Broad Street. The sun was gone from the sky, darkness came quickly, and other towns over which we passed were mere blurs of light.

*September 17, 1933* This was my second trip to Southern California. Early that year I had been discharged from a Los Angeles garment factory and blacklisted for union activity. Low in funds, I had hitch-hiked home to Boston, via New York. Now I was speeding back to the West Coast in response to appeals telegraphed to the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union by the dressmakers in the City of the Angels, asking that I be sent there as an organizer.

The intervening months had seen an upheaval in the American labor movement. With the inauguration of President Roosevelt the New Deal had been born, and multitudes of workers throughout the country had become conscious of certain fundamental rights. Under the National Industrial Recovery Act passed by Congress in June, Section 7-a provided that all workers had a right to join a labor union of their own choosing. Both employer groups and labor representatives were invited to Washington to write codes of fair competition for their respective industries, specifying minimum wages and maximum work hours.

In this interim, the dressmakers staged a general strike of unprecedented magnitude in New York City and adjacent territory; and kindred strikes took place in Boston and Philadelphia, aimed at winning back decent wages and human working conditions, lost in battles with unscrupulous employers during the depression.

Early that summer I was working as a sewing machine operator in a Manhattan dress factory. But I took a leave of absence to serve in the campaign which preceded the New York strike — and was promptly sent to Brooklyn as secretary and general assistant to Giacomo Di Nola, who had been assigned to organize the Williamsburg

district. Blissfully unaware that Brooklyn was gangster infested and was regarded by ILGWU organizers as the “Siberia” of the Greater City, I plunged into the job with zeal. It was tough going but invaluable experience. Before the campaign was over, we broke up the racketeering ring which was supposed to control “certain garment firms.” Late in August we had sent most of the striking workers back to their shops, fortified with a union agreement, improved working conditions, and better pay.

While we were still clearing away tag-ends in the New York area, my friend Paul Berg arrived from Los Angeles, delegated by the small dressmakers’ group there to attend the preliminary Code hearings in Washington. He told me several letters and telegrams had been sent to the national office urging that I be dispatched to “L.A.” to help with an organization drive. They needed some one who knew the peculiarities of the Los Angeles set-up, and yet was not of it, to lead that drive — some one from the outside, assigned by the ILGWU, and backed by it both financially and morally.

Paul’s words rang a bell in my mind. Boldly I appeared at the office of President David Dubinsky of the International and volunteered to go to Los Angeles, explaining that the situation there was familiar to me. I told of my being fired and blacklisted, after we had planted the nucleus of a union, with a handful of members from several dress factories.

I had promised friends — and the boss who discharged me — that “some day” I would be back, that “we” would organize the local industry, and that the workers of that firm would be the first to be unionized.

“D.D.” smiled at my recital.<sup>1</sup>

“What are your plans?”

I had a ready answer: “First, I want a charter, so that we can launch a dressmakers’ local at the psychological moment. Second, I want a revolving fund, to impress upon the Los Angeles crowd that we are in earnest and that the campaign is being financed by the national office. Third, let it be understood that I am directly responsible to you.”

All this must have sounded brazen to our president, who knew little about me, except that I was an active rank-and-file member of the union who was always ready to pitch in when needed. But evidently he was willing to take a chance.

“All right. How do you want to travel?”

“It’s immaterial. I hitch-hiked here from the Coast.”

“Yes, but time is short now. Can you stand travel by plane — and go tomorrow?”

I nodded agreement, my breath catching in my throat. This would be a new adventure.

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<sup>1</sup> President Dubinsky is known informally to thousands of ILGWU members as “D.D.”

A plane reservation was made immediately. Then I was given a \$250 check — advance allowance for organization expense — and the requested charter. Ordinarily, any local group seeking national affiliation had to have at least seven members and send in \$25 with their names to get a charter.

On one point only did our president instruct me: to consult frequently with two trusted L.A. cloakmakers, Louis Pine and Henry Rubinstein. My salary was to be \$35 a week, less than I made in the factory where I worked before the New York strike. This, however, bothered me not at all. The thing uppermost in my mind was the task to be done.

Though I had large hopes for the labor movement generally, I had no illusions about what lay immediately ahead. Los Angeles was notorious for hostility to labor unions. Long an open-shop stronghold it had boasted an anti-picketing ordinance ever since 1911. Naturally the new assignment was a challenge. It would mean a hard fight, against well-organized enemies. I was not afraid of that. No job in the labor field; it seemed to me, could be more difficult than the one just finished in New York.

Heading southwest, the plane stopped briefly in Harrisburg, then sped on above widespread dark stretches of forest. The other passengers appeared to be sleeping. I turned out the small light above me, lay at ease in my reclining chair, closed my eyes, and let my thoughts roam.

Mother's sad face at the airport gate lingered. Where had I seen her looking like that before? That scene was a repetition of some other. My mind flashed back, back ... across time and space ... I had it — Derazhnia, my home-town in the Ukraine, in the dismal railway station there, on the day I left for America. Was it possible that 20 years had passed since then? ...

Now I am a child again in Derazhnia, roving with three sisters — Esther, the oldest, Marishka, who is younger, and little Hannah. Odd how much youngsters can absorb without knowing it at the time, and without its being noticed by their elders.

Our favorite haunt is the market-place, which serves as the town's open forum between fortnightly trading days. We hear talk about many things, some of it remembered because it is discussed repeatedly afterward at our dinner table. Talkers and listeners in the market gather in circles — tradespeople, bearded peasants, artisans, and men in old drab Army uniforms. It is late in 1905, and the latter are discharged soldiers, beaten and maimed, and just back from the lost war with Japan in the Far East. These weary and broken men speak out bitterly against their officers for leading badly armed troops ruthlessly to slaughter.

In one circle, our tall, keen-eyed father, with his well-groomed beard and slightly gray temples, is the center of attention.

“This defeat of our Army and Navy is the first victory of yellow men over white in our time. Mark my words, the Japanese war lords will not stop at this —”

We move on to other circles, standing on tiptoe to see who is talking. Voices mingle, some held to a whisper, others sharply keyed. They speak of rising taxes, of pogroms in the industrial cities, of Widespread hunger among the people... But most of those with opinions look around cautiously before saying what’s in their minds.

*General Stoessel had plenty of food at Port Arthur, and enough ammunition to last three months. Then why did he run up the white flag?*

*I can tell you why: Because the hearts of our people were not in the war.*

*And do you think the hearts of the Japanese were in it? Nonsense! I was there. The Japanese fought because they either had to fight us or face their own firing squads.*

*When more soldiers come, who will feed them?*

*Not the government.*

*Maybe the ravens will feed them, as they fed Elijah the prophet.*

*Purishkevich says he organized the Black Hundreds to uphold the law. But do they uphold the law when workers are shot and killed? And when they kill Jews and students?*

*All this killing is to make the people forget that Russia lost the war.*

*Do they think that we who were in the front lines can ever forget?*

*I won’t forget. I was wounded at Mukden and lay twenty hours in the mud before the stretcher-bearers came. When I got to the base hospital it was too late to save my leg... What am I good for with this stump?*

*There are rumors that our Tsar will issue some new manifesto — Maybe a constitution?*

*Konietchno, indeed, we ought to have a constitution like America.*

*But we won’t live to see one.*

*You are not yet forty. You are too young a man to be so hopeless...*

*The Government will press the people just so far, and then there will be a revolution ... some day ... some day.*

Gradually dusk falls, and the circles begin to break up. Father, surrounded by a dozen soldiers, is still speaking.

“I have served my time, I am now a reservist, I was ready to go if called... Many of our Jews were fighting in the Far East... We must have equal rights. If we were good enough to send our best blood to defend that corrupt clique of bureaucrats, we are good enough to enjoy equal citizenship in the country of our birth —”

“But, Barin, who does enjoy equality in our country?”

*Well, if we have to fight we may as well fight for it right here.*

*The day will come ... have patience, the day will come ...*

Now the talk ends, and Father, accompanied by a limping soldier, walks off to our flour and seed store, a short block away. We have to hurry to keep up with his long stride...

In the evening at home Mother worries about his being so outspoken in the outdoor discussions. “Why do you keep sticking your head into a noose? A man with a large family must be careful. Suppose a new *gendarme* heard you? ... It is not safe to speak your mind in our country ... many honest men like you have gone to Siberia just for saying that Russia is autocratic ... that we need a constitution, a democracy...”

Our family is seated at the Sabbath dinner table. Father has brought home another guest. We youngsters are unobtrusive but our ears are open. The stranger, a little man with heavy spectacles, is telling of down-trodden peasants burning their landlords’ estates, of night-fires lighting the sky... Many such guests come to mind – traveling speakers, university professors stranded for lack of money in this provincial trading town; Talmudic students, and other “students” who seem more worldly, young men and older men with *torbas*, duffle bags, the contents of which are never shown to us children. They talk with Father far into the night, after the rest of the family are in bed. Next day Izaak Peisoty has important new information with which to hold forth to an eager audience in the market.<sup>2</sup>

Years later I am to learn that our little railroad town served as one of the centers for the underground, a link with the outside world – Europe and America.

Esther, my older sister, returns from a visit to Odessa, the historic metropolis of Southern Russia, 200 miles off, and comes back bursting with realizations. She explains to us younger ones the difference between evolution and revolution, learned by chance from some of our cousins. I listen eagerly. Then she tells us excitedly of a marvel she saw while away – *electric lights* can you believe it? – lamps burning upside down. We scoff at her. No! It couldn’t be – the kerosene would spill and explode.

Riding at ease in the airplane, I slept occasionally in my chair. But much of the time I was wakeful from inner excitement. When we reached Pittsburgh, I got out with the other passengers and stretched my limbs, while the plane was being serviced by a small crew of men dressed in white.

Night still reigned when we got to Chicago, where new passengers replaced those disembarking, and then we winged onward.

Dawn brought clear skies. Life seemed utterly peaceful as that magical transport carried us along. Towns, railroads, rivers, and highways, seen by daylight, looked

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<sup>2</sup> In the Russian language gender is indicated by the final syllable of one's name. Thus my mother and her daughters signed themselves Peisotaya. When my sister Esther came to this country, somehow the family name was changed to Pesotta. The pronunciation, however, is as if it were Peysota.

like parts of a toy setting. The harsh angles of industrial cities were smoothed out when viewed from lofty altitudes; and the wide plains resembled crazy quilts with intricate designs and colorings. From the height at which we flew I could not discern a single human being below — the masters of all creation were invisible from the skies.

Rummaging in our attic, I come upon books that fascinate me. One is a volume of eye-witness accounts of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, and the retreat of the Grand Army from the deserted and burning city of Moscow a grim but absorbing story... Bonaparte's soldiers dying by tens of thousands along the roads and in the Pripet marshes and at the crossing of rivers — caught in the merciless grip of the Russian winter, and driven back by the army of Alexander I and the Russian partisans, the peasants and villagers.

That retreat, too; is discussed at length in the market-place circles.

"Napoleon lost in Russia for the same reason that we lost the war with Japan," declares a battered veteran. "He was too far from his base of supplies."

"That was one reason," my father agrees. "But a greater reason was that the Russians were defending their own ground. No foreign invader will ever succeed in Russia — for the people will fight to the last man, on Russian soil."

On another day in the attic, I stumble upon a trunk full of books and pamphlets dealing with *Zemlya i Volya*, Land and Freedom — the underground movement to overthrow the House of Romanov and replace it with a democratic form of government. Without being told, I know that such literature is taboo, but daily I disappear into this quiet hiding-place and read about men and women imprisoned or exiled or hanged as revolutionists.

I ask seemingly innocent questions of my tutor, Hannah, a pale young woman hired by Mother to supplement my two years of study in Rosalia Davidovna's private school for girls. Likely Hannah knows the answers, but she is cautious. It is dangerous to discuss such things, for the *okrana*, the secret police, are constantly eavesdropping. Young girls must not ask too many questions, I am warned, and I heed the lesson, keeping secret my attic find.

Our close-knit family begins to break up. Esther leaves for America. We have heard much about that far-off land. Its people fought for their liberty ... carried on a revolution, proclaiming that "all men are created equal." Surreptitiously we have read about the American Declaration of Independence. Some day such a document, created by the Russian people, will be read openly by all boys and girls.

The name of George Washington is known to us, and the name of Abraham Lincoln, who freed the Negroes, and that of Thomas Edison, whose picture is on the pasteboard boxes containing the cylindrical wax records for the phonograph which Uncle Shloime's sons sent him from America. We relish Mark Twain's stories about

venturesome boys; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* we know almost by heart; and we are stirred by Jack London's tales of rough men who battle with tooth and nail.

What a wonderful country is America, holding out a welcome to those who, like my sister, want to live in a free world! Everybody can earn a living there. To us in Derazhnia, America is the *Goldene Mdeeni*, Land of Gold. We think of that whenever we see Israel Telpner, storekeeper's son, who worked in New York for months and then came home, with a black derby hat and gold teeth, the first we ever saw, which he exhibits with beaming pride.

There is a steamship agent in Derazhnia, who sells tickets for three lines — Cunard, Red Star, White Star — the names of which everyone in our town knows. He talks eloquently about fortunes made in America by poor emigrants. Drinking all this in, peasants from our vicinity have scraped together enough *rubles* to buy passage and have gone there to dig for gold. Lately, however, some have returned home, confessing that what they dug from the earth was plain black coal.

But Esther writes that there is plenty of work in New York. She has a job — in a shirtwaist factory.

With my sister gone, I grow increasingly restless, and when I become 17 I can see no future for myself except to marry some young man returned from his four years of military service and be a housewife. That is not enough... In America things are different. A decent middle-class girl can work without disgrace... After months of argument and cajolery I persuade my parents to let me, too, go to the United States.

A gray October morning. Almost half the town crowds into the dull-red station to see me off. Most of the young people envy me. My mother stands near the gate, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. Father is escorting me across the Ukraine and Poland to the German border. Hurried kisses and goodbyes. My heart pounds with excitement as we climb into the train. A bell rings, the locomotive coughs and puffs, and in another instant Derazhnia fades into the mist.

We ride in an old square-ended third class all-purpose car, with double-deck bunks. It overflows with peasants, soldiers, traders. They use the bunks on both levels for seats, sit on their bundles, or stand in the doorways. Each carries a *torba*, in which there is food, and that food reveals the character and social standing of its possessor. The air becomes thicker and thicker as we go along.

Father's voice sounds clearly in the dimly lit car. A beardless lad in a soldier's uniform holds a candle for him as he reads the day's newspapers aloud, most of these people being illiterate. At each stop I hurry to the station platform to get hot water for tea and the latest *extra*. All are interested in the case of Mendel Beiliss, Kiev watchman, on trial on a trumped-up charge of murdering a Christian boy in a "religious ritual." We wait anxiously for the verdict. The prosecution overshoots the mark, with coached witnesses and forged documents — so blatantly false that

the jury does not believe its accusations. Beiliss is acquitted, and we all celebrate joyously.

At the German frontier I hold my father close with a sudden pang. A chill comes over me, and I have a feeling that I shall never see him again. But I have made my choice and cannot turn back.

I awoke from a doze as the plane glided down to a stop in the airfield outside Kansas City. There was a two-hour layover here amid oppressive heat.

Amarillo, Texas, was next, and I recalled being there on my way East in the Spring. Now one noticed a difference in the voices and complexion of men native to that section. Tall and wearing wide Stetson hats, they walked with an easy gait, and spoke with a drawl.

I see myself leaving Antwerp, a friendly city, in the rain. The steamship *Finland*, huge to my eyes — my first voyage anywhere. Second-cabin luxury for a provincial girl; frankfurters at one meal, the first I've ever seen. And ice cream, much more substantial than the fruit ices I knew at home. Eleven days at sea — long days, with few ships passing, and often with only an illimitable empty ocean to look at; it is an event when gulls swoop down close to us as we lean over the deck rail. \Will we ever reach New York? But in the evenings many voices join in Russian and Ukrainian songs; they help to still my restless impatience.

At last the Promised Land! The Statue of Liberty rises before me, exactly as I knew it would from pictures — a stately, determined woman in a light green robe, with uplifted hand holding a torch to welcome seekers of freedom.

*“...Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”*

My sister and I fall into each other's arms as I leave the ship at 23d Street in the Hudson River on Thanksgiving Eve, 1913.

The making of another American begins... Esther gets me a job in a shirtwaist factory and I learn the trade. I have barely missed the time when the men working in New York's garment industry had to provide their own sewing machines, needles, and thread, and when girls like myself were apprenticed to a “masterworker,” who paid them a meager few cents for a day's work, out of his own wages.

I join a virile and growing labor organization, Waistmakers' Local 25 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. At its meetings I learn about the “Uprising of the 20,000” women and girls in 1909, my sister Esther among them, who walked out of the waist factories in protest against intolerable sweatshop conditions . . . imbued with their spirit, others now carry on...



As we approached the Rocky Mountains, we heard that we were traveling in the wake of a tornado, but saw no evidence of it. The plane rose to 11,000 feet and soon we were above the clouds, a sea of milky foam... In Albuquerque, New Mexico, canopied by clear skies, several dozing Indians sat leaning against the white-washed walls of a gift shop, in which an attractive copper-skinned woman displayed fine examples of tribal craftsmanship.

Ascending for the last lap of our flight, we headed for the barren desert lands of Arizona, Nevada, and California, a boundless expanse of sand, cactus, and sagebrush. I closed my eyes again. Once more my thoughts were busy with the past.

*May 1, 1914* — I see myself in blue skirt and white middie blouse, blue sailor collar, and red flowing tie, marching with hundreds of other girls like myself in the May Day parade in New York. It starts from the *Forward* building on the East Side and ends with a massmeeting in Union Square, at which union leaders speak. Abraham Baroff, manager of Local 25, leads the procession on a white horse. The bakers are clad in white. We march past the scene of the Triangle Waist Company fire near Washington Square, and shudder as we look up at the windows — eight, nine, and ten stories high — from which so many girls jumped to death because the exit doors were locked to keep union organizers out. One hundred and forty-six persons died there that day in 1911, nearly all of them young girls. Conditions in the garment factories are better now, made so by new safety laws because of the fight led by our union.

Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria is assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia, in the Balkan tinder-box, on June 28, 1914 — and quickly Europe is swept into war. Canada, too, is drawn in, and Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, on the side of the Allies against Germany and Austria. In 1915 the steamship *Lusitania* is sunk by a German submarine only ten miles off the Irish coast, and 124 Americans are among the 1,198 persons lost. Despite this, public sentiment against the United States entering the war continues widespread.

Local No. 25 sets up an educational department, with Juliet Stuart Poyntz as director, the first of its kind in the American labor movement. Most of us young immigrant waist-makers attend night school to learn English, and supplement our education with the union classes in subjects of social significance. Thus we gain knowledge and poise and confidence. Under the auspices of that department, too, we have weekly outings and later establish our first vacation center, Unity House, in the Catskill Mountains. When that is destroyed by fire another, much larger, is set up in the Poconos in Pennsylvania.

American munitions makers add to their millions by selling to both sides. All over the country there are rumblings among the mass production workers, the unskilled, the underpaid, as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer... Many are on strike, largely for better wages, to keep up with mounting costs of living...

Selling prices of iron and steel climb to the highest levels since the Civil War... Preparedness Day parades in many cities. In San Francisco the labor unions refuse to take part. A bomb is exploded closer to the line of march, killing ten persons. Several labor leaders are arrested. Tom Mooney and Warren Billings are convicted of the bombing, on evidence later shown to be perjured.

*Union Square* — soap-boxers, circles in impassioned discussions mass-meetings, demonstrations. Singing, too! *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier*. I hear outstanding labor leaders, defenders of civil liberties... Arturo Giovannitti, dynamic Italian-American poet, speaks, his soft wavy hair blown in the breeze. "Labor's enemies tried to frame me in the Lawrence textile strike, just as they've framed Mooney and Billings in San Francisco! ..." All day, every day, the circles are in the Square, close packed huddles, voices rising and falling and rising again.

*If they ever try to force us into the war, there'll be a revolution in this country overnight.*

*We'll be in the war in another six months.*

*No, we won't. Woodrow Wilson will keep us out of it.*

*Nobody but the bankers and munitions makers want war.*

*Yes, but the British control public opinion. They bought sixteen. Of our biggest newspapers. I had it straight.*

*Did y' see Art Young's cartoon in The Masses? That one where two big cops are draggin' a little guy off to jail? One bystander says. "What's he been doin'?" and another guy says: "Overthrowin' the gov'ment." It's a scream!*

President Woodrow Wilson, pacifist, changes his mind under pres. sure. War is declared.

Emma Goldman, fearless champion of human rights, in Madison Square Garden. Short-sleeved, her fists clenched, she vehemently opposes our entry into the world holocaust, and is threatened with arrest. "I defy the police, when the lives of millions are at stake I " ... Alexander Berkman also speaks: "The men of this great land will never let themselves be led by the nose into an imperialist war! ..." More speeches like those spell prison for both.

*The war won't last three months.*

*We'll go over there and we'll clean up them Huns in a hurry.*

*I was against the war, but now that we're in it I'm for my country, right or wrong.*

*Yeah — but you're over the draft age. You won't be called.*

*There's a long, long trial a-winding... Over there, over there... They were all out of step but Jim..., How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paree?*

The Russian people revolt in February, 1917, the House of Romanov falls, a provisional government is set up. Weary of fighting and bloodshed, the German masses follow the Russian example, and the Kaiser abdicates. On November 11, 1918, an

armistice is signed, and millions rejoice over the enemy's "unconditional surrender" and "the restoration of peace."

But almost immediately Russia is torn asunder by civil strife, with the Allied armies openly supporting counter-revolutionary elements. Our soldiers are sent to Murmansk and Archangel and into the wastes of northern Siberia to fight the Russian people. The Bolshevik dictatorship is established, and aided by the Allied intervention and blockade of Russia, it is in a position to entrench itself solidly.

Fair-minded individuals and organizations in this country sound insistent cries of protest against the blockade and the intervention; and A. Mitchell Palmer, Attorney General with an ambition to become President, sets going a "red terror" unheard of in the history of this country. Hundreds of innocent persons, among them some of my close friends and co-workers, are arrested in lawless raids on Russian labor and cultural centers in various American cities and are deported without trial. Some 246 are shipped out on the old transport *Buford* before daylight on December 20, 1919.

Terror comes to my home-town. "General" Petlura's "army" of hooligans, both anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic, sweeps into Derazhnia in the night like a swarm of rats. There are heavy footsteps on the porch of my family's home, and pounding on the door. Father opens it, to see who the intruders are, and to reason with them if need be, as he has done at other times like this. Mother is close behind him. Unarmed, he is shot down, before he has a chance to speak or raise a hand, He dies as he had lived, unafraid...

The Roaring Twenties roll in. My excess energies find an outlet in organizational activities, and I am elected to Local 25's executive board.

A new movement — Workers' Education — gains momentum. It is designed to provide education for union rank-and-file members, to strengthen their effectiveness and develop leaders among them. With labor's gains in the economic field, mental discipline and knowledge of history and economics become indispensable for unionists living and working in a democracy. Just as organized labor's insistence forced the establishment of free public schools early in the nineteenth century, so now labor demands modernized education to train the workers to meet their problems in the machine age. Our International is in the forefront of this movement; we take pride in the fact that my own local set up the first union educational department in the country in 1915.

M. Carey Thomas, the nation's leading woman educator, and president of Bryn Mawr College, induces its directors to institute a summer school for women workers in industry — "to stimulate an active and continued interest in the problems of our economic life which so vitally concerns industrial women as wage earners; to develop a desire to study as a means ... for the enrichment of life..."

With 104 other young women from various parts of the country, I am given a scholarship and spend the summer of 1922 on that campus. Most of our classes are held under shady green trees on beautifully kept lawns. With a faculty representing nine top-rank colleges, we worker students are given short-cuts to an understanding of labor economics, political and social history, the relation of women to the labor movement, English literature, appreciation of music. We are aided in our studies by tutors, daughters of wealthy families, young women amazingly tall, who never had to bend over a sewing machine in their growing years, and who always had proper food. They, too, learn from us about the world of work. Hilda Worthington Smith, dean of Bryn Mawr, is the summer school's first director. Later on she is to achieve an outstanding record as head of the WPA Workers' Education Project.

After Bryn Mawr I feel that my adult education has only begun and a year later I apply for a scholarship at Brookwood Labor College, a resident school in Katonah, Westchester County, 40 miles north of New York City. In 1921 the estate occupied by Brookwood was given to the labor movement for use as an educational center, by William Mann Fincke, liberal-minded clergyman and son of a coal operator, from whom he had inherited the property.

I spend the next two years there studying the social sciences — an adventure in living, with faculty and students not only meeting in class-rooms and in recreational activities but jointly doing the manual labor of maintaining this cooperative college. Many new roads of thought are opened up to me by our instructors. Our dean, A. J. Muste, who teaches the history of civilization and public speaking, was formerly a minister in a conservative Massachusetts town. The others are David Saposs, Josephine (Polly) Colby, Arthur Wallace Calhoun, and Helen G. Norton.

Brookwood attracts labor-movement notables from many lands. They come there to exchange views with the students and faculty members. Class study is informal but intensive. Every important industry is represented in the student body, which makes it easier for us to understand the industrial and rural problems facing the country. "Organizing the unorganized" is our great objective. Many of the students come from steel mills, coal mines, auto plants, textile mills, and farms. After a year or two at Brookwood they return home to impart their newly acquired knowledge to their fellow workers.

I see the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union rise to its highest peak of strength in the Twenties, and I see the union go to pieces. 'Through much of that decade savage internal strife raged; within our organization. This is a result of the setting up of the Red Trade Union International in Moscow, designed to take over the labor movement of the whole world, and to "liquidate" all the trade unions

affiliated with the Amsterdam International. Those of us who do not side with that aim watch with apprehension the fast disintegration of all our past gains.

The International's membership goes down, down, down. But through it all a devoted minority holds on loyally, and certain officers continue their work doggedly, though they are heartsick. They stay on the job not because of the rewards. For in our union a paid officer gets no more pay than a skilled wage-worker in a garment factory. And during this period, some of our officials receive no salary for as long as three years. Others get paid sometimes — i there is enough money in the treasury after all other bills are paid

My mother comes from Russia in 1928 to make her home with me I try to arrange for some of the others in our family to come also But the Soviet government refuses to let its youth leave; my four sisters and two brothers are needed to help rebuild that war-shattered country.

Nineteen Twenty-Nine brings to the United States the black day of the Wall Street crash. The garment industry is hard hit as the nation tumbles into the worst depression it has ever known.

Banks close, manufacturers go bankrupt, thousands of dressmaker are close to starvation... Apple-selling by jobless men runs its course, and the number of shoeshiners on city streets breaks all records... President Herbert Hoover, for whom so many shack-towns have been named, vacates the White House to let a new tenant in Congress pass the National Industrial Recovery Act, which give labor a shot in the arm, and fresh hope comes to millions of hitherto unorganized workers. Our International takes full advantage of the opportunity to rebuild its shattered ranks.

Twilight and darkness, and for a while the journey grew tedious We had crossed the desert and the mountains. Then a whiff of fresh air seemed to push through the tightly shut doors of the plane. Looking down, I saw luxuriant green gardens and orange groves.

Ahead of us presently were the bright lights of Los Angeles. The plane nosed downward and landed, coming to a cushioned stop on its rubber-tired wheels in Glendale airport.

As the door opened, I saw several of my friends waving a welcome from the gates — Helen Richter, Anna and John Ribac, Boris and Sophie Surasky, Raina Finkel, Sophie and Julius Siegel. The plane being hours overdue, they were anxious, wondering meanwhile whether they should have brought a stretcher. Airplanes in 1933 were not so easy-riding as they are now, and not every one could travel two miles above sea level without becoming ill.

But I felt tip-top, and soon we were sitting in a cocktail lounge, where we talked far into the night. Then I went home with the Ribacs, to occupy again the comfortable studio room that I had left in the spring.

## Chapter 2. California Here We Come!

Conditions in the Los Angeles dress industry had grown steadily worse in five months. Manufacturers generally were violating the state minimum wage of \$16 a week for women, and the President's Re-employment Agreement, more often called the Blanket Code, in effect until a permanent Code of Fair Competition under the NRA could be agreed upon for the industry. An appallingly large labor turnover was deliberately fostered by the employers for their own benefit. Workers who showed any inclination to organize for selfprotection were promptly fired; and the blacklist operated relentlessly against those who dared protest.

I got a close-up of this from local union leaders the morning after my arrival. Something drastic must be done within the next few weeks.

The City of Angels then had about 150 dress factories, employing some 2,000 workers. About 75 per cent were Mexican women and girls, the rest Italians, Russians, Jews, and American-born. Over a thousand worked in the cloak and suit industry, now fairly busy. A small hut active sportswear industry made cotton garments, casual attire, and slacks, in vogue among the Hollywood younger set.

Comparatively few of the dressmakers knew anything about unionism. Employers took advantage of language difficulties and racial differences to encourage separatism and suspicion. One group was played against another. The factory door was shut as tightly on the \$16 state minimum wage law as on the Golden Rule. Records of hours worked were falsified and earnings were pitiful, in some cases as low as so cents a week. From the standpoint of wages and hours, there were sweat-shops in some of the most modern buildings in Los Angeles.

The "open-door system" prevailed. Women hunting jobs were given "the freedom of the building." Doors leading to staircases were left unlocked, so that they could take the elevator to the top floor, ask at each shop if there was work, walk down to the next floor, and repeat the performance until, if lucky, they found a few days' employment for the price offered.

If a rush order for a few dozen dresses came in — for this was largely a short-order industry serving the local market certain firms put out a *Help Wanted* sign, bringing in all workers that could possibly be placed. As soon as the order was filled, they would be laid off. One such factory had only ten sewing machine operators, and required at most two hand finishers, but as many as 13 were hired.

Garment factory owners regarded their employees as casual workers, in the same class as migrants who harvested fruit and vegetable crops.

This policy was not confined to the women's garment industry; it was that of most California employers. And always they had a large labor reserve to draw upon. For various agencies helped to swell the state's population. An organization known as the *All Year Club* spent large sums for ads in national magazines, inviting tourists to come to Southern California, where there was sunshine all year round, and good living. And other organizations and individual employers used both newspapers and handbills to attract people from outside, implying if not stating that workers in that region were treated better than anywhere else in the country.

Because of its semi-tropical climate, Southern California had long been a haven for the sick, especially those suffering from rheumatism, arthritis, asthma, tuberculosis, bronchial illness, sinus ailments, and heart trouble. Often when a doctor prescribed a stay in California for one person, his whole family migrated there for the duration. Its able bodied members had little choice of employment. Even people with good union records and from good union towns, were inclined to rush to the first job available, heedless of existing conditions, working on a temporary basis until the family decided whether to settle in Los Angeles. This constant influx of newcomers, from every part of the country as well as from South of the border, is still a grave problem for labor unions.

That same evening, at a Cloak and Dress Joint Council meeting, I heard more about working conditions. Louis Pine, council chair man, introduced me as the new general organizer, sent by the national office to line up the dress workers. Sixty or more persons were present, including shop chairmen, more than half being women.

Pine, for years chairman of New York Skirtmakers' Local 23, and then working at a sewing machine in Los Angeles, was an impressive figure with his mop of black hair and high cheek bones. A fighter for the rights of the cloakmakers, he was feared and respected by his enemies and loved by his friends. His lead is still generally followed in union affairs, except in matters of divided opinion on political issues.

Cloakmakers' Local 65, under the leadership of Pine and Henry Rubinstein, a presser who stood side by side with him, had managed to weather the depression, maintaining its membership despite the political warfare led by the Communists within the organization. Later they liquidated the cloakmakers' branch of their dual union in Los Angeles and enrolled en masse in Local 65. Although the local had no written pact with the employers, it was always taken for granted that cloakmakers were the backbone of our union. Hence when the upsurge of 1933 took place, they quickly re-aligned their forces. That spring, too, Cutters' Local

84 was formed, with Harry Scott and Jack Hass as manager and secretary and a group of young men in the forefront. The dressmakers followed in their footsteps and began enrolling members, electing Paul Berg, a dress operator, to serve as their secretary gratis.

I told the gathering of the recent achievements in the East, touching on the drama and the human side of the mighty general strike which had given our union in New York City a chance to rebuild its broken ranks. I dwelt upon the rising of labor throughout the country, voicing my earnest belief that Los Angeles would soon have a solid organization of both cloak and dressmakers. Responses varied from lukewarm to hearty. My recital evidently had the effect of a powerful injection on a dozen or so. Others felt pessimistic – “Mexican women could never be organized.” The skeptics reminded me that Los Angeles garment manufacturers preferred Mexicans to others because they would “work for a pittance and could endure any sort of treatment.”

I contended that the Mexican dressmakers were normal humans, who simply needed honest and intelligent guidance. I had worked with them the previous spring and we had got along well.

“Several of those women,” I said, “are greatly respected by their own people. Give these an intensive training in elementary trade unionism, and it won’t be long before they are Up to the rest of the ILGWU organizing staff.”

“What we need,” declared one council member, “is a general strike. We are all for it’ but we haven’t the money to finance it.”

“When the time is ripe,” I assured her, “the necessary money will be available.”

The local union leaders breathed more freely when I explained that the International had undertaken an organizing campaign of women’s garment workers all over the county. Their tension was further eased when they learned that I had already deposited a revolving fund in the Bank of America. Beyond doubt they got the impression that I had brought thousands of dollars with me.

Wherever I went those first few days, I met anxiety coupled with hopeful expectation. Friends in the Clare Dress Company shop, from which I had been fired, came to see me next day. In the few months since I left the West Coast, they had suffered continually from the indignities against which I had protested, and their sense of rebellion had grown.

“We want a strike,” said Carmela a tiny creature with flashing black eyes. “We want to picket our shop.”

“Have you ever been on strike before?” I asked.

“No, but if others can go out and win, like the Philadelphia and New York dressmakers, why can’t we?”

“They say the NRA is back of us what is the NRA anyway?” another wanted to know.



I brought together groups of these active workers and explained, that following the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, labor and industry were invited to Washington to present their ideas of Codes of fair competition for their particular fields. Our draft of a Dress Code was filed after the New York strike was settled, and our representatives were to go to Washington and convince employers from all sections of the country that they should abide by it and give the workers a living wage.

In Los Angeles, the NRA office was supposed to be upholding the President's Blanket Code. Instead, that office was actually working hand-in-glove with the reactionary forces, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Better America Federation — a front organization enjoying the blessing of Harry Chandler's *Los Angeles Times*.

Our union soon accumulated a mass of evidence of discrimination and intimidation. Workers were let out on mere suspicion that they had signed union cards. With the manufacturers' blacklist working overtime, they were doomed. I knew what that meant: constantly at work behind the scenes was the anti-union machinery of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association. Organized in 1896, its principal object was to maintain the "traditional open shop in Los Angeles."

One basic rule of the Blanket Code provided that workers register their time in order to be paid for actual hours spent in the factory. The dress manufacturers, however, discovered a way to chisel.

"Do you know, Rosa, what the boss makes us do now?" Maria, oldest of the three Flores sisters, complained to me. "I come in the morning, punch my card, work for an hour, punch the card again. I wait for two hours, get another bundle, punch card, finish bundle, punch card again. Then I wait some more — the whole day that way."

This was a continuous process, a bundle of hand finishing often requiring only a few minutes' work. The resulting time-sheet was cumbersome, complicated, and frequently unintelligible to the Mexican worker. And she had to surrender it before she received her pay. In certain factories, too, the vicious kick-back system operated. Workers would receive pay in keeping with the minimum wage law, would sign for it, and then would have to turn back part of the money.

Apart from the ever-present underlying industrial conflict, Los Angeles offered a curious spectacle to any student of social problems. To the average tourist, the city spelled sunshine, Hollywood, broad boulevards, film studios, and homes of favorite players, the Brown Derby, where one could rub shoulders with celebrities, and Sid Grauman's Chinese Theatre, where hand and foot prints of many motion picture stars are "immortalized" in sidewalk concrete. Nature lovers might climb the mountains, stop overnight on Mount Wilson to visit a world-famous observatory, spend a week-end in a canyon, or at an old Franciscan mission along *El Camino Real*. In

the summer one could attend the Hollywood Bowl open air concerts nightly, or go swimming in the Pacific ocean.

But there was another side. For many years Los Angeles had been a Mecca for strange religious cults, utopians — people with political and economic panaceas, health faddists, quack doctors, nudists, homosexuals, people who believed that optimism and a smiling face would carry them triumphant through all difficulties, and individuals informally classified as eccentrics, crackpots, and screwballs.

Wandering through Pershing Square, a mid-city open forum opposite the swank Biltmore Hotel, one got a closer picture of the ideas that permeated this melting pot. Amid tropical verdure, soapboxers, itinerant missionaries, and debaters of all shades constantly carried on. During the Hoover era, the politically-minded and the utopians offered their cure-alls. Now the topics had changed, and the virtues and shortcomings of the New Deal, with its wide array of alphabetical departments, were under close scrutiny. All “isms” were given a hearing, though sometimes the harangues were shouted down with collective lusty laughter. There one heard frequent uncomplimentary allusions to Governor Rolph, “rosy-cheeked baby kisser,” who obviously was no friend of the poor.

Mapping out an organization program, we laid emphasis on reaching the Mexican workers. A local cultural society operated a radio station, broadcasting in Spanish from a movie theatre on Main Street near the Plaza. Members were entitled to use the station to announce births, marriages, and deaths. I joined the society and explained to the manager the task confronting us. He was sympathetic, particularly when he learned that our problem was to reach Mexican women workers. When I paid six months’ dues in advance, he agreed to stretch the rule about announcements and let us talk about the union. So each evening at 7 we did a short broadcast, which we knew was heard by every family owning a radio set among the city’s innumerable Mexican population.

Presently we engaged Bill Busick journalist, orator, publicity man, and former Socialist Presidential campaign manager for Norman Thomas. He began to edit our four-page semi-weekly newspaper, *The Organizer* in both Spanish and English. We issued attractive leaflets addressed to workers in specific shops. This resulted in important new contacts, which gave me an opportunity to cultivate some of the more articulate dressmakers from across the border.

After the broadcasts we would go down to Olvera Street, a narrow alley at the foot of the Plaza, dating back to the first Spanish settlers in 1781. It had been reconstructed in recent years and turned into a bazaar as an attraction for tourists, who got a taste of Mexico by visiting the quaint booths and stores owned and run by Mexicans. Here were hand-made pottery and glassware, giant-size candles for saints’ days, *huarachas* (sandals), *mantillas* (shawls), and colorful baskets, silver

jewelry, candy made from cactus — and in some places v here one was known to the proprietor, *tequilla*, and other potent Mexican beverages.

Dark handsome girls with fire in their eyes lent color and grace to the scene. They carried on lively conversation with women who were busy cooking over red-hot charcoal on tin plates *tortillas*, *frijoles* and hot *tamales*, sold to customers who sat at small tables under the open sky. And groups of boys, wearing big *sombreros*, their shoulders draped with gayly woven *ponchos* sauntered to and fro in the roadway, singing Mexican ballads to the accompaniment of guitars, fiddles, and *marachas*.

A little theatre in Olvera Street had been artistically remodeled by Leo Carrillo, of the stage and movies, himself a descendant of an old Spanish family. A variety show in the everyday tongue of the Mexicans, coupled with national dances, was given here nightly. Close by, *La Golondrina* a cellar restaurant in an ancient building, did a rushing business, with tourists waiting outside for a chance to get in to drink and dance.

Many of the people I met during these nocturnal excursions, workers all, bore names notable in early California history — names of explorers, military and religious leaders and grandees who had received large land grants from the Castilian Crown.

In the Plaza, Mexican men engaged in informal sharp-tongued debates. The women, traditionally keeping out of public life, sat on nearby benches chatting with their neighbors, while the children played. Several swarthy-skinned orators discussed passionately the relations between the United States and their own country.

“All this California, this land of gold and sunshine,” one said, “in justice belongs to Mexico It was taken from her in 1848. Some day Mexico will take it back.”

“But that’s not the best way,” replied an opponent. “If our compatriots would listen to me, they would urge that Mexico become part of the United States. We’d all be much better off as American citizens, with the many rights and privileges that the people of this great country enjoy.”

Other voices took up the theme. It was good for a whole evening, or perhaps a whole week, of arguing.

Some of the women quietly admitted to me that they, too, would like to be Americans. In Mexico, they said, women still had no freedom; a married woman could not vote nor hold a job without her husband’s consent, and the father was still the supreme ruler over unmarried daughters until they reached the age of 30. The poor were always overburdened with work, entire families toiling on the plantations owned by the rich. Those who wanted to enter a profession were looked upon with contempt — a hang-over from the Moors who at one time ruled Spain and whose Oriental traditions were carried to the Spanish-speaking New World.

Two active union co-workers, strolling with me on the Plaza's curving walks, pointed proudly to the bold statue of Felipe De Neve, Governor of California, when it was part of the Spanish realm. De Neve brought with him 22 men, women, and children from Mexico in 1781 to establish a *pueblo*, a town, and named it *de Nuestra Senora La Reina de Los Angeles*, our Lady, Queen of the Angels. Afterward, for convenience, the name was shortened to the last two words. The Governor mapped out detailed plans for the town's expansion, and gave each incoming family seven acres of land to cultivate.

"He was a good man" Ramona Gonzales declared. "He made Los Angeles for us to live in. Why do the *Yanquis* say we are to be deported?"

A stone's throw from the Plaza, at the head of Sunset Boulevard, the girls looked with equal pride on another statue — that of Padre Junipero Serra, leader of the Franciscan Friars, founders of 21 Catholic missions in California in the days of Spanish rule. These stretched along a 700-mile road, *El Camino Real* — the King's Highway, offering shelter to the traveler after a day's ride.

Spanish and Indian blood flowed in the veins of many of the workers with whom I had daily contact. For decades, when California was young, the muscle and energy of their Indian forebears had been conscripted by the friars, who saved the souls of these simple people and exploited their bodies.

Churchly peonage in the agricultural fields was long gone from California, but in its place was wage slavery, which had in its toils thousands of humans with bronze and copper skins. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican tillers of the soil and their families had been encouraged to come into the Golden State in steadily increasing numbers to gather the seasonal crops and then to depart. In later years their services were used largely by the Associated Farmers, an alliance of big land-owners, notoriously callous to the welfare of hired hands.

Living quarters provided for the Mexican migrants were primitive in the extreme, usually consisting of a cluster of tents or shacks in an open space, without thought of comfort or privacy. These families for even tiny children accompanied their mothers into the fields or orchards to work beside them throughout the day — "chased the seasons" in battered flivvers several families often riding in one car.

As the season advanced, and the later fruits or vegetables ripened and were ready for picking, the migrants moved from ranch to ranch, toiling from sun-up to sun-down. In California a farm is called a ranch.

Poorly paid and hard driven, many of these agricultural workers, seeking to leave their thankless labors, naturally gravitated to the principal California cities, where compatriots had preceded them. Thus hundreds of Mexican women and girls, traditionally skillful with the needle and eager to get away from family domination, had found their way into the garment industry in Los Angeles.

A few high caste, California-born Mexican families prospered in trade and owned well-appointed homes in the better sections of the city. The people with whom I was concerned lived mainly in the outskirts, on unpaved streets, at the end of car-lines, in rickety old shacks, unpainted, unheated, usually without baths and with outside toilets. Within the flimsy walls of those shacks, the occupants shivered with the morning and evening chill. Like the desert, Los Angeles is hot during the day, but comfortably cool on summer evenings. In the fall, spring, and winter homes there need heat.

The usual method of a labor organizer in new territory is to ring doorbells in seeking out prospective unionists. But there were no doorbells for me to ring when I went calling in these slums with some of the Spanish-speaking girls.

Yet often the squalid exteriors were deceptive, the interiors, while poorly furnished, being clean and neat. In not a few of the Mexican dwellings were frigidaires, expensive radio sets, large floor lamps, vacuum cleaners, and other luxuries which had been sold on the installment plan by silver-tongued salesmen. In one place I visited a huge refrigerator stood as a show-piece in the center of the living room, unused because the electricity had been shut off for non-payment. In another house, also a rear shack in the Belvedere section, I saw a baby-grand piano, bought on time for \$340 for a 12-year-old girl studying music in a public school. The child's father was a pick-and-shovel man, irregularly employed, the mother a dress finisher, eking out a meager living. Her greatest fear was that the piano, her proudest possession, would be taken away if she failed in her payments. Hence she was willing to take work home, any kind and for any length of hours, for her daughter's sake.

The chief fear that hung over these immigrants, however, was that of deportation. Many families had no income beyond the meager seasonal wage of a single worker, and were on county relief. Employers, knowing that a complaint to the authorities would lead to deportation of outspoken employees, used this threat to curb the rebellious.

Gradually the Mexicans in the dress factories came to our union headquarters, asking questions timidly but eagerly. Some employers, learning of signed membership cards, scoffed: "They won't stick." Others were plainly worried. Women not yet in our ranks came with the disquieting news that their boss had threatened to report them to the immigration authorities and have them "sent back" if they joined our union. We promised that our attorneys would fight any such underhanded move.

Meanwhile the Cloakmakers' Union, having consolidated its ranks, was trying to reach an agreement with the employers. Negotiations had been going on for weeks, but the employers had used various pretexts to stall for time. They hoped matters would drag along until the end of the season, when they would have the

upper hand, for it is usually hard to gain any improvement in conditions while factories are shut for lack of work.

Under the leadership of Louis Pine, ably assisted by Henry Rubinstein, the solid, slow-speaking presser and veteran member, and bushy-haired I. Lutsky, recently added to the staff as business agent, the union called a mass-meeting to decide on the next move.

At 3 o'clock on Tuesday, September 25, the city's cloakmakers laid down their tools, walked out of the shops, and marched through the garment district to Walker's Orange Grove Theatre on Grand Street. Quickly the place was filled to capacity and another hall had to be opened for the overflow.

The determination of the workers at that gathering was impressive. They listened to the report of their leaders, and voted unanimously to authorize them to call a general strike, if the employers continued to stall. The stoppage was itself a manifestation of a vigorous organization celebrating its rebirth. There was only a one-and-a-half-hour cessation of work, but it made the front pages of the local newspapers.

That strike vote was a surprise and a shock to the employers, who had been skeptical about our organization strength. Next day some hastened to voice their readiness to sign up, evidently fearing that a second mid-day meeting might be more serious.

With the cloakmakers' action as a cue, the largest meeting of dressmakers ever held in Los Angeles took place in the same auditorium on the 27<sup>th</sup>. They discussed their grievances at length, cheered speakers who told of the recent dressmakers' victories in the Eastern cities, and voted unanimously for a general strike if the employers failed to recognize their union and refused to grant their reasonable demands. The leadership was given full power to act. Those demands included union recognition, a 35-hour week, a guaranteed minimum wage for each craft, in accordance with the pending Dress Code; regular union hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with an hour for lunch; a five-day week; shop chairman and price committee to be elected by the workers of each shop; no home work; no worker to punch a time-card except on actually entering or leaving the factory; all disputes to be adjusted by a committee composed of the shop chairman, a representative of the union, and a representative of the employer, and an impartial arbitrator selected by mutual consent, to decide on disputes in the event of a deadlock.

A copy of the proposed agreement had been sent each employer with a letter asking that he meet with us in conference. But we realized that none of the dress factory owners would consider meeting with us, since they were acting under instructions from the Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles.

We had in our possession a copy of a bulletin issued by that organization on August 31, recommending “methods which may be of assistance in forestalling possible employee difficulties.” It included these suggestions:

“Delay or postpone wage or hour discussion with employees for 24 hours after a request is received... Within that time please meet with the proper association committee that may be posted on conditions of the moment.

“Before hiring any employee ... do not fail to communicate with the last employer to learn actual cause of leaving. This is essential just now ...”

“Establish a policy of laying off temporarily or permanently those apparently more interested in making unreasonable trouble ...”

We also had a copy of an earlier bulletin calling members to a meeting, to block a proposed merger of the State Bureau of Labor and the Industrial Welfare Commission. This consolidation, the association’s executive secretary wrote, would work “tremendous hardship” upon local manufacturers.

Citing “serious competition from the Eastern markets” which Los Angeles garment companies had to meet, the secretary’s message continued pointedly:

“We have been able to overcome a lot of this resistance through the close co-operation of the Industrial Welfare Commission. However, if that department is merged with the Bureau of Labor ... all this good work will be wiped out and we will ... *be forced to strictly adhere to the minimum wage laws of California...*

“Los Angeles has always been an open shop town, and it is our intention that it remain so. Therefore we must resist this consolidation...<sup>1</sup>

As our campaign gained momentum, the newspapers dealt with it at some length. The local NRA office stepped in, inviting both sides to a conference. Three sessions with the employers convinced us that they did not mean business. They objected particularly to having the word “union” or the name of the ILGWU in any signed agreement!

Events moved swiftly. Discharges for union activities continued – in one shop 29 workers were fired; dressmakers enrolled in increasing numbers, with the Mexican women and girls leading; and we gathered a mass of evidence of intimidation, of

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<sup>1</sup> Italics here are mine – R.P.

open violation of the state minimum wage law, and of flagrant disregard of state sanitary and safety regulations.

Looking into the matter of expense for the strike which now appeared inevitable, I found the cost of a public hall within walking distance from the garment district prohibitive. Then I canvassed streets off the beaten track and found several vacant buildings which could be had at reasonable figures. We would have to install a commissary, for feeding the strikers would be essential. The rest was not a problem, as our International always pays strike benefits and incidental expenses that are included in an organization drive. We had only three officers on our payroll. Our other active people, as well as the office staff, worked as volunteers, the union paying for their lunches, trolley and bus fares, and gasoline for those who owned flivvers. Our payroll was negligible, the officers receiving around \$35 per week each.

Writing to my home office late in September, I told of the steady influx of Spanish-speaking workers into the ILGWU. The number of Mexican workers already signed up was sizeable enough to compare promisingly with the largest of the Latin groups within our International, the Italians. "We get them," I explained, "because we are the only *Americanos* who take them in as equals. They may well become the backbone of our union on the West Coast."

If a strike had to come, I reported, we were prepared to act quickly. Such a contingency might arise any day in view of the concerted discharge of our members in large numbers. The president of the International was astounded at our speed, but obviously impressed. I asked that some one be sent to help with negotiations while I took care of organization routine. Promptly one of our national vice-presidents, Israel Feinberg, an ace negotiator, was asked to come. I also received a considerable check, not all the money I asked for, but enough to give us a good start.

Feinberg arrived by plane on October 4. Next day he acted as chief spokesman for the cloak and suit makers in conference with the employers. The half-day stoppage made them more amenable to a peaceful settlement, which was worked out in subsequent discussions.

Manifestly a gentleman, and always correctly dressed, Feinberg was then in his middle fifties. Like most of our leadership and contrary to the popular conception, he is quiet spoken, yet hammers home his arguments convincingly. One employer remarked that "if he had studied law, Mr. Feinberg might have become one of America's greatest lawyers."

Our relations with the dress manufacturers were not smooth. They balked anew at our proposals and wanted "more time for consideration."

At a special session with local union executive officers and the rank-and-file organization committee, various standing committees were appointed for "emergency duties" if negotiations should fail. In such a conflict, premature announce-



ment of plans must be carefully guarded against so as not to give the other side opportunity for further intimidation. The executive committee therefore had agreed to leave it to Vice-President Feinberg, Paul Berg, and me to set the date for the walkout, not to be announced until the actual day.

I went ahead at full speed with final arrangements — rented a vacant three-story loft building at Los Angeles and Eleventh Streets, had a telephone installed, and rented desks for the offices and 2,000 folding chairs for the strike meeting rooms and the large assembly loft on the top floor. No one but myself and another committee member knew the location of those quarters.

## Chapter 3. Mexican Girls Stand Their Ground

Early in October the dress manufacturers were firing workers right and left, on flimsy pretexts, and especially ousting individuals known to be active in the union. Several shops locked out their employees. By Monday, the 9<sup>th</sup>, hundreds were on the streets with no jobs. A strike was clearly being forced upon us.

Carrying out the mandate of the dressmakers' mass meeting, the union leadership agreed upon Thursday, the 12<sup>th</sup>, as the date for the walkout, and the organization committee was called to meet after work Wednesday. Meanwhile the union issued leaflets asking all Los Angeles dressmakers to "*get ready for the general strike*," saying we wanted to make it short and effective through 100 per cent unity. We cautioned them against the danger of being stampeded by the tactics of the opposition union, which had been sniping at us with handbills calculated to confuse the issue.

It must be borne in mind that next to its following in New York City, the Communist Party had its largest unit in Los Angeles, perhaps an indication that its members, after years of exhausting service in the East, needed the balmy air of California. Even there the long hand of the party directed all their movements.

The period of World War I and the 1917 Russian revolution gave birth to the Communist International as an instrument of world revolt. This organization, generally referred to as the Comintern, officially "dissolved" in 1943, had been organized along military lines. Its policy was to set up Communist "cells" in every part of the world to serve as links between the government of Russia and the wage earners and farmers of every land. The general membership of the party was never taken into confidence by the Communist "high priests" in Moscow, but the chosen top leadership in each country was given each new line as an order to be carried out. This was invariably dictated by the needs of the Moscow government, and a *new line* often brought a complete turnabout: what had been taboo six months before became the *new line*, regardless of whether it was feasible to carry out such a policy locally.

Members who dared question or disobey a *new line* would be summarily expelled or brought before a court of their own for judgement. Usually they would be subjected to humiliation, and in some instances, they would even disappear

without trace. One such case often pointed out was that of Juliet Stuart Poyntz, at one time connected with the ILGWU educational department, but afterward for many years an active member of the Russian Secret Service. She walked out of her room in New York City early in June, 1937, ostensibly to return in a short time, and vanished completely.

Some who were expelled from the party formed Communist "splinter" groups, which made a great deal of noise without developing much strength.

The *Comintern* established a so-called Red Trade Union International, designed to set up "revolutionary" trade unions the world over. For this purpose, the Trade Union Educational League, headed by William Z. Foster, came into being in the United States. In time a Needle Trades Workers' Industrial Union evolved, with the aim of "ruling or ruining" every labor organization in that field.

Some party members were instructed to remain with the existing unions, while the rest were assigned to function in the dual union. In the period between 1925 and 1933, the Needle Trades Workers' Industrial Union succeeded in demoralizing our International, among others, and tearing down every important gain we had made in three decades. Stock tactics of the dual union were to sow distrust in their chosen leadership among the rank and file. Derogatory epithets hurled at decent officials in widely distributed newspapers in various languages were picked up by labor's enemies and used as weapons against unions generally.

Discouraged members dropped out of both organizations, crying: "*A plague on both your houses!*" The employers reaped vast benefit from all this internal dissension.

There was a small but raucous branch of the dual outfit in Los Angeles, taking in all needle trades groups, and its leadership frequently denounced us and our campaign.

Plans for the strike, with no mention of the day set, were submitted by our delegates to the Central Labor Council, which voted indorsement and pledged full support. J. W. Buzzell, the council secretary, Mae Stoneman of the waitresses' union, and several A F of L organizers spoke at strikers' meetings and gave us other valuable cooperation.

Various tricks were used by the employers in attempts to hamstring the strike movement. One man came seeking "information" for a magazine which we later found to be non-existent. We gave him copies of our literature.

One of the factory owners asked me to have breakfast with him. He had taken part in a recent conference, and claimed to be a liberal. I knew enough never to talk alone with any one from the other side in a labor conflict, so I asked Paul Berg to go with me. We met the man in the *Pig'n Whistle*, a colorful and popular eating place on Broadway.

"I want to make a friendly suggestion to you," he said over the coffee.

We listened. "You ought not have a general strike," he advised us. "It would be very bad. It would create great bitterness and work hardship on many people. It would be much better to call strikes in individual shops, one by one, and settle with each, then the others would meet with you and sign a collective agreement."

"That's a fine idea," I answered.

He beamed upon me.

"An excellent idea," I assured him. "We'll do it. On Monday we'll call our first strike — in your shop."

His face clouded with alarm.

"Why in mine?"

"Because you are sympathetic to our cause. You would sign an agreement promptly, your workers would go back to their jobs, and that would set an example for other employers."

He objected strongly to my revision of his plan.

"Maybe it isn't such a good idea," I told him. "Our union will have to use its own methods."

The organization committee comprised about 200 persons, cutters, operators, pressers, finishers, and other workers. When the committee met on Wednesday, Vice-President Feinberg and I, chairman and secretary, respectively, explained that all preparations for the walkout had been completed, except for eleventh-hour details. A headquarters was ready; a commissary had been set up to feed the strikers, and a legal committee appointed to bail out any who might be arrested, and have them defended in court. Chairmen of the standing committees knew exactly what they were expected to do.

All members of the organization committee were instructed to come to the union offices at 5 a.m. next day — "to distribute leaflets and for other duties."

The truculent voice of a frequent dissenter was raised. "When do we strike?"

"You will be told that when you come in the morning."

We knew that though he was a member of our union, he also belonged to the Communist organization. Several such dissenters were in our ranks. Easily identified, their technique was the same in every industrial city I visited. Systematically and vociferously they disagreed with the majority on all questions. No one observing their methods could doubt that their purpose was to disrupt our ranks. We placed them on innocuous committees where they could do the least possible harm.

On Thursday at 5 a.m. every one was on hand. Ten thousand copies of the strike declaration had been printed. English on one side, Spanish on the other. Each committee member took a bundle of these to distribute in front of the buildings in which dress factories were located.

DRESSMAKERS' GENERAL STRIKE DECLARED TODAY! read the large black-type heading on the leaflet. Addressed to "all our union members and non-members, all cutters, operators, pressers, finishers, examiners, drapers, sample-makers, cleaners, pinkers, and all jobless dressmakers," it called upon them not to enter the shops, but to "go in an orderly manner" to strike headquarters at 1108 South Los Angeles Street.

"The bosses have forced this strike upon us," the declaration said, "because they refuse to recognize our organization and have refused to concede our just demands..."

"Present working conditions in Los Angeles are unbearable. Never has it been so hard for a dressmaker here to earn a living as it is today. The general depression on the one hand, and the sweatshops on the other, have made it possible to break down all standards and make our jobs more insecure than ever before.

"We must make the 35-hour week universal in order that every dressmaker shall have employment We must establish the guaranteed minimum wage scale for every worker in the industry to assure us a living wage. We must establish the right to the job..."

"We must have a powerful union to enforce union standards in every dress shop every day of the year..."

"Down with the sweatshops I On with the strike! On to victory I "

When all the others had dispersed, shortly after 7 o'clock, I proceeded to strike headquarters alone, forgetting about breakfast. I unlocked the door, turned on the lights, and looked around. Everything was in good order.

I stepped outside to wait. Los Angeles Street was deserted and silent. Minutes dragged by, painfully. Once I held my watch to my ear to make sure it hadn't stopped.

The watch hands at last reached 7:30 ... 7:31. The silence remained unbroken. It pressed down on me. I felt as if I were standing in a vacuum. I could hear my own heart beat.

7:35 ... Still no one in sight. Doubts assailed me. Suppose something had slipped? Suppose the workers didn't respond? Suppose only a few came out. I knew of other strike efforts where the ground had been well prepared that had failed dismally. What effect had sniping by the Communist-led dual union had upon morale? Had the bosses succeeded in intimidating their employees?

I looked up at the loft building I had rented. It looked so huge, so monstrous — and I had been concerned lest it not be big enough for our needs! Again a chill went up my spine, and I felt very small — much smaller than my five feet two.

The minutes dragged on. I stood still, facing the Broadway corner, a block away. I no longer looked at my watch. I could only wait, numbly.

Suddenly the silence was broken. Several girls turned the corner, then more girls and women, then a throng, laughing and talking excitedly. Some from the Clare Dress Company, all smiles, were waving at me. Soon they were pouring into strike headquarters by the hundreds. The Clare Company's employees had been the first to strike; they were all here.

Workers from each factory assembled for separate shop meetings in the smaller rooms. Hall attendants registered each on an individual shop list which gave the name, address, factory location, price of garments worked on, wages received. Each group elected a shop chairman. A striker's card, to be presented daily at headquarters to be punched, would serve as identification, entitling the holder to meals in the commissary and a weekly cash benefit.

As soon as this necessary clerical job was done, the strikers were sent back into the garment district to swell the picketing.

Reporters came, looked over the crowd at headquarters, asked questions, picked up copies of our leaflets, visited the picket lines, and telephoned stories to their offices.

Simultaneously the dual union also issued a strike call, but the dressmakers flocked into our headquarters.

Some time that afternoon I was called outside, where I found a woman talking to a group of Mexican girls.

"This union is a fake," she told them. "This bunch will mislead you. Come to our place where the masses are."

A Mexican youngster looked at me, puzzled.

"You ought to take her suggestion," I said laughingly. "Go over and take a good look. Maybe she is right."

"There are enough people here," the inexperienced girls answered. "If they stay here we will, too."

Mass picketing went on throughout the day in front of all the dress factory buildings, in the heart of the downtown shopping district. Traffic frequently stopped for minutes at a time while crowds of shoppers watched the spectacle.

In the evening, when the demonstrations were ended and the strikers had left headquarters, I met with the staff. We compared notes and mapped out a schedule for next day. Scanning the list of factories and registered strikers, I was satisfied that we had succeeded in shutting down the Los Angeles dress industry.

Every one on the staff was tired but happy. The spirit of the strikers was excellent. The Mexican girls and women, who were by far the majority, acted almost like seasoned unionists, bearing out my expectations fully.

I met also with the commissary committee. No meals had been served that day, for all the workers had brought their own lunches as usual. We would begin serving breakfast and lunch at headquarters next morning.

On Friday some of the dress factories “opened under police guard.” This simply meant that the police were present again, as on Thursday. The word *opened* didn’t mean much, for we knew that not enough dressmakers appeared for work anywhere to keep production going.

Arthur Booth, executive secretary of the manufacturers’ association, issued a statement averring that the demand for recognition of the union was the only point of difference between the employers and the ILGWU. This was just one of our demands, the strike committee replied; 40 per cent of the girls and women in the Los Angeles dress shops were being paid less than \$5 a week, although the manufacturers had signed the President’s Re-employment Agreement providing for a minimum of \$15 a week. The minimum under the state law was \$16! The committee offered to produce hundreds of checks for \$3 and \$4 to prove our charge of widespread wage chiseling.

“We want union recognition,” we said, “so that we can enforce the NRA rules in our industry and see that evaders of the code are made to abide by it “

On this second day and throughout the whole strike, each picket line was a lively parade. The girls came dressed in their best dresses, made by themselves, and reflecting the latest styles. Many of them were beauties, and marched on the sidewalks like models in a modiste’s salon. Stories and pictures appeared in the daily press, and the general public got a better understanding of our difficulties. At a mass meeting Friday afternoon in Trinity Auditorium, 1,500 strikers cheered the announcement that the Cloakmakers’ Association had signed an agreement with the union, conceding the union shop and all other demands. A few obstinate employers had refused to sign, but 1,600 cloakmakers had been victorious, and would not have to strike.

The commissary, now in full swing, was in the hands of a competent committee headed by four strikers, Sophia Malis, Nellie Saltzman, Mary Millazzo, and Morris Kaplan. Most of its members had had practical experience in feeding large groups in workers’ clubs to which they belonged. Breakfast consisted of an orange, coffee, rolls, butter, and jam. Lunch included sandwiches of meat, peanut butter, or cheese, salad, fruit, coffee, or milk. Occasionally we served tamales for the Mexican strikers.

Each day at least 200 loaves of bread were necessary to make more than 2,000 sandwiches. We bought coffee, sugar, cream, and milk, but other provisions came to us either as unsolicited gifts or through the persuasive efforts of a “chiseling committee” which canvassed butchers, grocers, and vegetable and fruit markets, and pleaded our cause.

Members of the Unemployed Councils used their own trucks to bring surplus fruits and vegetables which they obtained by working in the orchards and truck farms in a “Save the Crops” co-operative movement. A special committee of Latins

from the union, interviewing merchants in the Mexican quarter, found them generous.

When the newspapers reported that we were feeding such a large number, many poorly clad men and women, who had never been inside a garment factory, came to our headquarters and sought to register as strikers. A question or two quickly revealed their lack of knowledge of our industry. We regretted having to turn away hungry people, but we had strikers to feed and a desperate cause to fight for.

As enrollment proceeded, we got added light on the prodigious number of marginal or surplus workers in the dress field. Hundreds listed themselves as unemployed operators and finishers. They had worked little in the trade, and were more properly classifiable as housewives, grandmothers, juveniles. Many could operate an ordinary home Singer machine, but that was all. Among the “finishers” we found women long past 70 who occasionally went to work with their grandchildren. The juveniles, under the legal employment age of 16, got past the uncritical eyes of the foreman or forelady with the aid of high heels, heavy make-up, and spit curls, when rush orders had to be filled.

We also were visited by an emissary from the Catholic Welfare Association, who asked especially how we were handling the food situation. With a good deal of pride, we showed him through our well-equipped, spacious kitchen and dining hall, and led him into a freight elevator that had been made stationary to serve as a storeroom for edibles. The visitor said his organization would like to donate some provisions — without publicity. And presently it sent us 100 pounds of sugar, 100 pounds of peanut butter, and 50 pounds of coffee.

Each morning at 10, I held a meeting with the hall attendants, shop chairmen, assistant chairmen, and members of shop committees. Then they would meet with strikers from their respective shops, keeping them informed of the latest developments.

By the time the strike had been running two days we learned that many of the strikers were facing a serious plight. They needed more than meals at headquarters and carfare. They needed relief — food or cash, or both. By the third day a considerable number reported that their gas, electricity, or water, or all three, had been shut off for non-payment of bills. The number of families was large enough, and the timing by the utility companies was such, that mere coincidence would not explain the situation. Pressure evidently had been exerted behind the scenes.

We found that a sizeable percentage of the strikers, particularly married women with unemployed husbands, had been receiving aid from the county welfare bureau while working in the dress factories, because their wages did not cover the cost of feeding their large families.



To help those in immediate need, the commissary committee began putting up bags of food for home use. These contained milk, coffee, bread, sugar, rice, peanut butter, tomatoes, lettuce, apples, cheese, and oranges.

For a few days the Spanish-language cultural society's radio station served us well. It carried concise bulletins about our campaign to a wide audience. Then the theatre owner who operated the station told us sadly that he had been ordered to stop giving us time.

We pondered what to do, whether to make a fight about it. Some of the Mexican girls solved our problem. At their suggestion, we bought time from another station, *El Eco De Mexico*, in Tiajuana, just across the border, which would not be subject to interference. That gave us what we needed. The Tiajuana broadcasts were made daily at 7 a.m. Spanish-speaking workers all over Los Angeles learned of the progress of our strike before starting for their jobs each morning.

Overnight the dress manufacturers used a new device in an effort to break the morale of the strikers. They wrote to those who had walked out that unless they returned to work Monday morning, October 16, all the dress shops in Los Angeles would be closed for two months

We met the issue squarely in a new leaflet, declaring that this threat was an admission that the strike was a success.

"The fact is," we pointed out, "the employers could not keep their shops closed for two months, for rent and overhead would keep piling up and they would lose their trade. We've heard that argument before from others — but they always recognize the union in preference to going out of business."

## Chapter 4. The Employers Try an Injunction

Hired thugs appeared in front of the strike-bound garment factory buildings as another week began. Ostensibly their job was to protect “non-striking” workers; actually, they were on hand to foment disturbances. Clashes were provoked by these “guards” as they led in people who had never worked in the dress industry before, to replace the striking workers. Girl strikers were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace.

Representatives of both sides conferred on Monday with Campbell MacCulloch, executive secretary of the National Recovery Administration’s state board. He proposed a three-month compromise plan to end the strike. We could see only danger in that proposal. Early and specific action was vital to us; more waiting would mean a tired and disgusted rank-and-file, and final acceptance, through sheer weariness, of unfavorable terms. The wearing-down process is a well-known tactic on the industrial battlefield. We rejected the plan quickly. To our surprise, the employers didn’t favor it either. Next day MacCulloch was reported to have “tossed the strike situation into the lap of Washington officials.”

On Tuesday evening, after every one else had gone, Paul Berg, secretary, Harry Scott, manager of the cloakmakers’ locals, and I lingered at strike headquarters to clear routine details and ascertain where we needed reinforcements. Our desks were behind a railing.

About 9 o’clock a short man with a cast in his eye came in and asked: “Is Rose Pesotta here?”

“No,” one of the boys answered promptly.

“When will she be in?”

“I don’t know.”

He inquired also for Israel Feinberg, Harry Scott, and Paul Berg. They didn’t know when any of those gentlemen would come in.

“They don’t tell us everything. Come back in the morning.”

“No,” he said. “I’ll wait around for a while.”

He sat down. After some 45 minutes of cooling his heels, he placed four folded papers on the railing.

“If any of these people come in tonight,” he admonished us, “be sure to tell them about this. It’s important. There’s a jail sentence waiting if they don’t obey this order.”

When we were certain the process server had left, we read the injunction. Issued on behalf of the Paramount Dress Company, among other things it prohibited the four of us and all other members of the ILGWU from “intimidating or harassing” any of the employees of that corporation. The Paramount shop was one of several factories in the building at 719 South Los Angeles Street, in front of which the clashes had been promoted by the “guards” on Monday.

Obviously this action was an attempt to demoralize us and end the picketing. The manufacturers were using the Paramount firm as a cat’s-paw.

I knew that picketing must go on at No. 719, injunction or no injunction. Our lines must be kept intact. We would have to work fast. Without taking time to consult our lawyers or Vice-President Feinberg, my superior, I decided that we would stage a demonstration at the Paramount building next morning that the employers would not forget.

We sped to the homes of key members, instructing them to line up every possible picket in front of “719” at 6:30 next morning.

By the time the Paramount Dress Company opened its doors on Wednesday, over a thousand of our people were massed on the sidewalk. Scores of cloakmakers augmented the striking dressmakers’ ranks, but the great majority of the marching pickets were girls and women.

Captain William (Red) Hynes, his assistant, Detective Lieutenant George Pfeiffer, other members of the “Red Squad,” and a large detachment of uniformed policemen, were powerless against that mass of unionists. The police had decreed that our pickets must walk two abreast, but they couldn’t enforce this rule. They had forbidden the pickets to call “Scab!” But when private cars owned or hired by the employers appeared, bringing in strike-breakers, no one could prevent the pickets from yelling that epithet in lusty chorus. Pent-up emotions were loosed. The hired thugs were on the job. There were fights in the center of the milling crowd, and shouts and screams.

Though the injunction applied to all members of the ILGWU, the police arrested only five strikers — all women — and then charged them not with violating the court order, but with disorderly conduct.

The employers saw the point of the demonstration: We had the strength of militant members. They realized that any further use of the injunction would win increasing public sympathy for the strikers. It was the only injunction during that strike.

Shortly after the walkout, a pleasant visitor had come to our headquarters — a slim, fair-haired young man, dressed so simply that he might have been one of

our own members. He introduced himself as Jerry Voorhis. I had heard of him and knew something about his liberal activities. Son of a well-known California family, he conducted a self-help school for under-privileged boys on his estate at San Dimas, in the foothills of the Sierras.

Taking me aside, he said he had long been especially interested in labor problems. From his pocket he took two paid-up life insurance policies with a cash value of more than \$5,000, and offered them as a contribution to our strike.

I explained we did not need money; what we needed most was moral support from the people of Los Angeles.

“What, then,” he wanted to know, “can I do to be most helpful?”

“It would help a lot,” I said, “if you would arrange a public mass meeting, and invite both the employers and our union to state their cases.”

He got busy at once, and such a meeting, well-advertised and largely attended, was held October 20 in the First Unitarian Church. The speakers included two of the strikers, who had poignant stories to tell of what they had been up against in the factories; the Rev. A. A. Heist, Methodist minister who had helped settle the great Colorado coal strike in 1927; the Rev. Allan Hunter, pastor of the Mount Hollywood Congregational Church; Chester Williams, chairman of the Southern California Youth Congress; and David Ziskind, prominent Los Angeles lawyer. Jerry Voorhis presided.

Charles Katz, attorney for the manufacturers, presented their side of the story, Bill Busick and I, that of the union. There could be no question in the minds of unbiased persons present that we had the better of the argument.

Afterward, Mr. Katz was frank enough to say to me: “If I were on your side, I’d speak as convincingly as you.” Later he became one of our attorneys.

Several similar meetings followed, gaining wide support for our cause.

Voorhis continued to give us practical and whole-hearted co-operation. Ever since, he has proudly carried a paid-up union card in one of our Los Angeles locals. I learned later that, not satisfied with a Yale degree, he had worked as a cowboy, a freight handler, and as an automobile mechanic. In 1936 he was elected to Congress, where he is one of an outspoken minority with a liberal point of view.

Systematically our pickets were reinforced each day by large numbers of others in the early morning, noontime, and late afternoon. Skeleton crews of watchers were assigned for duty throughout the night. Pickets served in relays, staying on the lines two hours or so at a time, and then coming to headquarters to attend shop meetings, for coffee and food, and recreation. Each afternoon there was a large meeting in the assembly hall, with talks by the organizers and by speakers from outside. Norman Thomas, standard-bearer of the Socialist Party, then touring California, was one of the visitors.

In that second week Senator Robert F. Wagner, chairman of the National Labor Board in Washington, wired MacCulloch urging arbitration. The manufacturers' association assented, on condition that we stop picketing. We answered that the strikers were ready to submit the issues to "an impartial committee of citizens," but opposed any cessation of picketing so long as the employers kept their shops open. "We will stop picketing when you close your factories," was our reply.

Booth, the employers' spokesman, asserted that "in all strikes picketing was halted during arbitration proceedings." It was an old ruse. Labor history is full of examples of broken faith by employers and of union defeat when strikers have been persuaded to stop picketing at this stage of an industrial conflict. The momentum we had gained, the solid morale of the strikers, must be protected.

Dr. Roy L. Smith, pastor of the First Methodist Church, inspected the strike area, visiting picket lines and headquarters. He reported his observations to a committee of representative clergymen. They passed a resolution calling upon members of their congregations to observe the picket lines at certain hours when clashes were most likely to occur.

Singing on the picket lines attracted and held crowds of shoppers. The time-tried union songs were best — *Hold the Fort*, the *Soup Song*, and the rest. But the favorite of the strikers was *Solidarity Forever*, set to the ringing tones of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Their voices swelled and lifted, filling the brick canyon of the garment center.

When the Union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun,  
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one,  
But the Union makes us strong.  
Solidarity Forever!  
Solidarity Forever!  
Solidarity Forever!  
For the Union makes us strong.

A hundred college students, girls and boys, joined the picket lines and staged a demonstration in our behalf, improvising songs and yells. They had been attending the Southern California Youth Congress at nearby Pacific Palisades. Nine were arrested for "disturbing the peace and blocking the sidewalk." Like charges were placed against the Rev. Wesley G. Nicholson, pastor of Westwood Hills Congregational Church, who was present as an observer. The Congress issued a statement saying it had investigated every phase of the strike, and condemning the manufacturers for paying dressmakers "as little as \$2 or \$3 a week."

One girl student from the University of Southern California performed a notable service for us, of which I knew nothing until later. I remember only her first name,

Gretchen. She walked into various department stores and swank downtown retail shops and asked to be shown expensive dresses. After examining them closely, she asked: "Where is the union label? Why do you sell sweatshop merchandise?" The saleswoman had no answers to those questions.

Gretchen would then raise her voice in indignant objection. The manager would hurry to the scene. Gretchen would continue her protest, still in high key, while customers listened. As she walked out, she would tell the manager that unless his firm changed its policy and sold union-made goods she would never buy anything there again.

Soon we received inquiries from stores asking where they could get garments with the union label.

By the 26<sup>th</sup>, both sides had agreed to "arbitrate without reservation," and four days later a board of five was chosen to weigh the issues in the case. The five were: Mrs. Frances Noel, club-woman; Dr. J. L. Leonard, professor of economics at the University of Southern California; Rabbi Isadore Isaacson of the Congregation Israel, Hollywood; the Rev. James F. Cunningham, assistant pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, and Campbell MacCulloch, state executive secretary of the NRA.

Some 250 strikers marched on the 30<sup>th</sup> from headquarters to the California State Building, to file complaints with the State Labor Commissioner against manufacturers who had long violated the California minimum wage law. They had checks and work-hour stubs showing they had received \$2, \$3, \$4, or \$5 a week, though the legal bottom wage for women was \$16 for 48 hours.

The state police refused to let the marchers go up to the commissioner's office. So they crowded into the main floor lobby and set up a roar of protest. Bill Busick pushed his way through, and at his urging they poured into the Assembly Chamber and took seats. Then Bill phoned upstairs, and Deputy Commissioner Charles Lowy hastened down and heard the delegation's complaints.

Immediately 200 other strikers led by Paul Berg marched to the City Hall and protested to Mayor Frank L. Shaw against undue police interference. The mayor said he would appoint a committee to investigate.

Meanwhile there were rumors that the police planned to use tear gas. We discussed that possibility at shop meetings and prepared our women for it. When "guards" provoked a clash between the strikebreakers and pickets at 719 South Los Angeles Street, I saw a policeman dashing toward the spot with a tear-gas bomb behind his back. I caught up with him and shouted, "I'd advise you not to throw that."

He turned quickly and halted. "Why not?"

"Because it would serve no purpose. Our strikers know as well as you do how to protect themselves."

“What will they do?”

“Nothing, just let the tears run down their faces.”

As a matter of fact, we had advised our women to do what they did when peeling onions — never rub their eyes, but allow the tears to run down their cheeks.

No tear-gas was used.

Lieutenant Pfeiffer, “Red” Hynes’s assistant, although constantly in the strike area, was unable to cope with the activities of the striking girls, who were too swift for him. A tall, powerful man, he once stopped me at the corner of Ninth Street and Broadway. Towering over me, he shook a finger within an inch of my nose, and said, “Rosie, don’t think this is New York.”

“I know it isn’t,” I answered, “but before we’re through these girls will be working in shops as well organized as in New York.”

Up to the time of our strike the Hynes “Red Squad” had ruled supreme in the Los Angeles labor field and in the Communist movement. Hynes always had advance knowledge of Communist activities, garnered from undercover men. But he was unable to get advance information on our movements. For practically always our strategy was planned by Feinberg and myself and communicated to others in the union only on the eve of execution. Most of our activities were organized swiftly and carried out before they could be interfered with.

On Hallowe’en, we arranged a children’s party for the morning and another for the strikers in the evening. The hall was festively decorated on Saturday morning. Dressed in appropriate costumes, the youngsters played games, sang and danced. Several children spoke the “pieces” they knew best; others performed native Mexican dances. We served lunch with milk, ice-cream, and cake. While our young guests were enjoying these refreshments, I sprung a sudden question:

“Would you like to see where your mothers picket?”

“Sure! You bet!” they shouted.

Immediately after lunch, I had the mothers round up their offspring in Hallowe’en attire, and started a procession of some 300, two by two, toward the garment center. One of our girls phoned the newspapers, and by the time the marchers reached the heart of the district, reporters and photographers were on hand. The cameramen got good shots of the colorful parade, and the newsmen found the scene rich in human interest. Broadway shoppers stopped traffic to look on.

The tail end of the procession was passing the last of the garment buildings and was about to turn a corner when I saw men running toward me. At their head was Captain “Red” Hynes.

He spoke breathlessly, indignantly. “You always *would* embarrass me. Why wasn’t I notified about this? Why am I always the last one to hear about things?”

I snapped back at him. “I didn’t know we were supposed to notify you about anything. We have plenty to do trying to settle this strike.”

Two days later Lieutenant Pfeiffer came to our office and made a similar complaint in his own behalf. The "Red Squad" was becoming a laughing stock because of our tactics, he lamented.

For a change I used a pleading tone. "Please lay off. Let us alone. We have a couple of thousand girls and women on strike. If you'll let me take care of it, I'll see that they return safely to work."

"All right, Rosie, I know you can do it."

Pfeiffer hailed from New York, having been born and raised under Brooklyn Bridge. Sometimes he remembered he had a sense of humor, buried deep. One morning, he was in charge of the squad in Hynes's absence. Strikebreakers had just got out of several of the employers' automobiles and were being led into the Cooper Building on Los Angeles Street. Some of the girl strikers yelled: "Scab!" Pfeiffer evidently thought they weren't doing justice to their cause. He stood in front of them, raised his arms in the position of an orchestra conductor, and commanded, "Now, girls, all together!" The repeated epithet was a roar of derision.

The employers and the police evolved a scheme whereby pickets were arrested in the afternoon so that they couldn't have police court hearings until next day. They had to be bailed out to avoid staying in jail overnight.

One group of girls, before leaving headquarters for the afternoon picket lines, instructed us not to bail them out if they were jailed. They were arrested, 14 of them, refused bail, and were placed in cells in Lincoln Heights jail. I sent in food and fruit.

Next morning we went to take them to court.

The matron of the jail, red-eyed and haggard, faced us. She had a heartfelt protest to make. "For the love of God, never leave a bunch like that in this place overnight again."

"What's wrong with them?" I asked.

"It's their songs. They sang all night. I never got a wink of sleep."

Usually strikers convicted on one charge or another were sentenced to pay a fine or serve 10 to 15 days in jail. Invariably they preferred to serve their sentences rather than pay the fine. Several of the girls, all American-born, told me later that not until they found themselves in a cell did they realize that men and women who had never committed any crime were often arrested in this land of the free, particularly in Los Angeles. Reading newspapers in the past, they had thought of arrested persons as thieves, murderers, prostitutes, swindlers, or gangsters. Now their knowledge was broadened. They expressed no regret that they had chosen to be jailed in a worthy cause.



## Chapter 5. Our Union on the March

Strikers crowded the corridor outside the hearing room in the Los Angeles City Hall on October 31, opening day of the arbitration proceedings, ready to testify when called. Vice-President Feinberg and Harry Sherr, attorney for the ILGWU, presented our case. Feinberg told of a whispering campaign against the union, by employers who contended it did not represent the dressmakers for whom it professed to speak.

Arthur Booth, executive secretary of the manufacturers' association, asserted that "there has been no clash between the employers and employees in the dress industry on wages, hours, or working conditions."

Our witnesses testified that the employers were operating a blacklist; had dismissed workers for discussing unionism and attending union meetings; and had shown marked favoritism to non-union workers in an effort to break the union's strength. One cited a recent statement by Mrs. Mabel Kinney, chief of the State Industrial Welfare Commission, that "since the NRA, workers are reporting conditions which previously they hesitated to disclose. Many of these conditions are of a nature that no department of the state government could ever find unless reported by workers who are being exploited."

Clementina Gonzales, dress finisher, swore that she had been discharged by the Fernion Frocks shop when she demanded the legal minimum wage. The press reported that she said she was fired "when she asked for more pay," which was only half the truth.

A new Dress Code, designed to supersede the blanket agreement already signed by employers, was announced by the National Recovery Administration on November 4. Effective on the 11<sup>th</sup>, it called for wages ranging from \$14 to \$45 a week and from 50 to 90 cents per hour, depending on the degree of skill involved, Collective bargaining was provided for, child labor and home work prohibited.

Manufacturers in the South and Middle West and on the Pacific Coast demanded a hearing and proposed a 50 per cent differential from the Code's wage rates. Charles S. Katz, attorney for the Los Angeles employers, was sent to Washington

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<sup>1</sup> Late that fall the Dress Code was amended, the Pacific Coast groups being given a differential of 30 per cent. Thus the wages they had to pay under amended NRA rules were 88 per cent less than those paid for the same work in the East.

to press their case. They based their demand for this outrageous differential on a sweeping claim that their employees were “sub-normal” and thus not entitled to the minimum wages specified by the NRA.<sup>1</sup> We issued a leaflet holding that it was the bosses, not their employees, who were subnormal. We urged the local dress factory owners to “learn how to read,” for evidently they were unaware that their Chamber of Commerce had published statistics to prove that workers in Southern California were 18 per cent more efficient than those in any other part of the country!

On Saturday, November 4, the arbitration board held its final session. Feinberg, Attorney Sherr, and others spent several hours in the City Hall arguing the union’s case, while the girls were kept busy at strike headquarters, on the picket lines, and on committees. A decision by the board was looked for in the afternoon. But at evening none had been reached. We worked on until 11 p.m. without any word. Then we went to the City Hall.

The outside doors were locked, but the board was still in session, so we waited on the steps for our representatives to come out. Shortly before midnight they emerged, weary and forlorn. The board had issued a decision, and it was not what we had hoped for. Feinberg handed me a typewritten copy.

I glanced through it quickly and slumped down on the steps again, unable to speak. I felt as if I had been struck by a lash.

The decision was an “order” calling off the strike. It read:

“The Board of Arbitration appointed by the National Labor Board at Washington, orders as follows:

“1. The present strike in the garment industry is to be called off and the *status quo* existing prior to October 12, 1933, restored. The International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, *on behalf of its members*, shall in the first instance take up all complaints with the employers and/or the employers’ representatives and in the event of any dispute or disagreement the dispute shall be referred to this Board of Arbitration ... and in case the Board shall decide that an employee has been unjustifiably discharged the Board may impose such fines or penalties in the form of back or future pay as it may determine.

“2. The members of the Silk and Wool Dress Manufacturers’ Group of Los Angeles are to restore the relations existing between employer and employee ... to the status existing prior to October 12, 1933; employees then employed shall be received back in the shops and shall have an equal share of the available work in the shops; the working conditions shall be those established under Section 7-a of the National Industrial

Recovery Act; the wages of the employees to be those provided in the Code for the dress industry as signed by President Roosevelt on November 1, 1933, and applicable to the Western area of the United States.”

To a novice, the specifications that working conditions were to be governed by Section 7-a of the NIRA, and that wages were to be those in the Dress Code, might indicate that we had won something. But without a signed agreement between the employers and the union, who would enforce the board’s “order”? Certainly not the local NRA office, from all that we had seen of its operations! Moreover, aware of the unscrupulous policies of the dual union, we knew that the Communists would immediately make new efforts to disrupt the ranks of the inexperienced Mexican dressmakers.

Thoughts and questions pounded against my brain: “After all our efforts, is this all we have to take to our membership? What will they say? How can we convince them that we cannot go against a decision by a government board? ...”

Sitting in a restaurant, our spokesmen explained the situation slowly, exhausted from a day of debate with the employers and the board members. They had done their best, I knew. Though greatly disappointed, I had faith in the integrity of the board and believed that it had no ulterior motive in reaching its decision.

Feinberg, Berg, and Sherr told us about some of their verbal exchanges with the opposition. Then we decided to get some rest and hold a special meeting next morning (Sunday) with the strike committee, before submitting the board’s decision to the whole body of strikers. The committee was notified by telephone and telegraph.

At 10 Sunday morning we assembled at union headquarters and soberly discussed what could be done. Older unionists from the East remembered that when the waistmakers called their big strike in New York in 1909 they had much less behind them than we had now. There was no law then to back them up.

Sophie and Bessie Goren told us that in Philadelphia girl strikers fainted in the union hall when informed that they must return to work on a “preferential shop” basis without a union. Later, after years of effort, they had succeeded in solidly unionizing the waist and dress industry. It was argued now that it wasn’t always possible to achieve a real union agreement with the first strike in a community.

We agreed that at our regular afternoon mass meeting on Monday, the board’s decision would be submitted to the strikers.

I contended that the vote on acceptance or rejection of the decision should be by ballot. The rest of the committee didn’t think it necessary. Their attitude worried me throughout the night. Whatever my own feeling about the arbitration board’s decision and the prospects it presented for the future, I wanted it voted upon fairly,

and without any attempt to stampede the strikers. The responsibility for the vote must be placed clearly on record. I had seen too much skullduggery practiced in oral voting.

On Monday I went to strike headquarters early, after visiting the picket lines. I asked Bill Busick to make up a stencil for a ballot in both languages stating the issue and bearing two hollow squares labeled *Yes* and *No*, and to mimeograph it without any one else knowing. Then I sent for some rubber stamps bearing the word *Voted*.

The press had carried the news of the board's ruling and it was talked over on the picket lines and at shop gatherings in headquarters. At 2 p.m. the big assembly hall on the third floor was crowded with strikers.

After the ruling had been read to the membership, several speakers discussed it from different points of view. We explained to the listeners, practically all novices in strike action, that this was not the kind of agreement that our union had wanted, but that, due to circumstances beyond our control, a governmental agency had been brought into the picture.

"If we accept this decision," the strikers were told, "we are confident that, with the stamina you have shown on the picket lines, you will win your fight in the shops. This decision by a board which is not for either side gives us a basis for organizing the dress industry of Los Angeles legally... If we get back into the shops, we can go ahead with organization activities at full steam."

In the back of the hall, I could see some of the known dissenters milling around and holding hurried conferences in whispers. I knew what was being planned: they would shout down the board's proposal in an oral vote.

Somebody yelled: "When do we vote?" From all sides came cries: "Why do we waste time?" ... "Let's take it to a vote now!" ... "How are we going to vote?"

Then I sprung my surprise — and it was a surprise even to the rest of our own leaders.

"Voting will be in a democratic way by *secret* ballot," I announced, and I made each word stand out so that every one in the hall could hear me. Microphones were not yet in general use. "Only those who carry a strike card from this headquarters which was punched this noon are eligible to vote."

Cries from all four corners again.

"I forgot my card."

"Then you can't vote," I answered.

"I left my card in my other clothes."

"We'll do without your vote. No one can vote without a card." I knew very well that our strikers had their cards punched every day. This was necessary to entitle them to meals, carfare, and cash strike benefits.

My answers quieted the dissenters. And now I appointed a special committee of 10, chairmen and active members in important shops, to supervise the vote, count the ballots, and report the result. Several of these tellers were known to be sympathetic toward the dual union.

The committee sat at tables placed at the exits. As the strikers passed the tables they presented their strike cards, and were handed ballots to fill out. Their cards were stamped *Voted*, and they dropped their ballots in slotted-top boxes provided for that purpose.

The vote was 5 to 1 in favor of the arbitration board's decision.

Under that order, which was ratified by most of the manufacturers, approximately 75 per cent of the strikers were to return to work that week on a 35-hour work-week basis, with NRA minimum wages. We would continue picketing however, at some 20 shops which had not accepted the board's ruling.

Next morning I was busy in our Ninth Street union office when a Mexican girl hurried in to tell me that a policeman had just arrested another girl for distributing leaflets. She had brought one of the leaflets with her. I knew before I looked at it that it was not ours, for we had issued none that day. It was headed: "*Smash the Sellout!*"

The Mexican youngster was waiting anxiously for me to do something.

"Lolita," I said, "that girl is not a friend of our union. She doesn't want any help from us."

Reading the vicious words of the leaflet, I marvelled that any group which loudly proclaimed its devotion to labor could act like this in so serious a situation. I realized anew that in our fight we must use a double-edged sword. We had to battle not only the employers but this fringe of irresponsibles in the labor movement.

Designed by obstructionists who followed the current party line strictly, with utter disregard for the welfare of the workers in our industry, the Communist union's printed attack, addressed to the dressmakers, read:

"Instead of utilizing your splendid struggle to beat the bosses to submission, your officials have handed you over to the mercy of an arbitration board, to the mercy of the so-called impartial citizens! ... They have decided for the bosses and against you. They have given you nothing...

"For three weeks your officials were maneuvering with the bosses behind your backs. While in words they did not agree to a truce, they weakened your picket lines and tried to stop your militancy.

"Dressmakers: Were you ever consulted whether you were willing to give over your fate, your conditions, and the question of union recognition, to arbitration? Every voice of protest against arbitration was

suppressed by your officials with an iron hand...

“The Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union warned you against these misleaders. Now these misleaders have sold you out... Now is the time for you to act. You, the rank and file, must take over the leadership of the strike...

“Arbitration never gave anything to the workers. Struggle on the picket lines did!

“Down with the decision of the arbitration board!

“Down with the fakers of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union!

“Drive out your misleaders...

“Rank and file leadership is the only guarantee against sell-out and defeat!”

#### NEEDLE TRADES WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION

The ILGWU leadership was too busy trying to settle the strike to answer this or similar attacks.

Unfortunately there was little work in any of the local dress factories at this time, and the employers took advantage of the situation by refusing to re-employ the more active members of our union. Often, too, they tried deliberately to provoke employees to insubordination by giving them inferior work and by other discrimination. Now a new and devious method was designed by some of the employers to get around the wage minimums. Workers who had never made the minimums because their bosses did not pay fairly for work done, were advised to go to the State Industrial Welfare Commission and sign slips stating that they did “not claim full competence” in their work, and thus did not expect to make Code wages.

A Russian woman, a hand finisher formerly employed in the shop of Joseph Zukin, a leading manufacturer who had fought us bitterly but had to sign up, told me her story. The Zukin firm refused to re-employ her, on the ground that she was too slow and wouldn’t be able to earn the \$16 minimum. She was told instead, about the yellow slip that could be signed at the Welfare Commission office. Her husband suggested that she get a certification as a handicapped worker. She was young, good-looking, and obviously sturdy.

“But you’re not physically handicapped,” I protested. “You’re perfectly healthy.”

“Yes,” she admitted, “but my husband said that I could claim that I have rheumatism.”

Then she could get work in the Zukin factory — at a starvation wage.

We became aware also that the employers were using the Bureau of County Welfare as a weapon against our union. Hundreds of the girls who had taken part in the strike brought us letters written to them by that agency, a Unit of the Los

Angeles County Charities. A typical letter, received from the Belvedere District Employment Relief Office, read:

“We have been informed that you will be reinstated in your former position at the Kay Joyce Frock Company, 834 South Broadway, providing that you resign from the Union for which you have been on strike.

Will you please notify this office concerning the action you are taking with regard to this matter?”

We proceeded to set up separate headquarters for the newly organized dressmakers. I rented a vacant old two-story warehouse on Main Street near 10<sup>th</sup>, close to the garment district. It had to be renovated and partitioned to provide offices and rooms for shop meetings and study classes, and the upper floor was made over into a spacious meeting hall.

Meanwhile the dressmakers held meetings to elect an executive board. With the charter for a dressmakers’ union on hand, all we needed was to insert the names of those elected, making them charter members of the new local. Nineteen names in all appear on that document — the first elected officers of that local — Mrs. A. S. Enright, who was chosen as chairman of the board; Bessie Goren, recording secretary; Anita Andrade, Paul Berg, Ruby Burrows, Jessie Cervantes, Emma Delmonte, Ramona Gonzales, Sophie Goren, Rose Harrington, Julia Huselton, Frieda Lance, Anna Meyers, Mary Milazzo, Lola Patino, Carmen and Marie Rodriguez, Jack Whitley, and Helen Wier.

Thus dressmakers’ Local 96 of the ILGWU was born, and a new trail was blazed in the Los Angeles industrial wilderness.

Bill Busick remained on our staff as organizer, editor of our publication, and educational director. Harry Scott became business agent, and Paul Berg, who helped so ably during the strike, returned to a factory to earn his living. Claudia Benco, one of the most able chairladies in Clare Dress, was later elected secretary of the local.

Education of workers in our union is never confined to study classes, and many of the dressmakers who had taken active part in the strike still had a lot to learn.

It was my function to install the new board and officers at a meeting which packed our hall. Near the front I noticed a Mexican woman and her daughter, as much alike as two peas in a pod, who had served staunchly on the picket lines. Soon after the ceremonies began, the mother opened a bundle, and the two began turning over collars, cuffs, and belts for silk dresses. Later I asked them what they had been doing.

The elder woman smiled ingenuously. “You told us not to do any home work. But all this work from the shop has to be done. So we bring it here.”

I explained to both that “no home work” meant no work to be taken out of the factory, and that they must be paid for every hour of work done.

Foes of the union continued their attempts to undermine us. In the slack period, when unemployed members were worried about tomorrow’s meals, our enemies sought to alienate them from the dressmakers’ local.

One day, while I was busy in the new headquarters, I heard a disturbance in the outer office. I found a little Mexican girl with her strapping young husband, loudly demanding that the dues clerk refund the 50 cents she had paid as her initiation fee before the strike.

I asked why.

“Because,” the girl answered pugnaciously, “all bosses are Jews and all Jews are bosses, and they won’t give me a job.”

“But I’m Jewish and I’m not a boss.”

“I don’t want to belong to your union anyway.”

“All right,” I said, “come into my office and I’ll take care of you.”

I saw that the girl was emotionally unstable. Inviting them to sit down, I engaged her in conversation.

“Were you a striker?”

“Yes.”

“Did you get strike benefit?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Three dollars a week.”

“Carfare too?”

“Yes, two tokens a day, and my husband got some tickets for gasoline.”

“Did you get food while on strike?”

“I ate every day, morning and noon, at strike headquarters.”

“Any food to take home?”

“Yes every week two bags of bread, coffee, peanut butter, sugar, and fruit.”

I added up what those items would cost her.

“Tell me honestly,” I said, smiling, “don’t you think you got enough for an investment of only 50 cents? Look at what you got! “ I showed her the figures; they added up to more than \$15. She didn’t answer, but sat there dejected and ashamed.

The dues clerk brought in a half dollar, and I offered the coin to the girl. She broke into tears and refused to accept it.

I learned that she never had a decent job, having been fired repeatedly after working a single day. She was unemployed when the strike started, and joined up hoping to get work. Now the bosses told her that because she had been on strike they would not hire her. She had nothing against our union, she said, but “people” had told her to come and demand her money back.



I lent her a dollar and had her register with our unemployment division, which would find a job for her when the busy season began.

She could repay the dollar when she was working again. The couple departed with fresh hope.

A long procession of such girls came in daily with their worries. Hand in hand with our program for expanding the new union, we had to do social service work, as well as combat a degenerate economic condition which pervaded the Los Angeles garment industry.

The arbitration board had designated two of its members, Rabbi Isaacson and Father Cunningham, to handle any grievances from either side. To the arbitrators the whole thing was new; it did not occur to them that their decision would be followed by a pile-up of complaints.

We discussed this at our staff meetings.

“What are we going to do now? What will we do about all these complaints of discharges, discrimination, and intimidation coming in from every shop?”

“We must collect all the complaints,” I answered, “and submit them to the board for immediate adjustment.”

“But will they be able to adjust them all?”

“Of course not. But we must insist that these grievances be attended to. The board members will be overwhelmed, and will finally call on us to show them how to handle them. Then we will have the proper solution: ‘Give us a union agreement and we’ll handle them ourselves!’”

As it turned out, that is exactly what happened... And to our gratification knowing his fair-mindedness, Father Cunningham subsequently was appointed by the NRA as Dress Code Authority for that district. He also was selected as impartial chairman.

Our union was on the march in California.

## Chapter 6. Subterranean Sweatshops in Chinatown

Footloose for a day, Bessie Goren, Bill Busick, and I were gay as we drove to San Francisco. We sang frivolous songs. Bessie recalled humorous incidents in Philadelphia, her home town, and Bill told of his adventures as campaign manager for Norman Thomas. We were thrilled by the grandeur of the scenery, save where it was blighted by Hooverilles on the edges of towns.

I had received a call from International Vice-President Israel Feinberg to address a dressmakers' meeting in San Francisco and to do some intensive organizational work. He met us at our hotel and took us to dinner.

Negotiations were then in progress with the San Francisco cloak manufacturers, and Feinberg was confident that a collective agreement would soon be reached. The dressmakers, led by David Gisnet, manager of Cloakmakers' Local 8, had received a charter for a new local, No. 101, from the national office. Under the President's Blanket Code, Gisnet already had collected back pay for a considerable number of workers who had suffered from wage-chiseling.

Soon many enrolled members were laid off, for the fall season was over, and they dropped out of the union. But a small militant group clamored for organization. Feinberg persuaded me to remain and help. Samuel S. White, young former editor of the *Bakersfield Labor News*, was called as manager for the cloakmakers, so that Gisnet might devote all his time to the dressmakers' problems.

About 300 girls and women turned out for the meeting next evening, in union headquarters at 739 Market Street.

Bill spoke first. Usually he was skilful in warming up an audience, but it became apparent that this wouldn't be an easy task now. He tried some of his best anecdotes — sure fire in Los Angeles — but they were duds in San Francisco.

"What a frozen crowd!" he murmured behind his hand as he sat down during the perfunctory applause.

"Cheer up," I whispered. "They'll thaw out!"

Bessie Goren reported recent developments in the Los Angeles dressmakers' local, and Feinberg gave the highlights of the negotiations with the cloak and suit manufacturers. By this time the audience was more animated.

I told of our achievements in Los Angeles, and of our hardships there, expressing the hope that we wouldn't have to repeat them here. But we must be prepared for any eventuality.

"Don't sit around frozen stiff! " I admonished the listeners. "This is your union, and we're here only to help you. The gains we make will be for your benefit. And please remember that nothing will ever be won by waiting around. You've got to put your shoulder to the wheel to get ahead."

It was understood that we would try to avoid drastic action, but they must be ready to stand by the leadership.

Their applause and subsequent singing of *Solidarity Forever* indicated that they got the point and saw the necessity for building a strong union.

Next day Sam White and I started things moving by visiting the newspaper offices. City editors were receptive. We detailed our campaign plans, and mentioned that refusal of the dress manufacturers to meet with representatives of the union might make it necessary to picket the style show, scheduled for the following week. One columnist dwelt on that angle in commenting on my presence in town.

At the *Daily News* office I was asked to pose for a picture.

"Would you mind showing a bit more of your legs?" the photographer asked.

"I'm a labor organizer, not a glamor girl," I protested.

"Yes, but even a labor organizer ..."

Anyhow a picture of me *did* get into print, and without doing violence to my sense of modesty. And the *News* used a good story about the union's forthcoming campaign.

Our threat to picket the style show brought a quick response from the employers that they would meet us after it was over. We accepted this promise in good faith, and when the show ended we conferred with their spokesman. As usual they tried to evade the issue, and raised objections to dealing with the union. One objection was that much of their work had been leaking into Chinatown in recent months, and that since the NRA Code of fair competition had become operative there seemed no way of stopping this leakage. What guarantee could the union give that an agreement would also include Chinatown?

"Leave Chinatown out of this for the time being," we argued. "A collective agreement must be signed by the group represented at this conference. A substantial majority of the dressmakers in your shops is already enrolled in the union. After we settle with your group, we will proceed to Chinatown and into other industries. If you intend to dilly-dally, trying to stretch the time until the season is over — our only alternative is to repeat our Los Angeles procedure "

"No! No I " one of them cried. "We don't want a strike. We can't afford one here. A strike right now would ruin us. Buyers in this part of the country avoid a town where strikes delay orders as they would poison."

We had won our first skirmish.

On Thursday, February 9, the Regional Labor Board with its director, George Creel, presiding, held a hearing on the dressmakers' charges of NRA violations. Several hours later, the cloakmakers' local staged a mass meeting to air their grievances at 3 p.m., which of course meant a work-stoppage. This worried both the cloak and dress manufacturers, who feared it signified an immediate strike call. We assured them the cloakmakers had "only called a mass meeting."

Here, too, a small dual union, a fragment of the Communist Needle Trades' Industrial Union, began to issue circulars assailing us.

When the cloakmakers announced their mass meeting, this so called union, which really represented no workers at all, put out a leaflet calling for mobilization and a mass meeting on the same day at the same hour. Audaciously it said that "at this meeting the question of a general strike in the cloak trade will be decided upon." The leaflet urged that certain demands be made upon the employers to force an agreement "with real conditions" (whatever those words meant), and continued: "To secure all this, rank-and-file leadership must be established. Guard against fake agreements and arbitration schemes... Fight for better conditions."

None of the cloakmakers attended that meeting.

The women's garment manufacturers, fewer in number than those in Los Angeles, and presumably not backed by any outside organization, evidently realized that while Los Angeles was notorious for anti-unionism, San Francisco was traditionally a strong union town. Moreover the Central Labor Council indorsed our campaign, and designated its secretary to help with our negotiations.

We prepared a short agreement which provided for a union shop and all that went with it. But there was a new hitch. We gathered that the dress employers' group had consulted the Industrial Association, an alliance of manufacturers and merchants, and had been advised to stall.

Soon the cloakmakers ratified their pact with the factory owners, which embodied most of their original demands. The membership swelled in numbers, and it was necessary for Local 8 to move to larger quarters.

Constantly the question of work leakage to Chinatown' cropped up in our conferences with the employers, and we felt we must do something about it promptly. Since the previous August all the Bay region skirt-making business appeared to have vanished into the Chinese factories. Blouse production followed, and latterly rayon dresses.

Checking the list of local dress and blouse producers, I found the 20 mid-town shops had to compete with 40 Chinese-owned and Chinese-operated establishments, located in the heart of Chinatown, where the work was done exclusively by Chinese. Some factories employed as many as 200. The Chinese contracting shops made goods for mid-town and out-of-town jobbers. Some sold directly to the re-

tail trade, turning out everything from silk blouses and silk lounging pajamas to dungarees and mackinaws. There was keen competition in Chinatown, with wages miserably low, hours limitless, and no semblance of any kind of labor organization.

When we attempted to line up the employees of the city's worst exploiter, we discovered that the bulk of his "product" was being made in Chinatown. He told his white workers that if they attended even one of our meetings he would send the rest of his work there and close his factory. They remained in the shop.

To organize the Chinese workers would be a tough job, infinitely more difficult than dealing with the Mexicans. Most of the workshops were situated in Chinatown, with its paradoxical swank retail stores on the street floor, and unsanitary underground dwellings below, at times three cellars deep.

Tourists in Chinatown saw but one side of the picture. They moved amid the glitter of many-colored lights, visited well-appointed restaurants where excellent food was served, and shopped in luxurious stores which displayed Oriental antiques and arts and crafts of bygone Manchu days.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the edge of the glitter, tourists did not go; they never knew that the shadowy adjacent streets and narrow alleys hid factories in which conditions were worse than in the old tenement sweatshops on New York's East Side.

Within a few square blocks some 15,000 Chinese were crowded in tiny rooms above and below the street level. Workshops making adult and children's garments were confined chiefly to three squares.

We brought the situation to the attention of Leland J. Lazarus, chief field adjuster for the National Recovery Administration. In a few days I was invited to accompany him and a representative of the manufacturers' association on a visit to some of the Chinese factories.

They called for me at the YWCA, and together we drove to Stockton Street. The building we intended to inspect first was locked and without lights. We proceeded to the next on the list — in a dark alley, where we felt our way to a door.

A knock. "Who is there?" from inside.

"A government officer."

Cautiously the door was opened a few inches, and some one peered at us through the narrow space. The NRA investigator stuck his foot into the opening and forced the door wide open. We heard movements within, and presently a dim unshaded light was turned on by a grizzled elderly Chinese.

To my amazement I saw a small room, containing half a dozen sewing machines. Four had been removed from their table bases, which were being used as sleeping berths. Four Chinese, fully clothed, sat up on these improvised bunks, rubbing their

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<sup>1</sup> After Pearl Harbor some of the best shops there were closed down by the municipal authorities, because they were Japanese-owned.

eyes. We learned subsequently that they were both owners and workers in the factory, which produced men's and women's work clothing — dungarees, shirts, overalls, and coveralls. Contractors for a large midtown manufacturer, they worked whatever hours their orders demanded. We had come in while they were taking a nap preparatory to working later in the night.

Making the rounds, we discovered that many of the Chinese factories had both day and night shifts, in violation of the Dress Code, which expressly prohibited two shifts in order to spread employment in slack periods. Three stories down, where daylight and fresh air never penetrated, we entered long narrow lofts with barely space enough between rows of sewing machines for one person to walk through. A wooden partition, the height of a seated operator, separated the machines. Thus workers were prevented from seeing or conversing with their neighbors. They toiled under electric lights, seldom bright enough and often unshaded.

In these holes, unfit for human occupancy,<sup>2</sup> garments were being made by the thousands — cotton, silk, and rayon dresses, skirts, blouses, overalls, corduroy pants, shirts, pajamas, slacks, nurses' and waitresses' uniforms, shorts, women's underwear, and children's apparel.

On Grant Avenue we entered a fashionable store, walked down steps that were little more than rungs of a ladder into a cellar, and then descended to a second cellar. On both levels men, women, and children were working silently. The NRA man asked questions, but the workers, either gave evasive answers or indicated that they couldn't understand English. Manifestly they were unwilling to tell anything about themselves or their pay. It was easy to see that enforced regulation of hours or wages was impossible here, since no inquirer could learn the hours these people worked or the amount of money they received.

We saw entire families of three generations engaged in making garments husband, wife, grandparents, grandchildren. I asked what the youngsters were doing there so late at night, and what they were getting for their labor. "These are our children," was the answer. "They're waiting for their mothers to go home with them. While they wait they help by pulling out the bastings."

One employer explained the late working hours by saying: "They came back to make the buttonholes," adding the bizarre touch that his mother-in-law was working on the buttons at home.

Around 11 o'clock we returned to Stockton Street, where the car was parked. The factory we had found dark earlier was now brightly lighted, and people were moving about inside. About two dozen men and women were at work. The women

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<sup>2</sup> As late as 1941 according to the San Francisco Housing Authority, approximately 3,000 of the 3,830 dwelling units in Chinatown were totally without heating equipment; three of every five Chinese families there lived in one or two rooms, often windowless; and the Chinatown tuberculosis rate was three times that of the rest of the city.

were making rayon dresses, which came from the jobbers already cut and put up in bundles. The place was equipped with the newest special machines for hemming, making buttonholes, and button-sewing. Some of the women were old, with dark shriveled skins. Men did the pressing.

The employer-contractor and his family lived in the basement. There he worked busily with his wife and their four children. All the workers on both floors, as in every factory we visited that night, were concentrating deeply on their tasks, hardly looking up as we moved about them and talked, their busy fingers never stopping an instant.

Yet when we ended our exploring tour after midnight, I found it hard to believe that the Chinese employers were as callous as their white competitors made out. I asked how long these shops had existed.

"The Chinese," one of my companions answered, "have been doing needle work in San Francisco since '49."

Going home I began to see what a great task it would be for Occidentals to establish any kind of organization among these people, who, though raising a new generation in the country where many of them were born, lived in it as unwanted tenants. I knew that past attempts made to approach the Chinese in the name of our union had met with suspicion. In the Chinatown stores, attempts of white Americans to engage in conversation usually ran into snags; the talk was held closely to the business at hand by the merchant.

The NRA investigator promised that the Chinese employers would be summoned to a conference the following week under federal government auspices, and that several of us from the ILGWU could attend.

But I was not content with what I had seen. I wanted inside information. Recalling that a letter to a group of Chinese students had been given me by a friend in New York, I wrote to one of them, and received an immediate invitation to tea.

My host lived on the fourth floor of a walk-up tenement on Stockton Street, above a Chinese grocery store. I entered a dingy gas-lit hall, mounted creaking stairs, and breathed an odor of stale meats, over-ripe fruits and vegetables, and dried fish, emanating from the basement. But the room to which I was admitted was bright and cheerful. Chih Ling and a friend, Yung Lee, both cultured young men, welcomed me.

Chih Ling's home comprised a small living room and kitchen. The walls were lined with shelves, crudely made and unpainted, but crowded with books and pamphlets. Browsing through these, I found numerous English and French works, as well as those in Chinese. Obviously they had been read repeatedly. On some of the pamphlets were the familiar portraits of Lincoln, Washington, Sun Yat-Sen, Chiang Kai-shek, H. G. Wells, Karl Marx, Kropotkin, Proudhon, Jaures, and other writers

and social reformers. Several national journals of opinion were scattered about the room.

My note had explained the reason for my being in San Francisco, and Chih Ling had moved swiftly to be helpful. Presently two young Chinese women arrived, garment workers, coming directly from a nearby Chinatown shop. They brought their contribution to the party – lichee nuts and almond cakes. These girls were Americanborn, Christians, trimly dressed in short dresses made in Chinese style, with fresh permanents and long scarlet finger-nails.

Our host began to tell them about me and the ILGWU in English, but after a few sentences switched to his own language. Soon the four were in rapid conversation, their faces lighting up and clouding by turns. For several minutes this kept up, while I sat studying the earnest expressions on those clear-skinned faces and sipping my tea. Then the talk stopped, and Hilda addressed me.

Choosing her words carefully, she explained why girls in the Chinese factories would not join our union.

First, they were afraid of their parents. Second, in nearly every instance most of the employees in the Chinese contracting factories were kin of the owner, regarded him as a benefactor, and would not go against his wishes. Third, they would lose their jobs, and probably would never be able to get others.

This last reason did not seem insurmountable. I told the four that if any Chinese girl lost her job, the union would see that she got another, in one of the organized plants.

Chih Ling interrupted. “My dear friend,” he said kindly, as if speaking to a child, “you do not seem to understand Hilda’s predicament. What she tells you is correct.”

I persisted in my argument.

“How long have you been in San Francisco?” Yung Lee inquired.

“Since February first.”

“Then you don’t know our history on the Pacific Coast.”

Asking my indulgence, Yung, in his impeccable English, traced for me, with occasional interpolations from Chih and the girls, the story of what the Chinese had undergone throughout the Far West, and especially in California, since the Seventies.

A grim narrative of white exploitation of Chinese labor, then reaction and discrimination against the Chinese bolstered by law And without law, there was a great drive against them in which they were robbed, beaten by mobs, and wantonly killed... All this was new to me. I listened aghast.

Yung told of the first Chinese in California, two men and a woman, brought by sailing ship to San Francisco in 1848. After the discovery of gold in the Sacramento valley, Chinese came in large numbers. The lure of “easy fortunes” was held out



to them by captains of ships touching the port of Hongkong, who thus filled their vessels with passengers for the return voyage to America.

Public officials in California welcomed the Chinese in those early years, praising their industry, honesty, and respect for law. It did not take the newcomers long to realize that this friendliness was due to the Americans' need for their labor. Many Chinese went to the gold diggings, but Yung never heard of any of them making a fortune there. For the white men took all the good claims, and the Orientals were left to work the "tailings," claims abandoned by the whites. Each Chinese, too, had to pay a tax of \$4 a month for a miner's license, which the whites did not have to pay.

Numberless Chinese became laborers in the mines at low wages, while others worked as cooks and laundrymen, became vegetable gardeners, or hired out to farmers. Many were utilized to drain great stretches of swamp lands.

When the first transcontinental railroad was being built in the Sixties, the contractors were desperate for a labor supply. They tried to recruit sufficient white men for this hard work, but comparatively few whites were willing. So the railroad heads sent to China, and brought over contract laborers by the thousands.

Completion of the railway started a stream of white workers rolling from the East to the West. Depression hit the Coast and the Chinese were no longer wanted in California. The whites now resented their presence, regarding them as competitors. The Chinese laborers were used to low living standards and worked for less pay than the whites. A great anti-Chinese drive was begun.<sup>3</sup>

In 1871 a Los Angeles mob lynched 19 Chinese in one day, because one of their number was suspected of shooting a white man... Politicians made capital of the sentiment against the Orientals, branded them as undesirables. California enacted laws restricting their liberties, tried to oust them from the state.

Nearly all these laws were found unconstitutional, because they violated treaty provisions, the Civil Rights Statute, or the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. But in 1882 the California politicians raised such a loud outcry against "our danger from cheap coolie labor" that Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act, barring all Chinese immigration for 10 years.

"If our people worked for low wages," Yung commented, "it was not through choice. Tens of thousands of them had been urged to come to this country. They took what pay they could get, in order to live. They were not organized to resist the employers who cut wages."

Yet the Exclusion Act was not enough. Violence against Chinese broke out anew in various parts of the West. They were robbed, beaten, murdered. Hoodlums shot them down like dogs and were immune from punishment. In the Eighties there

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<sup>3</sup> Later I dug into books and other records which bore out Yung's story in detail.

were anti-Chinese riots in Eureka and other California communities, with numerous fatalities, many homes burned, and many deportations. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, a mob killed 28 Chinese.

Additional laws were enacted to keep Orientals out of the country, except students, merchants, government officials, and others who might enter temporarily, and to prohibit their naturalization. Chinese men who had established legal residence here were not permitted to bring their China-born wives into the United States, which forced them to choose between celibacy and consorting with prostitutes.

In the face of the onslaughts against them, the Chinese on the Pacific slope centered in fight colonies. In San Francisco many of them burrowed into the ground, away from the light, away from the menacing hands of the whites who opposed them. Here they multiplied, and some prospered in trade, despite prejudice and discrimination. They could get business by underbidding on prices.

Even in 1934 the kinds of jobs open to Chinese in the United States were severely limited. University students, when not in classrooms, worked in restaurants, laundries, and in other menial capacities.

And there was another difficulty, a family angle.

“Our parents look down on us,” Yung explained, “because many of my generation do not speak good Chinese, and because we have American ways. Because of this lack of language we would not be welcomed in China, either. We are a lost generation without a homeland. Here in the country of our birth we are step-children, and in the country of our forefathers we are aliens.”

Yes, I was beginning to see. But surely something could be done. The San Francisco labor movement would help us, I was certain. I wanted to consult with my associates in the union. Meanwhile I assured these four courteous young people that the Chinese garment workers would find a welcome in the ranks of the ILGWU.

That evening I conferred with the union staff and active members — David Gisnet, Joseph Minkoff, Sam White, Ethel Blumberg, Mary Gonzales, Beatrice Lopez, and Henry Zacharin — posing the question: “What shall we do next?”

Clearly it was necessary to convince the Chinese workers that the International would not permit any discrimination against them, so long as they were working in the women’s garment industry and were eligible to join our union. Moreover, it was important that we take them into our fold because of the disproportionate number of Chinese apparel factories in San Francisco. If these remained unorganized, the rest of the local industry could not continue to exist on a competitive basis.

We requested John O’Connell, secretary of the Central Labor Council, to come with us when we met the Chinese manufacturers and contractors. As official spokesman for the San Francisco labor movement, we pointed out, he could con-

firm our statement that the ILGWU was ready to take in all the Chinese garment makers. It never occurred to me to ask him about his own views on the question.

We met nine of the Chinatown employers in the NRA office. There was lengthy argument. Some objected to unionization and standardization of working conditions.

Chinese workers would not work in other shops, they said, preferring to work among their own co-racials, because white workers refused to sit side by side with Chinese. Chinese workers were satisfied with their conditions of work, and there was no need for a change. Finally, they added, the changes demanded by our union would increase production costs and force some of the smaller firms out of business. Their employees would be doomed to continued unemployment.

“Our union is ready to put up a cash guarantee,” Gisnet and I assured them, “to place any and all who may lose their jobs in Chinatown in union shops elsewhere.”

I turned to the secretary of the Central Labor Council for verification. “Isn’t that correct, Brother O’Connell?”

“Damn right, I say I Why should these Asiatics get the jobs that our white girls could keep?” He spoke as if he had not heard my question. We were stunned by such an answer from a representative of organized labor.

To my dismay, I learned that the Chinese did not have many friends among the San Francisco labor groups, and that all Asiatics were barred from union membership there except in our own ranks.

And in the end I realized that this was not only a San Francisco dressmakers’ problem. It was closely bound up with federal government policy, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the attitude of the general labor movement toward Asiatics, the susceptibility or resistance of the young Chinese workers to union education. Our dressmakers’ local prepared a strong resolution and instructed its delegates to the ILGWU national convention, opening in Chicago on May 28, to present the case for the Chinese there. The San Francisco delegates were Vice-President Feinberg, Beatrice Lopez, dressmakers’ executive board member, Charles Silver, and myself. Introduced jointly by the Coast delegations, our resolution was adopted by the convention. It indorsed a plan for a campaign to organize the Chinese garment workers.

I wrote a detailed article on my observations of the appalling conditions in Chinatown and sent it to Max Danish, editor of our International’s official publication, *Justice*. After he published it, the article was reprinted in several foreign-language papers and in other labor periodicals, including the San Francisco Central Labor Council’s organ, the *Labor Clarion*, which also used an editorial calling attention to it. The *Clarion* discussed the problem of the Chinese workers at some length, with a query: “Does their organization into trade unions answer this question?”

But the attitude of the conservative unions in San Francisco toward the Chinese remained unchanged, and the issue was left hanging in the air.

Subsequently, after I had been called to work in other sections of the country, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union chartered a local in Chinatown. Yet the subterranean sweatshops lingered.

In 1943, however, new friendliness and sympathy for the Chinese people spread widely through this country — because of their courageous fighting against our common enemy, Japan, and because the Japanese were emphasizing American discrimination against Chinese in their radio propaganda. So Congress, in December, repealed the anachronistic Chinese exclusion laws and put China's nationals on the same quota basis as those of other nations. It provided also for their naturalization. Thus a long-existent stigma was removed.

With this social wall at last torn down, I am confident the labor movement will in the near future admit Chinese workers to equal membership. Together the two races will eradicate the industrial blight I saw in the fetid lower levels of San Francisco's Chinatown.

## Chapter 7. Far Cry from 'Forty-Nine

Conferences with employers and organization meetings now kept the union heads steadily occupied. Meanwhile our newly enrolled membership busied itself with the educational and recreational activities I had started. With the co-operation of Brownie Lee Jones, ever alert industrial secretary of the YWCA on Sutter Street, where I was then living, we were able to make use of the "Y" classrooms, gym, cafeteria, and even its mimeograph.

I visited Dr. Alexander Meiklejohn, director of the San Francisco School of Social Studies, and former president of Amherst College, who expressed a deep interest in what we were doing. His wife, Helen Meiklejohn, agreed to conduct a class in workers' problems and elementary economics, with emphasis on NRA Codes, union agreements and policies, and the reviewing of current literature on labor.

This class was popular from the start. A free discussion period followed the informal talk each week. Helen Meiklejohn's personality was such that the discussions were maintained on a high level, and were stimulating and informative.

Students enrolled in our classes included executive board members, shop chairmen, and members of shop committees. We tried to shape all lectures especially for the new rank-and-file members, who were eager to learn about their organization.

It was always inspiring to watch the impact of knowledge and a broadening process on untutored minds. Some of the younger girls fresh from high school who were half ashamed that they had to work in a garment factory, blossomed out as we portrayed the drama of the uphill struggle of labor in California, and brought home to them that they were now an intrinsic part of it.

The state history these girls had been taught consisted mostly of nostalgic, romantic bits about the '49ers and the Gold Rush days and lurid stories of the Barbary Coast. That there had been such a thing as a strike in the dear romantic days of the '49ers usually came as a shock.

In the period of the Gold Rush, as now, wages had not kept pace with the cost of living. San Francisco carpenters struck and won higher wages in 1849. On the day before Christmas, a fire broke out, spreading swiftly among the wooden buildings. Property valued at \$1,250,000 was destroyed. It was charged that unemployed carpenters started that fire, to provide work for themselves, but this was never proved.

The printers were the first to establish a functioning trade union in 'Frisco, that same year. Unionization quickly followed among teamsters, building trades

workers, ship-riggers, waterfront workers, and musicians. The community grew by leaps and bounds. By 1852 its population had risen from 860 to 42,000.

Gamblers, prostitutes, and gunmen naturally had flocked to California with the gold-seekers. Crime became rampant; robbery, slugging, and murder were daily occurrences. Australian hoodlums, many of them ax-convicts ("ticket-of-leave men") who congregated in Sydneytown, later known as the Barbary Coast, had their own special technique. They would set fires in various parts of town and rob homes while the occupants fought the flames.

Established law could not keep up with the constant run of crime. So civilians, in both the Bay City and the mining camps, found it necessary to make and enforce their own laws, informally but expediently, through "vigilance" committees. Vigilantes hanged men found guilty of horse-stealing, murder, arson, robbery, and other major offenses, and tarred and feathered culprits convicted on lesser charges.

Legend has haloed these committees, and the term vigilante has since been borrowed by anti-social groups which have flogged, maimed, deported, or killed individuals who insisted upon upholding their own right, or the right of others, to free speech, free assemblage, or free press. Labor organizers often have been victims of such groups.

Through three decades the early San Francisco labor unions fluctuated in size, consolidating their strength in the Seventies when they joined forces to fight "cheap Chinese labor." In the Seventies, too, the Seamen's Protective Association was formed and headed by a young Fenian exile from Ireland, Frank Roney. One of the association's chief objectives was to put out of business the "crimps" who doped luckless sailors in saloons and "shanghaiied" them aboard "hungry" out-bound ships with hard-boiled captains whose reputations made it difficult for them to get crews otherwise.

Eighteen Eighty-Five saw the establishment of the Coast Seamen's Union when ship-owners attempted sharp wage-cuts. Andrew Furuseth, valiant self-sacrificing Norwegian, who landed in 'Frisco as a youth on a British ship from Calcutta, emerged from that union's ranks and made the seafarers' cause his life-work. Later he widened his field greatly, and helped found the International Seamen's Union, which took in sailors, firemen, cooks, and stewards. And he led the movement which in 1915 resulted in passage of the Seamen's Act, sponsored by the elder Senator Robert LaFollette, and called the "Magna Carta of the Sea."

In 1893, a year of "hard times," when unemployment was rife throughout the land, an anti-union campaign was put on by the newly formed Employers' and Manufacturers' Association of San Francisco. With 35,000 workers idle there, union membership fell below 5,000.

But when the American Railway Union, under the leadership of Eugene Victor Debs, called a strike in 1894 against the Pullman Company in Chicago, railroad

men in San Francisco and Oakland refused to move trains containing Pullman cars, and federal troops were sent into 'Frisco, as in Chicago, to break the strike. In the same year hundreds of jobless men, commanded by "General" Charles T. Kelley, left the Bay cities and moved eastward on freight trains to join Coxey's Army of the unemployed in its march on Washington to demand relief from the federal government.

By 1900 labor in San Francisco had reformed its lines, and was regaining strength. Unions were multiplying and expanding, and the Central Labor Council brought about the establishment of a State Federation of Labor.

Conflict between the teamsters' union and their employers tied up all Bay region freight traffic when the water-front men walked out in sympathy. For two months the opponents were dead-locked; until Governor Gage interfered. The seamsters' union gained greatly in strength, while the sailors won an improved contract.

Labor elected two San Francisco mayors — Eugene Schmitz and P. H. McCarthy. Schmitz, put into office by the Union Labor Party, ended his political career in disgrace when corruption in his administration was laid at his door. Some of his political associates endeavored to make huge illegal profits on the rebuilding of the city after the 1906 earthquake and fire. On the other hand, McCarthy, president of the State Building Trades Council, served with credit. He engineered the erection of mills owned by the council to insure a continuing lumber supply, and set into motion a boycott against other mills throughout the state which paid less than union wages.

In 1916 the organized lumbermen struck, demanding a living wage. An employer-inspired Law and Order Committee then prevailed upon the City Council to pass an anti-picketing ordinance.

Following the Preparedness Day tragedy in that year, which resulted in the imprisonment of Mooney and Billings, 'Frisco employers organized an Industrial Association, designed mainly to combat the spirited buildings trades unions, and to oppose labor unionism generally. It set up its own employment office, and a training school for non-union carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and plumbers. Strongly intrenched, the association made itself detested in labor circles.

The 1929 slump hit the city hard, and with a multitude of men and women jobless no union dared push any new demands.

:But the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933, and especially Section 7-a, guaranteeing the right to organize, aroused a keen sense of independence among workers there. Particularly along the water-front did labor now go into action.

For 14 years the city's cargo handlers, had been compelled to join the employer-controlled Longshoremen's Association to get jobs. Wages were low, hours long, and work went mostly by favor. An organization controlled by the longshoremen

themselves was necessary to safeguard thousands of men whose livelihood came from loading and unloading ships.

Determined to achieve this end, a small militant group obtained a local charter from the International Longshoremen's Association, affiliate of the A F of L. San Francisco cargo-men readily joined up, and within six months the new local claimed to have enrolled at least 90 per cent. At its meetings the cockney voice of Harry Bridges, hook-nosed, lean, Australian dock worker, was frequently heard.

Similar organization was going on in other ports, from San Diego to Vancouver, and in the spring of 1934 a coastal longshoremen's convention was held in San Francisco. A spirit of revolt against the conditions on the docks all along the West Coast seethed among the delegates. Demands included decent wages, reasonable hours, and joint control of hiring halls, the employment centers where waterfront workers got jobs on a day-to-day basis. The halls were a bone of contention between employers and longshoremen, for here discrimination was widespread.

Obviously these workers would be compelled to strike to better their situation. And strike they did — in May.

Realistic stories of labor's vivid past in California were listened to appreciatively by those who attended our classes. But many union members never came to lectures. For these there were other activities, including gym classes at the "Y." On Sundays and holidays we frequently joined with the California Alpine Club in hikes and excursions "into trailed and untrailed areas," sponsored for the purpose of "bringing the people of the cities into the open, and to the full enjoyment of the natural wonders of the state."

Each year, at the end of its hiking season, the Alpine Club staged a play on top of Mount Tamalpais, in a natural outdoor amphitheatre. In 1934 it put on a drama set in Gold Rush days — David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*, which afforded unintentional comedy.

Sunday, May 20, was swelteringly hot. A broiling noonday sun beat down. After the hard climb up the crooked mountain trails, many of the men had stripped off their shirts and sat in shorts, sweat glistening on their bodies. We women opened collars, rolled up sleeves, made ourselves as comfortable as possible.

When the tall Spanish screens which served as a curtain were folded back, we saw a simulated cabin (with no roof) set in a gold camp high up in the Sierras. The temperature was supposedly 40 or 50 below zero. Actors dressed as old-time gold-miners were coming into the cabin, wearing felt boots, and bundled up heavily in furs. They pretended to shiver with the "cold," and hastened to "warm" themselves at a property fire. The spectacle was so ludicrous that loud laughter greeted serious moments in the drama, and the actors were hard put to it to play their parts with straight faces.



In that spring of 1934 John Ribac and I went with Anna Mooney to visit her brother Tom in San Quentin penitentiary...

On July 22, 1916, while a war preparedness parade moved along Market Street, the famous four-car-track thoroughfare of San Francisco, a bomb exploded, killing ten persons and wounding many others. Among those arrested were Tom Mooney, member of the Moulders' Union; his wife, Rena, a music teacher; Warren K. Billings, a shoe worker; Edward Nolan, president-elect of Machinists' Lodge 68; and Israel Weinberg, jitney driver.

Four spectacular trials stretched across months. Two of the five were found guilty. Mooney was sentenced to be hanged, Billings to life imprisonment. Mrs. Mooney and Weinberg were acquitted. Nolan was not tried.

Soon after the trials, the defense produced evidence showing that both Mooney and Billings had been convicted on perjured testimony, with knowledge and connivance of the prosecution, and that the case against them had been built up largely by Martin Swanson, a former Pinkerton detective employed by the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. In 1913 Mooney had been active in a strike against that company.

The whole American labor movement was aroused. Special committees were appointed to work for the liberation of the two prisoners. Echoes of the case reverberated in Russia, and workers there, following their successful revolution in 1917, held demonstrations in front of the U. S. embassy in Petrograd demanding freedom for "Muni." Persistent agitation led to intervention by President Woodrow Wilson, and Governor Stevens commuted Mooney's sentence to life imprisonment.

Through the ensuing 17 years, the accumulation of new evidence unearthed by the defense was more than enough to convince any reasonable person of the complete innocence of both men. Repeated appeals to succeeding Governors and state and federal courts for their release or re-trial proved futile.

At the penitentiary Anna, then secretary of the Mooney Defense Committee, and I were permitted to take turns in talking with Tom, while John Ribac called out a friend sentenced in another labor case.

Despite long years of imprisonment, Mooney displayed amazing optimism about winning his freedom. He was confident that a new move in the courts which his lawyers were planning would liberate him.

Our visit cheered the two prisoners, but it left me thoughtful. After we had left Anna at the Ferry House in San Francisco, Ribac and I talked over Tom Mooney's case. I wondered how he would stand the outside world after all those years in prison when his thoughts constantly revolved about his own case and his ceaseless attempts to win liberty. I was afraid that Tom's lack of knowledge of what had been happening in the labor movement, and his intense preoccupation with his own case would make the readjustment hard when labor finally succeeded in getting

him out. Yet I knew that we all must keep up the battle for the freedom of the man who had come to be regarded as America's outstanding labor martyr.

## Chapter 8. Police Guns Bring General Strike to 'Frisco

After prolonged negotiations our dress agreement, modified, was accepted by 15 of the 18 mid-town manufacturers. It provided for a union shop, 35-hour week, minimum wage scales in line with the NRA Dress Code, two weeks' trial period, workers to elect a shop chairman and shop committee to handle complaints and grievances, equal distribution of work during slack season, and impartial arbitration machinery in case the union and employer could not adjust differences amicably. It was understood that the workers might join the union without interference by the employers.

One manufacturer explained that his employees were "conscientious objectors" who flatly refused to join up. They were Russian emigres who feared that by joining our union they would have to follow the Communist line.

I suggested that I go to his factory and speak to them.

"No, thank you!" he answered. "I know what you'll tell them. I'd rather send them to your office."

Next afternoon about three dozen arrogant women walked into our headquarters. They were annoyed, impatient, in a hurry to get home.

Gisnet read to them the main points of the agreement. They sat cold and hostile. He tried addressing them in Russian. They were contemptuous. He had been away from Russia more than 25 years and his pronunciation was faulty.

When I took over, I made it clear that they had better take their time, for working hours were not in question at the moment. Henceforth they would work regular union hours as specified in the agreement, 35 hours a week, instead of all kinds of hours as before; when the boss asked them to work overtime, they had not dared refuse for fear of losing their jobs.

I explained what our union had accomplished in three decades; pictured the miserable sweatshop conditions and unlimited hours which had taken toll of garment workers' health in many cities and towns. After years of tireless effort, we had succeeded in establishing decent conditions in our industry in almost every garment center across the land. San Francisco was the latest area in which a collective pact had been won by the silk dress workers, and those who sat before me were the beneficiaries of our campaigns.

They began to show some interest. I ended by asking: "Are there any disagreements, or questions? Please speak up. This is your union, and free expression of opinion is respected here."

The first question, from several at once, was about the dues. I explained that we would take them into the union without any initiation fees, that the weekly dues would be thirty-five cents. My answer satisfied them.

Then a middle-aged woman, later identified as "the ghegeneralsha" — the general's wife — began to talk in badly broken English. I advised her to speak her own language.

Vividly she described the sufferings of her family since 1914, when they fled from their comfortable home in central Russia to escape the horrors and hardships of the far-spreading war. Later the Revolution and the civil wars had taken their inherited land-holdings.

They fled to Japan and thence to America via Vladivostok, where her children had to work as dishwashers for their food, and now poor and disinherited in a foreign land, they were again being "drive into a union," which to her mind was akin to a Communist organization.

"Gospodee pomilooy!" she lamented. "We are poor emigres, with out a home or a country. What will become of us now?"

Her story was heart-rending, but it was nothing new. I had hear it many times from others. My own people had been driven from pillar to post, from country to country, and for centuries. I tried to comfort her, explaining that ours was an economic organization and not a political party; that we were acting in accordance with the United States Constitution, which upheld the right of workers to band together for their own benefit; that we were protected by law and that she would now benefit from our new agreement. She would work regular hours, be home in time for supper, and receive a living wage; and her status as an immigrant would not be jeopardized. Moreover, when she was ready to apply for citizenship, our office would help her.

Several of the younger ones spoke up, in good English. They now seemed to realize that it would be better to have the union backing them; and they dwelt upon various troubles, such as intimidation, discrimination, and unsanitary conditions in their shop.

"Isn't it worth the price of your monthly dues," I asked, "to be able to come here and air your grievances without fear of losing your jobs? This is what we call industrial democracy."

The meeting concluded on an amicable note, and we all became fast friends. Though the point was not pressed, they willingly signed application cards.

I didn't tell them that the dual union had just issued a characteristic leaflet, headed *The Fast-Traveling Sales-Lady*, and branding our new agreement as a sell-out. Its text read in part:

Rose Pesotta is an excellent saleslady. She had showed her skill in helping to SELL-OUT the Dressmakers' strike in Los Angeles, from whence [sic] she came to San Francisco. Here, after several weeks of bickering, wire-pulling, and back-door deals she finally, with the help of Feinberg, Gisnet, and the other A. F. of L. big shots, succeeded in selling an agreement to some Dress Manufacturers...

"Now, Rose Pesotta announces that she is going over to OAKLAND to PUT IT OVER there, as well as in CHINATOWN. Here we see a skillful SALESLADY, TRAVELING FAST."

Next morning Paul Greenberg, one of our members, who was sympathetic to the dual union group, came into my office and showed me a copy of that leaflet.

"What do you say to that?"

"I take it as a compliment," was my cheerful reply. "It gives me credit and puts me among the best salesmen."

"How so?"

"Well, take for example the recognition of Soviet Russia," I said. "Your crowd tried for years to sell the idea to our government, but failed. Then along came a fast traveling salesman — Litvinov — and bingo! he sold the idea to President Roosevelt."

Naturally I compared the case of our union in San Francisco with that of Russia. The local Communist-led dual union had been in existence several years. Repeatedly it had attempted to gain the confidence of workers and respect of employers, without success. Finally, we arrived on the scene and succeeded in winning an agreement without loss of time by the workers. Now our union would move ahead at full speed.

"So why should I feel insulted?" I concluded. "I am proud of the fact that we achieved our ends where your outfit failed."

Paul mulled this over. "You are right," he said, to my surprise. "I realize now that in our propaganda against union officialdom we overlooked a vital fact — that organizers are not really union officials, but emissaries who are performing an important duty. I like your spirit."

Today Paul is one of our devoted officers in San Francisco, an able lieutenant to Henry Zacharin, head of the joint board there.

The charge of selling out to the employers was made by the Communist against our union officers and organizers many times, no matter how good the settlements obtained in strikes or non-strike campaigns. The Needle Trades Workers' Industrial Union, which existed chiefly on paper, covered up its own shortcomings by the smoke-screen of its attacks on our union.

A diverting incident occurred in one of the larger dress shops, the owner of which professed to be sympathetic toward Soviet Russia. But most of his employees were "White Russians," in the political and not the geographical sense, and the local Communist group assailed him for not employing party members.

His reply to his comrades was a masterpiece of party-line thinking.

"As a good Communist," he said, "I shall always exploit the enemies of Soviet Russia, never its friends, and since Communists claim to be its only friends, I cannot conscientiously exploit any of them."

I had reason to believe that he was talking with tongue in cheek.

Returning from a speaking trip to Portland and Seattle on May 11, I found the longshoremen on strike. They had reached the limit of their endurance, and despite opposition by the ILA's officers had walked out. Then the teamsters struck, and the seamen and licensed officers quit their ships in sympathy; and the strike spread up and down the Coast. By May 15 not a freighter left any American Pacific harbor, an unprecedented circumstance.

We of the ILGWU talked with groups of the strikers, pledged our financial and moral support, urged them to call upon us for advice if needed, offered our headquarters to them for meetings, and promised that we would bring their strike to the attention of our International convention in Chicago. Little did we dream that it would lead to a general strike which would rock the whole Pacific Slope.

I spent a great deal of time now on the Embarcadero, historic water-front. The scene there was remarkable. Hundreds of men, able-bodied and willing to work, and asking only to be treated like human beings, were constantly shoved around by the police. Frequent clashes resulted.

On July 4 the Industrial Association announced that the port would be reopened next morning. At dawn non-union trucks brought in to remove freight were overturned by strikers who were trying to guard their jobs against scabs. Tear gas and guns were used by the police. Two strikers were killed, many wounded. More than 8,000 workers followed the cortege to the cemetery.

Out of the far-reaching indignation against those killings, sentiment for a city-wide general strike to support the longshoremen grew quickly. The general strike came on July 17; that afternoon 127,000 men and women stopped work. No street cars ran, no taxis. Trucks ceased moving except for milk deliveries. Small stores and gasoline stations were closed and only 19 restaurants were permitted to stay open.

Mayor Rossi asked the populace to keep their heads, saying there was ample food. Pressure was put upon the municipal street-car workers, who, as civil service employees, faced loss of their jobs if they remained out. They returned to work on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and the same day the general strike committee, by a scant majority, ordered the strike ended.

Though this walkout was backed by all A F of L unions in San Francisco, it did not have sanction higher up. William Green, president of the A F of L, attempted to discredit it by saying it was “only of local character, possessing no national significance.”

For 10 more days the water-front men continued picketing. Meanwhile their employers offered a new agreement, and in that and other West Coast ports, the unions voted assent to arbitration. On July 31 after being out 10 weeks, the long-shoremen returned to their jobs. The arbitrators subsequently gave them a six-hour day, 95 cents an hour for straight time, and \$1.40 an hour for overtime, with hiring halls jointly controlled.

The general strike in 'Frisco gave tremendous momentum to unionism all along the West Coast.

## Chapter 9. Some History is Recorded in Chicago

My Mexican co-delegate, Beatrice Lopez, and I arrived in Chicago early Sunday morning, May 27. The special train bringing the Eastern delegation to the convention was due at 10 a.m., and we joined the official reception committee. I was happy to find many of my New York friends among the delegates or guests, especially Anna Sosnovsky. Chums of long standing and classmates at Brookwood Labor College, we had much to talk about. She had organized several hundred cotton garment workers, mostly girls and newcomers in the industry, in Newark, New Jersey, and was now representing their local at the convention.

While we sat at breakfast, several delegates announced that they had “decided” to sponsor me as their candidate for a vice-presidency in the International. I was too astonished to say anything, and the girls went on to remind me that there was no woman on our General Executive Board. This was ridiculous, they said, in a predominantly women’s industry. In the past, two women had served at different time as vice-presidents — Fannia M. Cohn, now executive secretary of our educational department, and Molly Friedman, who resigned after she married and retired to private life to raise a family.

I tried to make clear that I had no wish to be a vice-president of the ILGWU, though I recognized that it would be a great honor. Now that I had finished my job in California, I wanted only to return to a sewing machine in a New York dress shop.

The rest of the day I was so busy helping to check in delegates and place them in hotels, that I had no time to give the vice-presidency idea another thought.

A serious problem arose at the Medinah Michigan Avenue Club, convention headquarters, where we were to hold our sessions. The management refused to admit the Negro delegates from Local 22. In protest, the rest of No. 22’s delegation declined to check in, and remained outside, their baggage beside them. After a protracted argument, the management relaxed its rule, and the delegation filed in and registered.

It is usual for the local ILGWU organization in a convention city to put on a good show in welcoming delegates and guests. Chicago, under the leadership of Morris Bialis, the International’s vice-president there, did a creditable job. As a



prelude, the Chicago unionists had organized a parade, and on Monday morning 9,000 dress and cloakmakers marched from Canal and Van Buren Streets to West Side Carmen's Hall on Ashland Boulevard. The women wore white costumes, with white overseas caps bearing the letters ILGWU, and the men wore similar caps of blue. Cheering onlookers lined the sidewalks five deep, and countless flags waved, as the marching workers sang to stirring music played by three brass bands.

Carmen's Hall, with a seating capacity of 4,000, was swiftly filled, and an overflow of several thousand blackened the streets outside. The stage was gay with flags and flowers, sent by locals and shop groups of workers.

Vice-President Bialis officially opened the convention. Slender and boyish-looking, with a mane of black wavy hair and clear black eyes, he seemed to personify the militant spirit of the International. Victor A. Olander, secretary of the Illinois Federation of Labor, made the welcoming address; and Alderman Oscar F. Nelson, a vice-president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, extended "the key to the city" to the delegates in behalf of Mayor Edward J. Kelly. Then Bialis turned the convention over to David Dubinsky, president of the International.

Before beginning his keynote address, Dubinsky asked the assembly to stand in silent tribute to his predecessor, Benjamin Schlesinger, who died shortly after being re-elected to the presidency in Philadelphia in 1932.

D.D. reviewed the struggles of the ILGWU through difficult years, as it surmounted great obstacles and fought enemies outside and inside. Sentence by sentence, he built up a compelling picture of the tremendous significance of our organization's achievements. One got a new conception of the International, of the boundless energy, stubborn devotion to an ideal, and stamina it had taken to rebuild the organization out of the wreckage left by the dual union after the disastrous 26-weeks' strike in New York in 1926. That had been our first defeat, he pointed out; it left the ILGWU saddled with a debt exceeding \$2,000,000, a shameful monument to the reckless spending orgy which characterized the "left wing" administration then in power.

The International had ridden out the storm and cleared the bulk of its obligations, and its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary was being celebrated with the greatest convention it had ever held. The ILGWU membership had dropped from 110,000 in 1920, to 40,000 in January I, 1933. Now it had climbed to a height of nearly 200,000. At this 22<sup>nd</sup> biennial gathering were 369 delegates, 143 locals, and 13 joint boards, located in 73 cities in 16 states and Canada.

Our president dwelt on how the union had pioneered in collective bargaining, and in labor education, enlisted the aid of public-spirited citizens and government officials in the fight to eliminate sweatshops, protected the health of the workers, participated in community activities, given aid to charitable institutions, and helped other labor organizations both in this country and abroad in their battles to

uphold human rights. The International had reduced working hours in our industry to 35, won high minimum wage scales, and established the right of workers to their jobs, so they could not be discharged without review by a proper impartial tribunal.

Dubinsky touched upon the 1930 industrial upheaval, when tens of thousands of our workers lost their jobs, employers forced work conditions down to the lowest possible level, and the sweatshop in its worst forms reappeared. In the three years following, garment makers were close to starvation.

When the National Industrial Recovery Act came into being as a part of the New Deal, our workers benefited greatly, Dubinsky recalled, “largely because of the militancy of our union and its readiness not only to threaten to strike, but actually to resort to strikes when the occasion called for it.”

Mainly, however, he declared, our success was achieved because we concentrated our drive during the early months of the NRA, the “honeymoon period,” and because our International, like the United Mine Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, was quick to realize the importance of the new law.

At that time the administration in Washington appeared ready to give the underdog a break, and employers had not yet shown much resistance to the NRA Codes. This came when the heavy basic industries became involved in Code hearings.

In the non-union industries, the Codes were not being enforced, and flagrant violations by the most “patriotic” employers were common. The unions, however, were in a better position to enlist the services of the NRA for enforcement; they could insist, under threat of strikes, that restitution of wages be made to underpaid workers. In our industry, tens of thousands of dollars in back pay were collected for ILGWU members.

Dubinsky regarded as a mistake the efforts of the Darrow Commission to maintain the small businessman’s existence at all costs.

“From the first day of the depression,” he declared, “it was clear that the little man could survive only at the expense of labor. Unwilling to admit that economic forces were working against him, and that he would shortly become a part of the working class himself or starve, the small business man continued a haphazard existence by slashing wages here, chiseling there, lengthening hours...”

“The little businessman ought to realize that as a capitalist he cuts a sorry figure, and that no legislation or other force can turn the clock back for him. In any event, labor does not propose to be exploited by him. We refuse to return to the sweatshop or permit the degradation of our workers to justify or extend the existence of the small business man.”

Applause rocked the big auditorium as our president finished with these words:

“It was an outcry of injustice against miserable conditions that finally prompted the Government to begin thinking and talking and considering social legislation.

But it will be the power of organized labor that will make it not only the subject for discussion, but a matter of law, a matter of practice, a matter of relief to the op-pressed...

“We are serving humanity, fighting for freedom... Our cause is just and our purpose is noble. Our defeats are only temporary setbacks. We are bound to win... United as never before, shoulder to shoulder, let us go marching on to our future battles and more glorious victories.”

Short-statured and in his early forties, Dubinsky had a peaches – and-cream complexion, so cherished by women. In a corner of his mouth was clamped a cigar which peeled apart as it was smoked to a stub. At times his round face, with up-turned nose, would take on the expression of a baby. Gavel in one hand and cigar in the other, he conducted the convention sessions masterfully.

Much has been said and written, both commendatory and critical, about the president of our International, since that convention. Some observers have compared him to the young David slaying the giant Goliath; others consider him almost a demigod whose wisdom cannot even be questioned. Reactionaries classify him among the hated New Dealers, a connotation damning him in the eyes of profiteers, Tam-many politicians, and gangsters.

As I viewed him on the opening day in Chicago, during the two weeks there, and in my close association with him through ten succeeding years (as a member of the General Executive Board), Dubinsky was and is an ordinary mortal, who happens to be living in a period favorable to his type of leadership. And clearly he is not infallible.

He is the third man to head the ILGWU since I joined the union, and to my mind the luckiest of the three. Benjamin Schlesinger, cloakmaker, the first, put the organization on a rock-solid foundation. Morris Sigman, presser, became president at the beginning of the internecine war, never recovered from its blows. Abraham Baroff, congenial and fatherly, one of the builders of the Waistmakers' Local 25, served as secretary-treasurer for ten years under both Schlesinger and Sigman. Late in the Twenties Sigman resigned, and Schlesinger again became president. Baroff retired later, and Dubinsky, manager of Cutters' Local 10, and since 1922 an International vice-president, was chosen to succeed him.

When Benjamin Schlesinger died in 1932 Dubinsky was elected as president-secretary-treasurer, and has held that joint post ever since. Within a year after he assumed office the whole American labor movement underwent a radical change. With favorable legislation to help them rebuild the ILGWU, he and the GEB had the cooperation of a loyal corps of men and women in various cities who had given their hearts' blood to keep our organization from being destroyed in a critical time.

I came to know Dubinsky in the following years as a man of tremendous vitality, ready to undertake almost any big task, provided he was sure the huge membership

of the International was behind him. An individual of strong feelings, sensitive and impulsive, he could alternately be ruthless or break out in tears of humility.

Many times across a decade I dared to contradict him, when I saw that with all his knowledge of governmental, labor, and social problems, he was unaware of the existence of issues confronting me at the moment in some remote part of the country. Sitting in his New York office, he does not always readily comprehend the peculiar situations faced by an organizer afield, and one cannot always give detailed explanations over the long distance telephone.

Hence I frequently took liberties, using my own judgment in endeavors to act in the best interests of the union and the workers involved. Remembering Admiral Dewey, who cut the cable with the States so that he would not be hampered in winning the Battle of Manila, I found that an organizer often had to make her own decisions, even though they ran counter to her superior's instructions. But usually when there was reckoning afterward, D.D. accepted the situation like a sportsman.

I had been appointed to serve on the organization committee of which Vice-President Joseph Breslaw, manager of Pressers' Local 35, was chairman, and at its initial meeting, I was chosen secretary.

All proposed resolutions on organization were referred to us — and requests for organizers, charters, funds, educational directors, literature, and other forms of co-operation. We were in almost continuous session that first week. A constant stream of delegates came to us to explain conditions in their respective areas, and we got first-hand information about what was happening in our industry all over the land.

Enactment of the NIRA in 1933 had a profound effect upon millions of exploited people. Unorganized workers who had never before raised the question of their rights as human beings, and who had accepted whatever they were given as inevitable, suddenly awakened to the fact that they were part of a great democratic nation. With a new sense of their own value in production, they began to clamor for organization. They had new and solid standing ground in Section 7-a of the Recovery Act, which provided that workers had a right to join unions of their own choosing.

Stirred by the victorious general strikes of the Philadelphia and New York dress-makers, workers in the garment industry all over the country called upon our International for guidance. We became aware of groups of workers numbering tens of thousands, in widely scattered cities where factories had sprung up like mushrooms during the depression.

These shops came into being as a result of advertisements by Chambers of Commerce offering alluring advantages to industry, such as free factory sites, no taxes, free power, and a dependable supply of labor, "cheap, plentiful, and contented."

Many workers in those factories were wives and daughters of unemployed miners, factory workers, and farmers, who had taken jobs at any pay offered. But they were not so contented nor so dumb as their sanguine employers believed. Many, too, were the wives and children of former union men. When New Deal legislation gave governmental sanction to labor unions “of the workers’ own choosing,” the awakened ones realized the pressing need of working-class solidarity.

Our national office responded quickly to the flood of inquiries, hastening to send detailed information and constructive advice, and dispatching charters and organizers wherever they were most needed. Organization drives were started simultaneously in many areas, some hitherto untouched (Missouri, Illinois, Texas, Georgia) Ohio, Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and on the Pacific Coast. Campaigns were carried on in at least 60 cities. Delegates from these centers gave our committee the human side of the story, the dramatic phases, the minor notes, that seldom get into formal reports.

Occasionally the committee recessed to hear addresses of special importance in the convention hall. This conclave was truly a pageant — a richly colored moving panorama chronicling major victories of labor. Its interests and discussions were not confined to the ILGWU, large as that had now grown. We were concerned with the fortunes and fate of all workers throughout the world, and with their right to those liberties since called “the Four Freedoms.”

To the flower-decked convention platform came a long line of distinguished guests — public officials and veterans of the industrial struggle and others whose hearts had long been close to labor’s continuing fight for a better world. Among the speakers were men and women who had been arrested on picket lines; who had faced onslaughts by police clubs; who knew the inside of courtrooms and jails. Some brought close to us the tragedy of the European labor movement under the iron heels of Fascism and Naziism. Through the speeches one dominant note constantly resounded: “Fight Fascism everywhere! Fight Fascism in any guise!”

Two speakers whose words made a deep impression were political refugees — Martin Plettli, from Germany, fraternal delegate from the International Clothing Workers’ Federation, then centered in Amsterdam, Holland, who spoke in German, and Dr. Max Winter, former vice-mayor of Vienna, who had escaped with his life and little else, from the terror under the Dollfuss regime.

“Vienna has been fighting and starving since February,” said Dr. Winter, “not only for Vienna but for the workers the world over. On May Day we were not allowed to hold public meetings of workers, but we had, in the Vienna woods, three great mass meetings...”

He told of a friend, John Bertzer, a former clothing worker and member of the Austrian Parliament, who died in jail from starvation. The authorities forbade any

announcement of the funeral. But the news spread secretly and swiftly, and when his body was brought to a crematory, 2,000 workers quickly gathered there.

“Not a word was allowed to be said in honor of my dead comrade,” Dr. Winter related. “No flowers were permitted on his coffin. But as it sank into the fire those 2,000 men and women shouted: ‘Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!’”

Then Luigi Antonini, vice-president of the International and secretary-manager of Italian Local 89, largest local in the ILGWU, with a membership nearing 40,000, reminded the delegates of the nearness of June 10, the date on which the Italian Socialist Giacomo Matteotti was killed by Fascists. It was hard to realize that Matteotti was dead. One recalled his words: “Liberty, liberty — it is like the air we breathe. We do not miss it until it is gone.” First Vice-President Salvatore Ninno added that it was only 11 months since young Anthony Fierro, Italian anti-Fascist, had been murdered in New York by a member of the Khaki Shirts of America.

My interest was held strongly when William D. Lopez of the Puerto Rico Free Federation of Labor spoke. He told of the plight of that island’s 100,000 women needle workers. For 20 years Puerto Rico had been used as a source of cheap labor by outside manufacturers. Wages there were incredibly low. Listening, I formed my own mental picture of the sorry lot of those victims of employers’ greed. It was akin to that of the Mexican women and girls in Los Angeles, whom I had organized a few months before.

Lopez urged the ILGWU to take the Puerto Rican needle workers under its wing. President Dubinsky answered that the convention already had before it a General Executive Board recommendation for an early organizing campaign in the island.

Jim Crowism cropped up anew at the Medinah Club at the end of the first week, when elevator operators refused to let the Negro delegates ride with whites, and ordered them to use the freight elevators. So the GEB moved the whole convention over to the Morrison Hotel. Tumultuous applause greeted the announcement of its decision. The organization committee was the first to hand in its report. On all requests for organizers and organization drives we made affirmative recommendations. When we reached the section of the report covering the Pacific Coast, which urged continuation of unionizing campaigns in San Francisco’s Chinatown and in the Northwest, President Dubinsky called on both Vice-President Feinberg and myself to tell the delegates about the situation in our territory.

This was the third time in my life I had faced an ILGWU convention as a speaker. My thoughts flashed back to Cleveland in 1922, when I tried to speak in behalf of a fellow delegate whose seat was contested, and was shushed down by President Schlesinger. Later I again demanded the floor, got it, and held it until I had voiced a plea for a resolution calling for liberation of all political prisoners in Soviet Russia. And as a guest speaker at the 1924 convention in Boston, I voiced a plea for the same cause, before a partly hostile audience.

Now, in Chicago, commended by Dubinsky for my work on the West Coast, I was listened to attentively and sympathetically. Some of my co-workers, who had never before been outside their own environment, sat with open mouths.

On Sunday two bus-loads of delegates went to Waldheim cemetery, to lay a wreath on the joint grave of the five Haymarket martyrs: Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel, who were hanged, and Lingg, killed by a dynamite explosion in his cell, never plausibly explained by the jailers. I presided at the ceremony, Arturo Giovannitti and others speaking.

They brought one close to the long reign of police terror in Chicago in 1886, growing out of organized labor's fight for an eight-hour day; the bomb, thrown by an unseen hand at a protest meeting; and the trial, in a hysterical atmosphere, before a biased judge, and with a jury crookedly chosen to serve anti-labor forces. And they paid tribute to Governor Altgeld, who, in freeing the other eight defendants from prison in 1892, declared that the whole eight were convicted of murder chiefly because they were Anarchists, and that there was no evidence that any of them was guilty.

Throughout the convention my Eastern friends kept hammering at me, insisting that I accept the nomination for vice-president. They argued that we must not pass up such a splendid opportunity to place a woman on the GEB again; that mine was the best record of those eligible; that I was from "out of town" and therefore would be deposing no one. At least three women delegates, two from New York and one from Cleveland, were gunning for the post, these friends said.

Emphatically I reiterated that I did not want it. I tried to make my reasons clear. I had no ambition to hold executive authority. Valuing my own freedom, I wanted to avoid getting into harness, and to keep from becoming enmeshed in inner-circle politics. Too, I felt that I could serve the cause of my fellow-unionists just as effectively as a rank-and-file member. And it was my contention that the voice of a solitary woman on the General Executive Board would be a voice lost in the wilderness. Having expressed myself positively on the subject, I dismissed it from my mind, considering the issue closed.

To my great surprise on the last day of the convention, I was greeted in the Morrison lobby by several delegates who cried: "Congratulations on your nomination!" Indignantly I answered that I had never agreed to be a candidate.

"It's all settled," Isidore Nagler, a member of the caucus committee, told me. "You were officially nominated last night. It's too late to do anything about it now."

I poured out more protesting words.

"You're crazy to talk that way," Nagler said. "I know some women here who'd give an arm for a place on the board. One of them sat in the caucus room until five o'clock this morning pleading that she be nominated."

Gloom pressed down upon me.

When the nominations for the eight out-of-town vice-presidencies were made, Delegate Edith Phillips of St. Louis put forward my name. I felt hot and cold at the same time. It seemed as if I were being dragged down by some dread force — like a swimmer caught in an undertow. I wanted to cry out in protest, but my throat felt paralyzed.

All eight nominees were elected by acclamation.

Just before adjournment, Dubinsky asked Sol Polakoff, a former vice-president and one of the ILGWU's oldest leaders, to take the chair and swear in the newly elected board.

The delegates stood up and a hush came over the entire audience as we went through the solemn ceremony:

"I do hereby sincerely pledge my honor," each of us repeated after Polakoff, "to perform the duties of my office as prescribed by the laws of the union and to bear true allegiance to the ILGWU.."

This ritual, and the seriousness with which the whole regarded it, stirred me deeply, and helped console me as I assumed office.

Yet that was one of the most unhappy days of my life, and my diary shows this entry: "The greatest misfortune happened to me this morning. The convention delegates unanimously elected me to serve on the GEB for two years. Although there were several who aspired to that office, they were opposed, all favoring me. Some one else who wanted this honor would have been happy — I feel as if I had lost my independence. Cried the whole day."



## Chapter 10. I Go to Puerto Rico

Back in New York after the Chicago convention, I explained to President Dubinsky that I had done everything in Los Angeles that I had promised, and now intended to go back to work in a dressmaking shop.

“Anything to prevent it?”

“No,” he said, “I wish some of our other vice-presidents would do that. It would be good for them. But I think you’d be wasting your time. I can give you something better to do.”

“What?”

“You heard William Lopez’s speech about Puerto Rico?”

“Yes.”

“Would you like to go there?”

Would I? ... For me the Lopez speech had been one of the high lights of the convention. Here was a chance for vital missionary work.

“Lopez is in town,” D.D. said when I agreed. “See him and he’ll give you a line on what needs to be done.”

Next day I lunched with Lopez and Jacob Potofsky of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, who had visited Puerto Rico in the spring for the NRA and helped frame a Needle Trades Code which now awaited President Roosevelt’s signature. Both were pleased at the prospect of action in Puerto Rico by the International.

It was pleasant to contemplate going to this tropical mountain paradise which Christopher Columbus had discovered in 1493 and which Ponce de Leon, seeker of the Fountain of Eternal Youth, had colonized. This was the only land now under the Stars and Stripes on which Columbus had actually set foot.

Three and a half days from New York by steamship, and 1,400 miles southeast, Puerto Rico lay 400 miles east of Cuba, with the Atlantic Ocean on the north, the Caribbean Sea on the south. A hundred miles long, one third as wide, and thus about the size of Maryland, it had a population of about 1,500,000, mountains as high as 4,000 feet, produced sugar cane and tobacco, grew luscious fruit, and raised “the finest coffee in the world.”

A festive bon voyage dinner was given me by the women members of our union. Arranged by Fannia M. Cohn, executive secretary of the educational department, there were flowers, pleasant speeches, good wishes.

Time sped by. Reminded about medical precautions before entering a tropical country, I consulted Dr. George M. Price, director of our Union Health Center, who has since died. I needed to be immunized against malaria, typhoid, and several other diseases. This would require several weeks.

“Then I’ll have to forget it. I’ve got to leave in two days.”

Dr. Price said I was taking a big chance. He gave me some advice, warning me especially against drinking unboiled water.

The S. S. Borinquen was sailing on Thursday, July 12, and Lopez and I had booked passage on her. I felt it was important to arrive in San Juan with him. His report on the convention and my presence would be evidence that our union meant business in Puerto Rico.

My mother and several friends saw me off. Flowers and fruit had been sent from the ILGWU office. Once more I was departing for a strange land, and again my thoughts took me back to my last day in Russia before coming to the United States. The distance seemed so great that it was like looking at some loved scene through the wrong end of a telescope.

The ship left her East River pier late in the afternoon. I stood at the starboard rail until we had passed the Statue of Liberty. Remembering my feelings the first time I saw that symbol of hope and promise so many years before, I felt a lump in my throat. I led Lopez sternward, to watch the sunset, as it tinted the buildings and towers of Manhattan with pink and red and gold. The pink and red faded out, leaving only the gold, and some lines by Alfred Noyes came to my mind:

There’s a barrel-organ caroling along a golden street, In the city when the sun sinks low.

Slowly shadows crept over the scene, the gold was gone, and dusk fell. We moved past old cargo ships anchored and riding high in the roadstead, ships gray and black and with iron rust showing in great blotches where the paint had peeled from their sides. The bare masts of a sailing ship were outlined against the sky. And a couple of hulks were anchored on the Jersey side of the channel. Ferries crossed our path, and motor boats chugged past. Staten Island’s lights evoked memories of pleasant Sundays there with Russian friends years before.

Through the Narrows and into the open sea.

Lazily, relaxing completely in slacks, Southern California style, I spent much of my time in a deck chair. Books from the ship’s library told me more about the wonderland in the West Indies to which I was journeying.

Borinquen was its name when the white men came, so called by its peaceful Indian inhabitants. Columbus gave it a different name — San Juan de Beutista. But Ponce de Leon, coming along a few years later with instructions from the Court of Spain to colonize the island, christened it anew. Sailing into its finest harbor, he exclaimed: “Ay, que puerto rico!” What a rich port! Subsequently this designation

was applied to the whole island, while the capital built on the harbor shores took on the San Juan name. That city was settled nearly half a century before the first house was erected in St. Augustine, Florida, oldest settlement on our mainland.

But the arrival of the colonizers marked the beginning of the end for the Borinquen Indians. Within a hundred years they were wiped out by a combination of forces — enslavement by the Spaniards, hurricanes, attacks by hostile Caribs, and epidemics of smallpox brought in by Negro slaves from Africa.

Loafing on the deck as the ship sped on and the air grew balmy, I amused myself by speculating on the lives the passengers led on shore. Some, I knew, were school teachers, and some might have been nurses, sales girls, students. Others were not readily identifiable. Most of the women looked bored and seemed to be changing clothes constantly. I wondered why. Slacks were so comfortable.

Lopez had a considerable acquaintance among those on board, and he introduced me to two manufacturers who were returning from a business trip. Our talk was casual, and I avoided touching on the industrial situation, for I wanted this sea-journey to serve as a vacation. But I did ask them:

“What are the women of Puerto Rico like?” And one of the men said:

“Many of them are very intelligent, and have the makings of good business women.”

I was up on deck early on Monday, for we were docking before eight. A perfect sub-tropical morning as the ship plowed through the deep blue Atlantic — a fresh breeze, clear blue sky, seagulls soaring above.

Massive stone fortresses stand high and bold upon headlands at the entrance to San Juan’s broad landlocked harbor. They were built by the Spaniards long ago as a protection against attack by pirates or enemy vessels. Morro Castle, oldest of these, was erected in 1539. As late as 1898 it withstood bombardment — by Admiral Sampson’s fleet.

As the Borinquen steamed into San Juan Bay, the sight before me took my breath away. Here was a part of the old Spanish town, flanked by an ancient sea wall. High above the wall were two palaces, and beside and beyond these, other houses of graceful Spanish line, with white or pastel sides, roofs of colored tile, and verandas with Moorish arches.

One felt as well as saw the great age of this city. Tall modern buildings in a newer section to the right could not take away from the charm of the ancient ones. To the south, a blue mountain, El Yunque, shimmered in the sun, like a gigantic precious stone.

Native boys, black and brown-skinned, dived from small boats for coins thrown into the bay by people on the ship. Through the beautifully clear water one could see their sleek brown bodies bobbing up and down. The pier was crowded with people — white, bronze, brown, and black, in white clothes, some dingy, some

immaculately clean. Twice a week they gathered, as for a social event, to meet the boat from New York.

Out of that crowd I heard my name called: "Welcome to Miss Pesotta!" And then: "Welcome to Mr. Lopez!" Above their heads were waving hands and fluttering handkerchiefs and a big banner of the Puerto Rico Free Federation of Labor. In the forefront of a delegation of about 30 was a little dark-skinned young woman holding a huge bouquet of red roses. She was Teresa Anglero, who had made the first move to organize the island's needle workers three years earlier, and who now headed their union.

"How long have you been away from Puerto Rico?" one of the school teachers asked.

"It's my first trip here. I've come down to work among these people."

"Oh!" and her exclamation seemed to denote a special kind of loneliness. "It must be wonderful to receive such a welcome!"

As we stepped off the gang-plank we were greeted by representatives of the Department of Labor, co-workers of Lopez. Teresa Anglero handed me the roses with a gracious bow. Some of the delegation had traveled all night to meet the ship.

Teresa gave me telegrams from officials of locals throughout the island, inviting me to visit their cities. I was to live, the girls told me, at the boarding house where Rose Schneiderman, president of the Women's Trade Union League, had stayed when she visited Puerto Rico for the NRA several months earlier. This proved to be a large colonial house on the Condado, a historic shore highway. Facing the ocean, the house was set against a background of dense tropical vegetation.

After I had changed clothes, we went over to the Free Federation Hall, where some 50 members of the union were waiting. I explained the purpose of my coming.

My speech was translated into Spanish by Lopez, a sentence at a time. The ILGWU's decision to organize the Puerto Rico needle workers under its protective wing made a deep impression. Here, as in our union in the States, I found women taking the lead. Their hearts were deep in the labor struggle.

After the meeting we mapped out a plan of action. We would make a tour of the cities where there were needle trades factories, set up local unions in important sections of the island, and start organizational and educational activities. Where several small unions existed in a city, each shop comprising an independent local, we would endeavor to combine these under a single ILGWU charter. Visiting the NRA offices, we talked with those in charge, got copies of the new Code, which was to go into effect on July 19, asked what plans they had for enforcing it. They had none; they would get to that later... The Code signed by President Roosevelt on June 28 provided for a wage scale of \$2 a week for home workers, instead of the customary \$1 paid for 60 to 70 hours of home work, with as many as three persons in a family toiling. The Code also raised the pay of factory workers to \$3 and \$5 a

week, the latter rate being for machine operators. Instead of 48 hours, the factory employees were to work only 40 hours.

I spent the next three days preparing for our campaign, conferring with the leaders of the Free Federation of Labor in San Juan and lining up all possible support. We put out feelers to see what the employers thought of a collective agreement. Before any such action could be taken, however, a strong organization must be built up. For I had arrived at a time dreaded by all experienced organizers — in the wake of a lost strike. Recently the telephone workers, striking to gain better conditions, had met with crushing defeat.

From Teresa, Sara Alers, chair lady in the Morris Storyk factory, and others I learned something of the history of our industry in this island.

For generations needlepoint work, embroidery, and other forms of fine hand sewing had been taught by the nuns in the Puerto Rican convents. Girls in middle and upper class families took pride in acquiring skill with the needle, making exquisite table linens, lingerie, dresses, blouses, handkerchiefs, and dress accessories. Before World War I, however, they used their skill only for themselves or their own families.

Until then the great sources of such articles for the commercial markets of the United States and other countries were France, Belgium, and the Madeira Islands. Costs were low and profits large. Then the war cut off that supply.

Some of the more enterprising needle-point teachers in Puerto Rico got a bright idea that would mean profit for themselves and trade and additional income for the island. One of them was designated to go to New York with samples and establish business contacts.

Thus Puerto Rico got its start as one of the world's principal cheap labor markets in this field, with China and the Philippines looming as important competitors. Factories came in later. Steadily the needle work industry expanded, and in 20 years became the island's third largest, subordinate only to sugar and tobacco. Out of an estimated 100,000 needle workers, 17,000 were employed in the factories, while the other 83,000 toiled by hand in their homes. Some cutters were employed in the shops; but most of the raw material was cut to pattern in New York garment shops and sent down in bundles to the Puerto Rican contractors.

Mayaguez, center of the island's handkerchief industry, afforded an example of operating methods. Cloth for handkerchiefs was cut in the New York factories and shipped to Puerto Rico, hundreds of thousands of pieces at a time. From the sorting department in the Puerto Rican contractors' shops, work would be farmed out to the homes of individual needle workers in bundles of several dozens. The needlepoint and embroidery would be done in those homes in the hills and, by the time the handkerchiefs were returned to the contractor, they would look like a door-mat for a mud-turtle.

Then came the washing process in the factories; from morning to night women washed and sterilized the handkerchiefs. Special chemical processes were used to bleach the material without causing damage to the colored embroidery. I have seen these women standing at the steam wash tubs, their hands and feet terribly swollen at the joints. Most of them suffered from arthritis or rheumatism. One owner of a factory told me this was the result of the chemicals in the water.

Hundreds of dozens of these handkerchiefs were hung on lines for ten or fifteen minutes and then went to the pressing and the shipping department, where young girls folded them in squares and packed them in fancy individual boxes. New York and other city customers would get them at the department stores, paying as high as \$1 each for handkerchiefs that cost the manufacturer only a few cents. Lingerie, blouses, table linen, children's wear, and other articles went through the same process.

A needle workers' union was established in San Juan in 1931. Other locals followed and a strike was staged against a wage cut in one San Juan factory, 400 girls walking out. After a month they won their fight and got a union shop. In 1933 there was a general strike, under the auspices of the Federacion Libbre Del Trabajo (Free Federation of Labor), affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Thus a collective agreement was won from the Needle Trades Employers' Association, recognizing the right of the needle workers to bargain collectively. Following this, the Federation set up the Union De Trabajadores De Aguja De Puerto Rico (the Needle Trades Workers' Union), each organized shop being designated as a local. San Juan had five locals.

When a girl applied for a job in one of the larger garment factories, she had to fill out an application blank tantamount to an intelligence test, much like a civil service examination. The back of the application bore a personal rating report and instructions to the manager of the establishment to judge each employee on the following points: Quality in production; quantity of work; industrial intelligence; ability to learn new duties; initiative and creativeness; co-operation; physical quality; leadership.

The manager had to check to make sure each employee was of exceptional leadership, could co-operate, was in good health, industrious, conscientious, and a rapid worker — all for the munificent sum of \$5 a week for 48 hours' work!

The Commissioner of Labor, Prudencio Rivera Martinez, a short dark former cigar maker and now acting president of the Federacion Libre, assured us of all possible co-operation from the Labor Department. One commendable thing Theodore Roosevelt Jr. had done during his Governorship was to establish this department, which (in contrast to some other governmental agencies in Puerto Rico) was composed of men and women with practical experience in the labor movement. Most of them were active and earnest trade unionists.

At that time the Labor Department was working on an ambitious rehabilitation plan for homesteads on which to resettle those who lost everything they possessed during the 1932 cyclone.

Walking in the narrow streets of the capital, one drank in romance at every turn. The mark of ancient Spain lingered in the fortresses, the Governor's palace, the cathedral, the mansion built by Ponce de Leon's son, the plaza, the memorial tablets, the statues of warriors and other heroes, the vestiges of the stout walls of masonry that had surrounded San Juan in pirate days, and in a thousand other nooks and corners. On the whole island, only about 20,000 persons among a population of 1,500,000 were from the States. Thus Spanish remained the principal language spoken.

Having seen the showplaces of the capital on the first evening with Lopez and his wife, I wanted to view the other side of the picture, particularly the conditions under which the workers lived. A committee of union girls planned to visit a sick member, late next afternoon, and I gladly accepted an invitation to accompany them.

The sick girl and her people lived near the water-front on the bay side of San Juan, on the edge of a slum section called El Fanguito. Their house was small, and obviously neglected by the landlord. But inside, the place was tidy and presentable, a tribute to the ingenuity and grit of the tenants. My companions brought gifts to the invalid, delicacies purchased with hard earned dimes.

When we came away they took me a little farther into El Panguito, "The Little Mud," which ought to be called "The Big Mud." What I saw now appalled me more than any sight in my past life.

Here were many single-room shacks built on stilts to lift them above the mud, shacks thrown together of old boards and pieces of rusty tin. There was of course no plumbing in these "homes," nothing that even remotely resembled sanitation. Garbage, slops, rubbish of all kinds, and human ordure went into the mud beneath.

Narrow plank walks led to some of the shacks. But to get to others the occupants had to take off their shoes — if they had shoes — and wade through the muck. Thus they became the prey of hookworm, which thrives in polluted soil. Piercing their bare feet, that scourge made its way to the intestines, multiplied, drained their vitality; the result was called tropical anemia. Children, dogs, and pigs also waded in the mud of El Fanguito.

I thought of my home in Ukrainia and the peasants, who used to carry their shoes slung over a shoulder, as they walked across the fields on their way to town. That was for reasons of economy. "Feet we don't have to buy," they said. But the soil in which the peasants trod was comparatively clean. No one in Ukrainia ever heard of hookworm.

My friends led me along a shaky plank to look in on acquaintances who lived in one of the shacks, and to peer through other open doors in the row. The couple we called upon were apologetic for the condition of their “house,” as if somehow it was their fault instead of their misfortune. The man had long been jobless and was plainly ill; the woman did needle work, but earned little. For furniture, they had a table and two chairs improvised from packing boxes. In a corner of the floor were ragged blankets and a sack of straw, which sufficed for a bed.

Cooking was done on a small open hearth made of stones. Empty coconut shells, from which the tops had been removed, served as cooking vessels, dishes, and cups. Smoke from the hearth ascended through a hole in the roof. Flakes of soot hung from the rafters, and the shack reeked with odors.

The men, women, and children I saw in this slum moved about as if half-dead, the light in their eyes dull. Most of the men were sugar-cane cutters, now unemployed, and their families lived from hand to mouth. I wondered what would be the fate of the children if they grew up.

Odd surprises were in store for me, and a few hours later a strange fright. The windows of my boarding house were without glass and unscreened. My bed was enclosed by a canopy of netting, which buzzing mosquitoes tried to penetrate. Lying in the dark and unable to sleep, I realized that I was hungry. On a shelf close by stood candy that had been given me when I sailed. That would take care of my hunger of the moment.

I reached out carefully under the netting’s edge, removed the cover from one of the boxes, and picked up a couple of chocolates. Almost instantly I felt something clutch my wrist, something that moved and writhed. In another second the arm was being gripped higher up, and then the pressure was at the elbow. The sensation was one of horror, but I didn’t scream; I couldn’t.

My voice was frozen in my throat.

Somehow I kept my head. Whatever this might be, snake or monster, I must save myself. Reaching up with my other hand, I turned on the electric light overhead and saw — red and black ants, thousands of them, swarming over my whole forearm, like some fantastic long glove.

I leaped out of bed and raced to the veranda, brushing off the swarm of ants in frenzy. That took a long time, for some of them clung tenaciously to my skin, and bit me, leaving my arm dotted with red marks. After throwing the candy out, it was a full hour before I got rid of the insects on the shelf and floor.

In the morning, half awake as I lingered in bed, I looked out of one of the long window openings. It framed three tall coconut palms, set against a shimmering blue sky. Down the center palm a tiny human figure clad in white was moving, as if in a movie set or in a dream. I had to rub my eyes to make sure that I was not



asleep. Afterward I often saw native boys “walk” up and down the trees, feet and hands moving in rhythmic motion.

“The real joy of living in its greatest realization...”

I turned from that line in a brochure, issued for tourists by the insular Department of Agriculture and Commerce, to another pamphlet from the same source, but designed to attract industry. In this I found some revealing statements.

Among seventeen good reasons listed for establishing industries on that island I read that “Puerto Rico’s wage scales are reasonable.” On other pages the language was more exact:

“Due to the over-population of Puerto Rico, there is always a large supply of labor available... Wages in Puerto Rico when compared to those on the mainland are very low, in many cases insufficient to adequately support the workers and their families, even if steady employment were available... Labor agitation, so common in the industrial centres of the North, is not found in Puerto Rico.”<sup>1</sup>

That of course was a spur to me. It made me keen to get to Mayaguez, the island’s big open shop handkerchief center, where the needle trades factory owners had banded together in an association to fight both unionization and the NRA Code.

I went there on Friday, the day the Code became effective, with Lopez, Teresa Anglero, Sara Alers, and three other active union girls. We sped westward along a road paralleling the north shore. The country was gorgeous, the roads lined with the red of the flamboyant trees, and the hills and valleys stretching off into the hinterland lusciously green. But in this garden of the gods there was evidence of utter poverty everywhere. On the doorstep of every hut, women and girls, many of them small children, were busily sewing linen. The children were spindly-legged, the adults looked half-starved.

Overpopulation ... 428 persons to the square mile ... To match the human spawning in Puerto Rico, a constant repetition of the miracle of the loaves and fishes was needed. But there were no miracles in these modern days.

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<sup>1</sup> Puerto Rico: Commercial and Industrial San Juan, 1934 pp. 8, D, 16. The italics are mine. — R.P. 114 .

# Chapter 11. Island Paradise and Mass Tragedy

In Mayaguez we learned that some manufacturers already had discharged workers in sizeable numbers. These employees had been working for a pittance, and the employers, not wanting to pay the increased wage provided under the Code minima, had begun laying them off. The rest of the force refused to start that morning until the dismissed workers had been reinstated. In certain other factories, ironers were asked how many handkerchiefs they could iron in a day. When they replied: "Five dozen," they were advised to double their output.

The NRA officials there obviously hadn't the slightest idea how to go about correcting the glaring injustices to labor on every hand, nor did they appear really interested in labor problems. They were governmental office-holders, who had been in a rut so long that watching them at work was like seeing a slow-motion picture on a movie screen. I asked the NRA enforcement officer in Mayaguez what he intended doing about the workers' immediate grievances. He admitted he could do nothing.

I told him we knew exactly what was going to happen in Puerto Rico, as we had been through it in the States. Employers would ignore the NRA and violate the Code at every turn. We would use our own methods when we saw fit to take action; in the long run the NRA administration would realize that without the co-operation of organized labor it would never be able to enforce the Code.

Then we insisted that the NRA representative go with us to put pressure on one manufacturer who had locked out his workers. Not expecting any such drastic action on the first day, the employer was flustered. It was all a mistake, he asserted; his employees would return to their jobs next morning. I took down his statement verbatim and said I would report it to the workers, and if they decided to return, I also would be there.

When we appeared at that factory early in the morning, the employees were congregated outside the gate. The employer had refused to let them enter. A delegation including spokesmen for the local Labor Department offices, Teresa Anglero, a committee chosen the night before, and myself, went in to speak to the "patron."

The employer, embarrassed, had difficulty explaining, but finally gave the excuse that there was not enough work for the whole crew of 48 pressers. "I will let ten of them work today, and later I will see."

But none of the pressers would go in to work unless all 48 were given an equal share, even if it came to only a half hour. After much debate, it was agreed that all would be re-employed on Monday.

The pressers were boys in their teens, yet most of them were toothless. Lacking income enough to buy a minimum of nourishing foods, their bodies were breaking down before they had fully matured.

We had to speed back to San Juan, where the Central Labor Union had announced a reception for us that evening. Torrential rains overtook us twice. We were in a touring car open at the sides and got drenched. But one had to get used to sudden rains in Puerto Rico. I soon learned to carry both an umbrella and a fan with me.

Bathed and in fresh clothes, I reached the meeting on schedule. Several hundred union members attended, mostly girls and women under 35. There were stirring speeches of welcome, delivered by Sandalio Alonzo and Francisco Paz Granella, officers of the CLU, and the gathering displayed a fine spirit.

Not until I got home that night did I realize how great a toll of my energy the week had taken. On Saturday morning I was so exhausted I could scarcely get out of bed. But Teresa Anglero called at 10, and I managed to rouse up, and we went down to the union hall. Then, with a committee of 20, we proceeded to several factories to settle prices. Some of the employers tried to browbeat us, but we stopped that by taking a firm stand.

The following Monday morning I went with a delegation to the pier to welcome Santiago Iglesias, the Eugene Debs of the island, then Resident Commissioner for Puerto Rico in Washington. His homecomings were virtually a legal holiday for the San Juan workers. As he walked down the gang-plank, the waiting throng acclaimed him ecstatically, with great cheering and music. A procession followed the distinguished visitor to his home.

As Resident Commissioner, Iglesias had the standing of a United States Senator, without a vote. Portly, clad in white linens, and then in his sixties, his bronzed face, white hair, and drooping moustache gave him the appearance of a Spanish Don. He had come from Spain as a young man, worked as a cabinet maker, and became active in the labor movement. When the United States occupied Puerto Rico, he was one of the island's men of influence who welcomed the triumph of democracy over autocracy. All his life he hoped to see Puerto Rico admitted into the Union as a state.

Founder and editor of three labor papers, the first in 1898, he also served as general organizer for the A F of L in Puerto Rico and at another time as secretary

of the Pan-American Federation of Labor. For many years he was a close friend of Samuel Gompers and Morris Hillquit, the Socialist leader, who was attorney for the ILGWU. From 1917 to 1933 Iglesias was a member of the insular Senate, and spokesman there for the common people of the island, who idolized him.

Several days later, he invited me to call at his home. There I talked with him at some length, and met his wife and some of his nine children.<sup>1</sup>

There was no question of his sympathetic interest when I told him what we had been doing and of the grim things I had observed in my contacts with the workers. I quoted him that line about “no labor agitators in Puerto Rico” in the Department of Agriculture and Commerce booklet.

“It would be good,” he remarked, “if you were to be deported for your activities here. Very good for the cause of labor organization.”

I asked him what solution he had for the island’s economic problem.

“Curtail the birth rate,” he answered. “Educate our people, and help them raise their standard of living.”

Elected Resident Commissioner to the United States in 1932, Iglesias continued in that capacity until his death in 1939. When he died of malaria contracted while on a tour of Mexico, Puerto Rico lost one of its most valuable citizens.

On my first trip to Mayaguez, I was compelled to wait in the boarding-house veranda for two hours before the committee from the union arrived with the Federation car. After that experience with the slow Puerto Rican tempo, I worked out my own technique. Henceforth I had the driver call for me first; then we made the rounds and picked up the others. Nevertheless, there were delays.

Heading for the west end of the island next time, we stopped in Bayamon and trustfully entered a Quick Lunch restaurant. The girls began ordering, but most of the things they chose from the menu were not available. What they finally got, starting with dessert and ending with canned bean soup, occupied them for an hour and a half. Meanwhile I dipped into my own lunch box, which my landlady had packed for me, eating leisurely and skimming a newspaper.

I pointed out to my companions that we couldn’t afford to spend so much time at meals, and it was agreed that thereafter Teresa would have lunches packed for all of us.

We proceeded to Mayaguez, spent some busy hours, stayed overnight, and next day met with committees to adjust complaints. At the end of the forenoon I went into the only decent grocery, not unlike an A & P store, and bought provisions — two long French loaves of white bread, butter, salami, cheese, and a “hand” of the largest bananas I had ever seen.

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<sup>1</sup> Afterward I was to meet the rest of the Iglesias family in Washington, where the names of the Senator’s daughters were a delight to many. They were: Victoria, Libertad, America, Fraternidad,

As we drove out of the city, bound for an evening meeting in Ponce, with stops between, Teresa suddenly remembered that she had neglected to bring the food.

“Never mind,” I said, “lunch is at hand.”

We stopped on the road near a river, spread papers on the ground, ate picnic style. But when I unwrapped the “large bananas,” the joke was on me. The girls held their sides laughing. These were not bananas, but plantanos which cannot be eaten raw. Even when cooked, they tasted like frozen potatoes.

After that Teresa nearly always remembered the lunches.

Under the routine we had mapped out, we began a tour of the island each Monday morning; managed to arrive by noon at Arecibo, where we conferred with amiable elderly Dona Lola, president of the union there, and other local leaders. Then to Mayaguez, and through various smaller towns; and thence over the south road to Ponce, to Guayama and Humacao. Usually we held daily meetings in at least two communities.

At these gatherings we prepared the needle workers for membership in the union. As soon as we felt that they were sufficiently posted, we chartered ILGWU locals and established educational departments, which began immediately to register members for classes in personal hygiene, birth control, and child care.

Frequently we made it a point to stop off at various places en route to talk with the workers in the hills. Along all the roads they were to be found. With very little clothing on their bodies, women, young and old, sat on the doorsteps of their thatched huts sewing from morning till night. They were largely the wives and daughters of the jibaros, who labored on the farms and sugar plantations — when they could get work.

Before the end of July, we arranged to consolidate the five needle trades locals in San Juan into a single local, No. 300, chartered by the ILGWU, with nearly 2,000 members. Union headquarters were then established at No. 1 Barrio Obrero in Santurce, a working-class section of San Juan geographically comparable to Harlem in New York. Considering the low wages of these workers, we set their maximum dues at 15 cents a month.

We’d be back in San Juan always on Saturday, and I’d clean up tag-ends of my program.

Airmail came and departed three times a week; steamship mail twice a week. Everyone having anything to do with the mainland (U.S.A.) had a time-table in front of him on his desk. I soon got used to the idea of mailing letters by a certain time and expecting an answer on schedule.

The Latin-American custom of taking three hours for lunch annoyed me. I had to call at the Post Office for my mail, and if the bus was late, and I got there a half

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Justicia, Paz (Laura), and Luz.

minute after 12, the doors would be closed, and I'd have to kill three hours until they reopened. One place to wait was a near-by bar where I learned to drink a cocktail known as Delphine No. 5. The bartender, Senor Delphine, told me he had devised a series of cocktails in his own honor in Havana, running them up from one to 15. I tried them all, and No. 5 was my favorite. Before leaving the island I obtained the recipe from Senor Delphine.

Most of my letters to the home office in New York, or to friends in the States, were written as I sat in bed inside the mosquito netting in my boarding house, with my portable typewriter on my lap. When I had cleared everything essential, I'd knock off work, and saunter to the Hotel Condado for a swim in the pool. That made me over.

After one such swim, I walked a short way along the oceanside until I was clear of people. Spreading a blanket on the sand, I stretched out to read a book. Dark goggles shielded my eyes from the sun I read a half hour or so, then I suddenly had a feeling of uneasiness. Peering through the glasses, I discovered that I was surrounded by a ring of native men and boys, who kept at some distance but stared steadily. I sat up, removed the goggles, and glared at this male circle with indignation. But my uninvited public was unabashed; no one budged. I picked myself up and went back to the boarding house. I didn't appreciate masculine attention in the form of a mass demonstration.

Saturday evenings I found time for play. On several occasions I was invited by Labor Commissioner Martinez to go with him to a night club. Usually his party included members of his department and of the Free Federation of Labor. The best of the night spots was the Escambron, on the ocean's edge. Here was a gay setting, a boardwalk, a lagoon bordered by lofty coconut palms, which in moonlight had an aspect of enchantment. Here, too, was a sparkling floor show, with Cuban singers and dancers and musicians. Excellent food, the favorite dish of almost every one being arroz con polio (baked chicken and rice, as only chefs of Spanish ancestry can prepare it). Senor Martinez and all the men I met in Puerto Rico danced lightly and well.

On Sundays we staged open air gatherings in the rural districts, either in some village or a grove at a crossroads. Advance notice was spread by word of mouth. The women would come down from the hills, with their families, often waiting for hours until we arrived, to "listen to the union."

"Across the saga of the ages, through the dramatic chapters of romance and adventure, bravery, heroism, and martyrdom the story of Puerto Rico is the story of civilization in its triumphant march from East to West." Thus the opening of one of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce booklets.

But all too plainly the story of that march also was the story of unbridled profiteering, absentee ownership of agriculture and industry, merciless grinding down

of the poor. The needle trades industry, which was part of this vaunted civilization, had been the curse of Puerto Rico. Employers who prided themselves upon being “pioneers” had brought misery to thousands of homes where mothers and daughters spent days and night, ruining their eyesight and lungs over finery they never could hope to wear. For their labor they got almost nothing.

Imagine a woman working on cotton nightgowns, doing all the handwork and embroidery, finishing the neck and armholes with pipings, and for all this work getting 16 cents per dozen garments! One and a quarter cents per nightgown. Those making the more expensive gowns made as little as the others.

Smart American women on the mainland wore those nightgowns with enjoyment. Let them try working on them for a living, making four a day... The maker of such garments could never afford to have one for herself, but had to buy the poorest kind of calico at triple what it was worth.

Spending practically all their time sewing, these Puerto Rican mothers had no time to take proper care of their families and homes, which usually were nothing but four walls and a thatched roof. Of sanitation most of the occupants had not the slightest idea houses had latrines. Drinking water was brought in large tin cans from the nearest brook, and the family washing was done in the same brook. When the mother interrupted her needle work to prepare meals or attend to other household duties, younger members of her brood went on with the sewing.

From lack of nutrition, infants died early, or grew up subject to anemia and other diseases. Food staples here consisted mainly of green bananas and sweet potatoes, which could be bought cheaply. Milk and bread were luxuries. In the hills the natives lived on anything that could be chewed regardless of its nutritional value — so long as it filled hungry bellies.

As I traveled in those hills, over narrow roads that slaves had built centuries before, their luxurious beauty reminded me greatly of Southern California, except that the landscape here lacked the vast fruit orchards and vegetable fields. Sugar cane grew almost everywhere. And any country given over to sugar growing is usually a hungry country because it is largely a one-crop country. Puerto Rico, raising sugar for export, could not produce enough food to sustain its teeming population.

On the piers in San Juan one saw extensive shipping of grapefruit, pineapples, oranges, bananas, limes, lemons, tangerines, molasses and coconuts. Government statistics on production of these commodities were impressive, but it was mainly for export. The masses of Puerto Rican workers who gathered the crops and loaded them on railroad trains and ships received wages so low that they could buy few of the edibles they helped raise.

When the Federal Government decided to curtail sugar production in Puerto Rico, 20,000 cane-cutters were thrown out of work. Driving along the San Juan

water-front one day, we saw one result About 200 natives, mostly young men, were standing on one side of the highway, opposite the pier, shouting and gesticulating.

Thinking them on strike, I asked the driver what was their grievance. "It is no strike, *Senorita*," he said. "A ship docked this morning. It has to be unloaded. Only about a third of those men will be needed, but all are trying to get on the crew."

All of them were pleading desperately for a single day's work.

As we were on the highways daily, I had ample opportunity to observe the wretchedness of untold thousands of natives. On every hand there was evidence that the vast majority of the islanders were suffering from malnutrition. The Federal Government had come in with relief, but the food it provided was never enough, and the distribution was unsystematic.

It was soon apparent that what these unfortunates needed first was continuous employment, to assure them steady and adequate income. They needed social service, education in hygiene, proper food and enough of it, playgrounds for youngsters, and in general more wholesome surroundings.

Burdened with large families and overworked from childhood, the women aged prematurely. Those doing home work in the needle trades were graphic examples. Among the young women as well as the young men were many with defective or missing teeth. One of our most capable organizers, Pasquala Figueroa, president of the Mayaguez local, mother of four children and no more than 35, had only two eye-teeth left. In this and other cases, I was able to arrange to have a dentist make plates. Always that meant transforming a life.

Though most of Puerto Rico's men were shabby looking, undernourished, toothless, and anemic, I never saw a bald native. All had luxuriant hair. Many were strikingly handsome. It was pleasing to see mops of white hair crowning dark faces — when one could forget their struggle to survive.

We picked him up on the road in a downpour. In one hand he carried something in a small cloth sack, in the other a long stick. We had him sit in the back seat. From the front, turning, I could observe him; barefoot and hatless, some of his ribs showing through his torn shirt, holes in his old white homespun trousers. I thought of him as being at least 40. He looked anemic and tubercular.

Where was he bound? Home — 10 miles from town. What had he been doing in town?

"I went there to sell a bunch of bananas which grow near my house. With the money I bought guavas."

How much did he get for the bananas? Three cents; and for the three cents he got these guavas, perhaps a dozen, no larger than medium-sized apples.

What other source of income did he have? "None, *Senorita*. When my wife is well she does some needle work, but now she cannot earn anything." They had three children, and now — he smiled bashfully — a fourth baby was coming.



How old was he? Twenty. He had been a sugar-cane cutter, but for two years there had been no work.

Usually he walked all the way to town and back to exchange bananas for guavas so that his family might have that much variation from the monotony of a banana diet.

Mention of the coming baby reminded me of a visit I had made to a mining camp in Kentucky in my Brookwood days. I was astounded at the number of children in each household. When I asked why they had so many, when the coal-diggers could hardly make a living for small families, one of the older miners gave me a pointed answer:

“You see, Miss, our young men have nothing else to do after a hard day’s work in the mines, so they have pleasure in their own way, and it doesn’t cost them any money.”

At another time when we were driving after a rain, with a government engineer in the car, water suddenly made the road impassable. Drainage outlets were lacking. We stopped in a comparatively dry place waiting for the highway to become clear.

Some small boys and girls, poorly clad and hungry looking, were wading bare-foot in the yellow mud nearby. I expressed pity for them and fear for their health.

“Well, they are all like that,” said the engineer. “If they survive for five years they go on living.”

He might have been speaking not of human beings but of dumb animals.

## Chapter 12. Yet the Puerto Ricans Multiply

Day after day I continued touring the island, usually with Teresa Anglero and a committee of girls from the shops, visiting all the cities and almost every village and hamlet in the hills where the home workers lived. I talked with all kinds of people, addressed organizational mass meetings — and because it was so obviously necessary, conducted workers' education and social service classes, in which the subjects included child care, birth control, personal hygiene, and nutrition.<sup>1</sup>

The great need of personal hygiene among the island's women had made itself evident soon after my arrival. Staying overnight at Mayaguez we got two adjoining rooms in La Palma Hotel, a dilapidated structure, the only place where we could find accommodations. Our three girl companions occupied one room, and Teresa and I the other.

No bathtub or shower; a common toilet outside. Mosquitoes entered through holes in the net canopies over our beds; we chased them out and tried to stop up the holes. Odors of spice and grease from cooking done in a charcoal fireplace in the outdoor court assailed our nostrils all night.

I carried my own towel and soap and a sanitary kit containing bottles of medicated alcohol, witch hazel, iodine, and kindred things. Next morning my traveling companions watched me in wonderment as I wet a wash-cloth with alcohol and gave myself a sponge bath. I explained that I did this always when no bath water could be had, and shared the alcohol with them. They found its cooling effect to their liking, and used it with enthusiasm. On succeeding trips I brought a larger supply, plus olive oil for the hair and citronella oil to keep mosquitoes away. While speaking in Lares, a small town, I noticed a woman with hollow eyes listening intently. Something about her caught my special attention. After a while, I saw her slump in a faint.

I halted the proceedings. One of the men carried her to another room, and I followed with my first aid kit. Loosening her clothing, I discovered that she wore a man's full-length union suit, winter weight, and was pregnant. I revived her, then

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<sup>1</sup> In 1937 the Puerto Rican Legislature enacted a law providing for dissemination of birth control information through clinics. I thought that law has stood a test in ITT test courts, and though con-

asked a few questions. She was weak from undernourishment. I gave her warm milk and crackers from my lunch box.

Several days later another woman fainted from hunger as I spoke in a crowded high school in Aguada. This time I was better prepared. I had brought a bigger thermos bottle filled with hot milk-and-water, plenty of crackers, and bars of chocolate.

Others fainted at subsequent meetings, and I took to carrying a liberal supply of emergency foods on all my trips. Always now, before the speeches started, I inquired whether any of those present had come without eating. If so, we supplied light food to them.

Sleek, fat cattle grazing in green pastures, but no milk for mothers or babies in tens of thousands of huts and shacks. Warehouses in port towns groaning with food and other necessities, to be exported at a handsome profit by the few who controlled production. Hunger and disease everywhere in this paradise — and bureaucracy and callous indifference. The poor and famished reduced to statistics by officeholders who dined sumptuously at their clubs.

To my delight I found that Puerto Ricans were not only born orators, but good listeners as well. Sometimes when we arrived at a meeting already in progress, one of them would be reciting a long poem, perhaps his own, on the beauties of the island, and the people's love for it. Audiences would listen for hours to such recitals. I thought of it as anodyne to them, their troubles lost in the melody of the spoken words. Local musicians, too, contributed diversion. Their rhythms to me seemed primitive and weird. One rainy night we finished a meeting at 10, and drove on to another town, where I was scheduled to speak. Delayed, we did not arrive until 11. I expected to find the audience gone, but to my astonishment the big high school auditorium was packed with men, women, and children listening to a recitation by a local poet. So eager were they for information about the union that none left until the meeting ended, after midnight.

In some needle trades centers, we found that the manufacturers were reclassifying their employees to evade the requirements of the NRA Code. Hundreds in the factories had been discharged, and the work given to contractors who would later take it into the hills for the home workers. Thus in countless instances the processes of pulling threads to cut squares for handkerchiefs, tru tru (hemstitching), and machine sewing had been transferred to home workers. The machines, of an archaic model never seen in the States, were either lent or rented at a high price.

Before the Code was established some of the faster workers were able to earn \$5 or a little more a week during the busy season. By shunting the bulk of the

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tinues strong at least 28 communities are active, religious opposition to them limitation continues strong. So the Puerto Ricans multiply even though most of them never have enough to eat.

work to the homes, the employers got by with a payment of only \$2 a week to each individual under the Code. In due time I met and talked with most of the important officials, including Governor Blanton Winship, the Federal Relief Administrator, and various Senators. Upon each I urged the necessity of establishing kindergartens and clinics to teach women personal hygiene, having public nurses visit the homes — and starting continuation schools for young people who had been compelled to go to work at an early age.

All these officials appeared to react favorably; but I had heard too often the phrase *Manana por la manana* (tomorrow morning) in that Caribbean isle. There were too many “tomorrow mornings.”

Teresa Anglero and I visited the Commissioner of Education, Senor Aran, and put before him a detailed plan, which, as an initial step, called for establishment of workers’ educational classes at the Labra School in San Juan, and at Rio Pedras, Loiza, Carolina, and Bayamon. Senor Aran approved of our plan, and \$5,000 was set aside by his department for that purpose. The classes dealt English, Spanish, public speaking, history and methods of the labor movement, sociology, and health problems, with emphasis on the last.

Now I wrote to Hilda Worthington Smith, formerly dean at Bryn Mawr College, who was then living in Washington. She held an important post on the WPA Workers’ Education Project as a specialist in that field. I asked her to use her influence on behalf of the Puerto Ricans, and she got busy at once. Later she advised me that the Federal Relief Administration had given a grant for a workers’ training center on the island. The following year, thanks to Miss Smith’s intercession, a summer school for workers was set up in San Juan, on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico.

Aguadilla (Waterville), a morose looking town, had long boasted that Columbus landed there in 1493 to refill the fresh water kegs on his ships. To commemorate that event, a statue of the Genoese explorer was erected on a tall pedestal in the plaza. But Aguada (Watertown), another community 15 miles farther southwest, contended that Columbus and his men actually came ashore for the water within its boundaries. Feeling was so high among the loyal citizens of Aguada that a delegation visited Aguadilla in the dead of night and carried off the statue. Only the pedestal remained. Mention of Columbus was sure to start a debate whenever residents of the two towns met.

But I remember Aguadilla for a more compelling reason. Visiting the home of the school principal, I asked his wife if I might wash my hands. She gave me a basin of rainwater in which mosquito larvae and the embryos of other insects were floating. To wash in such water was an open invitation to hook-worm infection. After that experience I depended more than ever on my alcohol supply.

In Yauco we visited a Labor Senator. He had six daughters and three sons. Honor had come to him for long activity in behalf of the workers, but he had not been able to overcome poverty. His wife and the six daughters owned only a single pair of shoes — all seven using them in turn! St. Mary's Hospital stands on a hill on the outskirts of Mayaguez. Occasionally it offers sleeping accommodations to guests; cots in private rooms. Once, when we could not get into a hotel, we stopped there.

In the morning we had breakfast on the broad veranda, from which we could look out at mountains and tropical verdure to delight the eye. A real American can not begrudge the hour and breakfast, so good that this time I did a quarter that the native waiter took to serve it. Grapefruit, oatmeal and cream, soft-boiled eggs, jam, toast, and coffee...

Then this perfect picture was spoiled.

Just as we finished, the hospital door opened, and four men emerged, bearing a coffin. Some one had died in the night. They came past us, carrying the coffin lightly. It meant that for another Puerto Rican the gnawing of slow starvation had ceased... We got out quickly, hurrying to our next destination.

Funerals in that island are frequent. Often we passed several in a day.

"We must train some of the Puerto Ricans in practical union organization technique," I reported in one of my letters to New York. "It would be impossible for any of our regular people to work here indefinitely."

At the same time I wrote to Brookwood Labor College, explaining the situation and asking for two scholarships. Tucker P. Smith, then dean there, immediately said yes, and I began looking for a likely pair of girls to send. One diminutive girl in the Mayaguez local attracted me; bright and aggressive, Amparo Rivera, spoke both Spanish and English fluently. All agreed she was highly eligible for one of the scholarships.

On recommendation of Dona Lola, head of the Arecibo local, the second scholarship was given to Carmen Curbelo, a tall girl who had done much toward building up the union in that city.

Morris Hillquit's daughter Nina wrote that she was coming down from New York on a Caribbean cruise, and planned to spend three days in Puerto Rico, while her ship went from San Juan to Santo Domingo and back. We made the most of those days, taking her to see not only scenic beauties and industrial enterprises that shown to tourists, but also the squalor and sorrow that tourists never saw. We took her into some of the workers' hovels — the "homes" described in the travel booklets as "picturesque thatched houses." She was appalled, as I had been.

In San Juan we inspected a large cigar and cigarette factory, of special significance since it illustrated vast displacement of labor by machinery. Puerto Rico had been one of the world's great centers of cigar manufacturing when cigars were made by hand. Most of the leaders in the Free Federation of Labor were former

cigarmakers. Now nearly all cigars produced on the island were made by machinery. Each girl worker in the San Juan factory attended several machines, and produced as many cigars per day as 20 men formerly turned out. About a dozen men, however, were still employed in the plant, making extra large cigars, which could not be produced by the standard machines.

We took our visitor also to the big tobacco curing sheds in Bayamon. The processing of the leaves, in high stacks in hot rooms, was shown and explained. But we were much more interested in the women — perhaps 100 of them — who sat in an adjacent room, endlessly sorting those leaves. They had virtually the same yellowish brown color as the tobacco, and always carried with them its odor. As our guide explained, they never had enough time to clean their bodies adequately.

Miss Hillquit was guest of honor at a meeting held by the Free Federation of Labor. In introducing her, I dwelt upon the invaluable work her father, pioneer labor lawyer, had done for the ILGWU through many years. The ovation she received moved her to tears.

There is no rainy season in Puerto Rico, one is assured in official literature; rainfall is equally distributed throughout the year. But late that month for three days it poured or drizzled almost continuously. I spent much of the time in my room preparing the speech that I was to deliver before the Free Federation of Labor Congress. My thoughts unfolded slowly, however; I was depressed. That unceasing tropical rain got on my nerves. I felt like a prisoner within the four walls of my room.

On the fourth day the sun appeared again, and I snapped out of my dark mood.

Swimming in the Condado pool restored me, and in the evening I attended a recital, at which a young violinist, Pepito Figueroa, played Spanish and Gypsy music that transported me to other worlds.

Santiago Iglesias presided at the Labor Congress, which was held at Mayaguez, in the Teatro Yaguez. Governor Blanton Winship, several Labor Senators, and other notables were present. Sitting on the platform with these distinguished guests, I was more impressed by the gathering before me.

Looking at those eager faces — almost a thousand, scrubbed clean and bright for the occasion — one could perceive instantly that this was a genuine Congress of Labor. It presented a poignant contrast to other gatherings at labor conventions I had attended. In the States, male delegates were usually well dressed, with collars, ties, and coats — except in hot weather — and most of them certainly were well fed. But here the bulk of the men delegates wore tattered clothes, usually only shirt and pants. They were lean and hungry looking, and many had walked long distances to be present. I had come with 20 delegates representing the newly formed Needle Trades Union.

There was no mistaking how much it meant to these delegates to be attending the Congress, nor their fervor for unionism. They showed it in their songs, and in applause — when speeches touched the realities of working-class problems and their own lives.

Governor Winship spoke just ahead of me. His address was remarkable in that it was one of the most banal I ever heard from the lips of a government official. Blandly he spoke of Puerto Rico's climate, sunshine, scenic grandeur, flowers, and the like. Everything on the island was beautiful and serene. When he finished I wondered for a moment whether he really had uttered those superficialities — or had I been dreaming? It was hard to believe that a man in the Governor's position, knowing the facts about the economic plight of the Puerto Rican people, could dish out such nonsense about the scenery to listeners who needed jobs and food.

It was my task, as the next on the program, to bring the audience back to earth. Speaking about 30 minutes, I told of the struggle that had gone into the upbuilding of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and its relation to the industrial world. I dealt with the New Deal, Puerto Rico's pressing economic problems, and the critical global situation, "with the world on the verge of another war, that will be the bloodiest that mankind has ever known."

When I finished, those who understood English applauded politely. Then Teresa Anglero read a Spanish translation of what I had said, and applause echoed through the auditorium. A delegate offered a motion to have my address printed as a separate pamphlet, in addition to being incorporated in the convention proceedings. The motion was made unanimous. Now I was touched to the point of tears.

Subsequently I learned from the Free Federation officials that the last outside speaker from the American Federation of Labor at a convention had been Samuel Gompers, in 1914. They showed me a copy of his address. It was a masterly exposition of conditions — clear-cut, militant. With only a change of date, what Gompers said in 1914 would have applied equally to the situation in 1934. I was sorry I had not seen that speech before — I would have asked leave to read it to the convention. It was as fundamental, I thought, as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Labor Senators among the speakers were poorly garbed, like the rest of the delegates. But this did not make them self-conscious. They dealt with the things they knew, their speeches going straight to the point.

Now we of the ILGWU completed preparations for the second annual convention of the island's needle trades workers. This would be held in San Juan, where we had consolidated the five scattered locals and laid a solid foundation for our now rapidly expanding Puerto Rican organization. That convention, at which Teresa Anglero presided like a veteran president of a major union, enabled us to strengthen our lines still further.

Soon afterward Charles Zimmerman, secretary-manager of Local 22 of New York, and one of my fellow vice-presidents in the ILGWU, came down by plane to spend his vacation in Puerto Rico. He was not averse to traveling with me, watching, and making occasional speeches at union meetings. These gatherings in various cities throughout the island now took on the form of farewells to me, for I had booked passage to return to New York late in the month. The climax to all this came on September 27, with a farewell dinner in San Juan for Amparo Rivera and Carmen Curbelo, (the girls whom I was taking back to Brookwood Labor College), Zimmerman, and myself. A mass meeting afterward in the big auditorium of Baldoriatz public school was crowded, the girls with whom I had worked occupying front seats. Labor Commissioner Martinez presided.

Teresa Anglero broke down while reading an address. Others, too, spoke with feeling of what the union meant to them. And many of those women and girls had brought gifts for me, pieces of needle-craft they had made. These were piled on the speakers' table. They included a beautiful set of satin lingerie done in intricate needle-work with exquisite lace; a linen dress of drawn work, the art of Amparo Rivera; handkerchiefs of a type I have never seen in New York; hand-bags, lingerie bags, and various woven articles fashioned with thoughtful care.

To me those gifts typified something priceless, a giving from the depths of these simple people's hearts. By the same token I gave to various girls things which would have special meaning for them — Chinese and Mexican jewelry, a camera, my own lunch box (which Teresa had particularly wanted), thermos bottles, and other possessions both utilitarian and decorative.

When the Borinquen sailed next day there were more gifts and flowers. And now, instead of the two dozen persons who had formed the committee of welcome when I arrived, hundreds of union workers were on the pier to bid us buen viaje.

On the return voyage, fellow passengers eyed our group curiously, doubtless wondering about the make-up of this odd party — the two dark Puerto Rican girls, Zimmerman, tall, light complected, and blue eyed, and myself, deeply tanned and Spanish looking, mothering those girls.

Back in New York, I took Amparo and Carmen on to Brookwood. For the next nine months they were subjected to an intensive training which would stand them in good stead when carrying on unionization work at home.

Rose Schneiderman asked me to come to Washington, to confer with Ernest Gruening, new Federal Administrator of Insular Affairs. Mr. Gruening listened keenly as I told of my observations among the islanders. He asked what suggestions I had to offer. I urged among other things steps to cut down the birth rate and to bring groups of likely young men and women from Puerto Rico to the mainland to be trained in social service, so that they could work effectively among their own people.



Since then economic conditions in Puerto Rico have grown even worse. After the Wage and Hour Law became effective in 1938, various needle trades employers left the island, transferring their operations to China and the Philippines. And later other manufacturers moved out and industrial production largely ceased when war exigencies stopped practically all commercial shipping from the Caribbean area.

With the beginning of the war Puerto Rico became of vital importance to the United States as a naval base. But this did not alter the tragic state of the great majority of its 2,000,000 inhabitants. Because of the widespread shutdown of industry, countless thousands of native workers face virtual starvation. The millions in relief money that have been poured in have sufficed only as a palliative.

Recommendations made by Governor Rexford Tugwell to President Roosevelt, if put into practice, should go a long way toward rehabilitating the island, both economically and socially. Among other things Mr. Tugwell urges election by the Puerto Rican people of their own Governors so that they will no longer have a mere colonial status, but will have the full responsibility of carrying on for themselves.

Puerto Rico clearly has great pressing need of new industries, new crops of staple foodstuffs for home consumption instead of export, higher minimum wages, abolition of child labor, health clinics, more schools for both children and adults, and training centers for both industrial and agricultural workers. And the whole population would benefit if there was less political bickering.

That land of splendor and squalor stands as a glaring example of the evils of imperialism and as evidence of the clean-up job which ought to be done on our own doorstep before we begin taking care of the whole world.

## Chapter 13. Last Outpost of Civilization

From the Tropics to the Northwest — from Puerto Rico to the State of Washington... Late in December, 1934, I was on my way to Seattle at President Dubinsky's request. The International had chartered a dressmakers' local there, and it needed building up. Crossing the continent, I had the odd experience of meeting all four seasons of the year in the course of a single week.

Enroute I visited Los Angeles, where the dressmakers had elected a new executive board, which I was called upon to install. The rival union had been liquidated some time before. I was proud to note how well our membership had carried out the program we had charted following the hard fought general strike in 1933.

In San Francisco the two locals had formed a joint board managed by Samuel S. White. The dressmakers were headed by Jennie Matyas, appointed as an organizer there by President Dubinsky. For years a resident there, she had lived as a girl in New York, where she had helped Waist Makers' Local 25 make history.

January 2 and 3 found me moving northward, feasting my eyes on a fascinating panorama — gigantic redwood trees, white-topped Mount Shasta, the Cascade Mountains. Great stretches of open land were dotted with snow-capped stumps which had the look of giant mushrooms. On either side of the train, roads glistened like pictures of fairyland in a child's book.

A committee headed by Clifford Mayer, Manly Labby, and Sam Schatz of Local 70, met me in the Portland station. The same evening I spoke at a cloakmakers' meeting. It was stirring to see these girls absorbed in serious union matters and arguing intelligently about them. A year earlier they had known nothing about unionism and were working for miserable wages. Now they had laid a solid foundation for a real union. Arriving in Seattle Saturday noon, I registered at the YWCA and believing I would stay here for some time, went hunting for an apartment. I was fortunate in finding a clean, well furnished place in the Spring Apartments, in the heart of the business section, a few blocks from the Labor Temple.

Unpacking my things in this new home, I turned on the radio and sat down in front of a bay window facing magnificent Mount Rainier, topped with snow the year round! Rain was falling, the sort the Scotch call a "drizzle-drazzle," but which

people in the Puget Sound country speak of as "Oregon mist." I contemplated the mountain as if through a veil of gauze.

The air was chill, and a great loneliness pressed down upon me. I asked myself: "What am I doing here alone? What is in store for me?" I got out of that shadow by phoning two trusted members of the Cloakmakers' Union, Meyer Rosenberg and Leon Glazer. At the Glazer home, we discussed the problem of putting the new dressmakers' local on its feet.

Meyer Rosenberg, father of four grown children, and a pioneer in our union, had come from Toledo, Ohio. An active member of the Democratic party, he took me to several important affairs, one being the annual Jackson Day dinner, in the Olympic Hotel. The guest speaker was candid about the party's patron saint, dwelling upon both his virtues and weaknesses. Rosenberg also took me to meet Warren G. Magnuson, the youthful, athletic District Attorney, since elected to Congress.

Leon Glazer and his son Eugene both worked as pressers, Eugene serving as secretary of the local. Always ready to do things for the organization, unfortunately he could not make the proper approach to the dressmakers. For this a woman clearly was needed.

Another telephone call brought four cheerful guests for breakfast on Sunday. Ross Brown, whom I had known in the East, brought his fiancée, and a tall young man from California, R. P. Beverstock, and his wife, Genevieve. Ross had attended Commonwealth Labor College in Arkansas, and was now with the Masters, Mates, and Pilots' Union. Beverstock, "Bev" to us, was a Stanford University graduate, and Seattle representative of the Pacific Coast Labor Bureau.

After breakfast we went sightseeing in Ross Brown's car. He took us to see the Skid Road, as Yesler Way is called, because in pioneer days logs drawn by oxen were skidded down this long sloping road to the first sawmill, owned by Henry Yesler. The foot of that thoroughfare, however, had a different connotation in labor circles. Here was the "slave market," where migrant workers sought jobs in employment offices all too often conducted by human sharks. Colman Dock also had special meaning. From it crowded steamers had pushed off for Alaska in the Klondike gold rush of 1897. Close by were the sites of the first cabins in Seattle.

Near the waterfront the atmosphere was dingy. But the prospect improved as we rode through the business center and into the residential sections. Seattle unquestionably has charm. It is a modern metropolis, which has managed to preserve a great deal of natural scenic beauty. A city of hills and terraces, where many homes seem to hang precariously, surrounded by luscious fruits and flowers. Roses, blooming all year round, are so large and perfect that at times they give the impression of being artificial.

Cloakmakers' Local 28 in Seattle had been functioning ever since it was chartered in 1912. ILGWU representatives visited the Pacific Northwest periodically, and the local membership kept in frequent touch with the general office.

The Seattle dressmakers, all women, who made house and cotton dresses chiefly, numbered about a thousand. After my visit the previous spring, a group of these women decided to establish a union of their own, and applied to the International for a charter. A local, No. 184, was set up. Without competent guidance, however, its charter members had made practically no progress with organization.

In October, President Dubinsky had stopped in Seattle on his way home from the A F of L convention in San Francisco. A committee representing the dressmakers, cloakmakers, and the Central Labor Council conferred with him and asked that I be sent to direct the upbuilding of the new local.

Now that I was on the job Glazer and Rosenberg suggested a room at the Labor Temple, as our organizing center. No office space was available in the Temple, but the secretary offered to let us use the ante-room to the large assembly hall on the fourth floor, with the proviso that delegates to the Central Labor Council sessions could continue to pass through that room.

Designed for coat-checking, this was small, dark, and depressing. A door equipped with a peep-hole opened into the assembly hall. At once I proceeded to clean up and beautify our new office. I made curtains for the window, bought potted ferns, improved the lighting with modern electric fixtures, acquired a typewriter and mimeograph, and wired to New York for posters and literature. From the basement some one brought an ancient rolltop desk and a swivel chair, lent to the newly formed union "for the duration." Quickly a drab interior was made over into comfortable and inviting quarters.

Several evenings later I sat in a corner watching the CLC delegates come in. Largely men who did hard manual labor, they included teamsters, longshoremens, marine workers, loggers, brewery workers, butchers, bakers, and machinists. Most of them naturally expected to find nothing in the room but the customary hooks on which to hang their coats. One man took off his coat while speaking to another and moved toward his usual parking spot. Instead of bare hooks, he found the wall covered with eye-arresting labor posters. Open mouthed with surprise but evidently pleased, he moved about the room, examining the other walls, stumbling over me, but too absorbed to remember to excuse himself.

Introduced to the assembled delegates as the new organizer for "the Lady Garment Workers," I was warmly welcomed into organized labor's official family in Seattle, with the Council pleading its full support to our cause.

Of necessity this campaign moved slowly at the beginning, for the new local had no active members. The courageous girls who applied for the charter had been grad-

ually eased out of their jobs; most of the others were reluctant to join. Frequently they gave us this answer:

“Why should I risk my job to join your union? The NRA is protecting me.”

Many of the dressmakers here were of types not to be found in a New York garment shop, except perhaps as buyers models, designers — or scrub-women. Not a few drove their own cars; some wore expensive fur coats, bought not with money earned in the factories, but from returns on inherited real estate, dividends on investments, or income from private dressmaking done at home evenings and Sundays. But others had had a constant struggle with poverty, had been on welfare or the WPA, and were in mortal fear of losing their jobs.

A large percentage of these people were children and grandchildren of adventurous Americans who had come overland from the East in “prairie schooners” — covered wagons. They included numerous Scandinavian immigrants or one generation removed, the latter mainly Minnesota-born, plus a sprinkling of Irish, Icelanders, French Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders.

When we began our Seattle campaign there were strong prejudices against unions among women garment makers, but of a type different from those I usually ran into. Unions in that rough and ready country were reminiscent, both in organization and administration, of pioneer days. They were nothing new in the Northwest, but they had been organized by men for men only. Union halls generally reeked with tobacco smoke, like saloons. Union meetings frequently ended in free-for-all fights, in which heads were bashed and noses broken. Grudges and arguments were settled in the same violent way. So a union hall, in the opinion of most of the women I met, was “scarcely the proper place for a lady.”

Since the NRA had established the Dress Code of Fair Competition, with a minimum wage, they felt that they were protected by the federal government. They had no knowledge of the part union action had played in bringing that Code into being.

Yet there were good reasons for their joining a union. Most of them were being mercilessly exploited. The NRA minimum of \$13 a week for 40 hours' work on cotton garments, was low enough, but even on this the employers frequently chiseled, using subterfuges to get around the law, and paying the same wages for higher priced silk and wool dresses.

Frontier habits and attitudes still prevailed widely among the inhabitants of Seattle. A large percentage of the men did heavy labor — as loggers, or in the sawmills; as longshoremen; as seamen on ships plying to Alaska, the Orient, or to Southern and Eastern ports; or as fishermen, who made periodic two-week trips to waters near Ketchikan, Alaska. There were a few whalers, too, who hunted Moby Dick in high-powered boats, with harpoons shot from small cannon.

In 1851, with the Civil War still ten years distant, 24 men, women, and children who for months had traveled westward, drawn by slowmoving ox-teams, arrived on the Eastern shore of Puget Sound, the last frontier.

Indians headed by their chief, Seattle, welcomed them. When the cluster of log-huts had grown a little, the men who built them named their village for the friendly chief.

Migrants had founded this city, and in 1935 the great bulk of its 375,000 residents were still from other places. Curiously enough, as soon as these migrants were firmly established in Seattle, they regarded later comers as outsiders. "Rugged individualists," their motto was "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost! "

From the beginning, and as late as 1925, all commerce in Seattle revolved around lumber production. Vast grants of timber in the public domain had been obtained from the federal government by hook or crook, and the timber barons slashed through the mighty virgin forests with no thought for the future.

As the lumbermen had exploited the forests, the loggers who felled the trees, and the sawmill hands, so many employers in Seattle took the utmost advantage of their workers.

Soon after the 1929 stock market crash 30,000 persons in that city were jobless. Some organized the Unemployed Citizens' League, which set the pace for similar self-help groups all over the United States. Harvesting fruit and vegetable crops on a sharing basis, it set up various co-operative enterprises, which, however, were opposed by business men, who feared these would cut into their profits.

On March 1, 1933, many of the League's members marched toward Olympia, the state capital, with the intention of presenting an appeal to the Governor for reforms in relief procedure. But they were prevented from entering that city by several hundred "vigilantes."

## Chapter 14. Early Champions of the Common Man

Tradition dominated organized labor in Seattle, which was living largely on its past. The high point of its history seemed to be the great general strike in February, 1919, in which 60,000 men and women in 110 unions quit work. The city then had a population of 315,000. That strike was voted by the Central Labor Council, a unique body with a revolutionary background unknown in the rest of the States.

The council was an open forum where any subject could get a hearing and a vote. Thus the general strike, as a class-war weapon, was discussed on the CLC floor as early as 1903, and the council had indorsed industrial unionism in 1909, its delegates being instructed to sponsor it on the floor of the A F of L national convention that year.

All industrial activity in Seattle was stopped by the general strike of 1919. Technically, it was voted in support of a walk-out by the shipyard workers of Seattle and Tacoma, 30 miles south, who wanted guarantees against unemployment and wage-cuts following World War I. But the unions which had pushed the demand for a city-wide tie-up had been stirred into action largely by the passage of a criminal syndicalism law over the Governor's veto; they knew well that this would be used as a legal club against outspoken union members. The militant locals, too, had been inspired by the recent Russian Revolution; a month earlier the Metal Trades Council had set up a Soldiers, Sailors, and Workmen's Council, after the manner of the Russians, to aid demobilized war veterans in finding work.

Across the land, editorial writers and orators cried out that revolution had begun in Seattle. They foresaw a reign of terror and bloodshed; and perhaps some were disappointed at the lack of violence. Many of the alarmists called this "an IWW strike." Yet the Industrial Workers of the World had no part in bringing it about nor in conducting it, though some of its units actively supported it. A F of L unions were responsible for the whole action.

A general committee of 300, designated by the Central Labor Council, in turn appointed a committee of 15, which directed all operations in the general strike. Unionists without guns served as auxiliary police, and arrests even for misdemeanors were markedly fewer than in ordinary times. This strike was a mighty

demonstration of working class solidarity and orderly procedure. It lasted five days.

In the CLC there were two distinct factions — the conservative old-timers who had urged a stoppage limited to 24 or 48 hours, and the left-wing groups, who were actuated more by emotion than by reason.

Ole Hanson, flag-waving mayor, was widely credited outside of Seattle with breaking the strike through threats of martial law. Actually however, it disintegrated and was officially called off because the committee in charge, dominated by the militants, had no concrete objectives, no practicable plan for carrying action further. That failure was a set-back from which the Seattle labor movement did not recover until the CIO came into the picture.

More than 35 years before “the Century of the Common Man” was spot-lighted in the speeches of a Vice-President of the United States, and long before the CIO was thought of, the Industrial Workers of the World aggressively championed the cause of the great mass of humans symbolized in that phrase.

The IWW was founded in Chicago in 1905, at a congress of some 200 radicals, who included Eugene Debs, Daniel De Leon, Mother Mary Jones, Lucy Parsons, widow of one of the Haymarket defendants, Father Thomas Hagerty, Catholic priest and social crusader, and Bill Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners. They were concerned with organizing the nation’s unskilled and migratory labor, that hitherto neglected multitude of workers, together with the skilled trades, into a mighty revolutionary union, built on industrial instead of on craft lines.

“The working class and the employing class have nothing in common,” the IWW’s flaming Preamble proclaimed. “There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among the millions of working people, and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things in life.

“Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.<sup>1</sup> ... By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

Those sentiments attracted a fearless company of zealots, men used to hard-ship, who went forth as organizers of the workers farthest down. For the most part, they headed West, to reach the throngs that labored in the agricultural fields, the orchards, the lumber woods, the metal mines, the canneries, on big construction jobs, on merchant ships, and on the water-fronts. Some, too, went East, to line up workers in the textile mills, making spectacular forays there. Others busied them-

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<sup>1</sup> In its original form, that Preamble called for the eventual coming together of all toilers on the political as well as on the industrial field, to “take and hold that which they produce by their labor...” Subsequently the political reference was dropped. Harrison Gray Otis, labor-hating editor of the Los Angeles Times, is said to have originated this label.



selves among the sailors on the Great Lakes, in the metal manufacturing trades, and in the rubber industry.

These organizers were not a class apart, but members who felt the urge to line up others. They served as volunteers, being paid nothing by the organization, and made their own living by working “at the point of production,” which gave them close contact with those they organized.

Traveling as did migratory workers generally — on night freight trains, in box cars, on top, or on the rods beneath — they had to keep on guard constantly against railroad police and hijackers. Usually, however, the trainmen, unionists themselves, were friendly to any traveler who carried a “red card.” By day the IWW emissaries stopped to cook meals and wash their linen in some “jungle,” usually alongside a railroad and on the bank of a creek or river a little way out of a town. Here, too, they would get some sleep in a lean-to or other shelter.

Spoken of as “Wobblies” by their enemies, supposedly to indicate instability, they ignored the derisive implication and adopted that term as a convenient handle.

In the brief span of its life, the IWW produced men who became internationally known and whose names were torches of inspiration in many lands. Most of them paid a high price for their fame, some with their lives.

Frank Little and Wesley Everest were lynched. Joe Hill, the poet and song-writer, was executed. Bill Haywood, out of prison on bail while his war-time conviction was being appealed, was persuaded by New York Communists that world revolution was just around the corner and that he was needed in it. He skipped bail and fled to Russia, only to be relegated to the sidelines, and to die there a broken man.

Richard Ford and William Suhr spent years in prison, solely because of speeches, alleged to have incited a killing committed in the course of a riot among terribly exploited workers in the California hop fields. Carlo Tresca, many times jailed in strikes and often in danger of death, survived to the age of sixty-four; then, after long anti-Fascist activity, he was assassinated in 1943 in the New York City dim-out. Ironically, he did not live to see the downfall of Mussolini, which came only six months later.

The IWW was much more of a revolutionary organization than a labor union — and frankly so. Its Preamble appeared in every issue of its various newspapers, pamphlets, and other publications, and its literature had the great virtue of simplicity.

Open forums in the Wobbly halls, scattered through cities and towns from coast to coast, helped to make clear to new members what the organization was fighting for. And it had one educational center where organizers were trained — the Work Peoples’ College in Duluth. The ordinary Wobbly was uneducated, except for what he had learned by reading IWW literature or listening to speeches by its organizers. But he had a feeling that something was coming to him in life. Ignored by the big

craft labor unions, he clung to the IWW, the “One Big Union,” as his only protection. Its pamphlets and books and newspapers in various languages explained in simple words the value of industrial unionism. The rank-and-file had a clear example of craft union weakness when, for instance, in railroad strikes, where the shopmen walked out because of deep grievances the enginemen, firemen, and trainmen kept on working and involuntarily helped break the strike of their own brothers.

The “little red song book” was the Wobbly’s Bible, and every IWW hall rang out with lusty male voices singing Hallelujah, I’m a Bum, which satirically glorified the lot of the migratory worker; Casey Jones, an IWW version; The Red Flag; Workingmen, Unite! and a host of others.

It was characteristic of IWW meetings that after the last speech had ended and the applause had died down, the audience would break up into circles, to continue discussing the subject, and later each circle would sing its favorite song. Gradually the circles would merge, and finally each man present, his arms over another’s shoulders, would join in Joe Hill’s best-known ballad, The Preacher and the Slave, a take-off on the street-corner revival hymn, In the Sweet Bye and Bye:

Long-haired preachers come out every night, Try to tell you what’s wrong and what’s right; When you ask them for something to eat They will answer with voices so sweet:

Chorus:

You will eat, bye and bye In that glorious land above the sky; Work and pray, live on hay, You’ll get pie in the sky when you die.

Immediately after the Seattle general strike a state-wide drive against labor radicals was begun, with the IWW as principal target. The new criminal syndicalism law was brought into play, and many Wobblies were sent to prison solely for membership, on the testimony of stool-pigeons who had joined the organization, and who volunteered “admissions” of acts of arson and sabotage. Similar prosecutions followed in Oregon and California.

These drives were designed to corral any articulate IWW organizers who might have sprung up since the imprisoning of 225 of its leaders. convicted in three big trials in Illinois, Kansas, and California, because of their opposition to the United States entering World War I.

From the beginning of their activities in the Northwest, the Wobblies were hated, feared, and bitterly opposed by the big industrial interests in Seattle and the surrounding country. All that opposition was a challenge to them. They fought courageously and doggedly to change the condition of the migratory workers. They had forced wages up in the agricultural and construction fields. But it was in the lumber woods that they made their presence felt most.

Pay rates in the logging camps were low, hours long (a work-day of 11 or 12 hours was common), compensation for physical injuries non-existent. A man

might be crippled by a falling tree, and then no longer could make a living. Bathing and laundry facilities were generally absent from the camps and the timberworkers had to sleep in vermin-ridden bunks. Often the food was monotonous and poorly cooked.

These men were of varying nationalities, a considerable percentage having Scandinavian parentage and some being French-Canadian, but the bulk of them were American-born. They were “womanless, homeless, and voteless.” The policy of the employers generally was to hire unmarried men, preferably those with itching feet, who would not stay long on a job. Migration was encouraged by the foremen, who worked their men until they were too fatigued to continue; then others would be brought in to replace them.

In 1917 the IWW staged a vast strike in the Northwest lumber woods, which cut the work-day to eight hours and forced employers to put in decent sleeping quarters and sanitary facilities. That strike was poison to the timber barons because it reduced their profits at a time when they had a chance to make huge war fortunes. They dealt largely with spruce needed for Army airplanes, and the price of spruce had skyrocketed.

The Wobblies stood for direct action, and among their most effective tactics were the slow-down strike and the strike-on-the-job. The slow-down was a means of giving “little work for little pay,” in contrast to the Samuel Gompers conception of “A fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay.”

Peculiar to the IWW, the strike-on-the-job was used to excellent effect in the 1911 conflict in the lumber woods. After a few weeks many of the striking Wobblies had run out of money. To get a stake, groups of the strikers took jobs at lumber camps scattered through Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. They would work five days on an 11- or 12-hour basis. On the sixth day, at the end of eight hours, one of them would blow a whistle. All of his gang would instantly quit work, draw their pay, and move on to another camp, where they would repeat the process. This went on until the employers in despair conceded the eight-hour day to get production.

In retaliation, two Wobbly halls in Centralia, a timber-shipping town 90 miles south of Seattle, were raided and wrecked, one in 1918 by the tail-end of a Red Cross parade and the other on Armistice Day, 1919, by parading American Legionnaires. Warned that the second raid was coming, the IWW’s appealed to the police for protection, got no satisfaction, and so prepared to defend their headquarters.

Gun-fire met the marchers as they broke down the union hall doors, and four Legionnaires were killed in the fighting which followed. Poses quickly hunted down and jailed dozens of IWW members. After dark, Wesley Everest, war veteran and one of the hall’s defenders, was handed over to a party of local merchants, who emasculated him with a razor, hanged him from a river bridge, and shot his body full of holes.

No one was punished for that lynching, but seven IWW's were convicted of conspiracy to commit murder and were sentenced to 25 to 40 years in prison. Another, found insane by a jury, was held a few months in an asylum, and then was sent to join the others in the penitentiary.

The heyday of the IWW was a romantic period, ending with its ultimate aims — industrial solidarity the world over and the social revolution — still roseate dreams. In its early stages the Russian revolution inspired the Wobblies, but they were soon disheartened by ensuing developments in Russia — the counter-revolution, supported by that nation's former Allies; the terror which inevitably followed; the one-party dictatorship; denial of civil liberties and of self-organization to working people.

Various forces, both external and internal, contributed to the disintegration of the Industrial Workers of the World — ideological differences over the Russian situation, war trials, which left the organization leaderless, mass deportations, tarring and feathering off organizers, lynchings, jailings under the criminal syndicalism laws, and post-war unemployment, which invariably comes with demobilization.

But apart from these elements, the IWW was marked for failure because of fundamental weaknesses in tactics. Loosely organized, it never got a tangible hold on its membership; and contemptuous of the business world's methods, it had no signed contracts. Thus the gains it made through hard-fought strikes were necessarily only temporary. Its attitude toward the future, though idealistic, was visionary and not practical.

In justice be it said, however, that this courageous fighting organization served as a trail blazer for the CIO. The mistakes made by the IWW were many, and the Committee for Industrial Organization learned from it what pitfalls to avoid. Advantages won by the CIO for the workers in the mass production, migratory, lumber, agricultural, and unskilled fields, have been duly signed and sealed in air-tight contracts. Moreover, the CIO appeared at a much more favorable time. It utilized the benefits of the pro-labor legislation enacted under the New Deal, while the IWW had no aid from law-makers.

To me, in 1935, Seattle was a union ghost town. Since 1919 labor there had moved like a sleep-walker. There had been strikes in the interim, yes, but, with the exception of the longshoremen's walkout in 1934, usually to little effect. Some had run on for months, even years, finally petering out like a stream of water flowing across desert sands. One strike of motion-picture operators continued for 13 years. It was settled during my stay.

Local technique puzzled me. A union would put a single picket with a banner, "This place is on strike," in front of a shop. After a few days, he would disappear. When I had seen this happen several times, I stepped into the office of one of the small unions, and asked if a certain shoe store strike had been settled.

“No,” said the secretary, “we’re out of money, so we couldn’t pay the picket any longer.” When the union was flush, it would assign another picket to duty.

Union officers, quartered in the Labor Temple, were largely of the type portrayed by cartoonists in the capitalist press — chair-warmers and cigar-smokers. I learned that rank-and-file members were not encouraged to hang around the union offices. At meetings of locals the officers would take up routine matters — reading of the local’s minutes, CLC minutes, the local’s correspondence, then adjournment. Dull proceedings, no new faces.

The only really animated labor scene in the Temple (apart from the gatherings of our own girls, who went on strike a little later and enlivened the whole building) was to be found in the Central Labor Council meetings, which still furnished an arena for verbal bouts and political contests. I remember particularly one stormy session there — a fresh outbreak of an old jurisdictional wrangle. After many years the Brewery Workers’ Union, industrial in form, had succeeded in affiliating with the CLC. Through all that time the Teamsters’ Union had claimed the brewery wagon drivers, and got away with it.

On the night that the brewery union delegates were seated, they told how glad all their members were over making this new alliance, and promised to bring plenty of beer for everybody to the next CLC meeting.

But that celebration never took place. Dave Beck, president of the Seattle Teamsters’ Joint Council, real boss of the CLC, and heir apparent to Dan Tobin, head of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, had not been present when the brewery workers’ delegation first appeared. As soon as he heard what had happened, he put his machine into motion.

At the next CLC session I sat in the front row with our delegates. When the secretary, calling the roll, reached the name of a brewery union man, Beck got up quickly from among the teamsters and objected loudly to the brewery workers’ delegates being seated, on the ground that theirs was a dual union.

Almost instantly a free-for-all fight started. No free beer flowed that night, but blood flowed later, as an outcome of that clash. Soon the Teamsters’ Union declared the Northwest Brewing Company unfair, and called a strike in its plant. The Northwest company had an agreement with the Brewery Workers’ Union, which Beck did not recognize as a legitimate union contract.

Violent battles broke out between the beer-wagon drivers in the brewery union and the Teamsters’ Union pickets. To protect the Northwest company’s employees, thugs who had been “on guard” at the factories we were picketing were transferred there. Gun fights ensued, and four teamsters were killed. The dressmakers’ local being affiliated with the CLC, I went with delegations to lay wreaths on their coffins. A deputized guard named Hiatt, who had been rough with our pickets, got a 10-year sentence as an accessory in one of those killings.

## Chapter 15. Employers Double as Vigilantes

A handful of cloakmakers diligently helped me in my visits to prospective members, yet our progress was snail-like. Clearly someone was required here who knew the workers in the dress industry. After a wide search I persuaded Dorothy Enright, a dress operator who had spoken up pointedly at my first Seattle meeting in 19'4, to come in as my assistant.

Daughter of a pioneer who crossed the plains and mountains to the Northwest in a covered wagon, and mother of a grown son (though she looked much younger), she was worth her weight in gold. She owned a car, knew every nook and corner of the city and its environs, and having worked long in our industry, was on friendly terms with almost every garment worker in Seattle.

She needed coaching in union technique, and enrolled for a course in stenography and typing at the University of Washington in order to be able to take dictation. I was already taking a course there myself, and so we drove to the campus together each morning. As the weeks passed Dorothy steadily gained confidence, and I encouraged her to approach the dressmakers on the subject of unionism.

We talked with scores of possible members, working fast and intensively, and in five weeks we succeeded in signing up enough women to enable the local to elect a president, secretary, and an executive board. The membership began to grow in healthy fashion, and presently I wired asking Vice-President Feinberg, our Pacific Coast director, then in San Francisco, to come to Seattle. Speaking at a meeting of more than 200 dressmakers, he was stirred by the response he got. Feinberg made several attempts to meet with some of the employers, but they referred him to Captain J. Thomas Dovey, manager of the Associated Industries of Seattle, an effusive mixer who was ready to discuss anything under the sun except coming to terms with the union.

We drew up a tentative agreement, based on our standard collective contract, and mailed it with an appropriate letter to every dress manufacturer. None of the employers even acknowledged this. So I sent a spokesman to call upon them — Beverstock, whom we had engaged to help us as local representative of the Pacific Coast Labor Bureau. That agency, headed by Henry Melnikov of San Francisco, specialized in negotiating agreements for labor unions in all the Western water-

front cities. Beverstock, too, was referred to Captain Dovey, who shot questions at him, asking whether he was an American citizen, what education he had had, and what his status was in this particular case. When Dovey found he was dealing with a Stanford University graduate who had a thorough knowledge of economics, constitutional rights, and labor legislation, he ended suggestively: "There's always a good job for a willing young man."

As soon as the local was firmly on its feet, we gave attention to the matter of education. Genevieve Beverstock consented to conduct evening classes in public speaking and current events at the YWCA. After class, the girls would put in an hour of gym and finish with dancing. Genevieve had an agreeable low voice, and spoke so clearly that everyone in a large hall could hear her. She was one of the most competent teachers I came across on the West Coast.

Apart from my own need of relaxation, recreation proved a vital element in holding our dressmaker members together. In play we could forget our daily struggle, catch our breath, and be made whole again.

We had Saturday evening dances in the Labor Temple. All trade unionists were welcome at these without charge, and dancers and spectators were often augmented by men drawn by the music from the basement saloon, hang-out for many because all other unions kept their offices closed on Saturday nights.

Such affairs served as an effective means of getting acquainted. There was a variety of entertainment, the children of our dressmakers exhibiting talent which included fancy roller skating, singing, accordion playing, and tap dancing. Our Scandinavian members contributed by presenting native dances.

Everyone in the local brought things to eat — hearty sandwiches, home-made cakes, pies, and cookies. Having no time to do any elaborate cooking in my kitchenette, I made it a point always to supply the beer. Beginning with one keg, I ended with six.

At one of the Saturday night gatherings I noticed a weathered old seaman sitting in a corner, sipping his beer and quietly watching the dancing. I had heard him called "Smithy." Sitting down beside him, I asked if he was enjoying himself.

"Yes, ma'am," and he thanked me. It wasn't often that good times were free. "I was thinking of the dancing I did when I was a young man."

"Where?"

"In the Klondike — in Dawson City."

Dance-hall gals, and it cost a dollar to dance three minutes. He had other memories, and I signalled for more beer.

Smithy dropped in at my office often and told me engaging tales of his experiences.

Ohio-born, he had owned a shoe-store in Seattle, sold it, sailed with two partners for Dyea, each carrying 1,500 pounds of equipment. It took them a month to

carry this over that terrible icy trail, Chilkoot Pass, into British Columbia. Cutting down trees, they built a boat, traversed several lakes, survived the rapids of the Yukon. But they got to the diggings too late in the year to do much prospecting, and wintered in Dawson, 15 miles away.

They drank and gambled, won and lost and won again. Tex Rickard's joint was one of their hangouts. Fresh food was so costly and scarce that Smithy fell ill with scurvy, and had to go home in the Spring. He met up with a fellow named Jack London, homeward bound for the same reason. Both of them "looked like hell." London's name meant nothing to him then, but later he read Jack's stories about the North, and recognized many incidents in them. And he had seen Jack Holt in the movies, and recalled him as a youngster to whom he gave a job sawing wood for a day when he was flush.

Smithy intended to return to the Klondike when he got well, but he "didn't have the guts" to face the hardship and the cold, and went to sea instead.

Shipping to China, he later sailed on all the oceans. He was proud of the fact that "Andy Furuseth himself" signed him up in the Seaman's Union in San Francisco. At 60 he had quit the sea, but he still carried a union card. "Andy's a prince," he said. "Any time I go broke I can always call on him."

"What happened to your partners in the Klondike?" I inquired.

They found little gold in their original claims, Smithy explained. So they moved on to Nome, in Alaska, where the next great strike was made, cleaned up big there, and brought fortunes back, enough to carry them in comfort through a long life.

"But one of them spent it all in five years on booze and women," he said, "and dropped dead on the street. The other died in the poorhouse in Spokane. I was the lucky one."

In the Spring we enjoyed communal dinners in the Labor Temple, and as the weather grew warm, we had picnics on the shore of the Sound or elsewhere in the open. These were attended by a hundred or more persons, the girls bringing members of their families and different kinds of food for lunch. I marveled at the variety of edibles provided by the Scandinavians.

Goodie Jorgensen made hot waffle sandwiches; Norwegian cheese, slightly melted, was the filler. Delicious! Ruby Lund brought potato salad with a flavor all its own. Ethel Stevenson ("Steve") came with exotic cakes. Esther and Roy Tremelling were specialists in chili beans. Roy also was a past master in tapping a keg of beer, keeping the foam at a minimum, an art in itself. As always, my offering was the beer. And invariably I had my movie camera with me and filmed the merry scene.

Realizing that this would be an extended campaign, I was ready to quit Seattle and leave the situation in the hands of the local people, under Feinberg's supervision. This would eliminate the complaint about "outside organizers." But things



were moving too fast. Several employers, undoubtedly acting in concert, had discharged girls who, on advice from the union, had reported Code violations to the local NRA office. It was agreed that we would demand their reinstatement.

At this point, however, I had to telegraph Jennie Matyas in San Francisco, asking her to come at once to Seattle. I had developed acute laryngitis and a fever, and couldn't speak above a whisper.

The employers flatly refused to reinstate the girls. So we decided to "stop the shop" of Rosenfeld Brothers,<sup>1</sup> where the lay-offs had begun and where a majority of the workers were eager and ready to follow our union. This was a men's neckwear shop and not strictly within ILGWU jurisdiction. But a delegation of Rosenfeld workers had come to one of our meetings, complaining about wage chiseling in violation of the Code, and bad working conditions, and implored us to take them in. I had asked the advice of Feinberg, and he said: "Take them all in, and later we'll see —"

Early Wednesday morning, March 6, we appeared in front of the Rosenfeld premises. I was running a high temperature, and a cloth saturated with camphorated oil was wrapped around my neck. We succeeded in stopping the shop.

The news spread around the needle trades section and toward evening workers from other factories came to the union office, urging that we stop their shops next.

Among the most persistent were girls employed by Nelly Dwyer Inc. and the Olympic Garment Company.

Working conditions in the Dwyer factory were bad. Lighting was inadequate and large electric motors ran without safety shields, so it was dangerous to pass them. Floors were swept only once a week, getting so littered with pieces of cloth that girls stumbled and fell. One girl was repeatedly burned on an arm by a steam pipe which had no asbestos covering. Complaints about these conditions were ignored by the management.

Charges against the Olympic Company included favoritism in dividing work among operators, failure in numerous cases to pay the required NRA \$13-a-week minimum, and lack of a properly equipped rest room for workers who became ill. Machine operators

had to walk up four flights of stairs, not being allowed to use the elevator, although the forelady, her two sisters (operators who were exceptions), and the office staff used it. We made a new approach to the Dwyer and Olympic firms, but they referred us to Captain Dovey. He declared that neither he nor those he represented were interested in negotiating an agreement with the union.

We tried another tack, having no wish to call a strike in either factory if it could be avoided. A shop meeting of the Dwyer workers decided that the best way to

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<sup>1</sup> Fictitious names are used in this chapter for two of the firms involved in our strike, and also

get Mrs. Dwyer to negotiate would be for the union members in her plant to stage a stoppage, since we had a majority there.

On Monday morning we met in front of the Dwyer shop at 6 :30 a.m. I went inside and explained to Mrs. Dwyer that this was not a strike, but that the girls were going to a meeting at union headquarters. Meanwhile, I suggested, she might find time to discuss the proposed agreement with us, in which event our members would come to work in a couple of hours. Once more Mrs. Dwyer referred me to Captain Dovey. We already knew his attitude, so a strike in the Dwyer shop was officially declared.

Mrs. Dwyer was aghast at the idea that any of her girls would: walk out. Hadn't she always treated them well, like daughters and: sisters instead of employees? The only evidence of this the girls could recall was that she had kissed a lot of them goodnight when: they left for home the previous Friday. A strange individual, this Nelly Dwyer, high-strung, emotionally-religious, often calling upon God in her conversations.

Other employers who had received a copy of our proposed agreement asked for a conference and expressed willingness to negotiate. On the day the Nelly Dwyer factory was stopped, we signed our first agreement with the Horowitz Dress Company, a silk dress firm for which Dorothy Enright had worked. The Horowitz workers came to the office of the union, heard the terms of the contract, and approved it enthusiastically.

News of our first settlement with a firm without interruption of work was highly encouraging to every member of the local.

Wednesday our members at the Olympic Garment Company followed the example of the Nelly Dwyer workers, and appeared outside the building in a body, but did not go in to work. I had an amicable talk with Frank Sharger, manager for the company, who came a little later. He knew the law, admitting that workers had a right to join a union of their own choosing. "If I were a workingman," he declared, "I would join a labor union as the only protection a wage earner has."

He voiced no objection to my calling his employees to a union meeting. We agreed that after the meeting I would phone him for an appointment and the workers would return to their jobs by noon. Mr. Sharger shook hands in a friendly manner, and I departed.

As arranged, we held a meeting and read the tentative agreement to the workers. They added some grievances to be discussed at the conference, appointed a negotiating committee, had lunch, and prepared to go back to work. I tried to reach Mr. Sharger, but he was "out." Throughout the afternoon I called his office repeatedly, and each time he was "out."

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for individuals connected with them.

When I finally got him on the phone next morning, Mr. Sharger explained that Mr. Carson, president of the company, was in Dakota, and until his return a few days hence, he could give no definite answer.

When I asked him: "What about the workers?" he replied: "You can do as you please." I reported this to the waiting girls, and they decided to go home and take a rest. No strike had been declared in that shop, and from what Sharger had said, we still expected that an agreement with his company would shortly be reached. We did not suspect what forces were operating behind the scenes.

On Saturday several workers came to the office and informed us that they had been visited the night before by the Olympic forelady and a companion, and had been asked to come in Saturday and vote on a shop union that was being formed. Things took on a new aspect. Over the week-end we sent out committees to call on all the non-union Olympic girls and appeal to them, for the sake of all concerned not to report for work on Monday.

That morning Jennie and I appeared in front of the plants with all those who had taken part in the stoppage. In a nearby stage depot we saw about 20 Olympic workers who had not joined us. And in front of the factory were about a dozen well-dressed men.

We speculated on the reason for their presence. I went over and asked: "You're not going to take those girls into this shop, are you?"

No, they answered. Then they walked off toward the depot. Soon after that, however, the non-union girls came out of the depot, and were escorted by these men into the Olympic building.

Immediately the men came out again, accompanied by Sharger. They wore deputy sheriffs' badges. Hailing me in his usual genial manner, Sharger introduced the whole group to me, one by one, as if this were a social function. They doffed their hats in acknowledgement. To my astonishment, they included most of Seattle's leading dress manufacturers, whose names I recognized because I had written to them.

"It seems strange to see all of you here," I said. "I had expected to meet you in conference... But I'm even more surprised to find you acting as Sharger's vigilantes. He chisels on the workers, and now he doesn't even want to pay scab-herders!"

Then, in a more serious tone, I went on: "You may be deputized, gentlemen, and you may bring those people in and out if you like, but that won't settle this strike. Sooner or later, you'll have to come to terms with these workers. The union is here to stay, and the ILGWU never lost a strike yet. You'll remember us for a long time to come."

To us no strike is ever lost. Whatever the immediate outcome, we eventually win.

In accordance with NRA regulations, we formally notified the Regional Labor Board that all three shops were on strike, and asked for hearings.

All day we picketed the Olympic plant, our lines reinforced at noon and evening by the strikers' families. The closing hour arrived, but the non-strikers did not come out; they were afraid to leave that night. Their fears were of their own imagining, or perhaps of the employers' devising, for although our mass picketing had been lively, it had included no suggestion of violence.

Darkness found us still on the picket-line. Presently a big truck appeared, and a crew of rough-necks carried army cots, blankets, and food into the factory. This told its own story.

Bill Busick arrived from Los Angeles at 9, and marched with us until picketing ceased at midnight. I had telegraphed him to come so Jennie Matyas might return to San Francisco.

The non-strikers remained in the shop all week, being taken home Friday evening by hired gunmen who also had been deputized.

We had set up strike headquarters in the Labor Temple, and a commissary, where a committee was kept busy serving meals to the strikers and all who helped on the picket-lines. We fed them solid and filling hot food. A specimen menu for a week will indicate the thoughtfulness of the committee's planning: Monday: Chili beans, sandwiches, cheese, meat, lettuce, coffee... Tuesday: Cream of tomato soup, sandwiches, farmer cheese with sweet relish, meat, lettuce, coffee... Wednesday: Potato salad, sandwiches, salmon, deviled eggs, lettuce, coffee... Thursday: Soup, sandwiches, meat, cheese, coffee... Friday: fish, sandwiches, coffee.

Nourishing food is vital to the success of any strike. Picketing calls for energy; and in Seattle that spring we encountered much inclement weather. We had to face snow, raw winds, and frequent cold rains.

Our headquarters became a rendezvous for Seattle's union men and women. We held meetings daily, with prominent labor leaders as speakers, and thus added to the education of all who attended.

Supplementing the banners which the pickets carried, I made chest-bands for them, giving the name and address of each strikebound factory for the information of the public. The strikers wore these bands proudly wherever they went. One girl had a brilliant idea. She and several others, when relieved on the picket-lines, went daily to the shopping district and marched through the department stores, where the message on the chest-bands was seen by thousands of persons whose sympathy we needed.

Overnight these formerly subservient workers had changed radically. They had found themselves, had gained a new faith. They felt at last that they "belonged," as one of them expressed it.

“You know, Rose,” said Hazel Vine, “before — when I used to go to work, nobody noticed me, and nobody cared what happened to me. Now when I walk the street wearing this band, I hear people say: ‘There’s one of the garment strikers — more power to them! They’re putting up a splendid fight!’ And I feel now that I know what I want.”

## Chapter 16. Out on a Limb in Seattle

In other cities a small strike against three minor firms, involving no more than a hundred workers, would have attracted little attention. But in Seattle it aroused a tempest. The employers yelled blue murder. I was amazed at the speed with which the whole anti-union machinery of the city was set in motion against us.

Large advertisements appeared in the daily press, frequently occupying a full page, attacking the ILGWU and giving false information. Signed either by 19 employers or by an anonymous "Citizens' Committee of 500," these ads bore arresting headlines, like: Even Dillinger Never Harmed a Child... We Are Victims of a Handful of Radicals... The 'Strike Baby' is on Your Doorstep Again and This Time It's Quintuplets.'

"Ideal conditions" had existed in Seattle dress factories for 20 years, the employers blandly averred. Feinberg and I were described as "persons with communistic backgrounds who have been sent to Seattle and are attempting to disrupt these conditions." Our strike was linked in the publicity with four other strikes — oil tankers, food distribution, flour milling, and wood box manufacture.

The Committee of 500 panhandled business men throughout the community to pay for those advertisements. Some of the smaller merchants, however, were sympathetic toward us and refused to contribute to the union-busting fund. We showed up the misstatements of the committee in detailed articles in the labor press and in widely circulated leaflets. We charged that it comprised less than 50 members, instead of 500, and that it was an offspring of the Chamber of Commerce.

Lawyers for the Olympic company got from Superior Court Judge Malcolm Douglas, ostensibly in behalf of 23 of its employees, a temporary injunction against our union, its officers, organizers, and members.

This was of course a challenge. We did not stop the picketing, but intensified it. Eight days later we went into court to answer a "show cause" order. We contended that we had been acting within our legal rights in our methods of calling public attention to the strike. Judge Roger Meakim agreed with us and dissolved the injunction.

Late in March we learned that Nelly Dwyer and Sharger were willing to "look over" our proposed agreement, and we sent each another copy. But nothing came of this, because of pressure from the larger crowd behind them. Early in April we held a conference with both, and their attorneys, who objected to everything we

suggested. We offered to submit the whole case to arbitration, but again they said no.

While the temporary restraining order hung over our heads, there had been some colorful excitement at the Nelly Dwyer factory. Mrs. Dwyer spent much of her time out in front arguing with the pickets. One sunny morning half a dozen over-ripe tomatoes were thrown from a crowd of onlookers across the street, and one landed on Mrs. Dwyer's cheek.

Standing near, I saw the tomato reach its target. As I was about to express regret, she pointed me out to a policeman and demanded my arrest. With obvious reluctance, he took me into custody.

The gratifying news spread quickly to every dress factory; at last they had got the "outside agitator" who had caused all their troubles. At the police station I was questioned, photographed, finger printed, and placed in a cell. I asked for breakfast and newspapers. The noon editions carried statements that I was to be deported.

But early that afternoon I was released without having been booked on any charge. I hastened to the Olympic picket line, where the girls hailed me joyfully. Some of the thugs on guard had gleefully told the pickets that I would be sent out of the country. Later they admitted sadly, "It's no use. She's been naturalized. We can't deport her."

Several weeks later a picket arrested at the same time as I, Mrs. Mary O'Brien, 58, was fined \$5 on a charge of throwing the tomato which struck Mrs. Dwyer. She denied the charge, telling the judge "it appeared as if tomatoes came out of the sky." I learned that the son of one of the strikers, an excellent baseball player, was the culprit.

Statistics published by the "Committee of 500" varied widely. Once it said we had come in to organize 1,500 garment workers, and again it said 2,200. Our chief aim, it asserted in an ad headed Tomatoes, Strikes, and Paid Lady Agitators, was to collect 25 cents a week dues from the supposed 2,200, which would mean \$28,600 a year. "Probably," this masked group said, "the Seattle women would spend this \$28,600 for food and clothes for themselves, their babies, and their dependent families. And probably the officers of the Lady Garment Workers in New York would spend it traveling around the country and throwing tomatoes at women and girls in other cities."

Actually, we pointed out, there were only about 1,000 workers in the local cotton dress industry, with which we were concerned.

Not only were we being fought by the whole Seattle Chamber of Commerce crowd, but the employers in the dress field now had nation-wide backing. All over the country the National Cotton Dress Manufacturers' Association was strenuously resisting every attempt to organize legitimate unions, and its members were widely violating the NRA Code.

In each Seattle garment factory a mimeographed notice was posted, assailing the ILGWU as “a proponent of revolution through the general strike,” and harking back to the red-baiting Lusk Report of 1919. One device of the employers was to charge me, as the prime mover in the organization campaign, with all sorts of offenses. They did not do this openly, but by means of a whispering campaign, designed to sow distrust and dissension in the dressmakers’ union.

Hearings of these whispers, I was far from comfortable: there was no telling to what lengths the employers would go.

One evening when I was alone in my apartment the phone rang, and a man introduced himself as a friend of an ILGWU officer in Chicago. He was visiting in Seattle and wanted to meet me. Might he call that evening?

I said I’d meet him in the lobby of the Spring Apartments. Then he explained that he would be in disguise, with a brown beard, and would wear a red carnation. Of course I did not keep the appointment. And we warned the girls on the picket-lines and at meetings’ to beware of strangers.

By this time the local labor movement had begun to sit up and take notice of what we were doing. Compared with general practice in Seattle, we were moving rapidly, conducting a militant strike and educating numberless workers by our example. Seattle unionists were surprised to hear that the ILGWU often settled important general strikes in a few days. They sadly remembered picketing which went on and on until it lost all its fire and became treadmill routine.

After weeks on the picket-lines the strikers, all women, had become robust and gained healthy complexions. Their spirit was excellent and they were getting valuable education.

I had trained a dozen or more of the younger ones to make smooth short speeches, so that whenever a request came from women’s clubs church sewing circles, labor unions, or other groups for information about the strike, these girls could present our case convincingly.

The garment employers organized “shop unions” or “guilds,” as they chose to call their company unions. Workers were given the choice of signing yellow-dog contracts or losing their jobs. Many who signed came to us afterward to express regret. They dared not: refuse for fear of being thrown on relief again. Paradoxically they expected us — a handful of strikers outside — to win while they were working inside, helping the employers in their efforts to break the strike.

Acting on our complaint, the NRA’s Regional Labor Board held hearings late in April on both the Dwyer and Olympic strikes. Testimony was heard by a panel comprising Judge Roscoe R. Smith, chairman, and Max Silver and Harry Listman, respectively representing industry and labor. We were given a favorable decision, the board ruling that our union had a majority in both shops, that we had a right to bargain for the employees, and that the companies had violated Section 7-a of



the Code. But the employers refused to abide by that decision, and the case was referred to the National Labor Board in Washington.

New workers were steadily taken into the three factories, the employers figuring they would have a majority if an election were ordered. Their attorneys had not advised them that only employees working on the eve of the strike would be eligible to vote.

The charges of chiseling filed against Rosenfeld Brothers had been found correct, and the National Labor Board ordered the firm to pay \$2,800 in back wages and reinstate those discharged for union activities. Elated, I pinned all my hopes on the board's forthcoming decision in the Dwyer-Olympic conflict. Around the 20<sup>th</sup> I had word from Washington that our case would come up shortly. Knowing how strong that case was, I had every expectation that the decision would be in our favor.

But at noon on May 27 newsboys were crying extras: "NRA decided unconstitutional!" The United States Supreme Court had so ruled.

The National Industrial Recovery Act, passed by Congress on June 13, 1933, had been designed "to remove obstructions to the free flow of interstate and foreign commerce ..., to induce and maintain united action of labor and management under adequate governmental ... supervisions, to eliminate unfair competitive practices, to promote the fullest possible utilization of the present productive capacity of industries, ... to increase the consumption of industrial and agricultural products by increasing purchasing power, to reduce and relieve unemployment, to improve standards of labor, and otherwise to rehabilitate industry ..."

Employers all over the country defied the NRA. They seized upon a loophole in Section 7-a, which did not clearly define the right of workers to belong to labor unions of their own choosing, and many of them fostered company unions.

Curiously enough, the big corporations avoided making a test case of this law. It remained for an obscure firm of poultry merchants in Brooklyn, New York, the Schecter family, to make that test. Whether the Schecter Company was used as a cat's paw or served the big fellows accidentally, is beside the point.

The Schecters were convicted of violating the Poultry Code. One count was that they had sold poultry without proper inspection; another that they had delivered an unfit dead chicken to a butcher. Carrying an appeal to the highest tribunal, they contended that they were not engaged in interstate commerce, and that accordingly this federal law could not be applied to them. The Supreme Court ruled that the attempt, through the Code, to fix wages and hours of the employees of the Schecters in their intra-state business was not a valid exercise of federal power; and that the Code system had been adopted pursuant to an unconstitutional delegation by Congress of legislative authority, which transgressed the doctrine of States' Rights.

One result of all this was that we in Seattle were caught out on a limb.

The time difference between Washington, D.C., and the West Coast is three hours. In the East the news that the NRA had been ruled void came in mid-afternoon. Employers there made no immediate move to change the status of their working forces. But in Seattle some of the manufacturers told their employees at lunch-time, within the hour after the news flash on the Supreme Court's action, that they would return at once to pre-NRA schedules — longer hours, with wages to remain as they were. And by the time the Wagner bill was introduced in Congress as a substitute for the Codes, local manufacturers were widely cutting wages and increasing hours.

Our general executive board, meeting in Philadelphia, assailed the demolition of the Industrial Recovery Act. President Dubinsky stamped it as “a great victory for big business and the reactionary forces of America,” and announced that he was asking the board to set aside \$250,000 for strikes in the cotton dress industry.

“The NRA is no more,” he said in a radio address. “There remains only one kind of protection, and one dependable force to which the workers can turn, and that is their organization, their trade union movement with its irresistible weapon of the strike! “

We prepared for a long siege in Seattle.

How could we settle the strike on our own? How could we contrive to meet, on an equitable basis, with the three employers who fronted the fight against us? They were a curious trio, each far apart from the other two, except for their present bond of sympathy — Nelly Dwyer, rolling her eyes and calling on Heaven to witness the goodness of her motives; Sharger, athletic, jovial, joking with the girls; Ted Rosenfeld, formerly operating necktie factories in New York and St. Louis, and forced out of those cities because of his opposition to unions. Complaining of this once to our pickets, he said: “Where am I to go next?” One of them snapped back: “Why not Puget Sound?”

Calling the membership together, I explained what the Supreme Court decision meant. Urging them to keep unbroken ranks, I promised that the International would never fail them.

Our strike was entering its fourth month, and the pickets needed a chance to relax. So I arranged to have each take a week's vacation, her regular strike benefit being paid. Some were released when they found employment elsewhere, but several married women, whose husbands were now making good wages, decided to remain on the picket-lines. I dispatched Violet Daniels, one of the Nelly Dwyer girls, to the Summer School for Workers in Berkeley, California, with the hope that this would lead to her becoming more active in the local. The others I managed to keep interested in our educational, social, and recreational activities.

Early in June, new and shady tactics were used in attempts to discredit our strike. One morning we arrived at the Nelly Dwyer shop to find many windows broken. We were told that a time bomb had been exploded inside. Then we heard that another bomb had been thrown through a window of the Rosenfeld plant, but had failed to explode. Later there was an “unsuccessful” bombing at the home of Mr. Carson, the Olympic president.

The Committee of 500 came out with more big ads, making no direct charges, but implying that all this was part of a “ruthless warfare” brought about by “radical agitators.”

We refused to be disturbed, pointing out to inquirers that in many strikes thugs hired as “guards” set off dynamite in the night to prove the necessity for their continued employment. Even the police were skeptical now and did not arrest a single suspect.

The local in Portland, 195 miles away, displayed keen interest in our doings. Occasionally Clifford Mayer and Manly Labby visited Seattle, and we in turn sent groups to Portland. During one such trip there, at a social gathering, I was told some woes by a member whom I had met only a few minutes before. “Sister Pesotta,” she said, “you simply can’t trust these Jews. Our chairman is one of them,” and she went on detailing his misdeeds. “I hope you are not a Jew!” she concluded.

“I certainly am!” I answered.

Red-faced, she tried to apologize. To put her at ease and to set her mind straight I gave her a short lecture. “Please don’t feel that you owe me any apology,” I said. “I understand your feeling, and it’s quite possible your chairman acted wrongly. But don’t think he did it because he is Jewish; that doesn’t always follow... Let me cite another instance — that of your former manager, Ernest Leonitti, who betrayed you.”

I reminded her of what he had done. A member of her local, Leonitti had served a year as its manager.

But at the last election he had been defeated by Clifford Mayer, and almost immediately accepted a job as personnel manager in one of the big factories. His first act in his new capacity was to change the system there from week-work to piece-work — a change the union had tried for months to prevent.

“You know,” I went on, “that Leonitti prides himself on being a good Catholic. Would you advise me, as a Jew, to say, that it was because he was a Catholic that he betrayed your cause?”

She mumbled something in answer and continued her apologies, promising never again to be so narrow in her viewpoint.

Though Rosenfeld Brothers, the necktie manufacturers, declined to hold any official conferences with us, Ted Rosenfeld, the firm’s secretary-treasurer, frequently talked with some of the strikers. They had been the first to walk out on a cold rainy

March day, and now in July they sunned themselves leisurely on the factory's green lawn as they picketed.

Once Rosenfeld asked: "How long are you going to keep this up? Don't you ever intend to return to work?" Whereupon one of the women answered: "Our International is rich. The union pays us every week, and it's going to pay us as long as you operate a scab shoe. So why should we worry? We'll leave all the worrying to you."

After fourteen weeks the heads of the firm apparently realized that they didn't belong with the cotton garment group, and were helping fight other people's battles. In a heart-to-heart talk with Ted Rosenfeld, we convinced him that it was time he did something for himself.

He agreed to sign a contract, on one condition — that the two copies of it be placed in escrow. This meant turning these over to a third party, trusted by both sides, who would put them in a safe deposit vault. I was satisfied that no matter where the contract might be, there was no danger of the old conditions being re-established in the Rosenfeld factory; for after four months of education on the picketline, our strikers knew their business.

So the agreement was signed, and the strike declared off. Most of our demands had been granted. With one conflict cleared, we strained anew to settle the other two strikes. We were sure that Nelly Dwyer and Sharger were thoroughly sick of the fight. Likely they would have signed with us then if they had not been "hog-tied" by their connection with the Associated Industries and the National Cotton Dress Manufacturers' Association.

Meanwhile the season drew to an end. Most of the dress shops already had closed for the summer, and these two also ceased operations.

Now my troubles were intensified. Worried strikers were fearful that they would never get jobs again at their trade. Whispers were spread around town that the strike bound firms would settle if the union leaders were local instead of outsiders.

I realized that my presence no longer had any value, and explained the situation in letters to my home office and Pacific Coast Director Feinberg, who agreed it might be well for me to retire from the scene. Accordingly I went on a vacation late in June, boarding the S. S. Ruth Alexander for San Francisco and Los Angeles. En route I spent a stimulating day at the Summer School for Workers in Berkeley, where several of our union members, from the four large West Coast cities, were in attendance. Among these, beside Violet Daniels, were ever-young Helen Richter and Julia Huselton from Los Angeles.

Concerts in the Hollywood Bowl helped me forget the turmoil I had recently been through. And on one unforgettable day I witnessed the dedication of the Sigman-Schlesinger memorial library at the Los Angeles Tuberculosis Sanitarium at Duarte, in the foothills of the Sierra Madre range. This had been erected in

memory of two late presidents of the International, Morris Sigman and Benjamin Schlesinger. Refreshed and sun-tanned, I returned to Seattle after three weeks' absence, and found that Dorothy Enright and Harold Hibbard had carried out instructions to the letter. I went at once to greet the pickets at both factories.

Nelly Dwyer now appeared in a mood to settle, and we submitted a tentative agreement to her. She objected to parts of it, saying she preferred to write her own contract. We felt that she was simply stalling for more time.

As days passed with nothing achieved, and no end to the whispering campaign, I saw it was time for me to make a final exit. The employers would then have no legitimate excuse for not settling with the union. So on August 1, I bade my friends and co-workers goodbye and departed for the East. Local affairs were left in the hands of Rosenberg and Glazer, Dorothy, and Harold. Feinberg had promised to make periodic trips to Seattle and do all he could to facilitate a settlement.

My last evening in Seattle was spent at a Central Labor Council meeting, where tributes and farewells were exchanged. I contended that while we had not won our strike, neither had we lost it. The local dress manufacturers would long remember our picketing, I maintained, and they'd never want another walkout. After I left, the strike gradually petered out, and the women and girls on the picket-lines drifted back into the shops... But they were no longer meek. They had learned to speak out against injustice and stand up for their rights. Six years later Local 184 acquired new strength, reasserted itself, and won a two-year collective agreement with the Pacific Northwest Association of Needlecraft Manufacturers, which contained almost all the provisions we asked for in 1935. This agreement was signed by practically all the men who escorted the scabs into the Olympic plant on that memorable morning. By that time, however, the Olympic company was out of business.

## Chapter 17. Travail in Atlantic City

Atlantic City was surcharged with expectation of strife when I arrived on October 11. Most of the other members of our General Executive Board were there for its quarterly meeting, and we discussed what was brewing.

The affairs of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, however important to us, would be overshadowed by a larger issue coming up at the American Federation of Labor convention — the question of organizing mass-production workers into industrial unions. This had caused a six-day battle at the Federation's 1934 convention in San Francisco. A compromise had sidetracked the issue for a year. Now, in 1935, it was coming up again, and would have to be faced.

Hot debate also was looked for on a resolution to form a Labor Party. The progressive delegates sponsoring it chose Francis J. Gorman, vice-president of the United Textile Workers, as spokesman. Immediately he began preparing his speech. Short statured, Gorman had an air of self-importance, perhaps a hang-over from the build-up he got in the press when he led the ill-prepared 1934 textile workers' strike.

The British Trade Union Congress had sent two fraternal delegates — Andrew Conley, national secretary of the Tailors and Garment Workers' Union and Andrew Naesmith, who held the same office in the Amalgamated Weavers' Association. With them was a guest, Anne Loughlin, a general organizer for Conley's organization. She had made a stirring extemporaneous address the day before my arrival, and my fellow board members were still talking about it.

Introduced to Miss Loughlin, I invited her to tea next afternoon. Lingering on the Hotel Chelsea veranda, I got illuminating information about Great Britain's labor situation, and economic, political, and social conditions there.

It was stimulating to listen to this woman. Splendidly alive and energetic about 5 feet 3, and in her early forties, she had sparkling blue eyes, and a lovely complexion, and was unmistakably British. One could have no doubt about her great devotion to the cause which she served, nor of her love for her country. To her the labor movement was a means to an end, and not an end in itself. It must gain for the wage-earners a better life, both physically and spiritually.

Anne Loughlin's father was a shop steward in the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union. As a young girl she went to work on "raincoats and heavy lines" in Leeds, Yorkshire, chief clothing center in the United Kingdom. In 1916 she was appointed

as “temporary” war-time organizer for the Tailors’ and Garment Workers’ Union, and had held that job ever since. The TGWU had 80,000 members, of whom 60,000 were women. Miss Loughlin was a member of the executive board of the British Trade Union Congress. King George V, at a special ceremony that year, had made her an Officer of The British Empire — a title formerly given only to members of high society — thus making her the first woman in the labor movement to receive this coveted honor.

As a field organizer Miss Loughlin had had much the same trouble, when organizing new areas, as we in the United States. Employers in her industry used to run out of town when the union began an organization drive. But in 1920 the TGWU devised a scheme to keep the employers bound by a national agreement specifying wages and hours for all sections of the country, and the industry became more stabilized. Union agreements were signed for 12 months, and then could be renewed through negotiations. I asked Miss Loughlin what impressed her most at the A F of L convention.

“The great waste of time in useless detail,” she said. “We manage to avoid that in the British Trade Union Congress.”

More than six weeks ahead of conventions, she told me, the executive council proposed a tentative agenda and local unions were asked to send in their resolutions and proposals. Resolutions on a given subject were woven into a composite resolution by a special committee and offered to the conclave with a definite recommendation.

In April, 1944, Anne Loughlin was one of the British Labor advisors to the historic International Labor Organization conference in Philadelphia. Thus we met again. Her hair now silvery gray, the shadows of more than four years of war had left an indelible mark on her vivacious face, but she constantly radiated energy.

Afterward she came to my home in New York for dinner, with Miss Florence Hancock, of the General Workers’ Union, also a titled Officer of the British Empire. Several friends who joined us got an intimate picture of life in war-time England. Before leaving England, Miss Hancock had asked a young nephew what he would like her to bring him from the United States. He wanted just one thing: a banana. English children, who loved bananas, had had none for three years.

In June, 1943, King George VI knighted Anne Loughlin, giving her the title of Dame Anne. Again she was the first woman in labor’s ranks to be given a royal honor. When one of my other guests asked her: “Were you thrilled when you received that title?” her reply was characteristic: “No, but I was thrilled when they elected me chairman of the British Trade Union Congress.”

Akin to our American Federation of Labor, the BTUC has a chairman who is elected for one year at the annual convention, instead of a president.

The first woman elected to that office, Anne Loughlin headed the British Trade Union Congress through 1943. In that capacity she presided over its sessions, led delegations to the Prime Minister, and adjusted serious problems submitted by its affiliated trade unions.

On October 15 (1935) John L. Lewis, lion-headed head of the United Mine Workers, electrified the convention by introducing two resolutions. One provided that “no officer of the A F of L shall act as an officer of the National Civic Federation or be a member thereof.” The other was to bar the American Federationist, the A F of L official organ, from accepting advertisements from any concern which did not recognize and practice collective bargaining with its workers.

The first demand put Matthew Woll, vice-president of the A F of L, on the defensive. He made no fight against it, and did not explain why he was serving as acting president of the National Civic Federation, an organization largely composed of anti-union business men.

In that office, Woll had got into the newspapers by repeated attacks on the “reds.” ... Before the day ended, he resigned from the Civic Federation.

Lewis’s second resolution struck at the A F of L executive council’s practice of selling advertising space in its monthly magazine to U.S. Steel, certain anti-union textile firms, General Motors, and other implacable enemies of organized labor. The delegates passed it unanimously.

Then the convention began its momentous debate on the issue of industrial versus craft unionism. Charles P. Howard, president of the International Typographical Union, read, as a member of the resolutions committee, a minority report favoring the industrial form.

The case for the mass-production workers was championed by spokesmen for the miners and for the garment, textile, typographical, and other workers. Lewis, Philip Murray, and Van A. Bittner represented the United Mine Workers of America, which claimed a membership of 600,000, but which paid per capita dues to the A F of L for only 400,000 miners, so that it had precisely 4,000 votes in the convention. My own opinion was that it was doing well if it actually had 300,000 dues-paying members, with most of the union miners working only part time in the depression years.

Lewis had a pressing reason for his concern with the unskilled in the basic industries. The coal miners, who had always had the industrial form of organization, were confronted by a critical problem. Through the lean years since the war, with countless mines shut down, large numbers of coal diggers naturally had drifted into other fields, especially steel, automotive, rubber, metal mining, cement, radio, oil, and lumber — industries with either no unions or company unions.

By establishing company unions, often through the use of industrial under-cover men known as “diplomats,” many employers had been able to circumvent New Deal



laws aimed to safeguard labor. The company unions also were organized along industrial lines, each taking in all those employed in a given plant. When workers in these set-ups attempted in the NRA period to form legitimate labor unions, and sought entry into the A F of L, they bumped their heads against so many craft unions that they became confused and often disgusted. Furthermore, the mass-production companies could bring in tens of thousands of farm hands and other unskilled workers, largely young people, to replace those demanding better conditions. So job tenure was always uncertain.

Wrought up, workers in steel, auto, rubber, and other basic industries who had been coal miners came back to their old union for help. The delegates who spoke in their behalf at the A F of L convention demanded a clear-cut decision. They wanted the unskilled and mass-production workers to be able to organize along industrial lines without interference by the craft unions. No longer could the issue be sidetracked.

Others also insisted on a hearing younger men, born in a period when mass-production had spread boundlessly beyond the reach of skilled craftsmanship; when machines could turn out vastly more and better products than men's hands, the streamlined belt conveyor making human skill only an incidental part of the production process.

On the platform of the convention hall, above which was emblazoned the A F of L watch-word, *Labor Omnia Vincit*, *Labor Conquers All*, a poignant cry was uttered, echoed, and amplified — a cry sent up for years in the wilderness by humans who followed a will-o'-the-wisp, a cry sounded by the IWW in lumber and construction camps, by lean men on the water-fronts, by sweating furnace workers in the steel mills. It was the old plea of millions of unskilled and semi-skilled toilers who for decades had clamored for admission into the house of labor only to find the door slammed in their faces because they were considered “trash”, — working in basic industries, they could not be properly classified into the existing “legitimate” unions of horse-and-buggy days.

Heads of craft internationals likewise spoke, heatedly, as they resisted the assault upon their supremacy. George F. Baer, Pennsylvania coal magnate, had declared that the coal barons held the destiny of labor in their hands by “divine right.” Likewise the dictators of these internationals defended their “right to keep and to hold whatever comes under their constitutional jurisdiction.”

Various “federal locals,” born since the NRA, were represented at the convention, their delegates having in the aggregate the smallest number of votes. I thought of the millions of workers, and potential members, they represented of industries that were consistently kept outside, and their votes: auto, 86 votes; cement, 7; aluminum, 1; rubber, 28; radio, refrigeration, and television, 75; steel, 86; lumber, with no representation — and I felt a pang in my heart.

Their cause was championed by spokesmen for the United Mine Workers, to which, according to Van A. Bittner, "even haircutters in the coal towns belonged." Some of these new unionists mounted the platform. One of them was 26-year-old James B. Carey of Federal Local 19774, Chicago, having a lone vote. Carey looked like a high school boy who had just donned long pants, but he spoke too seriously for some of the delegates, whose big cigars in the corners of their mouths and large diamond rings on their fingers did not bespeak any deep wisdom as they sneered at speeches like his.

Sitting with our delegation, I had opportunity to observe the gathering dispassionately. It was easy to tell from their facial expressions who were vitally concerned with the problem before the assemblage and who were indifferent or hostile.

Some of them, "born to be delegates," and attending a convention for perhaps the 55<sup>th</sup> consecutive time, were a tradition. To be seen there was enough for them: Some were elected year after year by their membership as recognition of services at home. Most were top officials heading the delegations from their organizations. Only a few delegates had the definite aim of accomplishing something concrete for the rank-and-file, the unskilled, the unorganized.

Certain delegates represented paper unions, or only themselves, rather than a membership like the spokesman for the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, which had lost a strike at Carnegie Steel in 1892, and two others in 1901 and 1909, and had never made another organizing attempt. Its delegate, a timid looking individual, didn't strike me as one who could induce a modern industrial worker to join his union. Controversial issues were numerous, and naturally were decided by roll-call vote, so these delegates could not leave the hall as frequently as usual. Some were irritated at being thus penalized, for they would have preferred a good time. They came to life only when the election of officers took place.

Julius Hochman of the ILGWU delegation read a report describing how the industrial spy racket had fastened its claws upon virtually every industry in the country, and urging the convention to take steps to counteract this menace to all unionization efforts.

Close by our table sat the aged president of the International Seamen's Union, Andrew Furuseth, who seemed an anachronism here. A tired old man, a bundle of dry bones covered with parchment-like skin, his long legs were stretched out on the next chair, his hands lay lifeless on his lap. Often his eyes were closed, but his jaws kept moving, as if he were chewing his own gums.

Once a hardy warrior who had fought a brave fight for the men of the merchant marine, he had taken up the cudgels for industrial unionism at the A F of L convention in San Francisco a year earlier. Now he appeared all through.

In his speech at the 1934 convention he had declared that “it is not the work that one does in one hour or another that counts here; it is the work that accomplishes a specific purpose ... New things will come into the world ... men will have to learn how to make them.”

He roused himself twice in Atlantic City, speaking at some length — on the question of anti-labor injunctions, when the report of the Committee on State Organizations was being considered, and on the matter of governmental subsidies to ship owners.

“Our anti-injunction bill, as it is piously called,” he averred, in a dry, crackling voice, “is an authorization and instruction to the courts to issue injunctions. The American Federation of Labor has evidently given up the fight on the question of injunctions.” He assailed the paying of \$30,000,000 a year in government ship subsidies as a racket enjoyed by vessel owners, while the ships ran by breaking all the laws covering inspection service and safety.

Looking at Furuseth as he was, old and tired, it seemed incredible that he was the person who had won for the seafarers their protective legislation. I could think of the many such old and sick labor leaders, who in their zeal and devotion to the cause never took cognizance of the fact that some day they might be too decrepit to render any useful service and would become a burden to themselves and a liability to the movement. During recent years, however, many a labor organization, including my own International, has established insurance and retirement funds for their officers, and plans are to continue along this line. If the government does not develop a cradle-to-the-grave formula the unions will at least provide for those who are no longer able to carry on, so they will not be thrown on the scrap heap.

Andrew Furuseth died at the age of 83 in 1938 in Washington, where he had spent many years in the interests of the seamen. His body lay in state in the Labor Department Auditorium. Senator Bob LaFollette the younger delivered a eulogy at his funeral and Andy’s ashes were scattered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

Saturday, the closing day, brought a climax.

Delegate Thompson of Rubber Workers Union 18321 spoke on a resolution demanding jurisdiction over all rubber workers through the granting of an international charter. Those he represented, he declared, flatly refused to let themselves or their fellow-workers be scattered among the craft unions. A barrage of points of order and questions tended to confuse this inexperienced delegate. Then came the now famous verbal and physical encounter between William Hutcheson, carpenters’ leader, and his friend, John L. Lewis. Lewis was acclaimed the hero of the day, but actually the credit for that victory should go to the United Mine Workers’ delegation as a whole.

The popular story is that John L. Lewis struck Hutcheson. Maybe he did — but there is more to the story than that. I was one of the many eye-witnesses to the fast-moving melee.

As the commotion started, I hastened toward that part of the hall, as I was used to doing when there was a clash on our picket lines. Distinctly I saw one of the miners land a heavy wallop on Hutcheson's jaw when he grabbed Lewis by the collar. A free-for-all ensued, a table being overturned with several delegates under it. When the contestants were finally untangled Lewis was standing defiant, hair disheveled, his collar torn from his shirt — while Hutcheson was nursing a badly swollen face.

Lewis emerged from the convention the reputed savior of labor. To me he was nothing of the kind. Looking at him realistically, I saw the man as a consistent conservative Republican, who might at any time support the Democrats if it meant gain for his organization or fame for himself. I could not accept his vocal concern for the mass-production workers as altruistic; the economic condition of the miners' union was an ample motive for his demand for the broad spreading of industrial unionism.

He was particularly interested in organizing steel to liberate and unionize the so-called "captive" mines, owned by the steel magnates and dominated by company unions. The United States Steel Corporation owned more than 100,000 acres of coal lands in Kentucky and West Virginia, and United States Steel and Coke also had large coal holdings. Miners going to union meetings often had to walk nine miles before they were clear of company ground. Captive mines spelled unequal competition for owners and unionized mines, and they clamored for the UMW chiefs to line up the others and establish union conditions in them. The Miners' Policy Committee must have discussed this problem time after time and demanded that the UMW leaders bring pressure on the A F of L to work out a solution.

Lewis was upholding the progressive side in Atlantic City and the Communists were chanting hosannas to his name, but I recalled that in his own union he was supreme dictator, Communists being barred from membership, and that those who disagreed with John L. were expelled and had to shift elsewhere. The Lewis dynasty had long demanded unqualified obedience.

Yet I noted curiously that Lewis was now flirting behind his shaggy brows with John Brophy and Powers Hapgood, hitherto anathema to him. As members of the miners' union they had challenged his policies, even daring to oppose his reelection at UMW conventions.

Despite the fistcuffs, I felt that John L. was much closer to reactionary Hutcheson, both being members of the Republican party, than to the radical wing in the labor movement.

One incident at the closing session on Saturday afternoon was a classic.

A resolution not to form a Labor Party was read. Delegate Francis J. Gorman of the United Textile Workers mounted the platform.

His secretary distributed mimeographed copies of his prepared address at the press table, which was close to ours. I borrowed a copy from a reporter eleven pages, single-spaced, on legal size paper. "He's crazy," I remarked. "They'll never sit through this."

Gorman read for a few minutes in a monotonous voice, to a rapidly dwindling audience. Then Delegate Anderson of the plumbers stood up.

"Mr. Chairman, a question of privilege. Don't you think it would be the right thing for the gentleman to turn over his report to the secretary and have it become a part of the record of this convention? The time is getting late and he is just reciting something we can all read at home."

President Green: "Delegate Gorman has the floor. He has a paper here that he has submitted to the convention, and of course he has the right to submit it unless the convention desires otherwise."

Delegate Anderson: "Then I move' Mr. Chairman, that Delegate Gorman submit his paper to the secretary and that it become a part of the record instead of taking up the time of the convention."

Another delegate pointed out that many chairs already were empty, and that the delegates wanted to leave so they could get back to their jobs Monday morning.

In the face of the prevailing sentiment, Gorman had no alternative but to hand in his address for the record.

Thus another expected "hot" debate came to naught. The vote on the Labor Party resolution again proved that the old political alignments stood firm, the champions of industrial unionism voting regular, with either the Republican or Democratic bloc, and against forming a labor party.

I doubt whether Delegate Anderson or any of the others ever found time to read Gorman's speech. Any one interested can find it, set in fine type, on pages 762-773 of the report of the 1935 A F of L proceedings. Whatever merits it may have had were lost.

Throughout the sessions I noticed that whenever some important question was up the steam-roller managed somehow to squash it; by reporting it too early, when those who wished to press the issue were either absent or not prepared, or by leaving it till the last day, when most of the delegates, after two strenuous weeks, were sitting on their suitcases.

As soon as the convention adjourned, the delegates who had drawn up the minority report on industrial unionism met and decided to form a committee to aid the mass-production workers in self-organization and to promote the cause of industrial democracy. Prominent among this group of trail-breakers, beside John L. Lewis, were the presidents of other outstanding internationals: David Dubinsky,

our president; Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, Charles P. Howard of the Typographical Union, H. C. Fremming of the Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers, Thomas F. McMahon of the United Textile Workers, Max Zaritzky of the Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers, and Paul M. Peterson of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers.

The new Committee for Industrial Organization had been formed, it stated publicly, "to encourage and promote the organization of the unorganized workers in mass production and other industries upon an industrial basis. Its aim is to foster recognition and acceptance of collective bargaining in such basic industries; to counsel and advise unorganized and newly organized groups of workers; to bring them under the banner of and in affiliation with the American Federation of Labor as industrial organizations."

At once the committee began active work, serving as a clearing house for information and advice, and sending organizers to work with various groups that sought organization. A public action subcommittee of national scope was established. Tens of thousands of workers in the basic industries swarmed into the industrial unions now being set up. Many who had pleaded for such organization volunteered their services, and hundreds of labor organizers already on the payrolls of old unions caught the fever and asked their officers to place them at the disposal of the new movement.

While this far-reaching enrollment of workers in unions of their own choosing proceeded, the national committee which guided it knew it was vital also to bring the major industries under union contracts. Opportunity, and the acid test for the committee, came in a few months with a sit-down of workers in the gigantic Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company plant in Akron, Ohio.

## Chapter 18. Milwaukee and Buffalo are Different

Somewhere in the Talmud there is an ancient Hebrew saying: The soldiers fight, the kings are heroes. It comes to mind as I review the rise of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

To write a truly comprehensive history of the ILGWU and get at the real source of our organization's phenomenal strength, the historian would have to visit many an odd corner of these United States in search of original data. Behind its growth in the face of political and economic vicissitudes there would be revealed a legion of men and women unheralded and unsung, rank-and-file people with natural ingenuity, strong working-class loyalty, readiness to sacrifice for an ideal, and all-around unselfishness.

The top leadership gets public recognition for the success of the International, but few outside the union know how much credit is due to members whose names rarely if ever see the light of print.

Martha Hart of Milwaukee was such a member..

Early in 1934 some cotton dress workers in that city decided that they must organize the local shops in their industry for self-protection. They were working long hours, for less than a living wage. Martha, a girl with no knowledge of union technique, made the first contacts with potential members of the projected union. She began at the plant of the Rhea Manufacturing Company, one of the largest cotton dress houses in the Mid-West, which normally employed from 1,000 to 1,200 women and girls.

To approach these workers was difficult because of their fear of being discharged. But Martha, who came of French Revolutionary stock, had determination and imagination.

A new brand of pudding advertised in the newspapers gave her a happy inspiration. She clipped out one of the ads, pasted it on a piece of cardboard, and bought a couple of packages of the pudding, bright-colored and eye-appealing. Walking into the Rhea factory at lunch-time, she spoke to an elderly woman who sat eating at one of the machines.

"I have a gift for you," Martha said. "I represent the Miracle Confection Company. To get new customers, we are giving away free samples of this new and delicious

pudding. What flavor would you like? Strawberry, peach, pineapple, vanilla, chocolate, or what? Let me have your name and address and a package will be mailed to you.”

Women and girls crowded around her. Before she left she had more than a hundred addresses. On succeeding days she got the rest, and repeated the trick at the other factories. Then a request to the ILGWU brought in a squad of organizers, headed by Abraham Plotkin, the International’s general organizer in Chicago, and an intensive educational campaign was begun. One of our most competent men, Plotkin has a wholesome sense of humor and is eloquent both with his pen and on the platform.

Each of the workers was invited by letter to the union’s first organizational meeting. When they caught sight of Martha Hart their faces first registered astonishment, then amusement.

“So this is our pudding?” one of them asked.

“Yes,” Martha answered, “and the more you have of it the better you’ll like it.”

Under Plotkin’s guidance, a new local, No. 188, was chartered, and within a year it had more than 1,000 members, with Martha as secretary-treasurer.

As a labor organizer I have learned that one must be ready at all times to go any place, day or night, in bitter cold, snow, rain, or scorching sun. In the course of my work, I became geared to pick myself up at a moment’s notice to take train or plane, or drive my car, to serve in an emergency, and invariably I got to the trouble scene on time.

More often than not, after speeding somewhere to save a bad situation, organizers are forgotten, while the local leadership reaps the laurels. But I have usually enjoyed pinch-hitting for fellow workers in the field, and felt that I was doing it for the welfare of the greater number involved.

In Ecclesiastes is the proverb: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” There is, however, another version which I seem to have known since early childhood: “Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days it will return to thee a hundredfold “

My father believed in that principle, gave of himself freely in service to friends and strangers alike, and found innate satisfaction in the doing. Memory of his attitude toward humankind was a sustaining force for me in my years afield. And the proverb justified itself. Organization campaigns and strikes in one city or another took great toll of nervous energy, and frequently left me empty and shaken. Yet replenishment and reward came in appreciation shown by countless fellow-unionists, and in a host of enduring friendships across the land, and beyond its boundaries.

One of my emergency assignments was to Milwaukee. I was asked by our president to go there quickly soon after my return East from Seattle in the fall of 1985.



A sharp struggle involving the Rhea plant had taken place in the Wisconsin city in the previous September. After a 24-day strike, Local 188 had won an agreement with that company, including most of the standard provisions and a seven-and-a-half per cent wage increase. But the management had not thought it necessary to live up to this, and continued to violate several clauses. So our union submitted demands for an additional 10 per cent wage increase, and for arbitration of 16 separate grievances, in line with the agreement.

With arbitration soon to begin, Salvatore Ninfo, jovial, gray-haired International vice-president, had suddenly become ill, and I was asked to take over in his place.

When I reached Milwaukee, Martha Hart and Kate Fadness, Rhea shop steward, took me to Ninfo's apartment. He was in bed with a three days' growth of beard, and looked haggard. I guessed correctly, however, that his illness was not physical; he simply was disheartened.

For weeks Ninfo had spent most of his time at the Rhea plant trying to adjust union complaints. The management's policy was to humiliate him at every turn. Repeatedly he was made to wait in the outer office, like a soliciting salesman, to demonstrate to the employees that a union representative was a nobody.

"It's important for you to shave," I told him. "I saw Abe Plotkin last night in Chicago, and he's coming to the meeting this afternoon. You'd better come, too... I'll guarantee to bring you back alive."

By 6 p.m. Miller's Hall was packed with dressmakers. I studied their faces — the faces of hard-working people, German, Polish, Italian, French, and some of Scandinavian, Irish and English ancestry. They were unfailingly attentive and aware, I was sure, of events of social significance, the kind of folk one would expect to find in a city with a Socialist mayor and a long working-class tradition. Under Mayor Daniel W. Hoan, Milwaukee's workers enjoyed the protection of the Bill of Rights. Police were prohibited from acting as strikebreakers, the co-operative movement flourished, and municipal markets helped keep down living costs. But the administration lacked the power to make garment manufacturers pay adequate wages.

The meeting having been opened by the local president, a slim young girl with an olive complexion began reading the minutes. I was struck by the quality of her voice, a deep agreeable contralto. Where had I heard those tones before? I closed my eyes and searched my memory. The answer came like a flash across a movie screen: Eleanora Duse! I had listened spell-bound to the Italian dramatic actress at the time of her American tour in the early Twenties which ended abruptly with her death. The girl's voice sounded almost like hers; I must talk with her after the meeting.

While Plotkin was speaking Ninfo entered the hall, a salvo of applause greeting him. Touched almost to tears by this warm reception, he found it difficult to express

his appreciation. The sympathetic attitude of the union membership made him well again.

The arbitration hearing was set for September 25, with Dr. Arthur Rubin of the University of Chicago as arbitrator. I had met him on the West Coast when he was there in the interests of the Cloak and Suit Code.

While Ninfo was busy preparing a brief of the union's case, we took steps to reinforce the Rhea workers. At my suggestion Mary Sortino, the girl whose voice so impressed me, was added to our office force. Mary and her sister were special machine operators in the Rhea plant. She was willing to take the job, but we had to reckon with her family. The mother, a deeply religious Italian, fearing something might happen to Mary if she stayed out late, objected vociferously. We gave her a solemn promise that only on meeting nights would she need to stay.

The educational department, directed by Moiree Compere, announced its fall program, including the publication of a monthly mimeographed periodical, *The Emancipator*, which was the special concern of Ninfo. We applied to the WPA Training School in Madison, of which Tom Tippet was head, for the services of teachers for ILGWU classes in both Milwaukee and Racine. The plea was granted and our educational work in both cities proceeded with vim.

On a visit to Racine, a city of 68,000, some 30 miles south of Milwaukee, I found that our rainwear local needed encouragement and stimulus. Its meetings were conducted in the manner of an old fashioned lodge, the members sitting silent around the walls, not participating. Called upon to speak, I asked them to come forward and occupy front seats.

"You're not wall flowers," I told them. "I know that, because I've heard a lot about the splendid courage and aggressiveness you displayed in your victorious strike against the Chicago Rubber Company."

I recalled the admiration and respect with which Morris Bialis told our GEB about the women in that strike, who lay down on a railroad track in front of a freight train at the factory gates and dared the union engineer to run over them.

The dramatic reminder pleased them and added warmth to the gathering. I had the audience join with me in the singing of some of our union songs and the evening ended pleasantly.

It was agreed that the recording secretary would supply material for *The Emancipator*, which would devote a full page to Racine news. We also arranged to have someone present at their meetings, to help them revitalize their local activities.

With the first issue of *The Emancipator* just off the mimeograph, still wet with ink, it was taken to the factories for distribution. Kate Fadness and I went to the Rhea plant at noon. Rashman, the company's production manager, asked Kate for a copy. She introduced me to him, and I asked whether he had time to talk with me.

He invited me into his office, but immediately went out again. After waiting ten minutes I left a note saying that I could be reached at our union office, and if he was interested, he could phone for an appointment. He needed that lesson, telephoned later, and then we talked at length. We, of course, could not settle the local grievances which were now in the hands of the arbitration board, but our conference smoothed out some differences.

Mr. Rashman explained that prior to this he had never been confronted with a labor problem. Marketing, styles, and production comprised his job. Evidently he realized that the union was there to stay, and was beginning to take cognizance of the fact that the labor problem also was an important factor in the production of cotton dresses, and I gently suggested that he pay a bit more attention to the well-being of his working force.

Departing I said: "Mr. Rashman, I would advise you to take our union seriously. The President of the United States does."

When I visited the Rhea factory again, the newly appointed efficiency engineer explained to me the new "progressive system" to which the employees were being subjected. A battery of eight machines was given a task. Eight operators at those machines had to turn out at least 25 dozen garments per day — 300 cotton dresses! The price rates were based on the unit system, and figured out about 14 cents per worker per dozen, or a little more than a penny per garment.

The method was simple: A bundle of cut garments was given to a group of eight. One worker seamed together the shoulders, passing the material to the next, who made the collar; a third put in the sleeves and so on until it reached the eighth operator. She finished the job, by blind-stitching the bottom of the garment, which then went to the presser, inspector, and shipping department. The speed of each worker had to be geared to the machine and to the next operation, which was regulated by the engineer's stop watch, and other gadgets, to make 3,400 to 4,000 revolutions per hour, which nettled the workers, keeping them at a constant high tension.

That system, the efficiency engineer explained to me, was in operation in about 30 plants, and had proved satisfactory to the managements.

Human movements could be made to correspond with the operations of the machines, with no waste of machine capacity, so as to produce the exact amount of work required by the company.

"What about rest and relaxation?" I inquired.

"Oh yes, a worker is allowed 3 5 per cent of rest in each eight hours. Do you know what 35 per cent rest means?"

I confessed my ignorance, so he explained that it amounted to about two and a half hours' rest per day. "Does that mean," I asked, with seeming ignorance, "that

an operator has 15 minutes of rest every two hours, to walk through the factory and get a breath of fresh air?”

“No, no, not that,” the expert hastened to explain. “Thirty-five per cent rest means, when a girl wants to stretch out during work hours near her machine, or relax when she gets tired — that is calculated as rest.” I was not satisfied with that system. As a machine operator myself, I contended it was better to work and take a rest when there was need for it. Moreover, as a human being, I refused to be geared to a machine like a robot; for the benefit of all concerned, I felt that the best way to make it easier for the workers to produce more was to determine the causes of industrial fatigue and eliminate them at the source, give the employees the kind of work they liked best and pay adequately. This would give the worker an incentive to work with enthusiasm and produce more like a human being than a beast of burden.

After a two-day hearing the arbitration board made certain constructive recommendations for better relations between the union and the company. It also recommended to the company ways to eliminate any misunderstanding in the future by having a union representative present when timing for piece rates took place, and advised it to refrain from any attempts to form a company union.

At a final dinner in Ninfo’s apartment we spoke about the manifold duties in which an out-of-town union representative becomes involved.

Ninfo, who had been manager of the Italian Cloak Local 48, and a vice president of the ILGWU for many years, admitted to me that he never had such headaches as in Milwaukee, because in New York in most cases complaints were first handled by his business agents; when they failed, Ninfo himself would phone the firm, and if that, too, was unavailing the case went through the regular channels.

“What are the ‘regular channels’ in New York?” Martha Hart wanted to know.

The case would be referred to the general manager, who would invariably pass it on to the industry’s impartial chairman.

But out of town he now learned one had to be all in one — business agent, general manager, organizer, lawyer, public relations director, family consultant, health adviser, with no limit to one’s working hours or physical energies.

“In New York it is all so very simple,” Ninfo sighed nostalgically “Before I came here, when I used to read some of the reports in Justice telling about conditions the organizers found in the field I thought they were balmy. Now I know.”

As we wound up the last phases of the arbitration in Milwaukee, I got ready to leave for the A F of L convention in Atlantic City. From there I was to go to Buffalo, where the time was ripe for an aggressive campaign, according to Vice-President Elias Reisberg, director of our cotton garment and miscellaneous division. He had lately surveyed that scene, interviewing some prospective assistants.

To me Buffalo was known principally as New York State's chief open-shop center, and as the American gateway to that glorious natural wonder, Niagara Falls, romantic lure for honeymooning couples.

Upon my arrival I found that Reisberg had practically promised jobs to two individuals, but neither was willing to work with the other. At the YWCA Industrial Division, Ethlyn Christensen and Patty Ellis gave me the low-down on organizing problems in that city.

Aware of the drawbacks but undaunted, and with the aid of Gertrude Stanley, a friendly social worker, I set up an office with all the paraphernalia and began the usual issuance of colorful literature and a magazine *What Now?* in Polish and English, which, in addition to general news about the industry, carried a special feature, *The Adventures of Stella and Helen*, a series of lively talks between two shop workers, comparing conditions in union and nonunion shops.

Ernest Bauman, whom I engaged at the suggestion of Reisberg, came in to assist me. We bought radio time, broadcasting Friday evenings in both languages. Bauman took over the English end. Briefly we would comment on the weekly labor news, with union songs at the beginning and end of the program. Our Polish listeners being Roman Catholics, we quoted Pope Leo XIII's encyclical in favor of unions.

Presently a young Polish organizer from Chicago was recommended for the job. Attractive and energetic, Marianne Alfons, who knew the hardships of factory toil from her own family's experiences, at once took over the Polish phase of the work, and began to make visits to her co-religionists.

But although during these visits we learned much about their difficulties — the forced kick-back of part of the paltry \$13, the legal minimum wage in the cotton garment shops; punching of one's time card by some other employee so that hours worked were only partly registered, the women we talked with hoped that their boss or forelady would get a lesson, "but I couldn't afford to get mixed up in it" ... "I'd hate to go back on relief." ... "My family depends upon my earnings." ... "This might cost me my job."

Their fear was based on what had happened to some of their more outspoken friends, who early in 1934 tried to establish a union in the cotton dress factories in Buffalo. These were gradually eased out of their jobs and never again could get work in their trade. This threat hung over the heads of young girls who had recently begun to earn a living, and over mothers of large families, whose earnings kept the home pots boiling.

Yet at times I became impatient with others among the Buffalo dressmakers for what struck me as complacency rather than fear. One Friday I encountered an odd manifestation of their attitude. After our weekly had been distributed in front of the Barmon Brothers factory I boarded a street car with a group of women who

were reading the latest issue of *What Now?* with evident relish. So I asked whether they liked it.

“Oh, yes, very much.” They wouldn’t want to miss an installment of *The Adventures of Stella and Helen* I asked whether they listened to our broadcast. They did, and their fathers enjoyed our summary of labor news, while they liked the songs.

Their enthusiasm heartened me. I felt that I had struck a bonanza in the form of good union material. “When are you coming to our office to sign up with the union?” They looked at me in astonishment. Of course, they admitted, things were better with our union in town; the boss had stopped chiseling on their pay, and the forelady was much nicer now. But it never occurred to them that just because they enjoyed our literature and listened to our radio programs they ought to join the union. They listened to many radio programs, but none of them bought Chase & Sanborn coffee, nor smoked Chesterfield cigarettes, nor used Sweetheart soap, or Pepsodent toothpaste, though some did buy Jello because it “took no time to make.” Buffalo is a nasty town in wintertime, the rain and snow keeping people indoors much of the time. In that winter at least, the snow remained on the streets in dirty mounds until the spring thaw.

It was memorable, too, as the only city where I ever witnessed card-playing en masse. Parties were staged by Polish social, religious, fraternal, and labor organizations. Each group of players held a bridge-table size square of card-board on their laps. At the end of the game the winner remained seated and the other three moved on to the next square. Prizes were given to those who won most of the games in two hours of playing. Entertainment and dancing followed.

After attending several such affairs, I purchased cardboard squares and some decks of cards, and in a leaflet announced an “open house” card party, with refreshments served free to cotton dress workers. Then I had the girls in the office teach me rummy in a hurry, so I wouldn’t be sitting idle when they played.

About a dozen of them responded, one of those talkative woman who proved to be a forelady’s stooge. The forelady sat in an automobile across the street and observed those who entered. Next day she threatened them with discharge if they visited our office again.

My work days now were filled with strain and discouragement, all the sharper after I visited other labor unions, where I tried to persuade the husbands of garment workers to induce their wives to join the ILGWU.

One such meeting was held in a dimly lit basement lodge hall. About thirty members of the painter’s local came in individually and took seats around the walls, while the secretary-treasurer set himself up in business at an old desk collecting dues.

Shortly afterward a slim middle-aged man walked with dignity to the chairman’s little table and sat down in the tall-backed chair behind it. Then he stood up. From

his back pants pocket he took out a small American flag, which he smoothed out on the table, from a side pocket a gavel, from a vest pocket the painters' constitution, and declared the meeting open; another member went about the room whispering in the ear of each, presumably the password for the next meeting.

Then the "Lady Garment Workers" organizer was introduced to say a few words. I had little desire now to say anything, in view of the dull formality, but I outlined briefly my mission and received unanimous, ringing applause. The president assured me that the members would do "everything in their power" to help us. Judging by the meeting, I left convinced that their "help" would be of no value to us. And it never was.

While in Buffalo Reisberg would ask me to make trips to nearby towns where New York run-away employers were trying to get themselves established without the union. Invariably I would hear in these towns the same song: the Chamber of Commerce had built a mill and invited industry to move in, offering free rent, no taxes, and cheap labor. Some designing employer, dodging union conditions, would avail himself of this opportunity. Within no time the union would follow in his footsteps and make him sign a union contract. Forced to pay regular wages, the employer had no reason to remain there, far from the market, with inexperienced labor and mounting costs. Hence when I came to Hornell, I found a dress factory located in a building which alternately had housed a hosiery mill and a shirt factory, both of which had been forced back to their former places.

So to many townspeople a union spelled unemployment, and they naturally resisted unionization. As time went on I became aware that with the snail's pace at which I was moving in Buffalo hardly any tangible results could be expected. Coincidentally the Akron rubber workers' sit-down kept me busy for a while. But that spring, during a visit to New York, I urged Reisberg to relieve me of my duties, saying that as I was not of the chair-warming type I had no reason to stay on any longer. He agreed with me.

Late in April, on the eve of leaving for Fort Wayne, Indiana, to attend the United Automobile Workers' second annual convention, I liquidated the Buffalo office. As anticipated, the old chiseling was promptly resumed, and later the National Labor Relations Board ordered one of the local cotton dress manufacturers to pay \$2,000 back wages to some of its employees. To this day, the ILGWU has not established a local in Buffalo.

## Chapter 19. Vulnerable Akron: The First Great Sit-Down

AKRON — rubber manufacturing capital of the world. A drab Mid-Western industrial city of 255,000. A city with a hum, a throb, an odor all its own. It made the front pages in February, 1936. A strike had closed the largest tire factory on the globe, which had 14,000 employees.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> Frederick Umhey, our International's executive secretary, wired me from New York: "Goodyear rubber workers in Akron on strike. A woman organizer requested. Urgently needed. Please proceed to Akron at once and report to Adolph Germer Portage Hotel."

Leaving Marianne Alfons, our Polish organizer, in charge of the Buffalo office, I took the first train, reaching my destination late that night. There I was hailed by Louis Stark, labor reporter for the New York Times, who got off the same train.

We checked in at the Portage, phoned Germer's room, and he came down to greet us. Then an organizer for the United Mine Workers, Germer had been in Akron several weeks, and now was devoting all his energies to helping the rubber strikers. Sitting in the cafe, he told us what had been happening. This strike had started as a small sit-down of 137 tire-builders on the 14<sup>th</sup>, in protest against a lay-off of 70 workers. That lay-off was the first step in a company plan to abolish the six-hour day, which had been in force in the Akron rubber industry for five years, and to return to the old eight-hour day. The sit-downers were promptly fired.

Quickly the sit-down spread through all departments and all shifts. Goodyear production was paralyzed. On the fourth day the strikers decided to change the form of their protest from an inside to an outside strike; they had run low on food, and realized that they could control the situation much better from outside.

They left the huge Goodyear works at midnight on the 13<sup>th</sup>, installing picket lines which sealed all the 45 gates to the company, properties, and completely shut down the plant.

Inside, in Building No. 1, however, about 1,000 "loyal" employees were stranded when the others walked out. Next morning President Paul Litchfield of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, appeared at the main gate, demanding that the pickets let him in. They did so. He was still inside on the 25<sup>th</sup>, seven days later, eating and sleeping in his office.



Despite great tension, the situation had been free from violence. The strikers had closed all saloons and liquor stores in the Goodyear area, policed the streets, and maintained excellent order.

But there had been an hour on the day of my arrival when battle and bloodshed and perhaps sudden death for many appeared imminent. The company had obtained an injunction against mass picketing, enforcement being Sheriff Jim Flower's job. He sent 30 deputies and 150 city policemen into the strike zone, with orders to disband the pickets and reopen the Goodyear gates — at 10 a.m.

Long before ten, Firestone and Goodrich workers and additional Goodyear men flocked in to swell the picket lines. By conservative estimates, 10,000 pickets gathered. Practically every one was armed with a billy — a baseball bat, a bowling pin, or a piece of broomstick.

Realizing the grave danger of a riot, Mayor Schroy and Police Chief Boss telephoned Flower, arguing against the planned attack, and saying it would mean slaughter. Flower answered that he had to “enforce law and order.” Two minutes before the zero hour, Boss sped to the strike scene in his official car, arriving with only thirty seconds to spare, and withdrew his men. There was no attack. Thousands of strikers cheered the chief for his display of good judgment.

At breakfast next morning, Germer told me the strike was in the hands of young leaders, honest, sincere, courageous. But this was their first big strike, and they lacked experience. They needed all the support they could get, and sound advice to guard them against pitfalls, especially in negotiating for a settlement. Hence the Committee for Industrial Organization had taken over the leadership, and Germer, as the first CIO man on the ground, had asked for more help. Company agents had been working in devious ways to wreck the unity of the strikers, especially exerting pressure upon mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. Germer wanted me to concentrate on morale-building.

Anxious to get to the scene of action, I hurried through breakfast. A taxi stood outside the hotel. “To strike headquarters,” I said.

“Wait till I tell my office I'm going into the strike zone,” the driver answered. He talked into a telephone on a post, and then we were off. With the strikers ignoring the injunction, and the company and its partisans loudly demanding that the Governor send in state troops, the Goodyear area was regarded as “hot.”

Speed-up was Akron's other name to the 50,000 or more workers in the five big rubber factories there — the other four being Firestone, Goodrich, General, Mohawk.

The Goodyear properties were wide-sprawled on the Eastern edge of Akron, making a small city in themselves. Huge production buildings, an assembly hall and cafeteria, a gigantic hangar where the dirigibles Akron and Macon had been housed, and a far-flung airport.

In front of the 45 gates to the Goodyear works and at many points between gates, the strikers had erected shanties or tents, more than 300 in all, as shelters for the pickets against the subzero air, biting wind, rain, snow, and sleet. That picket-line stretched 11 miles.

Shanties and tents were designated either by a number — “Strike Post No. 1,” “Camp No. 13; Average Service 13 years” or by such names as “Mae West Post,” “Camp Roosevelt,” “John L. Lewis Post,” “Senator Wagner Post,” and “Machine Gun Post.” At the “House of David Post” the pickets had vowed not to shave until the strike ended; some already had sprouted beards.

Goodyear Local No. 2 of the United Rubber Workers of America had its hall-and-office directly across the street from the company’s Building No. 1. This now served as strike headquarters.

Two or three hundred men and women were in the place when I arrived, many people were coming and going, and there was a buzz of voices. I introduced myself to John D. House, president of the Goodyear local, who was in immediate charge of the strike. Tall, with pale blue eyes and black wavy hair, and evidently in his early twenties, House hailed from Georgia, and spoke with a soft Southern drawl. He took time to show me around, plainly proud of the layout — the meeting hall, commissary, first-aid station, storage, office, information department, cash relief department, mimeograph depart.

The commissary, known simply as the kitchen, was doing a rushing business, operating 24 hours a day. It was equipped like a commercial cafeteria, with a battery of coffee urns, a 13-burner gas stove, a hotel size refrigerator, and an electric potato masher. The chef was paid by the strike committee, but his helpers were volunteers. Members of the Cooks and Waitresses’ Union and wives and daughters of strikers worked several hours daily.

Two attendants were on duty in the first-aid provided with all essential medical supplies for emergency treatment of accident victims. One was spraying a picket’s sore throat, the other treating, sterilizing, and bandaging a blistered heel.

When copies of the first edition of the Times-Press were brought into headquarters, I discovered that Powers Hapgood also was town, on a mission similar to mine. Two pictures of him were the front page with two of myself, which a youthful photographer had insisted on taking as I left my room that morning. I had not seen Powers since the Sacco-Vanzetti memorial meeting in Union Square, New York, in 1927. It was good to learn that I was to work with some one I knew well.

Presently Sherman H. Dalrymple, international president of URWA, appeared, accompanied by Thomas F. Burns, vice-president Frank Grillo, secretary-treasurer, N. H. Eagle, head of the Mohawk local in Akron and member of the United Rubber Workers’ general executive board, John Owens, Ohio district president of the United Mine Workers, Germer, Stark, and Hapgood.

Together we began a tour of the picket-line, in cars driven strikers. This tour was “personally conducted” by “Skip” Oharra, Oh’ who gloried in the title of “Field Marshal.” He was a small fellow with a chunk of chewing tobacco always in his right cheek. Only six months before, I was told, he had been an aggressive leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Akron. Many other strikers had been Klansmen. Oharra had a strong sense of responsibility toward the strike. Some one ventured that the title he carried sounded a bit too pretentious, and suggested that he change it to chairman of the pickets. He protested vehemently. “Oh no, you can’t do that! I’ve been nationally advertised as ‘field marshal.’ It would hurt our cause.”

A bitter wind was blowing, but inside the shanties and tents the men were comfortable. In each a stove had been improvised from two metal oil drums, with a pipe leading up through the roof. The pickets sat on boxes or old automobile seats. Some were playing cards, others found diversion in checkers. Occasionally there was music, from an accordion, banjo, or guitar. Food and coffee were brought to the posts at regular intervals by a truck from the commissary.

The pickets put in eight-hour shifts. At least one was always on duty outside to see that no one attempted to break the seal of the nearby gate to the Goodyear works. The others rested or amused themselves in the shelters. Ten pickets to a post was the legal limit established by a court ruling.

We stopped long enough at each post to exchange greetings and impress upon the pickets that organized labor throughout the country was backing them up.

Around noon we returned to strike headquarters, where we held an informal meeting, with several hundred strikers present. John House introduced Stark, John Owens, Haggood, and myself, explaining the significance of our being there; it meant reinforcements from two powerful international unions, and special interest in the situation on the part of the nation’s leading newspaper.

When my turn came, I emphasized the great concern of the ILGWU that the rubber workers’ strike should be successful. Commending their courage and steadfastness, I warned them that all sorts of unfair tricks would be used by the company to defeat them, and urged them to keep their poise and trust their leaders. To the women I made a special appeal that they stand by their men.

Then I led the audience in some of our union songs — Solidarity . Forever, Hold the Fort, and others, one of the younger men playing an accompaniment on the banjo. They made the walls ring with words familiar to many as a paraphrase of an old hymn:

Hold the fort, for we are coming Union men, be strong; Side by side we battle onward — Victory will come!

“Rosie,” said Germer afterward, “we’ll make you chairman of the entertainment committee.”

We got our lunch at the kitchen service counter.

“What will you have?” a trim waitress inquired. “A plate, or something else?” “Why, I’ll have a plate, please,” I answered quickly.

It was novel to have a choice of food in a strike hall.

The “plate” that day comprised baked beans, kidney beans, spaghetti with meat sauce, potato salad, white bread or fresh baked corn bread, home-made jam, coffee, and cottage pudding covered with warm custard sauce. There was meat of varying kinds daily and plenty of good fresh milk. We ate at long rough wooden tables, at which many strikers were having their meals.

Akron acquired its first rubber factory in the Eighteen Seventies when some of its business men prevailed upon Dr. B. F. Goodrich to come there from Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., where he had been doing well as a rubber producer. As new uses were found for this material, other rubber manufacturers were attracted to the Akron area, because of its transportation facilities and its moist climate.

When automobile owners multiplied into millions, rubber production skyrocketed. Goodyear’s net profit in the years 1921–32 totalled \$108,576,000. All the big companies in the industry prospered. protect profits they ruthlessly slashed wages in the depression years In 1929 the average pay of rubberworkers was \$1,377; in 1933 had been cut to \$932. Thousands became jobless. Those who remained in the factories were driven mercilessly under the belt system of production.

Where did the Goodyear company get its name? I wondered about that, and took pains to find out. Son of a poor inventor in Woburn, Massachusetts, Charles Goodyear followed in his father’s footsteps. He was especially interested in the effects of varying temperatures upon rubber, and in ways to toughen it without lessening its resiliency. Poverty-stricken, often hungry, and with few friends, he continued trying until in 1839 he discovered a process which he called vulcanization. After five years more of experimentation he obtained a patent on his discovery.

Vulcanization wrought a revolution in the rubber industry. But the profits went to others, not to Goodyear. Grasping men boldly made use of this process without legal right. Goodyear sued repeatedly, winning in the courts, but went on the rocks financially because of litigation costs.

He died in 1860, penniless, and owing large debts. Everything material had been stripped from him. Frank A. Seiberling, establishing a rubber company in Akron in 1898, decided to call it Goodyear. I wonder if any portion of that company’s tremendous earnings ever went to the Goodyear family for the use of the luckless inventor’s name, “the greatest name in rubber.” If so, how much?

From 1902 to 1913 occasional sporadic attempts to organize Akron’s rubber workers were crushed. One big strike was staged in 1913 by the Industrial Workers of the World and led by Bill Haywood, its colorful chief. The rubber companies broke that strike through high-handed tactics, including the organization of a Cit-

izens' Police Association, comprising 1,000 vigilantes, and institution of martial law.

Then the A F of L sent a young and little known organizer, John L. Lewis, into Akron. He surveyed the situation, presumably filed a report with his home office, and came away.

Across the next 20 years conditions in the industry grew worse in many ways. Other unionization efforts were thwarted, through the use of spies, widespread firing of men for union activities, and other forms of intimidation, and by factional warfare within labor's own ranks.

The National Industrial Recovery Act (the NIRA) guaranteed in Section 7-a the right of workers to join unions of their own choosing, and the rubber workers flocked into the A F of L federal unions by the thousands. Unfortunately, the Federation, instead of keeping these industrial workers together, distributed them among 13 separate internationals. Immediately the rubber corporations organized company unions along industrial lines, giving them the appearance of independent organizations to meet the legal requirements of the NIRA. Under the cumbersome system of craft organization the members of the A F of L couldn't make headway.

They pressed for an international of their own, and at their convention in 1935 William Green, president of the A F of L, presented them with a charter. The delegates insisted on electing their own officers.

Thus a new international was born, with a starting membership of 3,080. The delegates wrote a constitution and elected Sherman H. Dalrymple, formerly of West Virginia and head of the Goodrich local in Akron, as president. That city had four other locals including, Goodyear, Firestone, Mohawk, and General.

In 1930 the Goodyear company had reduced its work day from eight hours to six. At the end of two years Paul W. Litchfield, its president, in the periodical *Industrial Relations*, made these significant statements: "At the Goodyear, where we have had the six-hour-day in effect ... for two years we have not been able to make much of a case on the grounds of higher efficiency. It is our judgment that efficiency has been increased upward of eight per cent, but low production schedules preclude accurate comparisons. Of one thing we are convinced. It is that the short working day has not noticeably increase' our overhead cost — that is, the cost of personnel and product super vision...

"We should work toward shortening the average working hours to the point where there will be work for all."

When the company announced in 1935 that the eight-hour day would be restored on January 1, 1936 (presaging mass lay-offs) and that piece-work rates would be cut, the Goodyear local asked Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins to investigate. She appointed a fact finding committee comprising Fred C. Croxton of Columbus,

Ohio; John A. Lapp of New York, member of the Petroleum Board; and Hugh S. Hanna, U.S. Department of Labor statistician.

This committee's 50-page report held that the company, in cutting hours of work, had introduced the speed-up system, and that in fewer hours its employees actually produced as much or nearly as much as before. It found, too, that there was no justification for the proposed lengthening of hours ... that the change would reduce the company payroll 12 per cent, and that the company had discriminated against the URWA in favor of its company union.

But presently there were wage-cuts and lay-offs in various departments. Resentment smoldered among the Goodyear working forces, tension grew.

John L. Lewis, by that time chairman of the new Committee for Industrial Organization, spoke at a mass meeting in the Armory on January 19. Despite a blizzard, thousands of rubber workers attended. Lewis cited the millions in profits made by Goodyear and the other rubber companies, even during the depression.

"The only way out," he declared, "is to organize the workers into unions that can raise articulate voices..."

His parting words were: "I hope you will do something for yourselves."

Those who listened took heed — and in less than a month the Goodyear workers acted.

In contrast to short-lived sit-downs of Akron rubber workers in the past, limited to a single department, the tire-builders' sit-down on February 14 was a spark that fired the long dormant indignation of Goodyear employees generally. Here was mass revolt, which might at any moment spread through the Goodrich, Firestone, Mohawk, and General Rubber Company plants and shut them down also.

Realizing that they were novices in a conflict of this size, the United Rubber Workers' leaders appealed to the Committee for Industrial Organization for aid. It sent a \$3,000 check to the strike committee, and dispatched five organizers to the scene. The other two organizers — Leo Krzycki, vice-president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and Ben Schafer, from the Oil Workers' Union — arrived on February 26.

Strain and anxiety showed in the eyes of the young leaders of the rubber workers, and in their tired voices. They trembled as they spoke of "what might have happened" the day before if Police Chief Boss had not spiked Sheriff Flower's plan to smash the picket lines.

But while the Akron rubber workers were babes in the woods in legitimate unionism, they could have given pointed lessons to labor-movement veterans in other forms of organization and action. I had taken special notice of the fine sense of order among the strikers.

"When did you learn all this?" I asked one of the key men in headquarters.

"They trained us," he said, pointing to the huge plant across the way.

Most of the men in the forefront of the strike had been schooled in two institutions peculiar to the Goodyear corporation — the Flying Squadron and the Goodyear Industrial Assembly. Young and physically powerful workers, chosen for the Flying Squadron, were given three years of intensive training so that they could fit into any of the 4,000 different production jobs. Thus they would be available for any emergency — to take the places of men who might be laid off because they had passed the age of 40 and who perhaps had slowed down, or to serve as strike-breakers. With the Flying Squadron available to the company, seniority for the mass of Goodyear employees was non-existent.

The strikers had a profound hatred for the Squadron. Ex-members of that cat's-paw outfit poured forth their feelings in the shanties.

"I am one of those who graduated," said a broad-shouldered pick in the Mae West Post, as he showed me the wingfoot pin concealed under his vest. "They thought they bought me body and soul, damn it, when I was told to do dirty to my fellow-workers I quit .

Many Flying Squadron members also were members of the Industrial Assembly, comprising a Senate and House of Representatives, and part of the Goodyear "Industrial Republic." Set up in 1919, this was supposed to provide democratic representation for the workers. Actually, it was a company union, the Senators and Representatives being hand-picked.

For years the Goodyear management had used the Industrial Assembly for its own purposes. But in October, 1935, there was rebellion in the Assembly. It voted against the corporation's plan to restore the eight-hour schedule. The emptiness of the "guarantees of democracy" in the Assembly was demonstrated when Factory Manager Cliff Slusser vetoed its action.

Yes, there was exemplary organization among the strikers, and remarkable discipline. Yet it was apparent that we were standing on the brink of a smoking volcano, which at any time might erupt.

I thought of this while talking with Field Marshal Oharra in strike headquarters. In a corner of the office I had observed a stack of rifles.

"What are those guns for?" I asked.

"Just let them try to open the plant gates, or break up the picket lines, and there'll be a revolution," Oharra answered. The guns had been brought in after Police Chief Boss averted the Sheriff's planned attack on the pickets on the 25th. Many of the strikers, having come from mountain country, were hunters, and naturally owned rifles. They had brought them here "just in case —"

That night Powers Hapgood, Ben Schafer, and I made another tour of the shanties and tents. Henceforth this would be part of our daily routine. We talked with the pickets, asked questions, drew out their thoughts about the strike. In some posts hill-billy songs were being sung, and we inquired where the singers hailed

from. They had come from various states Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, and the Carolinas.

Frequently I heard them boasting about their respective states. Others took issue with them. A man from Kentucky bragged that that Commonwealth was famous for “fast horses and beautiful women.” A Tennessean would answer: “It’s just the reverse.”

Largely of American stock, their names testified to English and Scotch ancestry in the main, with a sprinkling of Irish and Welsh. They included many ex-coal miners, a considerable percentage of former tenant farmers, and others who had come to Ohio because they found themselves jobless or dispossessed as a result of the depression.

Watching and listening to the men in the shanties and in union headquarters, I was glad they were on our side of the fight. Some of the names recalled long-fought feuds in the Southern mountains. Here, it was obvious, were numerous hot-heads. Hence the vitalnecessity of wise leadership, for in its absence, an unforeseen contingency might impel them to desperate action.

A sit-down in Akron was precisely what we called a stoppage in the garment industry. It was an old method among independent rubber workers; when they found they could no longer put up with unfair working conditions, they laid down their tools. Usually they won their immediate point.

“But what happened after that?” I asked, in the House of David post.

“We’d go back to work,” said a man with a rusty beard, “and everything would be pretty for a little time. Then the company would find an excuse to fire the leaders... Now things are different. With you from the Lady Garment Workers, and the men from the miners, we’ll build a real union here.”

Back at strike headquarters by 11 p.m., we found an entertainment in progress, with an audience of 300 or more. Two boys around ten years old were on the platform, one crooning and the other playing a guitar bigger than himself. They looked sleepy, but sang and played into a microphone like professionals.

Frequently the entertainment would be interrupted, as a man in a checkered red-and-black windbreaker called through the “mike” for volunteers to relieve pickets: “Three men to Mae West Post ... two men to Camp Argonne ... four men to Post No. 14.”

From all parts of the hall strikers would leave for duty at those posts, to keep any one from entering or leaving the plant. Wives of some of the volunteers would go along to keep them company in the shanties and tents.

In such a strike there is no limit to the number of an organizer’s working hours. Often we conferred late at night, and some tours of the shanties did not end until 3 a.m. Days and evenings we spoke before many audiences in Akron, explaining the situation to church groups, consumer groups, fraternal organizations, women’s



auxiliaries, students, sewing circles, language groups. Almost always, without our asking, a collection would be taken up for the strikers. We asked only for moral support. Often we returned loaded with home-made pies and cakes and other edibles rounded up by thoughtful women in advance of our arrival.

The union had a sound truck, and we all took turns in speaking from it. It was useful in addressing groups of strikers and their families and the public in the strike area generally. Audiences would gather quickly whenever the truck stopped; the loud speaker never lost its novelty for them. Our speeches were varied by music from a victrola.

I had wired Fannia M. Cohn, executive secretary of our Educational Department, for a large supply of song books, and when they came we took them with us on a fast round of the posts.

“Captain! “ our escort called out as we arrived at the first shanty.

A tall burly figure emerged from the dark.

“Here is a song book the Lady Garment Workers’ Union is giving us. We want your shift to learn the songs and leave it with the next captain.”

“O.K. We’ll do that.”

Evidently the little red booklets were immediately put to good use, for by the time we returned the pickets were singing songs with familiar tunes.

“Soo-ooop, soo-ooop, they gave me a bowl of soup,” came from one post.

“It’s a good thing to join a union,” the voices in another avowed.

“We joined our union and now we have fun,” we heard from a third. (The tune was The Man on The Flying Trapeze.) ; “C-C-C-Company, company-union ...”

Each group picked out the lyrics which appealed to it most.

## Chapter 20. ‘Outside Agitators’ Strive for Peace

Edward F. McGrady, Assistant U. S. Secretary of Labor, had come to Akron by plane, spent two days in intensive conferences with company representatives and the strike committee, and departed on Friday, February 28. He left a recommendation with the committee that the strikers return to work and let the issues be settled by arbitration.

A meeting was scheduled for that evening in the strikers’ hall. Around 8 o’clock Sherman Dalrymple, the rubber workers’ international president, Frank Grillo, the secretary, Germer, Hapgood, and other leaders arrived. The strikers crowded in, anxious to know of the latest developments. From what I had seen and heard on the picket-lines, corroborated by the tenseness of feeling now, it was evident that some of the strikers were ready to do *almost anything* if the agreement reached with the company was not satisfactory.

Reporting on the negotiations, John House told of McGrady’s recommendation, and to my surprise, announced that a vote on the proposal would be taken — by secret ballot. Busy with the rank-and-file all day, I had not known that a ballot had been printed. There was an instant outburst of indignation, everybody talking at once.

Hastening to the platform, I grabbed the “mike,” asking House in a whisper to let me finish the meeting. Then through the loudspeaker I said:

“Sorry, gentlemen, we’ll have to postpone this matter until later. We have with us this evening a group of young people, members of a WPA acting company, who have come all the way from Cleveland to entertain us. They are working people and must return home immediately after their performance, so please clear the platform and let them proceed.”

The crowd applauded and the show went on.

Taking the strike leaders into the office, I explained that it was a mistake to have brought up the McGrady proposal at all; that my observations had convinced me the rubber workers would not accept it. From years of experience with the Goodyear company, they knew that its policy in any conflict with labor was to haggle and stall, tire the workers out, and give them nothing in the end. This time,

knowing they had the full backing of organized labor, the strikers were determined not to be bulldozed or cheated.

Tommy Burns, who had just come in from a conference, agreed with me, and the others quickly saw the point. Nothing more about the McGrady plan was said that night. After the WPA entertainers got through, we had a program of instrumental music and singing.

Next day, Saturday, more than 4,000 persons, including hundreds of women, crowded the Armory at the largest union mass-meeting in Akron history. Thousands stood outside.

Watching and greeting those who came in, I knew from their faces and comments what the outcome would be. They would not be satisfied with half-way measures.

Among the late arrivals was a slim, well-dressed young woman in a fur coat. "Will you please tell me where the deaf mutes are sitting?"

Not knowing there were any present, I repeated her question to a strike committeeman, who pointed to a section of the balcony where some two dozen men were seated. The young woman had come to interpret the speeches for them. Later, from my place on the platform, I looked up and saw her sitting on the balcony rail. She was busy "talking" to her own audience, who watched the movements of her right hand in sign language intently.

After the adjournment, I asked her how she happened to have that ability.

"Both my parents were deaf mutes," she replied' "and finger-talk was my first language. Now I listen for this group at meetings which interest them — 'lending my ears', I call it."

Gratuitously she performed a great service to men who otherwise would have been shut out from affairs important to their lives. They were part of a colony numbering about 1,000. Akron employers regarded deaf mutes as diligent and steady producers and had made a special appeal to employment agencies to recruit them. The colony has since increased to 5,000.

That morning the union had announced a recommendation by the strike committee "that the matter of calling a meeting to vote on the question of arbitration be held in abeyance until the strikers have had time to become fully informed on questions involved." Their legal rights under arbitration were to be shown in a brief being prepared by one of the union's attorneys, Judge Ernest E. Zesiger.

But it was clear from the temper of the Armory mass-meeting, of which President Dalrymple was chairman, that the rubber strikers were determined not to go back to work until they had a tangible and equitable agreement with the company. When the McGrady plan was mentioned, a great chorus shouted "No!" and thousands of voices began singing: *No, No, a Thousand Times No, I'd Rather Be Dead Than a Scab!*

Wilmer Tate, president of the Akron Central Labor Union, and member of the strike committee, was cheered to the echo when he assured the throng that his organization would stand solidly behind the Goodyear workers, and that the CLU would meet that night to plan unified action.

In the evening the Central Labor Union officially authorized the calling of a general strike of all Akron organized labor, if any move was made to reopen the Goodyear plant by force or if force was used to break the picket lines. Thus more than 100 unions were ready to walk out. That would tie up all the city's transportation and close scores of industrial plants.

A committee of non-strikers urged Governor Martin L. Davey to intervene. He telegraphed: "Believe very unwise to interfere."

Meanwhile, Mr. Litchfield and the Goodyear "loyal" employees remained in the plant. The company president, in radio broadcasts over a special telephone hookup, and in paid advertisements, demanded that the "forces of law and order" remove the picket lines outside and reopen the plant gates. But they stayed closed. The pickets continued at their posts.

There were reports that when the food supply of the "prisoners" ran out, additional provisions were dropped from airplanes.

From my first day in Akron I saw that women would play a vital part in the strike, and perhaps even be a decisive factor in the settlement. True, women workers in the Goodyear factory were comparatively few, so the number of feminine strikers was not large. But mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters of the striking men were there and we were getting important help, particularly in the commissary, from women employed in the Firestone and Goodrich plants.

These women were for the most part good looking and well groomed, with carefully manicured nails and permanent waves. Some of the younger ones might well have qualified as Powers models, so shapely were they.

When Germer appointed me as entertainment chairman, I had selected a dozen interested women to serve with me. In any long drawn-out strike, entertainment is vital, to keep the strikers from becoming discouraged or bored. The old Myles Royal theatre, on the edge of the strike zone, was rented, and we began recruiting talent from among the rank-and-file, holding nightly performances.

A member of the entertainment committee, whose husband was a House of David Post picket, said to me:

"I know this theatre well. Our Klan glee club used to meet here."

"Klan?" I echoed, with a poker face. "What Klan?"

"The Ku Klux Klan."

"What kind of an organization was that?" I asked, still without a smile.

"A social and educational society," she rejoined, in the manner of one explaining a local custom to an outsider.

When these impoverished people first came from the Southern mountain regions to Akron they brought with them their prejudices and superstitions, and fell easy prey to the dark forces which set out to mold their opinions. The Ku Klux Klan used them for its own purposes. Though the Klan had disintegrated, some beliefs it had planted among them still clung. We had to cope with these attitudes, and correct them where we could.

Once I deliberately ran full tilt into one of their aversions.

On a mean slushy day Hapgood, Skip Oharra, Ben Schafer, and I were visiting the picket posts.

As we entered one shanty the men began to laugh.

"We were just talking about you," a short man with heavy eyebrows said to me, "trying to figure out your nationality. Is it Spanish, Italian, or French?"

"None of those," I replied cheerfully, "I'm a full blooded Hebrew."

They were embarrassed; some looked stunned.

"Why are you so surprised?" I asked. "You probably thought all Jews were bankers, millionaires, exploiters, bloodsuckers. They're not. I'm a wage earner, like yourselves; and there are millions like me in the United States who work for a living."

Some of them had not known, they admitted, that Jews were industrial workers. They had heard that all big bankers were Jews, and that Jews owned all the big industries.

"Is Henry Ford a Jew?" Powers Hapgood put in. "Is Paul Litchfield a Jew? Or Harvey Firestone? Or J. P. Morgan? Or John D. Rockefeller?"

Our discussion went on at length. Before we left these men from the hills had a new attitude toward the subject and agreed that Jews and Gentiles alike needed strong organizations to back them in winning a living wage and decent working conditions. On subsequent visits to that post, I found the men there especially cordial.

At the entertainments, hill-billy songs were favored. There were excellent voices among both the men and women; and when they harmonized to the accompaniment of a guitar or banjo, Hollywood might well have taken notice.

To my delight, we quickly began to hear original lyrics set to old mountain music — words applying pointedly to persons and events connected with the strike.

Sarah Gribble, one of the strikers, composed a parody on the popular refrain: *She'll be Comin' 'Round the Mountain*, celebrating the sheriff's discomfiture over the continued presence of the pickets at the Goodyear gates. I had its author sing it from the Armory platform, and her performance brought down the house. The audience rocked with laughter as she sang:

*Flower'll be coming 'round the shanties, yes he will;  
Flower'll be coming 'round the shanties, yes he will;  
He'll be shiv'ring in his panties when he's coming 'round the shanties,  
He'll be shiv'ring in his panties, yes he will.*

Another favorite, sung with many variations by almost every crooner at our gatherings, was a sentimental ballad of a past decade:

*You'll be nobody's darling,  
Nobody's darling but mine.*

Our entertainers were of all ages. Elderly fiddlers and accordionists played, men and women close to seventy took part in the oldtime dancing, displaying great agility, and young boys and girls gave us tap dancing, yodeling, and guitar music.

Ballads sung by the older people were plaintive, and they put a wealth of feeling into lines like these:

*When I can read my title clear  
To mansions in the skies,  
I'll bid farewell to ev'ry care  
And dry my weeping eyes.*

But for the most part the songs were high spirited and often amusing.

One afternoon while on my way to the last of the strike posts I saw a picket, in hunter's cap and jacket, standing on a railroad track which led to the big dirigible balloon hangar, then being used as a Goodyear warehouse. A freight train was heading toward the guarded break in the company's high wire fence. The picket flagged it down.

Railroad men got off the train and opened the doors of the cars. Other pickets, emerging from a nearby shanty, looked into the cars to make sure that no raw material was going into the plant.

Shooting the scene with my movie camera, I remarked to one of the railroad switchmen that it was like a frontier inspection of travelers somewhere in Europe.

"What does the railroad company think about trains being stopped like this?" I inquired.

"It hasn't said anything officially on the question," the switchman said. "But even if it did, that wouldn't make any difference to us. We're union men, too, and we wouldn't go against the strikers."

After two weeks President Litchfield ended his self-imprisonment in the plant, established headquarters in the Mayflower Hotel, and issued a public statement.

“The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company,” he averred, “will not sign an agreement with the United Rubber Workers of America under any circumstances.”

Before the day ended I learned why his endurance had broken down. Two of the strikers, both old-timers, one tall and scrawny, and the other short and squat, had stationed themselves under his office windows. Armed with a guitar, they sang for two hours straight a parody on *Old McDonald Had a Farm*:

“Old Man Litchfield had a shop, E-i, E-i, O!”

At the end of the two hours, the head of Goodyear couldn't take it any longer.

Early in March the Goodyear company union's publication, the *Wingfoot Clan*, came out with a full page attack on Germer, Krzycki, Hapgood, John Brophy, and myself, headed in big black letters: “OUTSIDE AGITATORS TAKE OVER STRIKE LEADERSHIP.” Brophy, organizational director of the CIO, had lately arrived on the scene. Each of us was assailed in turn, and we amused ourselves by comparing the amount of space allotted to us. The company's adherents wouldn't admit that Powers Hapgood was “a real radical,” because of his family and Harvard background, and insisted on classifying him as an “intellectual pink.” Powers always regarded that as one of the most damaging things that could be said about a labor organizer.

“‘Outside agitators are keeping Goodyear workers from their jobs,’ spokesmen for the Goodyear Industrial Assembly charged late today,” said the *Times-Press* on March 4. “Jesus of Nazareth also was considered an ‘outside agitator,’” Tommy Burns replied. In the union's radio broadcasts, one speaker after another hammered home these three sentences: “The two agitators in this strike were Good year hours and wages. They are native products. They are not imported from Moscow.”

Meanwhile we “outsiders,” accused of endeavoring to provoke violence, were straining to keep the situation peaceful. For here were strikers ripe for violent action. Goaded almost beyond endurance, they had stopped work as a last resort. The foundation of the strike was built up of a thousand indignities and resentments, abortive attempts at organization, memories of sell-outs. Our job, therefore, was to keep hair-trigger tempers from going off. One inflammatory speech at the wrong moment — and the result might easily be mob rule and bloodshed.

Leaflets we helped prepare were designed toward the same peaceful ends. One was headed: “RADIOGRAM: ALONG THE EASTERN FRONT.” Edited by N. H. Eagle, president of the Mohawk local, this gave the day's strike news with this advice:

“Be orderly! Be peaceful! Be polite! Be sober! Our record is clean... Let's keep this America's most peaceful and orderly strike.”

But the opposition was aware of the men's tempers just as we were; and deliberate attempts were made to bring about the situation that we dreaded.

Rumors spread throughout Akron that Pearl Bergoff, America's No. 1 professional strike-breaker, had brought a train-load of finks — hired thugs — from the East, and that they were held on a siding just outside of town, ready to come in at any moment. All the strikers were warned to be watchful of strangers, and to make every effort to avoid unnecessary trouble of any kind.

We challenged Mr. Litchfield's contention that the present strike was a local affair holding that wages, hours, and working conditions of Goodyear employees were rightfully the concern of union workers everywhere.

The company carried on an unceasing campaign to discredit the strike and besmirch its leaders. Page advertisements were liberally used, and radio broadcasts, statements by non-strikers declaring that they wanted to go back to work and were being prevented by "a lawless minority," demands for "enforcement of law and order," demands for state troops, and widespread whispering of disruptive rumors. Even though the arguments of Goodyear and its partisans were often illogical or downright dishonest, it was not easy to counteract them.

Certainly we could not match the money the company was spending for newspaper space, radio time, and in less legitimate ways. The main thing we had to spend was ourselves, and this we did without stint.

Germer, Krzycki, Hapgood, Burns, Schafer, and I met frequently for hurried talks, compared notes, and spread out wherever the lines required tightening.

To fortify the strikers' cause, the committee wired to New York asking McAlister Coleman, ace labor publicity man, to come to Akron. Long active in behalf of labor, especially in the coal fields, his experience promised to be particularly valuable to the rubber workers. Graduating from Columbia University in 1909, he began newspaper work as a reporter on the *New York Sun*, and later covered strikes and trials for the *New York World*, made investigations for the American Civil Liberties Union, edited miners' papers, and wrote an excellent biography of Eugene V. Debs. "Mac" came quickly, and got busy at once, putting out effective news releases on each day's developments, and devising action to create news if at any time it was lacking. A tireless worker, he was an agreeable addition to the scene.

There were daily meetings in strike headquarters, mass meetings in the Akron Armory, and the members of our committee spoke to various gatherings around town — the Central Labor Union, individual unions comprising many trades, consumer groups, women's clubs, students, and others. Leo Krzycki was a convincing speaker, logical, simple in utterance, illustrating his talks with odd humor, making the strikers hold their sides laughing. Powers Hapgood, more somber, and clean-cut in his statements, used his talents to advantage in speeches to any audience that he was called upon to address. Germer, dean of the committee, had to be always on hand, for any emergency. Ben Schafer fitted in wherever he was needed.



Systematic personal contact with the strikers and their families was carried on, as the best method of keeping the strike lines intact, and of allaying any misgivings that might arise among the rank-and-file because of the company's sniping at us. Above all, it was vital that they be reminded often that they were not alone in this fight. Following the McGrady fiasco, the negotiators were in conferences for days, apparently making no progress. Our job was now doubly difficult. With no tangible assurances to offer, we had the problem of keeping the strikers optimistic without lessening their militancy.

When the conferees were deadlocked, gloom and unrest spread along the picket-lines. One could easily read the thoughts of the men in the posts: "... No wages coming in ... rent to pay . . . , gas and electric bills ... a payment due on my car ... how long can I hold out?"

It was then that my movie camera proved its worth. It gave me entree anywhere; everybody wanted to pose. At first I had been joshed about it. But after my first picture shot had been developed and I had shown it with a projector, the union leaders realized that this could be a potent factor in the strike. Ordering several hundred feet of film, the strike committee encouraged me to take as many action shots as possible. Later these were provided with titles and spliced into a composite strip of 1,000 feet, of which a duplicate was made, the URWA retaining one copy, and I the other.

In my speeches, whenever the point was timely, I explained how our union and others had been built up from a mere handful of members. And all of the CIO spokesmen invariably voiced unbounded confidence in victory for the strikers.

Aggressive campaigning to organize the other rubber factories, notably Goodrich and Firestone, where many women were employed, was carried on by the union. We organizers met with these prospective recruits, who came from all three shifts, and gradually they were lined up in the URWA. With our aid, some 2,000 members, 20 per cent of them women, were enrolled in the Firestone local. L. S. Buckmaster, native of Indiana, was its president, with Tom Owens as secretary, and E. H. (Jack) Little as treasurer. Owens, credited with being a descendant of Robert Owen, the British social reformer, was born in South Wales, where he worked as a coal miner from the age of 10. Coming to this country as a young man, he had dug coal in Indiana and Illinois mines. L. L. Callahan was president of the Goodrich local. All these men worked steadfastly to build up their ranks and to assure increasing aid to the Goodyear strikers.

One Sunday hundreds of the new members gathered in the Perkins high school auditorium to take the "obligation" to the union. I was invited to address them. President Dalrymple asked both the old and new members to stand up, and with right hands on their hearts they repeated: "I solemnly pledge ..."

That ceremony has never failed to stir me deeply.

## Chapter 21. Pageant of Victory

Protests against the picket shanties and tents, which had shut off street-car traffic in the vicinity of the Goodyear works, brought about a conference between city officials and the strike committee. As a result, it was arranged that the city would supply gasoline for automobiles to be used by the pickets as shelters.

But the promise of gas was not kept, and without warning Mayor Schroy sent 75 policemen and 30 street cleaners with trucks on the morning of March 7 to tear down the shanties. They didn't get far. After wrecking four shacks, they were beaten back by massed pickets. At the first telephoned alarm, more than 300 union workers in the General Tire and Rubber plant stopped work and sped to the rescue. Hundreds of Goodrich and Firestone men also came running. When the cops quit the scene, the demolished shelters were promptly rebuilt.

With this triumph confirming the strength and unity of the strikers, the negotiating committee strained again for concessions. They got a few; not enough for settlement purposes, but sufficient to serve as a basis for discussion at the next mass meeting in the Armory on Saturday, March 14.

Of the five points in the new terms offered by Goodyear, the meeting voted to accept two, but rejected the rest. Singing lustily: *No, no, a thousand times no, I'd rather be dead than a scab*, the strikers sent the negotiating committee back to the management. The leadership was given a vote of confidence, the strikers' ranks were reinforced by many new unionists, and they left the Armory determined to stay on the picket lines until victory was complete.

While the conferees were deadlocked, I took time out to spend a few days in New York, attending a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the ILGWU's Local 1. President Dubinsky listened carefully to my report on Akron, then advised me to go back and remain as long as I was needed. Stopping off at our Buffalo office, I found a wire:

“Vigilante committee formed to open plant. No date set. Company seeking new injunction. Everybody hopes you return.”

I took the next train to Akron, telegraphing ahead.

Ex-Mayor C. Nelson Sparks, who had been defeated for re-election, was organizing what he called the Akron Law and Order League. He boasted that it had gained

30,000 members in three days; alleged over the air that the union was “bringing in gas and fire-arms to create a reign of terror”; and proposed to “run these outside agitators out of town.” The vigilantes could be seen drilling back of the Mayflower Hotel.

By this time the headquarters of both sides were armed camps. Most of those who came into the lobby of the Hotel Portage, apart from the newspaper men, fell into two classes — spies from the Law and Order League, and union guards, who chose seats close to the spies. We, too, had observers sitting in the lobby of the Mayflower, where President Litchfield and his yes-men were quartered.

Now there were new and persistent reports that Pearl Bergoff’s “army” of rough-necks was about to descend upon Akron. In line with the Mohawk Valley formula for breaking strikes, they would be brought in as “workers” leading workers hack to work.<sup>1</sup> The situation was full of dynamite.

War veterans in the unions had been asked by the strike leaders to help protect the pickets. They responded quickly and began drilling in their union halls. Wilmer Tate, head of the CLU, assailed Sparks, stamped the Law and Order League as “un-American and Fascist,” and said that “if blood should be spilled in this strike, the people of Akron will know on whose conscience the responsibility for violence must finally rest.”

“Never,” said Tate, “have I heard a more direct incitement to lawlessness than that uttered today by ex-Mayor Sparks... There is talk of lynching parties and ganging-up buzzing around the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel.”

“NO ROOM FOR VIGILANTES!” was the banner on a frontpage editorial in the *Beacon-Journal*.

“The most ominous note yet sounded in the Goodyear strike,” it declared, “is the call for recruits to a ‘Law and Order League.’ ... Resort to organization of a ‘citizens’ vigilante’ [sic] to open the Goodyear plants is an open invitation to rioting and violence... If the Law and Order League does not at once abandon its stupid and dangerous program, then Akron can prepare itself for a bath of blood.”

Sparks announced that his vigilantes would break up the picketlines and force the reopening of the Goodyear works — he would give instructions for the attack over the local radio station. Reports that the onslaught would be made early on Tuesday, March 17, came to strike headquarters the day before.

On Monday, around 5 :30, Frank Grillo, URW secretary-treasurer, walked into the press room, and told McAlister Coleman: “I’ve just bought the radio station for the whole night for \$500 — and it’s up to you to put on a program. We start in half an hour.”

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<sup>1</sup> Details of that formula will be found In the appendix.

Coleman phoned strike headquarters and asked that all available musical talent be rounded up, grabbed his portable typewriter, and hurried over to the station. There he did more phoning, for speakers, and began turning out copy faster than he ever had to to make an edition.

At 6, Grillo went on the air, telling of the expected attack.

“Don’t turn your radio off,” he urged all union members and the Akron public. “This will be an all-night broadcast.”

He asked every man to be ready to reinforce the pickets in case of need. In answer hundreds hurried to the strike area despite the bitter cold.

Over the air union officials talked on the need for organization, and illuminating portions of Edward Levinson’s hook about Bergoff’s technique, *I Break Strikes*, were read, interspersed by music, supplied by crooners, barber-shop quartets, and players of ukeleles, harmonicas, bazookas, and accordions.

A highlight of the presentation was a skit akin to the Fanny BriceBaby Brice-Baby radio feature, written by Mac Coleman. He impersonated little Fanny Fink, daughter of a professional strike-breaker, who was played by Grillo. Papa Fink, coming home all worn out from throwing stones through “loyal” workers’ windows, was welcomed by Baby Fink. She began asking innocent questions, and in answering them Papa kept getting into difficulties. What did Papa do for a living? He was an “industrial counselor,” he said.

“Papa —”

“What?”

“Where is that nice gentleman who was talking with you here last night?”

“Which gentleman?”

“The one you called Hophead Cohen.”<sup>2</sup>

Papa instructed his daughter what to say if the police should come.

“If they ask you if you saw the strikers have any guns, you tell ‘em yes.”

“Oh, but Papa, those wasn’t guns. Those was the empty beer bottles you left.”

In the heavily guarded radio station the improvised program went on and on. The night passed, and there was no attack. Apparently the Law and Order League knew how stoutly the union was prepared to resist and got cold feet. At 8 in the morning, Frank Grillo went on the air again, reporting all quiet at the Goodyear gates.

That broadcast was the longest in labor history. It was the first time labor had used the radio as both an offensive and defensive weapon in a large-scale strike.

After a busy day in strike headquarters on Friday, March 20, I returned to the Portage Hotel to learn that a tentative agreement with the Goodyear company had at last been reached. Though it was admittedly “the best yet;” some of the strike

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<sup>2</sup> Two Rogues’ Gallery portraits of members of Pearl Bergoff’s strike-breaking army, shown

committee members were apprehensive that it, too, would be turned down by the rank-and-file.

I took a copy from Leo Krzycki, and began reading. As I went along I became elated.

“Why, gentlemen,” I said, when I finished, “you couldn’t hope for a better contract to offer your people. This is a union agreement, minus the closed-shop clause. I see no danger of its being voted down.”

Seven points were dealt with in the new proposal:

1. All employees to return to work without discrimination or interruption of service record.
2. Management to meet with employees individually or through their representatives to negotiate on all questions in which there is mutual interest.
3. Notice to be given to representatives of the employees affected of changes in wage rates before they are posted.
4. A 36-hour week to prevail in the tire and tube division — six-hour daily shifts. Before any change is made in these hours below 30 hours or above 36 hours per week, it will be arranged for by vote of employees in departments affected.
5. In all other departments or divisions, hours worked per week shall not exceed 40 nor be less than 30, except by vote of employees in departments affected.
6. A week of 24 hours to be worked temporarily in all departments without a vote in order to avoid lay-offs.
7. Lists of contemplated lay-offs to be available for inspection by the representatives of employees affected.

An oral understanding between the attorneys for the company and the union covered other points:

- Union shop committees to have opportunity to deal with foremen during working hours if necessary.
- Flying Squadron men to be given credit only for actual time they have been with the company, in determining seniority rights.

- All voting by Goodyear employees on questions having to do with their work to be fairly and impartially conducted, without interference by management.
- Reclaiming plant to be placed back on a six-hour day basis “as soon as possible.”
- Wage inequalities to be checked when plant is reopened.

One omission in this contract gave the strikers a distinct advantage, the committee could see. It lacked the usual provision against strikes and lockouts. After five weeks on the picket-lines, the strikers would go back to their jobs educated and disciplined, well versed in union rules, and confident in the knowledge that they had a solid organization behind them.

Not knowing what lay ahead, the management would provoke the union members into stoppages and sit-downs. Then the company would call on the union officials for an accounting, and they would answer that they couldn't do anything about it because there was no provision in the contract excluding sit-downs. After these stoppages became a nuisance, the company would be tickled pink to grant a closed shop to avoid work interruption, and let the union take all the trouble off its hands.

And I predicted that after Goodyear realized that it was dealing with an organized group and a responsible leadership, the company would see to it that the whole rubber industry had a closed shop. That had been our experience in the ladies' garment industry; some employers who had been viciously anti-union had later virtually acted as organizers for us.

The committee members began to perk up, and their confidence was further increased when Germer, Krzycki, and Hapgood agreed with me, telling of their own trials in obtaining collective agreements for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the United Mine Workers.

It was decided to call the key men among the rank-and-file together that evening and explain why this contract was the best obtainable under the circumstances, and why it should be approved. They would spread the word to as many strikers as possible in advance of next day's mass meeting. Grillo was to have the proposal mimeographed.

Taking a copy of the agreement with me, I started for my own room to study it further.

Through the open door of a room near by I saw Powers Hapgood talking with two other men. They hailed me. I recognized one of them as Louis F. Budenz, then labor editor of the Communist *Daily Worker* in New York.

“We want to know,” I heard them ask Powers, “what kind of an agreement you are presenting to the strikers.”

“And who in hell is *we*?” I interposed.

The two men looked startled. “Why, the Communist Party!”

“This is Jim Keller, C.P. organizer for Akron,” Budenz added.

“We are submitting an excellent agreement,” I told them, “the best that could possibly be wrested from the company. My advice to you both is to lay off this strike and let us settle it in our own way.”

“Why are *you* so belligerent?” Keller asked.

“Because you have no business here. What is more,” and I turned to Budenz, “you will remember, Louis, when you and I tried to settle the Westchester County pick and shovel strike in 1931, and the Communists threw a monkey-wrench into what we were doing. You were belligerent then, before you were a party member, because *you* didn’t like their interference.”

He mumbled something in reply and asked to see a copy of the agreement.

“You’ll get a copy when it’s given out at the Armory tomorrow afternoon, the same as the rest.”

A. J. Muste, dean of Brookwood Labor College when I was a student there, also had come to Akron to survey the strike situation. B. J. Widick, reporter for the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, and I went to meet him in a restaurant.

Again the question: “What kind of an agreement —?”

“A.J.,” I answered, “you trained us at Brookwood to organize the mass production workers. You laid stress on both the practical and ethical sides. And you never let us forget that when strikes are settled, they must be settled honorably. I won’t fail your teaching now.”

Powers Hapgood and I made the rounds with the strike committee that evening, talking with the pickets. We urged them to attend the Armory meeting, explaining that the committee had got what we considered the best possible proposal, and that it was up to the strikers to return to work and show the rest of the rubber workers the solidarity of their union.

Among the outstanding rank-and-file men whose word carried weight were Bill Carney and E. L. Howard. Carney later became New Jersey regional director for the CIO, and died of a heart attack just before its 1940 convention in Atlantic City.

We told them of experiences in our own industries; dwelt upon how long it took to build a real union; argued that it couldn’t be done with a single strike. A long strike seldom won better conditions, but was apt to peter out without result. The rubber workers had won the admiration and respect of the whole labor movement

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in the Levinson book. bear the name of Cohen. But any resemblance of Hophead Cohen to either, Mac Coleman insists, was pure coincidence.

and the Akron public for courage, stamina, and cool-headedness. Accepting the pending proposals would put them in a strategically advantageous position.

“Did your union ever have such an agreement?” Carney asked.

“Yes,” I said, “but in Los Angeles we didn’t have nearly so much to start with as you’re being offered.”

“Well, I guess if it was good enough for the garment workers,” Carney commented, “it will be good enough for the rubber workers.”

After visiting all the posts, talking fast at each, we went on to the Armory. By one o’clock it was jammed.

Overnight copies of a crude anonymous leaflet had been widely circulated. It denounced the union leadership; stamped the tentative contract as a “betrayal agreement”; and called upon the strikers to “raise hell” at the Armory meeting and boo and shout down any officer who spoke for the proposal.

Immediately after the session began Tommy Burns read the text of that scurrilous circular, and served notice that if any one followed the instructions therein he would be giving evidence that he was acting for some disruptive agency that was trying to prolong the conflict. His warning was effective. Authorship of the leaflet was never traced.

With great shouts the meeting voted to approve the new proposals. If there was any dissent it was lost in the din of enthusiasm. The strikers would go back to work Monday.

Adjourning, the throng in the Armory, plus thousands who had been unable to get in, began a spontaneous march through the business district, heading for strike headquarters. Their joy was unbounded. Not since Armistice Day in 1918 had there been such jubilation in Akron.

The marchers even cheered President Litchfield as he raised a window of the Mayflower Hotel and looked out. He must have been surprised.

Saloons and liquor stores were permitted to reopen. Shanties were torn down swiftly and all debris removed. And the traction company was informed that the streets had been cleared and that it might resume normal trolley service in the strike area.

Now we of the CIO committee could relax. We went out to dinner, where there was good music, and danced until the small hours.

On Sunday our people began to depart. Several visitors came in from Detroit, Cleveland, and Toledo, including Homer Martin, Walter P. Reuther, and George F. Addes, all connected with the small but promising United Automobile Workers of America. They were greatly inspired by the outcome of the rubber workers’ strike.

“We’ll be next,” said Martin, the UAW vice-president. “Will you come and help us?”

We said we would.



## Chapter 22. Auto Workers Line Up For Battle

Homer Martin reminded me of my promise in March. He wired from Detroit asking if I would speak at a series of mass-meetings. My co-operation, and that of Leo Krzycki, was especially needed now to round up delegates for the second convention of the United Automobile Workers, to be held in South Bend, Indiana, beginning April 27. A sizeable number of such delegates had to be found who were both intelligent and willing to risk losing their jobs.

So I went to Detroit, where Martin, Ed Hall, secretary-treasurer, and others of the younger, progressive group in the UAW welcomed me at their offices in the Hoffman Building.

They introduced me to their provisional president, Francis J.

Dillon, who had been appointed by President William Green of the A F of L, and whose term would expire with the coming convention. Dillon was a colorless person, the cartoon prototype of a union official, pot-bellied, always with a large cigar. He spoke derisively of the activities of his younger fellow-officers and about workers generally. He knew nothing about the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, (and seemed proud of that), said I was wasting my time in Michigan. It was sheer insanity for the UAW to hold the scheduled meetings, he added; none of the auto workers would show up. I learned afterward that Dillon urged the Detroit Board of Education to refuse us the use of high school auditoriums!

Leo Krzycki arrived the same day, and we both spoke at several meetings in Detroit and Hamtramck. My job particularly was to persuade the women, who almost invariably came with their men, to encourage them to serve as convention delegates.

At those gatherings I was greeted by Russians and Ukrainians whom I had met on previous visits. They were fearful of future repercussions in the international situation.

Next day, more meetings. In the evening Martin, Leo, and I spoke in Pengelly Hall, the union's headquarters in Flint. Though the place could have held hundreds, only a few dozen persons showed up. But this did not dampen my ardor. I knew that those present were good union material or they wouldn't have come. They had courage I recalled times when I visited Detroit in behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti,

and spoke to small groups of auto workers, mostly foreign-born, who appeared with their whole families. They were largely from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Prior to World War I, the automotive industry maintained agencies abroad to recruit unskilled labor among the peasantry. The war shut off this traffic, and during the industrial boom the manufacturers turned to the native labor supply. After the passage of the 1924 immigration quota law they depended almost wholly on native sources. Meanwhile technological improvements in production processes displaced men by the tens of thousands, so that Detroit and other auto centers harbored large numbers of unemployed.

Now most of the workers I met in the automobile field were American-born sons and daughters of the Europeans whom I had known earlier, and as in Akron men and women who had lost their means of livelihood during the depression. The men in the industry were automatons in the merciless conveyer-belt production system, and faced the prospect of being burned out before they were 40 by the speed-up's terrible grind.

We kept our speeches short, touching chiefly on the recent victories of the Akron rubber workers, the coal miners, garment workers, and other aggressive sections of the labor movement. We emphasized the opportunity before the automobile workers, contending that they must organize solidly — in an industrial union — to get a living wage and decent working conditions. So long as any worker stood alone, the boss could intimidate him, and the boss would always win. The coming convention would give the auto workers a chance to serve notice on their employers that they intended to stand together.

The union leaders were well satisfied with the outcome of those meetings. Enough open-eyed convention delegates were elected to give the progressive group confidence that they could put through obviously needed reforms in the UAW.

Close to 500,000 workers were then employed in the automobile industry. The UAW had a membership of about 28,000, spread among some 40 companies. A closed shop agreement with Nash in Kenosha, Wisconsin, covered 8,000 workers. In South Bend the Studebaker and Bendix plants had been completely unionized, with more than 7,000 members. There was a contract, too, with the White Company in Cleveland, won through a short sit-down strike in 1934.

Next in line for organization was the giant General Motors Corporation, which produced Chevrolet, Pontiac, Buick, Oldsmobile, La Salle, and Cadillac cars, Fisher bodies, and Chevrolet and GMC trucks.

Nineteen Thirty-Four also had seen a bitterly fought strike against General Motors in its Toledo Autolite plant, a strike notorious for brutalities to strikers. After the Toledo settlement, the company stated publicly: "It won't happen again," and

since then it had endeavored to decentralize its operations by setting up branches in scattered smaller communities.

Many efforts to organize the automobile industry, in its 40 years of existence, had been frustrated by the powerful employing groups. The open shop had generally prevailed, and the big companies notably Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors — had widely used industrial spies and fostered company unions, thinly disguised as “voluntary” employees’ associations.

A semi-industrial union called the United Automobile, Aircraft, and Vehicle workers, affiliated with the A F of L, built up considerable strength during World War I, and by 1920 claimed a membership of 45,000. But demobilization of industry following the war and loss of a strike for which it was not adequately prepared, plus attempts of the A F of L to split it into crafts, caused it to disintegrate.

At the A F of L convention in Detroit in 1926, plans were outlined for a drive to unionize the auto workers. The craft internationals were asked to waive questions of jurisdiction while the campaign was on, but they demurred, though automobile manufacturing was a mass production industry and the bulk of workers in it unskilled.

Heads of some of the 17 internationals concerned *did* make sympathetic gestures when the drive was started by six organizers in the summer of 1927, but that was all, and the campaign soon fizzled out. Even if the craft unions had been cooperative, other circumstances were strongly against it — the huge labor turnover, the shutting down of the great Ford works while preparations were made to produce the new Model A, and the presence of 125,000 jobless workers in Detroit.

So the auto workers remained unorganized, and nearly six years were to pass before anything tangible was done about the problem.

When the National Industrial Recovery Act became law in 1933, the automobile manufacturers balked at signing an NRA Code of fair competition, delaying behind a barrage of patriotic sounding utterances. When a code finally was agreed upon, it contained a “merit clause” enabling the companies to evade observance of Section 7-a, which forbade discrimination against union members. This clause gave them freedom to hire workers “according to merit — that is, competence on the job as judged by the employer.”

Wage cuts below the cost of living and vicious working conditions brought a succession of revolts among the auto workers in 1933. Strikes in seven plants took place in January, and through the year walkouts closed or crippled 33 plants in eight cities — Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Cleveland, Oakland, California, Edgewater, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Chester, Pennsylvania.

Three independent unions were formed that year — the Mechanics’ Educational Society of America, the Associated Automobile Workers, and the Automobile Industrial Workers’ Association. The first took in only skilled tool and die makers at

the start, but later widened its scope. Others in action in this field were the battle-scarred Industrial Workers of the World and the Communist-led Auto Workers' Union, developed from a remnant of the old United Automobile, Aircraft, and Vehicle Workers.

The activities of the independent unions aroused the A F of L to new organizing effort. It set up federal locals in the auto industry, and new members flocked in by the thousands. By 1934 the A F of L had lined up more than 210,000 auto workers in these loosely organized locals. A general strike, to compel union recognition, was "postponed" at President Roosevelt's request. The "settlement" arranged proved a Greek gift to the workers, for it added to the NRA Code a section providing for "proportional representation": for A F of L unions, independent unions, and company unions, on all committees for collective bargaining and adjustment of grievances. Thus company unions were given the same recognition as legitimate unions by the national government.

At the same time an Automobile Labor Board, headed by Leo Wolman, was set up, supposedly to uphold labor's right to collective bargaining and prevent discrimination. Its decisions, however, usually favored the employers, and the A F of L denounced it as unfair to labor.

Although the general strike plan had been ditched by the President's 'intervention,' automobile strikes occurred that year in at least nine cities.

One strike, at the Hudson plant in Detroit, pointedly proved the fallacy of craft organization. An A F of L organizer led a handful of A F of L mechanics, who had won a union contract, through an A F of L picket-line I

By thousands the disillusioned members now dropped out of the Federation. Transferred from federal unions into craft locals, they had soon discovered that this kind of unionism had no value for them.

But the conflict over the NRA Code and the rise of company unionism under the sanction of the "proportional representation" amendment brought into sharp focus the need for self-organization by the auto workers. Like all in mass production, they needed an industrial union. Outspoken men who remained in the A F of L pressed for an international of their own, and won it in 1934. Those who demanded an industrial union were largely former coal miners, who knew the power of that form of organization.

For decades the heads of the motor industry had been so sure of their position that they had defied law and disregarded common decency in human relations. On one hand they derived profitable free publicity from employee welfare programs more showy than real; on the other, they ruthlessly exploited their working forces. Men laid off in one department, where they had worked up to a fairly substantial wage, would be re-hired in another department at reduced pay. Workers who became vocal about plant conditions were fired as "trouble makers."

In 1932 Dearborn police had fired into a crowd of 4,000 seeking entrance to the Ford plant to protest against mass lay-offs, and had killed four men and wounded many others.

Ever since Henry Ford announced a \$5-a-day minimum wage for unskilled labor in 1913, the automobile industry had had the reputation of paying “fat” wages. But the auto workers received less than an average of \$1,300 a year in 1925, when times were good, and less than \$1,000 in 1935. A report to the NRA (by the Henderson committee) showed that 45 per cent of these workers were paid less than \$1,000 in 1934. In one plant three-fifths of the employees received less than \$800, while a third got less than \$400.

UAW aggressiveness in 1936 evidently was felt by the car manufacturers. With the exception of Henry Ford, always an independent, they acted in concert in most matters affecting the industry. Now they were spending \$100,000 jointly for “educational purposes,” which meant propaganda adverse to unionism. This sum was to be spent within six months on radio broadcasts, press, schools, recreation and social clubs in the plants, and general welfare practices, as well as financing company unions, which were being organized feverishly to offset the growing movement among the auto workers for a legitimate trade union of their own.

Germer, Leo Krzycki, Powers Hapgood, and I arrived in South Bend on the eve of the UAW convention. We worked with various committees, giving them the benefit of our experience in preparing reports on resolutions.

Most of those delegates, from 60 separate locals, were young men, and a few were young women. In-the main, they were attending such a conclave for the first time. Spokesmen for two independent unions came as “impartial observers.” One of these, who addressed the delegates, was a large, heavily built young man who wore a gold football on his watch-chain. This was Richard Frankenstein, former University of Michigan football player, worker in the Dodge plant in Detroit, and president of the Automotive Industrial Workers’ Association. The other was A. E. Greer, head of the Associated Automobile Workers of America. Later Frankenstein’s organization joined the UAW and he became a member of its general executive board. And subsequently Greer was exposed as a Pinkerton spy.

President William Green of the A F of L spoke on the opening day and turned the International over to the convention, lifting the probationary period and automatically freeing the UAW from its appointed officers. His voice vibrated with emotion as he viewed the future of the American labor movement with apprehension, obviously referring to the activities of the six-months-old Committee for Industrial Organization, which acted independently, though within the A F of L.

Provisional President Dillon, in his swan song, voiced great concern over the well-being of the nation’s workers, and particularly those in the automobile in-

dustry. What he had said to me in the privacy of his office completely belied the sentiments he now expressed from the platform.

Officers were elected on the third day. Homer Martin was named as president; Wyndham Mortimer of Cleveland, Ed Hall of Milwaukee, and Walter N. Wells of Detroit as first, second, and third vice-president; and George Addes of Toledo as general secretary-treasurer. Adde, one of the younger leaders of the 1934 Autolite strike, still holds that position.

Martin, then 84, had been a Baptist minister in Kansas City, Missouri, his congregation including many employees of the General Motors plant there. Because of sermons dealing with the social struggle, he was removed by the board of deacons, and went to work in a Chevrolet factory, where he was elected president of the federal local union. Later he was appointed vice-president of the UAW by William Green.

Mortimer, a former coal miner, worked for the White Motor Company in Cleveland. Ed Hall was a World War veteran, employed by the Seaman Body Company.

Every delegate had received a mimeographed letter, signed "The Communist Party," indorsing Martin and Mortimer for the two top offices. Earl Browder, head of that party, wired a quick repudiation of this testimonial. Clearly it was the work of an agent provocateur, designed to defeat the chances of the two candidates. The trick failed.

I was invited to address the convention on May Day Eve. A resolution to expel all Communists had been hotly debated, and I took issue with its purpose. I reminded the delegates of the great price the labor movement had paid to establish the right to hold conventions of this kind.

Other groups had championed unpopular social causes, sacrificing liberty and life. I spoke of the Anarchists hanged in Chicago in 1887 because they had fought for the eight-hour day; and of the IWW, brutally manhandled and lynched because they dared speak out against exploitation.

Regardless of the faults of Communism, I argued, our nation was confronted by an even greater danger — Fascism, whatever it might be called on American soil. I pleaded with the delegates to end political conflict among themselves. A trade union was primarily an economic organization; members must work together for the good of all despite their political differences.

Through succeeding months we kept in close touch with the United Automobile Workers. Quickly and effectively they strengthened their lines at every possible point, and their organization campaign in the big production centers steadily gained momentum. Carrying out a mandate of the convention, they established an efficient educational department akin to ours in the ILGWU, and a competently staffed research division, began to publish a newspaper, and issued various pamphlets and leaflets.

Several independent locals had joined the UAW soon after the convention, adding perhaps 8,000 to its numbers. With members coming in by hundreds each week, the young international moved on toward the inevitable show-down with General Motors. All along it had the constant support of the Committee for Industrial Organization.

Then the union's international officers, in an effort to deal with the numerous grievances, asked for a conference with William S. Knudsen, executive vice-president of General Motors. He curtly advised them to submit complaints to plant managers.

This was simply a runaround, for the managers had no authority to make decisions on questions of major import. But the union leaders decided to go through the motions of following Knudsen's advice, to see how far they would get. They drew up a tentative contract, handed it to the manager of the Fisher Body Works in Flint, owned by the GMC, and requested an answer within seven days.

Overnight three inspectors in the small Fisher No. 2 plant, where seat-covering material was made, were ordered transferred to undesirable locations because they refused to quit the union. Immediately 125 men in No. 2, a full shift, staged a sit-down. This was on December 30.

A few hours later company foremen in the huge block-long Fisher Plant No. 1, also in Flint, took drastic action, presumably as an object lesson to the workers there. Conspicuously they loaded dies onto flat cars for shipment to Pontiac and Lansing, where the UAW had not yet attained strength.

But that "lesson" defeated its own purpose for at once several hundred men in Plant No. 1 also sat down. the Belt — the production line — which depended on their continual activity, stopped as they stayed at their usual places idle. All ruses by company chiefs to get the strikers to leave the buildings failed. So long as they remained inside, the GMC could neither produce bodies nor remove any more equipment.

On the fourth day of this strike the company obtained from Judge Edward S. Black an injunction prohibiting the union from occupying the two factory buildings, from picketing, and from interfering in any way with non-striking employees. The sit-downers jeered the sheriff as he read the injunction to them, and remained where they were. They knew their one chance to win was to retain possession of the buildings.

That injunction was never enforced, because the union exposed the fact that Judge Black owned 1,000 shares of General Motors' stock. By sitting in a case in which he had a personal interest, he had violated a state law. The union began impeachment proceedings against him.

A week after the Fisher Body strike started, Homer Martin wired me: "Please come now." Adolph Germer, Leo Krzycki, and Powers Hapgood already were on the scene.

I was then in Montreal, where we had been carrying on an aggressive organization campaign, and was leaving for the ILGWU general executive board meeting in Washington. After that meeting, with the consent of President Dubinsky, I took a midnight plane on January 8 for Detroit.

Arriving there shortly after 4 a.m., I took the only cab at the airport, and went to the Fort Wayne Hotel, for a few hours' sleep. By 10 I was at UAW headquarters, where I met the strike leaders; including John Brophy, who had come from Washington to help. At the time of my previous visit this headquarters had been as dead as a doornail. Now it was teeming with activity.

After the morning press conference Martin Brophy, Wyndham Mortimer, and George Addes were leaving in a car for Flint, and took me with them. As we drove toward the embattled area, they told me what had been happening in Flint since the sit-down began — about the exposure of the judge who had granted the injunction; the organization of the "Flint Alliance," a back-to-work vigilante set-up, by George Boysen, ex-mayor of the city and former Buick paymaster; and an attack two days earlier on an outdoor union meeting of Chevrolet workers by hoodlums who wrecked the UAW sound equipment.

In Flint we went to the Pengelly building, where I had spoken the previous spring. Now used as strike headquarters, the place was crowded.

In the union office new members were steadily being enrolled. A pledge signed by all impressed me deeply. Each man promised to buy only union-made goods whenever possible; never to discriminate against a fellow worker, or wrong him or see him wronged, "if it is in my power to prevent it"; to "subordinate every selfish impulse to the task of elevating the material, intellectual, and moral condition of the automobile worker"; and to "be respectful in word and action to every woman."

On the second floor, the strike publicity department, directed by Carl Hostler, was turning out frequent news releases. Its office was a center for writers and artists attracted to Flint to record an epochal chapter of labor history. Among the writers were Mary Heaton Vorse and Josephine Herbst. In another room material was being prepared for the *Flint Auto Worker*, weekly organ of the strikers, by its editor, Henry Kraus, and his assistants. And volunteer students from the University of Michigan — both boys and girls — were busy putting out a mimeographed bulletin, *The Punch Press*, and miscellaneous leaflets.

Mrs. Bud Simon, wife of the union chairman in Fisher Body No. 1, was in charge of the commissary in Cook's restaurant, across the street. Normally Cook had enjoyed a healthy patronage from the men in No. 1. When the strike came, rather than close his doors, he offered the restaurant to the union, to use as long as need



be. All he asked was that the UAW pay for rent, gas, and light. Thus the union had a well equipped center for feeding the strikers, and Cook made many new friends.

I was taken into Plant No. 1, in which 8,000 workers had been employed. Escorted by two strikers, I climbed onto some wooden boxes, and got into the building through an open window. Bud Simon showed me around inside. Slim, earnest looking, and apparently in his early forties, he took his responsibilities as chairman of Fisher No. 1 seriously. He was anxious to avoid all unnecessary disturbance and conflict, and to prevent any possible property damage.

Brilliantly lighted, this vast plant was heavily guarded inside and outside — to keep strike-breakers and other interlopers from entering, and to protect the building and its contents. Especially did these strikers guard the company's dies. No liquor was permitted on the premises, and smoking was prohibited on all production floors. Forty-five men were assigned to police patrol duty inside. Their word was law.

Production being at a standstill, a long line of Fisher bodies hung from the motionless conveyor-belt,<sup>1</sup> as if frozen in space. But throughout the building there was ceaseless movement and watchfulness. One section had been fitted up like a hotel lobby, with soft cushions from car bodies to sit on. Newspapers and periodicals of varied political shades, labor papers, and mystery magazines were among the reading matter in evidence.

Having organized an orchestra and a chorus, they staged nightly concerts, broadcast through a loud speaker from the window to audiences outside in automobiles and on foot. One of the most popular of the songs had been composed especially for the Flint strikers:

- When they tie a can to a union man
- Sit down! Sit down!
- When they give him the sack, they'll take him back,
- Sit down! Sit down!
- Sit down, just take a seat
- Sit down, and rest your feet
- Sit down, you've got 'em beat
- Sit down! Sit down!

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily the word belt suggests leather. But in this case the conveyor-belt is more easily pictured if thought of as a trailing crane.

Most of these men had worked for Fisher Body from four to 12 years. They told me it was tough to sit around and do nothing after the speed-up had got into their blood.

“But I’ll sit here till Hell freezes under me,” said one. “I won’t give up the fight, for I know where I’ll land if we don’t win this time.”

There was a mass-meeting in the Pengelly building auditorium on Sunday afternoon, the place being packed to the doors. Brophy, Martin, Hapgood, Victor Reuther, and I spoke to a keenly receptive audience, in which many dared for the first time to listen to such speeches with hearts and minds open to conviction.

On this, the twelfth day of the strike, the scene was wholly peaceful. With the single exception of the breaking up of the meeting near the Chevrolet factory, when the union sound equipment was smashed, no violence had been used against the Flint strikers.

I had to leave that evening to fill a speaking engagement in Pittsburgh and return to Montreal, where pressing affairs demanded my attention.

“You don’t really need me,” I told John Brophy. “You have the situation well in hand, and you’re moving in the right direction. And you’ve got Adolph Germer, Leo, and Powers — they’re all free to stay on as long as necessary.”

“You may be sure we’ll need you before we get through here,” Brophy answered. “This won’t be an easy fight. Hell is likely to break loose any day.”

Early in February a long distance call from Ed Hall, UAW vice-president, to the ILGWU in New York, was relayed to me in Montreal. I must go to Flint at once; the situation was critical. At any hour the leaders expected to be arrested. They wanted me to be on hand, ready to take charge of strike headquarters if that should happen.

Flint, I already knew from newspaper dispatches, had become a battleground the day after I left there, with strikers as the casualties. More than 4,000 state troops, sent in by the new Governor, Frank Murphy, were on guard in the strike area.

Taking a midnight train, I arrived in Detroit next afternoon, and hastened to the Hotel Statler, where the UAW general strategy committee was quartered. Here the negotiations with the General Motors spokesmen were being conducted by John L. Lewis, though he was sick in bed, with assistance from John Brophy, Adolph Germer, and the UAW officials.

By this time the workings of the far-flung GMC system had been crippled so badly that it was producing only 1,500 cars a week in contrast to 53,000 in mid-December. Nearly all its 200,000 employees either were on strike or were prevented from working because essential parts were unavailable. Eighteen plants were strikebound in ten cities, the other nine being Detroit, St. Louis, Toledo, Cleveland, Atlanta, Kansas City, Mo., Janesville, Wis., Anderson, Ind., and Norwood, Ohio.

The sit-down owners in Flint still held Fisher Body Plants No. 1 and 2, and the union also had scored a master stroke in taking over Chevrolet Plant No. 4. The company had been compelled to negotiate, and the negotiations were friendly enough on the surface. But the strike leaders were apprehensive that the GMC was planning some smashing counter-blow. A new and wide-reaching injunction had been issued by a different judge, and arrests of strikers had begun.

## Chapter 23. General Motors Capitulates

In the strike zone the scene was war-like. Naked machine-guns mounted in the streets commanded every approach to the three plants-Fisher Body No. 1 and No. 2 and Chevrolet No. 4. National Guardsmen stood on duty with fixed bayonets, steel helmets on their heads, mufflers protecting their ears and throats from the bitter winds.

Despite this, most of the people in strike headquarters were relaxing when I arrived that Saturday afternoon. Earlier there had been speeches, but now they were enjoying themselves with music and dancing. Outside, a strong guard of union men watched for any surprise move by the company.

Chevy 4 had been practically isolated, ever since the soldiers came. For 24 hours they refused to permit food to be sent in to the strikers there. Then, after the union telegraphed a protest to Governor Murphy, the ban was lifted. But to enter the plant it was necessary to get a military pass.

Company and city police had attempted to oust the sit-downers from Fisher Body Plant No. 2 on the evening of January 11. Fourteen strikers received bullet-wounds, while scores of those inside and pickets outside were felled by tear gas bombs. The sheriff's sedan was overturned and wrecked, and three police cars were captured by the auto workers. Meanwhile a union sound truck stood in front of the plant, with Victor Reuther, UAW organizer, and other leaders at the microphone directing the movements of the besieged sit-downers and the pickets. Fifty strikers guarded the truck against destruction.

At midnight the police tried a second time to force their way into the plant, but were met by a deluge of cold water from a fire-hose, and an avalanche of two-pound steel automobile door hinges. The cops' lines broke under this defensive onslaught. Defeated and shame-faced, they left the scene at top speed, followed by laughter and derisive shouts from the strikers. Recalling Bull Run in the Civil War, that fight has come down in labor history as "the Battle of the Running Bulls."

The wounded men were treated in a hospital. Then, without being permitted to go to their homes, they were jailed by order of the county prosecutor, owner of 61 shares of General Motors stock. He caused 1,200 John Doe warrants to be issued, so that persons openly sympathetic toward the strike could be arrested singly or in

large numbers. The company hoped thus to frighten employees away from union meetings. Seven key men among the UAW rank-and-file were taken into custody, accused of “unlawful assembly and malicious destruction of property.”

Soon after the troops came, “solely to preserve order,” as Governor Murphy explained, a truce was announced. General Motors at last had agreed to meet with union representatives to discuss a settlement, and the union had conceded the company’s condition that it evacuate all GMC buildings in the cities where sit-downs were in force.

Before union leaders could carry out this promise in Flint, however, they discovered that the company also had agreed to “bargain collectively” with the Flint Alliance, obviously a company union. So the strikers in the two Flint plants decided to sit tight. Then the company heads refused to go on with the negotiations.

All the local leaders in the sit-down were young. Kermit Johnson was chairman of the strike committee. Bob Travis, from the Chevrolet plant in Toledo, and president of UAW Local 12, had charge of headquarters.

Several of those in the forefront of the strike had been trained at Brookwood Labor College, and I found that the teachings there were serving them well. Especially notable in this group were Victor and Roy Reuther, organizers for the UAW-Vic tall and lanky, with reddish brown hair and a humorous twinkle in his eyes; Roy debonair, and, like his brother Walter, president of the auto workers’ Detroit West Side local, possessing wavy auburn hair that a woman might envy. Sons of an old-time German Socialist and former brewery workers’ organizer, the brothers hailed from West Virginia. Other competent Brookwood graduates in the auto workers’ fight were Merlin Bishop, UAW educational director; Frank Winn, its publicity director; and Hi Fish, a young Socialist. I had recommended Bishop and Winn for their jobs.

The company asserted that 110,000 workers had signed back-to-work petitions circulated by the Flint Alliance. Immediately the union countered with documentary proof that intimidation had been widely used by foremen and other minor GMC executives in getting signatures.

For the moment the Flint Alliance was discredited. But the union leaders had ample cause to be worried.

In Anderson, Indiana, on January 25, a mob broke up a union meeting attended by General Motors workers and besieged UAW organizers for hours at union headquarters. Vic Reuther’s wife narrowly escaped being beaten, and the others were forced to leave town. On the 27<sup>th</sup> four union men were clubbed by another mob in Bay City, Michigan, where GMC also had a factory; and that same night these four were badly injured when their car was deliberately sideswiped by some of the clubbers. Next day UAW members were mobbed in Anderson as they waited for a train.

Though the strike lines in Flint appeared to be holding firmly, the leaders felt the growing pressure of the forces working against them. Aggressive action was needed. As in a war, something unexpected and startling was called for to tighten the sit-downers' morale.

Weighing all possibilities carefully, the leaders planned a masterstroke. Chevrolet No. 4 was the key plant, in which all GMC motors were assembled. If this could be captured, it would shut off the corporation's entire production in Flint.

But this plant was stoutly guarded, and the company police were quartered in the personnel building, close by. The strategy committee wrestled with the problem of luring the guards from the vicinity of Chevy 4. Finally it figured out a way.

Supposed plans for the union's "next move" were freely discussed at a meeting attended, the leaders knew, by company spies. They announced that on Monday, February 1, at 3:30 p.m. a sit-down would start in Chevrolet Plant No. 9, in which ball-bearings were produced. This was at the far end of the eight-acre Chevrolet area.

Early that afternoon all the company police, augmented by city detectives, poured into Plant No. 9, carrying clubs and tear-gas bombs.

Word systematically spread around town had caused more than 2,500 strikers to gather in Pengelly Hall or in the street outside. From a sound truck at the curb speeches were being made by some of the union leaders. Carrying out the day's strategy, a telephone call to union headquarters reported that the police had attacked pickets in front of Chevy 9.

To the cry of "Let's go!" the sound truck set off in the direction of that plant, the crowd following on the run.

Unionists who had got into No. 9 unobserved, began yelling for a sit-down, and the company police and the dicks now tried to drive them out with tear gas.

Outside this plant many pickets had assembled, including dozens of members of the Women's Emergency Brigade—distinguished by their red berets—wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of strikers. They had seen the company police go in with the gas bombs, and as soon as they heard fighting inside, they began breaking windows, to save their men from suffocation.

Talking fast through the sound-truck microphone, Powers Hapgood and Roy Reuther gave continuous instructions to the strikers, and helped to keep the attention of the company forces concentrated on Chevy 9.

After more than a half hour of fighting, a motorcyclist brought an all-important message to Roy. "The sit-down is on in Chevy 4!" A picked group of 500 strikers had seized it, brushing surprised foremen aside, and meeting with no resistance. Roy now asked the men and women in front of No. 9 to disperse, shouting: "There's a good reason!" Then the sound truck sped to Plant No. 4, where Powers and Roy joined Walter Reuther, who was already inside.

Scores of pickets were outside No. 4 when the company police got there. The cops attempted to take the main gate away from them, but were halted by a long line of Women's Brigade members, who barred their way with locked arms, singing *We Shall Not Be Moved*.

Eighteen men had been injured in the fighting at Plant No. 9, some being badly beaten and cut. Two had to be taken to a hospital the others were attended in the first-aid station at strike headquarters.

With Chevy 4 captured, the company agreed to negotiate, and conferences were begun. Hope for an early settlement was expressed on all sides.

But an injunction issued by Judge Gadola heightened the tension. It called for the surrender of all the occupied plants in Flint within 24 hours. Failure to obey the order would make the union liable to fines aggregating \$15,000,000. The strikers ignored the injunction, and Judge Gadola ordered the sheriff to arrest all trespassers on GMC properties.

Sheriff Wolcott answered that, with his small force of deputies, this was impossible. He could make those arrests, he explained, only if Governor Murphy would instruct the National Guard to co operate. From Fisher Body No. 1 and No. 2, the sit-downers sent telegrams to the Governor, urging him to continue his publicly expressed stand against violence and bloodshed in Flint. Pointing out that they were unarmed, they declared their intention of remaining where they were, though it might mean death for many of them.

Governor Murphy viewed the question judicially. He refused to allow the troops to be used to enforce the injunction.

Now the Flint Alliance became increasingly active. Its members were being illegally armed with guns owned by the municipality. Police Chief Wills persisted in this despite the sheriff's protests. The vigilantes threatened to drive the sit-downers out of the plants and to "shoot the streets clear." Then a way was found to arm them legally. Somebody remembered an ordinance enacted at the time of the 1913 flood which provided for deputizing of citizens "in case of public emergency." Accordingly more than a thousand were sworn in as special police.

As the days passed, Adolph Germer commuted between Flint and Detroit, as exigencies of the strike required. Krzycki and Hapgood spent most of their time in Flint, speaking at strikers' meetings and at gatherings of citizens interested in knowing the facts about the conflict.

We all took turns in cruising on the sound truck, talking through the "mike," giving instructions to sit-downers and pickets, warning them of dangers, and reporting to the public on the progress of the negotiations. But none of us except Vic and Roy Reuther could do this more than 15 minutes, because our throats got dry. Those two could go on indefinitely, improvising.

One saw the Women's Emergency Brigade on duty at all hours of day and night—serving in the commissary, in the first-aid station, and on the picket-lines, working always to keep up the morale of the strikers' families.

The press was well represented, out-of-town correspondents making their headquarters at the Durant Hotel. They included Louis Stark and Russell Porter of the *New York Times*, Stark spending most of his time in Detroit watching the negotiations, while Porter covered Flint; Paul Tobenkin, Edward Angly, and Geoffrey Parsons Jr. of the *New York Herald Tribune*; Edward Levinson, *New York Post*; Paul Gallico, *New York Daily News*; Edwin Lahey, *Chicago Daily News*; Thomas McIntyre, *Detroit News*; William Lawrence and Mickey Maloney, *United Press*; Ted Peck and others, *Associated Press*.

Beside the writers and artists who came to help give the story of the strike to the outside world, others of liberal tendencies appeared on the scene offering cooperation. Among them were Norman Thomas, and Mary Hillyer of the League for Industrial Democracy.

On Sunday afternoon I visited the strikers in Fisher Body No. 1. The boxes on which I had climbed to get through the window entrance had been replaced by wooden steps. As I entered, the announcer boomed through the microphone: "A lady is coming in," presumably so that none of the men would be caught in any embarrassing position.

Those inside had settled themselves for a long stay. There had been no let-down in order or discipline. Every part of the building occupied by the strikers was kept scrupulously clean. In the cafeteria 17 bearded young men were scrubbing the floor. These fellows were the butt of many jokes and yet the envy of others. For weeks they had not shaved. One had put red polish on his long pointed fingernails, to prove to his foreman he hadn't worked during the strike!

There was a better supply of reading matter now in the "lounge," as well as playing cards, checkers, ping-pong tables, and a roulette wheel.

The sit-downers regarded the roof as their fort, but on every floor the water-hose was ready for any emergency; and at every strategic spot, objects that might serve as weapons were piled. Before the strike ended these men expected to be compelled to defend themselves.

In the evening another mass-meeting in Pengelly Hall was jammed, women predominating. The speakers included Josephine Herbst, the novelist, Walter Reuther, Wyndham Mortimer, Addes, Germer, Hapgood, and myself. We spoke confidently of the outcome of the strike and of better days ahead.

But afterward I lay awake, acutely conscious of the seriousness of the immediate situation, and worried. The strike leaders had not been able to conceal their Uneasiness. There was no telling what might happen even before morning.



We knew the Flint Alliance was steadily adding to its membership. Despite the presence of the troops, some atrocity might be committed which would set off the works. We were living in a powder magazine.

There was no alarm in the night, but I was up early, wide-eyed and with torn nerves.

Soon after the sit-down in Chevrolet 4, the company had shut off the heat and electricity there, and many of the men inside were suffering from colds. General Motors agents industriously spread rumors of epidemic illness among them. One pro-company doctor volunteered to pull every man out of the plant by pronouncing him dangerously ill, so as to scare their families and bring the city and state health departments into the picture. But the union insisted on sending in its own physicians and nurses, who found no epidemic.

On Monday afternoon Genora Johnson, Dorothy Kraus, and I accompanied the committee carrying hot food into Chevy 4. The militia officers consented to let us in, but went with us.

The interior of the plant was cold, and dim because of the opaque window glass. Dampness was in the air, and fumes from cold metal dipped in acid clutched at one's innards. With neither heat nor electricity, it was not possible to make life as cheerful here as in Fisher Body No 1. The sit-downers in Chevy 4 were bundled in anything they could lay hands upon. Many walked around with flannel pajamas over their clothes.

We took the names and sizes of men who were insufficiently clad, and that night bought out a general store's entire stock of heavy underwear, pajamas, woolen socks, mufflers, and canton flannel. I cut up the flannel in the form of small ponchos, the size of a long towel, with a hole in the center to put one's head through. These would keep the strikers' chests and backs warm.

We had promised to return to Chevrolet 4 on Wednesday. But at strike headquarters Bob Travis told me that a National Guardsman, a member of the union from another part of the state, had phoned a warning that warrants had been issued for "Miss Rose Partola," Roy Reuther, and several others, and that "Miss Partola had better keep away from Chevy 4." I did.

Thousands of letters dealing with the strike passed through the headquarters "post office." Two of these are worth reproducing here, for the light they throw on the types of individuals involved. One came from a Negro, a former share-cropper, living in another Michigan city. The second was from a sit-downer.

The first wrote in part as follows:

January 15, 1937

*Dear Brothers:*

I am a Chevrolet foundry worker here the Past six years. I stouck out on the convear [conveyor] for about 3 1/2 years now I am to old and to slo for that so I am on the Brooms. I heard add the mass meading Wansday Jan 13 that you got organizers all over the city. So fare I have not seen any or seen anbody that has seen any.

I am very much in simpothe with you hole hart and mind. I am 43 years old 4 childirn 2 going to School. I had hard loock 3 mongths ago. Lost my wife. so don't get around musch mabe that is why I dont see any of your organizers. I want to be com a member of your U.A.W.A. What Freadom and Proticktion can you ofer me? Do not ask me to com meat suicide as a lone member here.

Why can't we organize this town with its 10,000 A.W.s? One reason is there is a big coulerd line here. When it is neassesary for the Polotishen or the G.M. then the colerd man is O.K. 100% cidez on. We expearance that last tuesday night an Wansday at the mass meading. Outside of that he is the same G D N to them. A nother reason to my openon is the larsch bounch of Farmers we got here.

Oh well if I get lade off here I go behind the Plow. My way of thincken it has to be mad compulsory here. Organize or we wont tack your producks. I hop you understad my letter. I am not very good rider an hop to get an answer from you soon. Can you tack me in as a member at larsch?

Yours truly,

From Chevrolet Plant No. 4, the sit-downer wrote:

February 7, 1937

*Hello Kids:*

Gee whiz it was sure great to hear from you folks at last, you don't have any idea how I felt, not knowing if everything was all right or not. Tell Mother I got her message all right last Mon. nite but I was way down in the other end of the plant at the time helping barrocade the doors and they looked for me about two hours before they found me and they had gone by that time, tell her I was awfully sorry.

I am writing this in one of the front offices overlooking Kearsley street, and at present there are about 15 of these mugs cleaning up the place, it is one of the dormitories, room for about 20 cots in it so I am having a Hell of a time concentrating on what I am doing

Am awfully glad you and Bob are going to Mothers for dinner today, it will kind of take the loneliness away, by the way we are having chicken and ice cream for our Sunday dinner, but as far as the ice cream is concerned the heat has been off for five days and it is cold enough. I see by the paper the Union has bought 1200 pounds of chicken for today's dinner, thats lots of chicken what.

The menue yesterday Breakfast, oatmeal, coffee, grape-fruit peaches or prune, and bread and butter: Dimmer roast pork dressing mashed spuds gravey coffee or milk and the roast was swell. Supper, pork and beans, bread and coffee...

There are a lot of fake messages coming in to the boys that their families are sick to weaken our ranks so if any boss comes to the house and tries to feed you a lot of junk you tell him to go to the devil.

Listen Honey the Union will furnish you with groceries and fuel, they will see that our rent is paid so you go down to the tempel and see them. And if you need me don't send for me thru a letter but get a pass and come to the gate and get me and then I will know it isn't a fake...

If you want to send me a clean shirt sox and underwear take it to the hall and you can get my dirty clothes a day or so later by calling back there for them. Sure need sox.

Will dose with loads of love to all.

*Daddy.*

Word from Detroit on Tuesday, February 9, said the conferees were deadlocked We got new warnings of possible raids by the vigilantes, and the union strengthened its headquarters guard.

Tuesday passed with no violent action, but with the strikers generally nervous and jumpy. I got to bed after 2, heavy with fatigue, and slept fitfully, waking often and listening for noises. There might be a raid in the night.

Wednesday morning there were more alarms. The vigilantes had increased their numbers, and we heard rumors that additional troops would be sent in.

Yet this day-the forty-third since the strike started-also passed without violence. That evening there was heightened watchfulness by all the strikers and their friends.

I got to bed after midnight, dead weary. At 3 a.m. the phone,bell awakened me. Powers Hapgood calling-the strike had been settled. "Great news l " I cried happily, and went hack for a couple of hours of restful slumber.

At 6 o'clock I was at headquarters. The strike committee met briefly, and decided to wait until the union's national officers arrived before evacuating the plants.

Some of our crowd presently came from Detroit, and gave us the gist of the agreement. It recognized the UAW as the collective bargaining agency for its members, and the company agreed not to interfere with the right of its employees to belong to that union. The strikers would get their old jobs back without discrimination or prejudice. In turn the union agreed to terminate the existing strikes in Flint and nine other cities, and evacuate all plants occupied by its members.

The contract provided also that on February 16 the company was to begin collective bargaining with the UAW on its demands for a 30-hour week, a six-hour day, pay and a half for overtime, minimum rates of pay to provide "an American standard of living," seniority rights, abolition of piece-work systems of pay, and mutual agreement on speed of production lines.

Though not part of the settlement, but undoubtedly because of the strike, a wage increase of five cents an hour in all GMC plants had been announced overnight by President Alfred P. Sloan Jr. This was featured in the press as adding \$25,000,000 a year to the corporation's payroll.

By 4:30 the UAW national leaders had arrived from Detroit, Toledo, and elsewhere. President Martin, Secretary-Treasurer Addes, the vice-presidents, and Walter Reuther and the other executive board members. The CIO representatives-Brophy, Germer, Ilrzycki, and others-also had returned to Flint. We rounded up the local leaders and drove over to Fisher Body No. 1 to lead the strikers out. Thousands of auto workers and their families and friends were assembled outside and hundreds of cars were lined up in front of the plant and in nearby streets.

We climbed in through the entrance window. The sit-downers were waiting just inside, with their belongings. Everybody began shaking hands and talking all at once. Strikers embraced their officers like long lost brothers. Unshaven, many of them had the look of castaways rescued from a desert island. They had been away from their families 44 days, and there were no bounds to their happiness now that the sit-down was over and they had won.

When the main gate of No. 1 was thrown open, they came out singing, led by their band, and with many carrying American flags. Tremendous cheers went up as they emerged- cheers for the strikers, for the union, for John L. Lewis, and for Governor Murphy, who had been indefatigable in his efforts to bring about a settlement.

Quickly Chevrolet Avenue, in the vicinity of the big Chevy plant, became jammed. With the arrival of the paraders, the scene took on the aspect of a Mardi Gras. At Chevy 4 the sit-downers were massed on an outside stairway. They lingered there to sing *Solidarity Forever* while flags waved, toy balloons floated through the air, and colored paper streamers and confetti were thrown in every di-

rection. Newspaper photographers took flashlight pictures, news-reel cameramen ground their machines on top of trucks, and flares lighted up the faces of the crowd.

Then the parade continued to Fisher Body No. 1, where the scene was repeated, and thence downtown to the Pengelly building. I couldn't get within half a block of it, so densely was the street packed. Tens of thousands of workers from other towns poured in to join the celebration.

These people sang and joked and laughed and cried, deliriously joyful, Never had anything like this been seen in Flint To great numbers of workers the UAW victory was more important than the ending of World War I, for it meant a freedom they had never known before. No longer would they be afraid to join unions.

Watching that tumultuous scene, I compared it with my first visit to Pengelly Hall, attended by only a few dozen venturesome workers and their women. They and others like them had paved the way for tonight's triumph. I realized suddenly that my face was wet. Tears of gladness were streaming down my cheeks.

## Chapter 24. French-Canadian Girls Get Tough

*This chapter is missing*

## Chapter 25. We Win Against Odds in Montreal

Signs of a widening rift in the Dress Manufacturers Guild were evident on Friday. One faction was determined to fight our union to the last ditch. The other group indicated that if a union was to be organized among the city's dressmakers, they would "rather have the responsible ILGWU than a Jew-baiting Catholic 'syndicate.'"

Their profits depended upon their taking advantage of changes in seasons. Soon there would be warm weather; summer dresses must be put on the market, but none could be shipped because the strikers had essential parts of them at home in large quantity – belts, loops, collars, and cuffs. In the past they had been compelled to do home work at night without pay.

Several manufacturers, including the four who had repudiated the contract with *La Ligue*, requested a conference with us. We met at the Mount Royal Hotel and discussed the issues amicably, and prospects for an equitable settlement seemed bright.

On Sunday, the 18<sup>th</sup>, however, more trouble loomed on the religious front. A letter urging the deportation of Shane and myself, addressed to the Archbishop of Montreal, was published with his approval in the widely read local French paper, *La Patrie*. Signed by representatives of the Catholic syndicates of Montreal and *La Ligue Catholique*, it read as follows:

To His Excellency,  
Monseigneur Georges Gauthier,  
Archbishop of Montreal,  
Montreal.

Excellency:

Following the conversation I had with you this morning, let me say that I had an interview with Rev. Father Bertrand and Mr. Conrad Bock, and that after discussion we came to the following conclusions, which I submit to you very respectfully.

After serious inquiry on “La Ligue Catholique des ouvriers des industries l’aiguille de la Province de Quebec,” we can assure you that the said “Ligue” is in a position to assure, in a very effective manner, the protection of the material, moral, and religious interests of the workers in the industry. There are no reasons for the workers to join foreign and neutral associations (unions). Hence, we humbly recommend to the Religious Authority:

1. to give his entire support to “La Ligue ...”
2. to warn the Catholic dressmakers against the exaggerated promises of foreign organizations hostile to our faith, promises that cannot ever materialize, and tell the workers to adhere to “La Ligue ...”
3. to ask the public authorities for special protection so that the Catholic dressmakers are not forced to give their name to the International Union in order to get work, because, if in the present conflict, “La Ligue ...” suffers a defeat, the Catholic workers, if they don’t want to go on relief, will have to belong to a union with communist tendencies, and has the government not promised to fight communism in this province?
4. to press upon the government the immediate deportation of Miss Rose Pesotta and Mr. Bernard Shane and the arrest of any picket who is not a Montreal resident.

(Signed) Jean Bertrand, priest  
Catholic Syndicates of Montreal  
Conrad Bock  
Organizer of “La Ligue ...”  
J. B. Desrosiers, p.s.s

Please believe, Excellency, in my filial and humble submission,

J. B. Desrosiers, p.s.s.

READ AND APPROVED by Georges Gauthier, Archbishop, and Cardinal Villeneuve.

April 17, 1937

On that Sunday the Catholic clergy made sweeping attacks on us in their sermons, and in parishes where many of the strikers lived the priests announced that Mademoiselle Pesotta and Monsieur Shane already had been deported. Some of the



girls phoned my hotel and learned that this was not true. I promised to be on the picket-line early next day.

To the surprise of the police, the employers, and the Fascist-minded officers of *La Ligue*, there was a huge turn-out of pickets on Monday, with Shane and myself at the head.

On the line that morning, the French girls confided to me that this time their priests had missed the point.

“If we had heard that stuff one year ago,” said Andrea Branchard, a willowy attractive brunette with shining black eyes, “we would have believed them, but no more “

“All they want is our money, money, money,” added Sally Paquette, a chairlady in one of the larger shops. “Now we know why they were against the union — we learn things for ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

At our afternoon meeting in the auditorium, I dwelt upon the attitude of the Catholic prelates, holding that they had no ethical right to aid or encourage the formation of company unions. In contrast to this attitude in Quebec, I pointed out that when Catholic priests in the United States entered an industrial conflict, they usually sided with the workers.

I cited a few examples: friendly co-operation given us in Los Angeles by Father James F. Cunningham; food donated to our strikers there by the Catholic Welfare Association; courageous help accorded by Father E:azinski to the steel strikers in Braddock, Pennsylvania, in 1919, and to the CIO in its drive to organize steel in 1936; outspoken pronouncements by Monsignor John A. Ryan of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in favor of labor unions; and the aid given to our union by Monsignor Joseph Smith of Cleveland. Also I emphasized the mandates to Catholics in behalf of the workers in the encyclicals of two Popes, Leo XIII and Pius XI.

The fight against us drained all our energies. We had to be alert day and night. Representatives of *La Ligue Catholique* visited the strikers' homes, and blackened our union and the strike in the eyes of their parents. Girls were put into the street by stern mothers because they could no longer bring in the pitiful wage they had been paid. Others were evicted from furnished rooms by landladies as “undesirable.” We met these emergencies with cash relief, but they left their mark.

*La Ligue's* emissaries assailed us for helping the Spanish Loyalists against General Franco, who was their choice for ruler of the Spanish people. This gave me a legitimate reason to discuss the Spanish conflict at strike meetings and to make clear the attitude of the ILGWU. Previously I had avoided that topic, but since the Church had brought up the subject I felt in duty bound to give our union's views

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<sup>1</sup> Both these names are fictitious for an obvious reason.

on the Spanish tragedy — and to indicate what might happen to other peoples, including the Canadians, if the Loyalists lost and Franco, backed by Mussolini and Hitler, won.

But whatever I thought about the reactionary elements in the Catholic Church, I had never tried to influence my secretary, Yvette Cadeux. In view of her general intelligence, I believed time would take care of that. It did.

Shortly before the strike began, Yvette's younger sister, Denise, came into the office one afternoon. Yvette received her with tears in her eyes. She seemed so affected that I asked why.

The younger girl had lost her job as an office worker. Unable to find another, and heartsick, she had resolved to make a pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Joseph, where a huge pile of crutches attested to the reputed miracles. Cripples who threw away those crutches, it was said, had been cured after climbing the long series of stone steps leading to the shrine.

Denise had walked several miles from her home and then made the climb on her knees, counting her beads and saying a prayer as she paused on each step. She had asked St. Joseph to help her find work.

"But, Yvette," I said, "why didn't you tell me? I could have saved her all that. We need another girl in this office. The job is hers."

As the months passed, both sisters became imbued with the spirit of militant unionism. After Yvette had translated a lot of our speeches and leaflets into French, and got a perspective on the whole fight, she began delivering speeches to her co-religionists. When the priests attacked us as "foreigners and Communists," she demolished their arguments for the benefit of the French-Canadian girls. Later the two visited many workers' homes, to counteract the speeches of our opposition.

"Now I understand what lies I've been fed all these years," Yvette confided to me one day. "Never again will I believe what is said by others about anything, unless I study the question for myself."

*La Ligue Catholique* opened an "employment agency" for dressmakers and began to send workers to the factories — girls who knew little if anything about the strike. But these innocents were intercepted by the pickets, who brought them to the strike halls, where the situation was explained to them. Nearly always they joined our ranks.

The employers placed advertisements in the newspapers headed 'An Invitation to the Workers in the Dress Industry,' singing the old song:

"We know that Canadian workers in the dress industry want to work for wages, not strike. We know that numbers of Canadian workers are being kept from their factory by threats and intimidation. We are willing, as employers, to meet and discuss wages and working conditions with any Canadian workers through *their own Canadian organizations*. We are not willing to assist any *foreign agitators* in

forcing Canadian workers to join *foreign organizations* which have no concern for the workers' welfare...

"We are willing to meet workers at any time, ... to negotiate sanely and honestly. Canadian workers, *do not be misled by fantastic promises from foreign agitators. We who have given you jobs and paid you wages are your best friends.,,*"<sup>2</sup>

By this time the girls could see for themselves how dishonest this creed was.

The Manufacturers' Guild, however, had gained the support of the reactionary daily press, which branded Shane and myself as "outsiders." Erroneously I was described in some of these attacks as a Cuban. The drum-fire became heavy.

May Day would fall on Saturday. We had planned to celebrate it fitly. Fine spring weather had come, and we all felt in holiday mood. But on Friday evening we learned that Premier Maurice Duplessis had ordered the arrest of Shane and Trepanier on a charge of "conspiracy to foment grave public disorder." And at 6:30 a.m. Saturday I was tipped off by telephone that warrants had been issued for all the strike leaders and that Shane and I were to be held for deportation. Immediately we were notified by the union's attorneys, Berkowitz & Spector, and Louis Fitch, that they would be ready to act. Mr. Berkowitz, a member of the Dominion Parliament, had many important governmental contacts.

The reasoning of our enemies was apparent. In Quebec it is not easy on a Saturday to find a judge to set bail; on Sundays none at all can be found. With the leadership in jail over the week-end, the manufacturers and the heads of *La Ligue Catholique* figured that the spirit of the strikers would be broken, for on Sunday, at mass in their parish churches, the priests would be certain to order the workers back into the shops.

We who faced arrest quickly got out of sight. I took breakfast in an obscure restaurant, then spent most of the forenoon in a beauty parlor, having my hair done, a facial, a manicure, and sundry other services, to keep me there as long as possible.

As I sat under the hair dryer, my thoughts strayed to New York. Delegates to the 23d ILGWU convention, who would meet in Atlantic City on Monday, would now be assembling on Randall's Island for the May Day pageant. I had hoped to be there. I pictured other May Day parades and pageants I had seen or taken part in. Outside the sun was bright and warm, the day perfect. Nostalgia pressed in upon me. Weeks of cumulative fatigue and loneliness were having their effect. I felt like a castaway on a desert island, not knowing when rescuers would come.

After the beauty parlor session, I scarcely recognized myself in the mirror and hoped others wouldn't. Not having had any word about what to do next, I ate lunch in a second secluded eating place, and went back into hiding in a movie. That night

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<sup>2</sup> Italics here are mine. — R.P.

I didn't use my own room at the Hotel Mount Royal, but slept instead in another room for which a friend had registered.

But the warrants Premier Duplessis had ordered were not served. Attorney J. J. Spector had given out a statement that if the threatened arrests were made the union would apply for a writ of *habeas corpus* — or whatever might be necessary — and would fight the case. He pointed out that the 50,000 unionists in Montreal had indorsed our strike and that they would not “take this lying down.”

A warning came from the Ministry of Labor that unless the strikers were sent back to work within 24 hours the arrests would be made. We answered that it was not the practice of the ILGWU's officers to order its membership around like a flock of sheep. Our arrests would not reopen the factories, we said; other leaders would step in and the strike would go on.

Duplessis backed down on Monday, when the Montreal conflict was the subject of heated discussion in the Legislative Assembly in the City of Quebec. The Premier asserted that the warrants had been issued “on information received from reliable sources, that disorder might spread to serious proportions.” Now, he had suspended the serving of the warrants “until the Attorney General's Department can check the information received.”

President Dubinsky, in the name of the assembled delegates at the ILGWU convention in Atlantic City, sent us a message of cordial greeting that afternoon. Hyman Langer and Sam Kreisman, our Toronto organizers, and the cloakmakers' delegates had gone to the convention, but none of the rest of us even dreamed of attending. There was no telling how long the fight might last.

But evidently we had overestimated the employers' financial strength. It soon became apparent that they were weakening. They realized that the strike must be settled, because the manufacturers who had signed individual pacts with us were operating to capacity. Now the shop owners were anxious to meet with us.

Conferences were begun Monday evening and went on continuously through the night and all day Tuesday. A settlement was finally reached at 2 a.m. on Wednesday. In addition to our standard provisions, it gave the strikers an immediate 10 per cent wage increase for all workers, a 44-hour week, time and a half for overtime, no Saturday afternoon work, and other concessions.

Thunderous applause, cheers, laughter, and jubilant singing marked a mass-meeting that afternoon at which the settlement was ratified. Girls cried with joy and kissed one another. They sang and cheered, putting great fervor into the mention of all of us around whom they had fashioned verses. One heard revealing comment:

“What a difference between this and the end of the strike three years ago... We went back to the shops then like whipped dogs.”

“Now I can go home again. My mother won't lock me out. We've won!”

“Too bad it had to end so soon. It was all fun.”

Our job now was to hold shop meetings and send them back to work. But here we struck a snag. During the strike I had tried to convey to the strikers that it was not becoming to scab, and that a scab was scorned by loyal unionists. My words had had effect, and now when non-striking girls came to the halls to register and obtain working cards, many strikers refused to go back to work with them and objected bitterly to their being admitted into the union.

I explained that seldom was any strike a 100 per cent walkout; in the limited time available, it was never possible to educate everybody. I compared a strike to an election campaign or a civil war, at the end of which people who had been enemies went back to living and working side by side and managed to smooth out their differences.

Some even stronger argument obviously being needed, I found myself at a mass-meeting pleading in the name of Jesus Christ for tolerance, recalling the words spoken on the cross: “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” That plea won them over.

Victorious in Montreal, we decided to attend the International’s convention during its second week. Our party of twenty included Raoul and Mme. Trepanier, Bernard and Mrs. Shane, John and Mrs. Ulene, chairwomen from five large shops, and several newspapermen.

At the convention in Atlantic City we were escorted to the gayly decorated platform by the rest of the Canadian delegates, preceded by a brass band playing triumphant music, and banners waving high. The vast assemblage rose to its feet cheering.

Afterward Merle D. Vincent, formerly administrator of the NRA textile and wearing apparel codes and then on our Washington staff, told me that when he saw us moving down the center aisle while that mighty welcome was sounding, he could not help comparing us to the marching citizens of Marseilles during the French Revolution.

President Dubinsky introduced the various members of our delegation and lauded each for his or her part in the Montreal victory.

“On this platform,” he said, “you see many gifts. But the finest gift of all to our convention is this group of girls and men from Montreal.”

At the final session of that convention I was elected as a vice-president of the International for a second term. Then I returned to Montreal to prepare for the General Executive Board’s next quarterly meeting, to be held there beginning June 21. That evening we staged a mass-meeting of 5,000 garment workers in the Arena. This was a joyful occasion, with the Scottish bagpipers’ band of the Canadian National Railwaymen’s Union playing, and the crowd cheering and singing in French and English.

The thousands of girls and women present, lately freed from long exploitation, realized that they were now part of the great army of organized labor, and were no longer defenseless.

The occasion was rounded out by a banquet and dance at which representatives of the workers in every shop were present as guests of the International.

“My job here is finished,” I told President Dubinsky as the board completed its work. “Now I want to take a long vacation.”

“You’re entitled to it,” he agreed. “But before you start, I wish you would do me one special favor. I’d like you to go to Cleveland and give the knitwear workers a hand. Their case goes before the NLRB soon. *At the most you should be through in Cleveland within two weeks.*”

Well, I thought, my vacation can wait that long.

But I could not foresee what awaited me in Ohio.

## Chapter 26. Union Fights Union in Cleveland

THERE WAS A LONG raw scar on Louis Friend's right cheek. It worried me as he and others met my plane at the Cleveland airport. He had been slashed with a knife eight days earlier when a back-to-work flying wedge had forced the reopening of the Stone Knitting Mills in the face of our strike. This followed a surprise announcement that the company had signed a "contract" with another union, led by Coleman Claherty, an A F of L organizer, who, cutting across our jurisdiction, had formed federal locals in each of the four struck knit-wear factories.

Riding downtown with Friend in his car, I heard what had been happening in Cleveland:

"We've been having a tough time," he said. "I'm happy you could come."

Claherty, who had been ousted by the rubber workers in Akron, had arrived in town that spring in the hope of finding a new berth for himself. Also there was a disgruntled woman formerly connected with our union, who was looking for an emotional outlet, and a place for herself. Both had gravitated to the knit-wear field, in which our people were conducting a campaign, with more than 1,000 members enrolled.

In the previous August the A F of L had suspended our International for giving active support to the Committee for Industrial Organization's drive to unionize unskilled mass-production workers. In February, 1937, our Ohio manager, Vice-President Abraham Katovsky, whose headquarters were in Cleveland, was waylaid by a gang at night, terribly beaten, and left half-dead. For months he had battled for his life in a hospital, and now was convalescing in Bermuda.

During the big New York general dress strike in 1933, various knitwear mills became involved, and a special local, No. 155, was formed to take care of their needs. Later the ILGWU and the United Textile Workers Union reached a pact of mutual co-operation in that field. A Joint Council was formed to supervise the signing of agreements for the whole knitwear industry, with Louis Nelson, manager of Local 155, as one of its prime movers.

In Cleveland, committees from knit-mills came to Abe Katovsky pleading for help. He issued circulars and was ready to begin enrolling these workers in the union, when a representative of the Textile Workers' Union brought in a woman,

Lexie Waites, introduced her as the TWU secretary and recommended her highly as an organizer. After she had been active a few months in Katovsky's office, he found himself surrounded with spies and dropped the entire matter. But some of the knitwear workers remained with the union.

Later Lexie Waites became critically ill. Close to death, she signed an affidavit on March 12, 1936, confessing that she had been planted in the union as a spy by Philip and Fred Frankel, attorneys for the Cleveland Knitted Outerwear Association.<sup>1</sup> With advance notice of the union's intentions, the employers had been able, in previous years, to thwart attempts at unionization.

At this time the Textile Workers' Organizing Committee organized by the Committee for Industrial Organization, began to invade our territory, ignoring the pact of mutual co-operation between the ILGWU and the Textile Workers' Union. It became too complicated to explain to the workers the difficulties involved, and our union made repeated protests to the CIO. At our Atlantic City convention in 1937, John L. Lewis, then head of the CIO, said in a speech: "As to the knit goods and yarn, you can write your own ticket." But even after this statement, conferences between the TWOC leadership and ours were of no avail.

In Cleveland, while Abraham Katovsky hovered between life and death in a hospital, organization among the knitwear workers was going on peacefully, but the TWOC organizers continued to raid mills where the employees were already enrolled in our union.

Attorneys Philip and Fred Frankel, seeing that they were now getting involved with the CIO also; called in the Claherty crowd and promised to hand over the whole Cleveland knitting industry to the A F of L on condition that separate federal locals for each mill would be formed. These they hoped later to convert into company controlled unions.

The situation had become so hot that the TWOC withdrew from the scene.

Sometime in the spring of 1937 groups of knitwear workers from four mills came breathlessly to our office, each with the same story. The foreladies in those mills had directed all the employees to step down to the lunch room, where they found several men, who introduced themselves as A F of L organizers. These men urged them to join "a real union affiliated with the A F of L and not a CIO Communist union like the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. That's nothing but a Jew-union dominated by Moscow." And they announced that they had already

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kreindler recalled that in 1911 the same two lawyers had planted an agent provocateur in our Cleveland office, to break the cloakmakers' strike. For the Lexie Waites confession see a report by the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee on Cleveland. Its title follows: Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Education and labor, U.S. Senate, 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, pursuant to Senate Resolution 266 (74<sup>th</sup> Congress)...Part 38...Washington, 1939. Pages 15089-15100.



signed contracts with the mills covering all those employed there. None of the workers had been consulted about it.

Quick action by the ILGWU was necessary, the season being nearly over. The first mill was struck on June 11, and within two weeks all four factories were shut tight. At once our union brought its case before the National Labor Relations Board, claiming a majority of members and the right to bargain collectively for them. While it awaited a hearing Claherty, with a gang of thugs, attempted to reopen the Stone Knitting Mills. They were repulsed by 150 pickets.

Several days later they came better prepared — the thugs armed with blackjacks, and aided by 14 police on horseback and 80 cops on foot, the cops carrying nightsticks. The mounted police tried to clear the way for the entry of a group of strike-breakers by riding their horses through the picket-line. A bloody riot followed, 120 persons being injured. Women pickets, swept inside and up a stairway in the stampede, were thrown down the stairs as soon as their presence was discovered, and many girls were mercilessly clubbed by the thugs and the cops. Knifed in the face, Louis Friend was knocked unconscious. Some of the wounded were treated by nearby doctors, and others were sent to hospitals.

The Stone factory was reopened with a skeleton crew of “loyal” workers — the office staff, the foremen and foreladies, with some of their favorites, and former seasonal employees.

Now Claherty and his crowd were threatening to reopen the other three plants the next Monday. We would have to think fast

Enroute downtown, we stopped at the Federal Knitting Mills. Its eight entrances were stoutly guarded by our pickets, three shifts being on duty daily, 160 on each eight-hour detail. We looked in, too, at the Federal strikers’ kitchen, where hot appetizing food, Hungarian style, was ready day and night.

I registered at the Hollenden Hotel, and went on to the union office, where the local leaders were busy with strike problems. There I found myself, in spite of their misfortune, in a congenial, wholesome atmosphere.

Vice-President Charles Kreindler had arrived on the day of the opening of the Stone factory, sent for the emergency by Dubinsky. Originally a Cleveland cloak cutter, he had headed our organization there for years. More recently, he had been in charge in Baltimore, as well as manager of Waistmakers’ Local 25 in New York. About 50, tall and dark-haired, his brotherly attitude was a comfort to all of us.

Nathan Solomon, a former cloakmaker, now secretary of the Cleveland Joint Board, had assumed full charge there in Katovsky’s absence. Louis Friend, bulky, carelessly dressed, and looking like an Irishman, with his wavy red hair, divided his time between the picket lines and his usual routine as business agent. His good nature brightened the strike scene.

Emil De Leo, clean-cut young Italian knitter from Pennsylvania, who was one of our NRA fledgling organizers, on the staff of Knitwear Local 155 in Brooklyn, had been lent to Cleveland for the duration of the strike. He proved a distinct asset. Tall, slim, and invariably with a red rose-bud in his lapel, De Leo has an agreeable voice and sparkling eyes that no young girl could miss.

Bernadine McGruder, young teacher, who had been on the WPA educational staff here, was local educational director for the union. She cruised in her flivver from one struck mill to another, looking after the special needs of the women and girls, cheering them with her contagious Irish humor. She saw that unpaid bills were cared for, took strikers who were ill to doctors, made sure their children attended school regularly, and did the purchasing for the commissary. Angie Bykowski, our Polish organizer, a husky, blond girl, gave unfailing attention to the newly organized knitters.

The joint board's office staff — Ruth Ashenfarb, Sophie Chait, Florence Fleisher, and Betty Weber, a Stone worker, were unsparing of their energies. Beside their regular routine, they put in long hours at extra typing, mimeographing, and anything else needed. Often on duty nights, Sundays, and holidays, they felt that victory for the knit-goods workers would benefit all.

More than 2,000 workers, chiefly girls and women, were out in this strike. For the most part, they were immigrants, or children or grand-children of foreigners — Serbians, Slovenians, Polish, Hungarians, Austrians, Macedonians, Italians, Bulgarians, Germans, Ukrainians — in fact, they included a sprinkling of every mid-European and Balkan nation. The peasant faces of the elder women and men were grim and worn with toil. They had long worked for a bare subsistence wage, and there was no mistaking their feelings toward strikebreakers and the gouging habits of the employers.

Some of the older ones had worked in the mills more than 30 years. Of Hungarian birth, the owners had employed their co-nationals from the beginning. And like the Chinese in San Francisco, the workers had regarded their bosses as benefactors. When told that wages were low because “times are bad,” they had trusted these men from their own land, not knowing that their employers continued to make ample profits.

All four factories had a large labor turnover. Inefficient and uneconomical from a standpoint of production, such a turnover was desirable for these mill owners, as it long had been for the big automobile companies. Labor surplus spelled insulation against labor troubles; if there was always a big reserve of idle workers to call upon, those in the plants would not “get too cocky” about wages and shop conditions.

I had brought a substantial check with me from New York, which enabled the strike committee to increase its cash relief allotments to needy strikers. We had to provide food for families; help pay rent, in some instances to avoid eviction; cover

bills for electricity or gas, turned off for non-payment; pay installments on cars, which would be seized if the purchaser defaulted; and even make payments on mortgages to avert foreclosures on homes.

Late that afternoon Julius Hochman, one of my fellow vice-presidents and general manager of the New York Dressmakers' Joint Board, also arrived. In the evening we addressed a mass-meeting, at which the strikers, crowding the Public Auditorium ballroom, made clear their determination to win.

While our office was downtown, on East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, the four strike-bound factories were in four widely scattered parts of Cleveland. Thus it was necessary to establish temporary quarters near each mill, where the strikers could hold their meetings, relax between shifts and eat.

For the Federal, Stone, and Bamberger contingents we rented small vacant stores, while the Stone strikers also were invited by a Negro pastor to meet in his church. Near the Friedman factory a militant woman striker turned her house over to us for the duration. A Serbian priest, too, let us use his church as a gathering place.

The strike commissary was set up in the Hungarian Social Hall, several blocks from the Federal mill. In a well-equipped kitchen, squads of women strikers prepared food, which was delivered in cars to the four picket-lines. Thought of those tasty dishes makes me hungry even now — hot soups, with piquant flavor, Hungarian goulash, home-made sausage, produced dexterously with curious gadgets and broiled to a turn, big loaves of health bread. Soft drinks and coffee were added. On that fare I gained ten pounds that summer.

Rose Topercer, a bright little Hungarian girl, was the chairlady of our Bamberger members, with Anna Rains as her assistant. Tall Catherine Ziegler headed the Federal group, with Leona Wolfe as her aide. Nick Hayden, a Serb, was chairman at the Friedman scene. Beatrice Schreiber was chairlady of the Stone group.

Because the local people had had no experience in conducting a strike of this size and seriousness, and the union offices were so far away, we decided to station an organizer at each plant to assist them, and to keep up the strikers' morale.

De Leo was assigned to the Bamberger situation, Marie Duke, organizer from New York, to the Stone mill, Bernadine McGruder to Friedman-Blau, while I went to the Federal factory. Daily also Bernadine and I spoke at meetings of all four groups.

Early on Monday, July 12, I was in front of the Federal knitting mill on Detroit Street, which ends about a block away from that point. Headquarters for the Federal strikers were in a vacant store= building diagonally across from the factory, which was on a corner of a car-line intersection. Directly opposite strike headquarters was the Eighth Precinct police station, its front facing the mill. The strikers gathered on the sidewalk, waiting anxiously, but the police had driven us off to the far end of the street.

Presently a small group of men appeared around a corner half a block away. They were quickly recognized by some of our people as those who had urged them to join the A F of L union. Then a squad of police with several dozen other men, and perhaps a hundred women, hove in sight, the civilians wearing big A F of L buttons. They headed straight for the main entrance of the mill, with another police squad behind them. The factory doors swung open, and the strikebreakers marched in. Some were brazen, but some looked shame-faced as they heard a din of jeering shouts in a dozen languages from the strikers who had been roped off and held at a distance by mounted police.

“Back-to-work” processions also forced the opening that day of the Friedman-Blau-Farber and Bamberger-Reinthal factories, where our organizers and pickets faced similar groups of thugs and “loyal employees” wearing the large A F of L buttons. Many of these, the strikers told me, had never worked in those plants.

When the four factories were shut down, the workers now on strike had refused to return until the mill owners signed a collective agreement with our Joint Board. The management then turned over their voluminous lists of reserve peak-season workers to the Claherty group, which sent letters and telegrams to all, promising them steady jobs under its so-called “union-agreements” with the owners.

All day on Monday, mass picketing continued. Late that afternoon the strikebreakers were escorted out of the mills. Our pickets were handled roughly by the cops and I made a protest.

Next morning the Federal mill strikers, except for six pickets permitted in front of the main entrance, were kept nearly two blocks away by a cordon of mounted police, while the “loyal” employees were conducted inside.

I had asked William J. Corrigan, our attorney, to be on hand to observe the hard-handedness of “the law.” So he was among the pickets as they were pushed around.

When he protested, he was instantly arrested, and so was I. As we were led through the street toward the station, I saw Captain Edward Flanagan, precinct commander, motioning to the two policemen to turn us loose. But they failed to notice his gestures. We could hear a great outcry of voices from hundreds of strikers, indignant at our arrest.

In a few minutes reporters and press photographers hurried in, and stories and pictures appeared in the Cleveland afternoon dailies. Corrigan pointed out that the police had no right to arrest us, for we had not violated any law. Earlier he had informed Mayor Burton that the police had acted illegally in limiting the strikers to six pickets at the Federal plant, and that the union would immediately begin legal action to remove that ban. After an hour we were released, without being booked on any charge.

Reading some of the press reports published before my arrival, I learned that Thomas A. Lenehan, secretary of the Cleveland Federation of Labor, had given active support to the anti-union employers. He had helped reopen the struck plants, mobilizing members of the building and metal trades, teamsters, gasoline station operators, and other unions.

Soon after the Stone factory was reopened and our members beaten and slashed, Lenehan boasted that his organization had “got a lot of co-operation from the police, which we never received before. I was surprised at their courteous treatment; we’ve been used to being the bad guy. We’ll continue our fight in spite of newspaper criticism.”

The paradox in all this was the inconsistent attitude of top A F of L officials. For years they had denounced company unions as dummies used to defeat organization by the Federation. But when our leaders protested against A F of L organizers holding meetings on company property, charging that they were now fostering company unions, their reply was characteristic of that period: “Those workers chose to remain with their mother organization.” They spoke as if some of the “loyal” employees had not fought this “*mother organization*” two years earlier — when the ILGWU was still within its ranks.

I was puzzled at first by the attitude of the A F of L officials here, for even after the suspension of the ILGWU from the Federation, its local executives had continued to be friendly to our people everywhere.

Introduced in the Hollenden lobby, by Kreindler, who had known these men for many years, I said to one of them:

“So this is what you fellows are doing now — giving aid and comfort to labor’s enemies I You know that bunch never wanted their mills organized. Yet now you help them against our union, and you even hire thugs to slug our women —”

“You can blame your own crowd for this.”

“How so?”

“What did you expect, after those leaflets attacking us?”

That was new to me, and he explained. Early in the strike some leaflets had been issued in which verbal brickbats were hurled at the Federation. One of these boasted: “We’ll dump the A F of L into Lake Erie.”

“We’ll show ‘em I “ Federation leaders replied.

I looked up the leaflets which had boomeranged with such velocity, and found that, in the feverish early days of the strike, the copy for it had been written by a young and confused outside volunteer, and was used in Katovsky’s absence.

Certain A F of L union heads in Cleveland, however, were exceedingly uncomfortable over the part played by some of their fellows in the reopening of the four plants. I know this because a man important in the affairs of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters showed me a telegram received by local leaders from

Daniel J. Tobin, its president. Tobin's wire, sent from the International's headquarters in Indianapolis, on June 29, said:

"Understand Ladies' Garment Workers have been on strike in certain Cleveland factories for some time. Information received here that American Federation of Labor with assistance of teamsters intend to break through picket lines tomorrow and thereby injure strikers. This International Union is opposed to destroying or helping to destroy any legitimate organization whether in or out of the American Federation of Labor, especially where strikers are endeavoring to obtain better conditions. My request to you is to do nothing in any way to injure the Ladies' Garment Workers, as they are not now or at any time interfering or trespassing on the jurisdiction of our International Union. Convey this message to all our people."

Presumably, the local pressure upon the teamsters had more force than this telegraphed request of their international president.

Later I talked with other local A F of L leaders who were discomfited by the knitwear situation. They now regarded Claherty as an "outsider" who had wedged himself into Cleveland, their unions having become willy-nilly involved, although none of them had any grievances against the "Lady Garment Workers," apart from that ill-advised leaflet.

Keeping a multi-lingual group together in a strike often calls for herculean efforts. Old racial conflicts come up, tempers flash over little things.

Yet the great majority of the knitgoods workers in Cleveland *did* stick together. Some of the women were as hard-boiled as Army sergeants. I had never seen a group of workers more courageous and determined. Long exploitation, misery, and humiliation had forced them to submerge their inborn pride, and had had a deep effect on their natures. But they were learning through bitter experience the meaning of unity and solidarity, and were forging ahead against all odds.

For years they had worked intermittently at thankless jobs, never certain of their earnings, always waiting for hand-outs from other sources. Kept on the employers' lists of "availables," many were given only a few weeks of seasonal work in a year. In the dull months the employers were not interested in knowing whether their "available" workers had food or were starving.

Once during that strike a factory owner warned a veteran Hungarian worker, in front of his mill, that if she didn't return soon he would hire somebody else and she would starve.

"All the years I worked for you," she answered, "you never asked me if I had enough to eat. Why do you worry about me now?"

And another woman, a Bulgarian in her forties, was asked by her forelady what she had gained in ten weeks on the picket-line. “I learned to speak English,” was the reply. “Isn’t that worth striking for?”

Most of these older workers, peasants, tillers of the soil, had been lured to this country by agents abroad who brought them directly from their villages to the Cleveland knitting mills. Some had odd lingual development. For instance, a Russian woman, placed between two Hungarians who usually spoke in their own language, of necessity had to learn Hungarian, and later had to learn English in her spare time.

One Serbian, father of nine children, some of whom worked in the same plant with him, had been employed there for 35 years – and in 1937, before the strike, received only \$18 a week.

Some workers here had raised a second and even a third generation while employed on a seasonal basis. I remember a Ukrainian grandmother who worked as a warper, her daughter, who had joined her in that craft, and her husband, all working in the same mill. Now the daughter came to the picket-line with her smaller children, one in a baby buggy.

When not on the picket line, most of the older women and some of the younger ones sat in the sun outside strike quarters and did hand knitting or crocheted doilies, table cloths, bed-spreads, handbags, baskets, or edgings on handkerchiefs. Crocheted baskets I have seen only in Cleveland. They were dipped in a solution of sugar and hot water and then were stretched over a flower pot or fruit bowl. When the solution dried, the baskets, now stiff, stood up alone as home ornaments. Presenting me with some of their handiwork, the makers pointed out that if the crocheted baskets became soiled, they could easily be washed and “starched” anew with sugar.

On July 15 the Regional Labor Board began its hearings, before.

Trial Examiner Irving G. McCann, to ascertain which union was to be certified as bargaining agent for the workers in three of the four plants – the Stone Knitting Mills, Federal Knitting Mills, and Bamberger-Reinthal.

Attorney Corrigan made a dignified and forceful case for our union. His argument was based on two pertinent clauses in the Wagner Act:

“*Section 7:* Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities, for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection.

“*Section 8:* It shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer – (1) To interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of the

rights guaranteed in Section 7. (2) To dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization.. . “

Our witnesses told their stories clearly. The two Simon girls, cruelly beaten when the Stone mill was reopened, gave graphic pictures of the events of that morning. Born and raised in a mining town, they spoke in simple language, which must have touched all but those who were trying to defeat us.

On the other hand, the presentation by our opponents set a new mark for audacity. Coleman Claherty was their chief spokesman, His testimony stamped him as a cynical, rough, and ignorant creature, mainly interested in holding onto his own job at any cost. Under cross-examination, he admitted that his organization had made a one-year closed-shop agreement with the Federal Knitting Company before it had a single member in that plant.

After the hearings, the case went to the National Labor Relations Board in Washington.

Because of the continuing attacks on our pickets, we staged a demonstration on Wednesday, July 21, with more than 1,000 workers marching, to the music of a 15-piece brass band, to the City Hall. We petitioned Mayor Burton to see that enforcement of the law was applied to both sides, not just to the strikers. He promised to act at once if any further violence was used against us.

On the afternoon of August 2 a joint conference attended by representatives of three striking groups – steel, textile, and our International – was held in the chambers of Judge Joseph H. Silbert, before whom all cases of “labor vandalism” were heard. We contended that he’d better call in the mill owners and their hirelings, who, in carrying out the Mohawk Valley back-to-work formula, had imported strike-breakers, professional sluggers, industrial spies, and vandals. We placed the responsibility for the current reign of terror squarely at the door of the employer who had brought in this unsavory army.

When I returned to the Federal mill, I found our pickets agitated by the presence of a gang of roughnecks, with several women among them, whose being there bode no good. Some were drunk.

Hearing that they were planning something drastic, I hurried into a stationery store, and telephoned Mayor Burton that some new kind of violence was brewing. Now, I told him, was the time to show us what his powers as mayor were.

When I opened the phone booth door, four strange women blocked my way. Dodging to escape a blow in the face, I felt a stinging pain above my left eye, and pain, too, in my left knee. Warm liquid streamed down over my face, blinding me, and I toppled over.

As in a dream, I heard people’s voices around me. Then I was lifted to my feet, my arm was gripped firmly, and I was made to walk, hobbled by a torn skirt. I



became aware that Captain Flanagan had led me across the street to the police station, and helped me into an ambulance, which took me to a hospital. There a surgeon in the emergency ward put several stitches above my eye. Apparently I had been cut with a razor.

Two steel strikers Steve Kohler and Joe Cavaluchi — had ridden in the ambulance with me, and were treated for injuries inflicted by some of the roughnecks. They had come to our picket-lines to visit friends.

Weak and light-headed, I walked out of the emergency room to find Marie Duke, Bernadine McGruder, De Leo, Kreindler, and Friend, waiting to take me to the hotel.

## Chapter 27. The Mohawk Valley Formula Pads

Our knitwear strike was closely linked up in the daily press with two other CIO strikes one in Republic Steel, and another sponsored by the TWOC in the industrial Rayon and Cleveland Worsted mills. The principal scene of conflict in Cleveland was at the steel plants, dominated by Tom Girdler, arch-enemy of labor unions. Here 6,000 workers had walked out.

July 29, 1937, saw a mass demonstration by the steel strikers in the Public Square. The speakers included Heywood Broun, then president of the American Newspaper Guild; Homer Martin of the United Automobile Workers; Leo Krzycki, Powers Hapgood, and others. This meeting, however, was cut short by a downpour of rain, which drenched thousands of workers to the skin.

Next morning Broun, Louis Nelson of Local 155, and Hapgood visited our Federal picket-lines and cheered the girls and women there. Immediately Broun became involved in an argument with an insulting policeman. He reported the incident in his widely syndicated newspaper column.

Powers Hapgood had an odd experience on the same day. While we were walking to and fro on the sidewalk opposite the Federal plant, Powers saw Phil Hanna, with other A F of L organizers, escorting scabs on the other side of the street. The two had worked together organizing gasoline station workers several years earlier, and Powers hailed Hanna impulsively.

They moved toward each other, for a friendly handshake, when five or six of our sturdy women strikers grabbed Powers and pulled him back.

“No! No!” they insisted. “You cannot speak to our enemy on *our* picket-line! “

Later one of those women, Maria, of Slovenian peasant stock, and gentle in spite of her outwardly rough manner, whispered to me: “Rosa, here is something I brought for you. It is to protect yourself.” From some hidden pocket in her circular skirt she brought forth an antiquated rusty “pistolette.”

She pleaded with me, for my own good, to carry it always, “because every day there is danger for you here.” Thanking her, I explained that I did not need anything of the sort, and gave her stern instruction to put that weapon away and never again bring it to the picket-line. Her anxiety for me was so moving, however, that

I promised I would visit her some day and accept the pistol as a memento — but I never got around to doing it.

As attacks on our pickets continued, the Fisher Body local of the United Auto Workers sent 500 men to reinforce our lines. The steel strikers also volunteered to help us, several dozen coming over. When they had tasted the wholesome food in our commissary and received a day's ration of cigarettes and chewing gum, they spread the word. Then hundreds of others hastened to our aid, and soon romances flourished between them and our girls, several marriages resulting. Gratified at first by this gesture of solidarity, I soon began to discourage the sending of volunteers, fearing the steel strikers might weaken their own forces.

I had been present when the CIO's Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, headed by Philip Murray, then vice-president of the United Mine Workers, officially opened its campaign to unionize the nation's steel workers. The scene was Homestead, Pennsylvania, and the date July 5, 1936. Burning sun-rays beat down on the heads of 3,000 steel men and coal miners at this, the first union meeting held in Homestead since the last unsuccessful attempt, headed by W. Z. Foster, to organize steel in 1919. This audience cheered lustily the reading of a challenging document, "the Steel Workers' Declaration of Independence," voicing the intention of hard-driven toilers to exercise their inalienable right to organize into a great industrial union.

Forty-four years earlier, in this smoky suburb of Pittsburgh, union men had died in the Battle of the Barges — a battle with 300 strikebreakers recruited for the Carnegie Steel Company by the Pinkerton detective agency: Some of the scabs, too, died that day — drowned

in the muddy Monongahela — but none of the Pinkerton crew got into the plant.

Old-time steel workers who listened to the speeches recalled the relentless war by Andrew Carnegie and his henchmen to preserve the open shop, and the repeated failures of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers to organize the steel industry. Some remembered, too, another day in 1892 when a young Russian revolutionist, Alexander Berkman, tried to avenge the deaths of the unionists by shooting Henry Clay Frick, chairman of the Carnegie company's board, who had brought in the scabs. Berkman served 14 years in prison for that act, and only a week before this meeting in 1936 had died, an exile, in France.

Several separate strikes were called when the SWOC began its drive. But it learned that the big companies, allied in the American Iron and Steel Institute, had agreed that if any member's plant was shut down the others would fill its orders at production cost. So Murray and his aides decided to enroll at least 100,000 steel workers, then ask for a conference with the employers.

The crusade moved swiftly. Battle-scarred organizers, drawn mostly from the UMW, enjoyed the complete confidence of the rank-and-file. An initiation fee of

only \$1 helped smooth the way. Long before the scheduled time the 100,000 mark had been left far behind.

To the amazement of many who remembered past anti-union wars in that industry, the mighty United States Steel Corporation suddenly consented in March, 1937, to sign an agreement with the union. Various legends are afloat “explaining” how Myron C. Taylor, high official of the company, was induced to meet with John L. Lewis and Philip Murray. One story which frequently crops up is that President Roosevelt interceded, asking Taylor to bring about peace in steel, later reciprocating by sending him to the Vatican as his “personal representative.” Whatever the truth, this “happening of the impossible” was the greatest event in steel labor history.

But various small independent companies, led by Tom Girdler of Republic Steel, formed an “unholy alliance,” widely known since as Little Steel, and announced that they would resist unionization to the last ditch.

After futile attempts to negotiate with this group, the SWOC, in May, declared a strike against Little Steel in dozens of cities in seven states. Both the Mohawk Valley back-to-work formula and brutal murder were used by the steel companies in this conflict. Eighteen strikers were killed — 10 being shot down by the police in the “Memorial Day massacre” near the Republic Steel mills in South Chicago, Illinois.

Cleveland and Youngstown, where Girdler’s corporation had large plants, were the chief centers of the strike in Ohio. In Youngstown hired gunmen fired from moving trucks on men, women, and children in the picket-lines. Two men were killed and many persons wounded. While the strikers buried their dead, their homes were ransacked in search of guns and dynamite. Troops sent in by Governor Martin L. Davey did not prevent city and county authorities from flagrantly violating the law to serve the steel magnates. In every Ohio city where that strike was on, “a striker could be arrested for having a pen-knife or a toothpick.”

A steel striker is killed in Cleveland, a poor man of the Slavic group. He is found dead close to the Republic Steel grounds. Was it accident or murder? Some of us attend the funeral and lay a wreath on his coffin. Looking at the dead Slav’s distorted features, I observe deep creases in the face and skull, wreckage the undertaker’s artistry couldn’t mend. He must have been crushed under the wheels of a truck.

Funeral services are held in front of his tiny frame house, unpainted for years. On the scraggly lawn, Alex Balint, steel workers’ organizer, delivers an oration through a loud speaker attached to a tree, the only tree in that grimy neighborhood. The bereaved wife, children, sisters and brothers, look blankly on the assemblage.

Going to their picket-lines in the mornings, steel workers made regular visits to the Federal lines, where Charles Kreindler and I showed up daily at 6 a.m.

Some of the steel men could not understand how it was that two international vice-presidents were in evidence so early while their strike director, living out of town on the Lake Erie shore, seldom

showed up. Their commissary was deplorably short of food, and over week-ends their gasoline pump was under lock and key.

Repeatedly groups of these men came to me, asking advice. Their children, returning to school in the fall, needed clothing. Coal must be provided at home against the coming winter; and strikers needed replacements for worn-out shoes, clothes, and tires. They wondered whether the "Lady Garment Workers" would lend them a helping hand.

It was not my business to conduct a commissary or a relief department for the Cleveland steel strikers, but something had to be done for them. Otherwise their morale, low since Girdler started the back-to-work movement, would sink still lower, and that would have a bad effect upon our people.

I cast about to see how we might be of help.

A miners' policy committee was in session at the Hollenden, and I approached a group of them in the lobby. They were listening to Powers Hapgood, just returned from Lewiston, Maine, where he had been conducting a shoe strike.

When I asked who knew "Bozo" Damich, the director of the Cleveland steel campaign, one of the group exclaimed:

"Jeeze, of all the miners it had to be that guy I "

"What has he done?" I inquired.

"It's what he hasn't done that makes me sore," another miner put in.

"I had my hands full of that bird during the 1922 coal strike in Pennsylvania," Hapgood recalled, "and I said in public that he was 'Damich by name and damage by deed.'"

Damich was a sick man, however, I soon learned, and in no condition to head such a strenuous campaign. His involuntary negligence made itself felt among the steel strikers, who, lacking guidance, wandered around aimlessly.

When the steel workers visited me again, I suggested that a committee ought to see their top leaders in Pittsburgh and tell them about Cleveland. They had no money to buy gasoline and food for such a trip, so I lent them enough cash to cover that expense, to be repaid when they got back to work,

Several days later the committee returned and reported to me the result of their mission.

On reaching Pittsburgh they found that the leadership was holding a meeting in Harrisburg, so they proceeded there and met John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, and others.

"But what did you ask for?"

Tom Lewis (no relation to the UMW chief) answered me with Irish indirection: “I said to John L.: ‘Why don’t you give us organizers like the Lady Garment Workers have? They don’t live out in the country while their people are on strike. By God, every morning when I pass by their lines, I find two of their vice-presidents right there waiting for the pickets. We need people like them.’”

“And what did John L. say?”

“He said: ‘I know they have good people, but we also have good leaders.’”

As a result of that visit, the Cleveland steel strike commissary was given a larger allowance and Damich presently was “relieved” of his duties.

Our strike went on. Captain Flanagan declared that our singing disturbed the mill-hands; we must either stop singing or go to jail. Knowing our constitutional rights free speech, free assemblage, and free singing — we took up that challenge.

Hurriedly we decided on a plan. Eight singing pickets would go on the line at a time. Messengers in cars were sent to the other three mills to bring reinforcements. Having served my time in jail that morning, I remained outside the moving lines to direct action.

Emil De Leo headed the first eight pickets one man, seven girls — as they paraded back and forth past the main Federal entrance, singing with fervor. Several additional cops came quickly from the station across the street. For seven minutes the singing continued, starting with Soup and ending with Home or, the Range. Then the police closed in, arresting the eight. Immediately eight more pickets stepped into place, and the procedure was repeated.

Other singing pickets marched on the line. Each time they sang for seven minutes, then were carted away.

Succeeding groups varied the songs, bringing in The Star Spangled

Banner, Solidarity Forever, and Marching Through Georgia. And a parody on Mademoiselle from Armentiers got a big laugh from onlookers:

The cops are having a helluva time, parley-voo,  
Trying to break our picket-line;  
Hinky-dinky parley-voo.

Now nobody was doing any work in the Federal mill. Scabs and bosses crowded together in the doorway and at the windows. Our pickets and the police provided a free show for them, for pedestrians, neighborhood children, and riders on passing street cars.

Seventy-four in all were arrested — 64 women and girls and ten men — a noisy lot as they were herded into the station. They were booked under an old ordinance forbidding “noisy assemblage.”

But the case was adjourned next day, and our pickets returned to the sidewalk in front of the Federal plant, singing anew, to the chagrin of the owners and their mercenaries. This time the cops didn't bother to make arrests.

From the day the Stone mill reopened, the police were constantly at Emil De Leo's heels. Each morning they would arrest him

"We'll send you back to New York," the police captain told him. "You'll wish you never came here." But De Leo repeatedly got sick to his stomach while in jail, and the cops had to get pills for him, and they stopped arresting him.

After my arrest with Corrigan, it became my lot to be "taken into custody" mornings. Tall, slim Flanagan, in his well-cut uniform held that it was "safer" for him if we organizers were not in sight when the strike-breakers were taken into the plant. We were convinced, however, that his real motive was to demoralize the strikers by removing their leaders, for he never pressed any charge against us. But they had to let me out of my cell each time a reporter would telephone insisting on talking with me.

Before long I grew tired of this routine, and decided to cure the captain of his annoying habit. Soon an opportunity arrived. One afternoon, when the thugs gathered in front of the Federal mill, and the scabs were escorted out, we staged another demonstration and I was promptly arrested. As two blue-coats led me across the street, I lifted my voice and began raising a hullabaloo. Passing trolley cars halted, and a sidewalk audience found diversion in the scene.

In the police station, standing before the desk sergeant, I kept up my vocal protests, demanding immediate release.

Then the telephone rang and the sergeant, answering, said: "I'm sorry, but she is hysterical, and in no condition to talk with you."

I tried to grab the receiver, and he kept it from me, saying that I was "too excited to speak to anyone."

That gave me a new cue. Talking fast, in a high key, I showered my indignation upon the police, scoffing at them for "being afraid of a woman."

Other members of the force hurried in to see what had caused this rumpus. And presently Captain Flanagan entered, with Kreindler and other officers of the union. Then I went after the Captain: "So you think you're a brave man? But you are not. You're a miserable coward, afraid for your own skin. I would not even say you were bribed. You couldn't sink so low for mere money. You are afraid of these thugs who are now breaking the strike, kowtowing to them, so you'll be safe."

Flanagan was pale and obviously unnerved as he faced that blast in front of his subordinates.

Kreindler tried to quiet me, but I pushed him aside. He and the others soon got me out of there, genuinely fearful about my mental state. They put me in a car and drove away.

The instant we were out of hearing by the police, I burst into peals of laughter. "What are you laughing at, Rose?" Kreindler demanded.

"Those cops in general, and in particular the look on Flanagan's face. How did you like my act?"

Then I told about the phone call in the station, and the sudden inspiration I got from it.

The cure worked. I was arrested no more.

Impatiently we waited for the NLRB in Washington to issue its decision.

The board's report ordering an election came on August 8. Signed by Chairman J. Warren Madden, it criticized the methods used by the three managements after our union had presented demands for conferences to begin collective bargaining. It said in part:

"It is clear that the companies, in total disregard of provisions of the Wagner Act, interfered with and coerced their employees in the exercise of their rights of self-organization... It is important to note that at each plant either officers of the company or supervisory employees were present at membership meetings where cards were distributed and filled out... This interference and coercion on the part of the companies cast doubt upon the question whether a majority of their employees had joined the Federation of their own free will."

Our next job naturally was to line up potential voters. And preparing our members for the elections was no easy task. For we had to explain to them that although they were legitimate contenders for places in these mills, the NLRB had ruled that only those who had worked in the week preceding the strike were eligible to vote. In some of the factories where the stagger system of employment prevailed, part of our membership was not called to work that week. It was of course difficult for the voteless workers to see any justice in that rule.

We made a house-to-house canvass, and a triple check-up of strikers eligible to vote. At meetings we explained how the ballot was made up, and how to avoid spoiling and voiding it. Because these elections would be supervised by the NLRB, every vote would count in the result. Some of the women had never cast a vote in any kind of election, and it was necessary to dispel their confusion and fears.

Often, too, we were confronted with domestic problems. Members of a family working in the same mill would be sharply at odds.

One forelady was compelled by her employer to join an A F of L federal local and went to work daily during the strike, while her sister, an active member of our union, marched in the picket-line outside. Suddenly the forelady's daughter took sick and died in a few days. A devout Catholic of Italian descent, she attributed



that death to curses uttered by her enemies. As election day approached, a child of the striking sister also became seriously ill with scarlet fever. Her condition was supposed to have been brought on by a counter-curse. We needed the mother's vote. I managed to get her to the polls in one of our staff cars, then sent her home quickly. Fortunately the youngster got well, and the mother remained loyal to the union.

When our strike started, some of the newspapers printed inaccurate reports and committees of girls from the picket-lines visited the offices of the offending dailies, demanding fair presentation of our side. I was told that Paul Bellamy, editor of the *Plain Dealer*, and son of Edward Bellamy, author of *Looking Backward*, was sympathetic, but that he didn't know all the facts about the situation. I phoned for an appointment, and next day we talked at length. Subsequently, the *Plain Dealer* was helpful, with objective editorials, one of which said that the ILGWU "shows the right attitude in announcing that 'we will live up to the decision of the NLRB.'"

The three elections, comparable to those for political offices, were held on August 16, under the supervision of James P. Miller, Regional Labor Board director, with government representatives at each of the polls, and with each of the contending parties having its own challengers. The balloting went on from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Voting at the Federal and Stone plants was done in borrowed municipal election booths, while the Bamberger-Reinthal contest was conducted in a room in a nearby school.

In the Federal mill we won 2 to 1; in Bamberger-Reinthal the victory was ours by a scant margin. In the Stone factory we lost 2 to 1. The reason was that that firm consistently kept our members out of its plant, and so in the week the strike was called few of our people were at work there.

Despite our victory in two of the elections, the companies involved refused to re-employ our members, so picketing had to continue. And the physical conflict was not yet ended.

On August 17, the day after the balloting, one of the "loyal" Federal employees, a big woman, waited for me to pass the entrance of that plant, and with all her might socked me in the right eye. So now I had a "shiner," dark and swollen, and attended by much pain. But I had to be Philosophic about that, and stayed on the picket-line until the last scab had entered the factory.

Then one of the girls went to fetch a piece of steak for me. The nearest butcher had none, but gave her some hamburger. With a handful of this bound against my face, I managed to go on with the day's work. The raw meat was effectual; in a few hours the "shiner" had paled to yellow, and to the evident surprise of the scabs I was again in front of the mill gates when they left that afternoon.

Several days later a gang of roughnecks invaded the store where Bamberger-Reinthal pickets took lunch. The girls managed to get out and boarded the first

passing street car, riding downtown to union headquarters for protection, while the roughnecks, yelling, followed in their own cars. Arriving at the union office, some of the strikers were hysterical with fear, while thugs outside the building staged a near riot.

As the days passed, it became more and more difficult to keep up the spirits of our strikers. Cool autumn weather reminded them of the approach of winter, when they would need coal and warmer clothing and additional food. More payments were coming due on cars and other things bought on time, and on mortgages. The union had to help its jobless members meet these problems.

Making a quick trip to New York, I suggested to our president that someone unknown to the manufacturers, one who had not been on the scene during those hectic months of strife, be sent to Cleveland. It was necessary to impress upon the employers the futility of their continuing the fight. We knew they had no love for Coleman Claherty, who had held out a promise of protection and industrial peace to them. The long conflict had drained both their profits and their vitality. They now realized that they had bet on a blind horse.

For that function I had in mind Elias Lieberman, one of our New York attorneys, and ILGWU legal representative in Washington at all NRA and NLRB hearings on our cases.

Here was a labor lawyer who had learned about industrial conflict from the bottom up. Born in Russia, he had come to this country as a student. Becoming a waist-maker, he joined our Local 25, and was its first "clerk." In those days that job combined the duties of manager, business agent, secretary, and office staff. Lieberman also was the first manager of our union's weekly publication, *Justice*, and its counterparts in Yiddish and Italian. Working by day, he studied law at night, with great determination, and passed the bar examination with high marks.

Slim and well groomed, Lieberman has blue eyes and black curly hair, graying at the temples, and looks like a college professor. Quiet spoken, with a slight accent, and of convincing manner, he rarely gets excited. I knew of no one better qualified for this special job in Ohio. Dubinsky agreed with me, and immediately made the arrangement.

I took the first plane back to Cleveland, and Lieberman followed next day. He went over the situation with William Corrigan, and they mapped out a program. Then he and Kreindler began a series of separate conferences with local A F of L leaders, the employers, and Claherty. Lieberman studied these several contendants carefully, feeling his way with caution.

In the first of the conferences one of the employers flew off the handle, damning the local union leadership, beginning with Katovsky and ending with Kreindler and myself, and getting red in the face, as if he was about to blow up. Walking across the room, Lieberman touched the fuming one on the shoulder, and said

gently: "You seem to be an excitable gentleman. It's not good for your nerves." The other quickly calmed down.

Lieberman pointed out that we had won elections in two of the plants, and that we unquestionably could show a majority in the Friedman-Blau-Farber case, in which our demand for a hearing was pending. He reminded the employers that the union could keep up its fight indefinitely, paying strike benefits to its members; that they, the factory owners, already had lost a large amount of business because of the strike, and that if a settlement were not reached they would lose everything.

Finally they saw the light, obviously being sick of the whole situation. And Lieberman worked out a plan which proved acceptable to all concerned. This embraced these provisions:

1. In a plant where an agreement has been made with A F of L, which claims a majority among the workers, our minority group also will be represented, with full right to collective bargaining on wage rates, and to adjustment of all grievances.
2. In plants where the ILGWU holds a majority, we will sign an agreement giving the A F of L minority the same rights and privileges.
3. Representatives of both unions are to act in concert in any future dealings with the four employers on matters affecting the interests of the employees.

This plan, novel then, was subsequently adopted by the National Labor Relations Board in similar cases.

It provided, too, that a sort of tri-party council be established in each factory; that our strikers be re-employed as fast as their particular craft might be needed; and that no discrimination be practiced.

Abraham Katovsky had been recuperating for many months from the assault by the thugs. Now he returned to Cleveland, and the four of us from the East who had come for the emergency were about to go home when he had to be operated on for appendicitis. That delayed our leaving. It was mid-October before I could depart. Then I booked passage for France, to sail on December 1. Only by getting out of the country, it seemed, could I be sure of a vacation.

Meanwhile the national office designated Al Desser, one of our organizers who had lately conducted a successful organization campaign in up-state New York, to take charge of the Cleveland knitgoods situation. Tall and blond, Al has a Harvard accent, though from England and Canada. With his cultured English, it is always hard for him to convince new acquaintances that he was trained as a cutter in our industry and is not a college graduate.

Immediately after the knit-wear strike was called off, the union management used every means at its disposal to place as many workers on jobs as possible. Some were absorbed in the various branches of the cloak and dress industry; employment for others was obtained in outside fields. A sizeable number was placed with a WPA sewing project. For several months the union continued to give financial aid to those who could not find work.

When Katovsky finally was able to resume his normal duties, he again took over the general management of ILGWU affairs in Ohio. And he soon found that the settlement we had obtained in the knitwear strike was a hollow triumph, though it had been hailed as a distinct victory in contrast to defeats suffered by the steel and textile workers. Our pact whitewashed the Claherty group, but the strikers received little if any benefit from it. The one shop where we had a clear majority, Federal Knitting, was liquidated shortly after the settlement of the strike, and the other shops failed to re-employ many of our members. Those who *did* go back to the knitting mills were, despite our union's repeated protests, compelled to give up membership in our union and join the A F of L federal locals as a condition of employment.

Also another agreement which our union had reached with the TWOC late in 1937 failed to work out. Supposedly this had settled the dispute over jurisdictional boundaries in the knit goods field. It provided that the workers in certain sections of the knitted outerwear industry came under the wing of the International. But the CIO, TWOC, and the A F of L federal locals continued their raiding tactics and disruption of our ranks.

In 1940, when the ILGWU rejoined the American Federation, Katovsky insisted on having full jurisdiction over all the sections of the industry that had been allotted to us. Immediately he encountered new obstacles, placed in his path by some of those who had worked hardest to break the 1937 strike. Despite active aid from President William Green and the heads of the Cleveland Federation of Labor, it took more than a year before we regained our jurisdictional place in the Cleveland area.

Once the path was cleared, Katovsky proceeded to reorganize our forces, and negotiated good union contacts with several large mills.

## Chapter 28. European Holiday: War Shadows Deepen

My European holiday was brief but full of excitement and diversion. On the *SS Manhattan*<sup>1</sup> the passengers included a young Spanish couple homeward bound from a mission in Mexico. Ardent Loyalists, they were eager to return to their native Barcelona and join their compatriots in fighting the Fascist Franco. The voyage was restful, and when we stepped down at Le Havre, France, and boarded the tourist special for Paris I was ready to go places.

The first time I saw Paris the picture was not pretty. In *Gare St. Lazare* porters young and old took our luggage, hanging the various pieces on leather belts suspended from their shoulders. With these loads dangling in front and back of them, they could hardly walk to the waiting taxis. It would have been much better to put the baggage on small trucks, but I saw none in that depot.

We arrived early in December on a murky day, my Spanish companions checking in at a *pension* at *Cite Bergere* — in an enclosed courtyard back of the famous *Folies Bergere*. At their suggestion I did likewise. An emaciated middle-aged woman grabbed my small steamer trunk and began dragging it upstairs, she being the only porter there.

Later we boarded a cab which looked to me like a Model T Ford and drove to the office of the Spanish Relief Society in Rue Saint Denis, where we learned that everybody was attending the Syndicalist Conference at Mutualite.

To that people's meeting house we proceeded at once, and it was pleasant to meet old friends, among them the veteran revolutionist Emma Goldman, whom I had last seen in Montreal when she was lecture-touring in 1934, and Mollie and Senia Fleshine, once of New York, who had achieved a reputation as portrait photographers under the name SEMO in Paris.

I had memorable talks with delegates from Norway, Sweden, Holland, Poland, Germany, Italy, Chile, and France, and particularly with four from the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo*, (CNT) the syndicalist federation, largest labor organi-

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<sup>1</sup> On September 8, 1942, the *SS Manhattan*, which had been transformed into a naval transport, the *Wakefield*, was severely damaged by fire at sea. The charred hulk was salvaged and towed to an Atlantic Coast Port.

zation in Spain, with 2,000,000 members. The latter four had come *sub rosa* from Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona, risking their lives to attend this conference. Others from Nazi and Fascist countries were exiles.

Their heart-rending plea for support for their just cause is still ringing in my ears:

“If your democratic countries, France, England, and America do not supply us with the necessary equipment now, such as food, clothing, and ammunition, for which we are willing to pay in gold currency we will lose, but your democracy will not be any safer then... The enemies of human rights are using our civil war as their stage to test their new weapons, new machine guns, new airplanes... Our people ... our children ... our cities are serving them as targets now, but yours will follow in our wake... We are determined to fight to the last... Our people cry *No Pasaran* I They shall not pass! ... We will die defending our rights to freedom and liberty now, choosing to die on our feet rather than live on our knees...”

And die they did.

Looking well in spite of her advancing years, Emma Goldman now made her home in London. She had known great hardship, and had led a fighting life, in behalf of the right of the masses to lead decent lives, but she still had an astonishing fund of energy. Some inner fire seemed to sustain her. The blue eyes were mellowed with age, but her face remained smooth, and she still had the fair complexion that had so impressed me two decades earlier.

Lately she had returned from Spain. And as an eye-witness, who had spent much time in both the Spanish cities and the rural districts, she gave us a compelling picture of those who were valiantly defending their republic, the industrial workers and peasants who had so few friends in France, England, and the Americas. She told also of the co-operative movement which had grown strong in many cities and towns, particularly in Catalonia, the care given to children, and the rise of women, who were coming into their own after centuries of Oriental subservience. When one remembered that all this was achieved while the Spanish people were fighting off a powerful and relentless enemy, one was awed.

And it was no secret to the brave fighters that while food and ammunition were denied them by the democratic nations, Nazi and Fascist planes crossed France nightly loaded with men, food, and other equipment to aid Franco's forces.

Next day Emma arranged a private luncheon, at which the Spanish delegates made clearer to me the agony, the terror, in which their nation lived. Mariano Vasquez, general secretary of the CNT in Catalonia, central figure of the group, appeared anything but an American's conception of a powerful labor leader.

Of peasant stock, strong and healthy and seeming older than his 26 years, he was dressed in a pair of worn-out shoes, baggy pants that never knew the crease of an

iron, his shirt open at the collar with a pull-over sweater — a gift from American trade unionists.

Impassioned in his talk, he hammered home his point with a clenched fist.

“Go back to your *Americanos* and tell them I said this: if they don’t send us ammunition — the kind your profiteers sell to our enemies — we will die, but your people will not live in peace ... these Fascists will go after you later, but they will be much stronger and much more blood will be shed and many more people will die and cities will be destroyed... Go back and tell them that a d more ... that our children are dying in the streets from bombs thrown from airplanes... Only when your children die from bombs thrown from enemy airplanes will your people know the kind of war we are now fighting... It is your war as well as ours ... the attack on us now is only a prelude to a greater terror that is to come.”

Yet all I could tell him to say to *his* people, was that our union, together with the rest of the progressive American labor movement, would continue to support them morally and financially; that our people would continue to enlist in their army as volunteers; but that our country was bound to adhere to a strict *artificial* neutrality in an era of appeasement which was beyond our control.

In the evening the SIA, the Syndicalist International Anti-Fascista, held a mass-meeting in the *Republique*, a large dim-lit hall in the working-class section of Paris, where I went with my friends. On the streets near by I saw numerous *gendarmes*, small in stature and dressed in their picturesque short blue capes, red-lined, standing in doorways waiting for something to happen. But although the gathering was emotional enough, there was no disorder, the climax being a solemn pledge by organized Parisian workers of solidarity with their fellow workers in Spain.

Standing under a spot-light on the platform the speakers told tragic and stirring stories about the Loyalists. In face of the civil war and the savage Fascist onslaughts, they had kept up their constructive work.

As the French workers all about me listened and nodded their approval, it was evident that they had tightened their lips as well as their belts. With the men seated in the middle of the hall and the women standing along the walls, I had a chance to watch their facial expressions. I saw outward docility there, but it was easy for me to believe that they were concealing an inward rebellion which might at any time flare into revolt in the Parisian tradition.

For a new reaction was sweeping over France in the wake of the ill-fated Popular Front Government, with Premier Camille Chautemps, servile and eager to please the reactionary forces that were fast driving the French people into oblivion.

All improvements so dearly won through the stay-in strikes during the short-lived *Front Populaire* under Premier Leon Blum were being wiped out; hours of work became longer, wages skimpier, vacations shorter.

Meanwhile the Fascists boasted that they would soon take over the government and establish a real dictatorship. Evidence of their preparations could be seen at every turn. Once Mollie Fleshine and I, out for an evening walk, stumbled into a *Keep Off* sign marked by a red light. Thinking it indicated a sewer repair job, I was about to pass on, when Mollie explained: "There was an explosion here last night, and the police found a subterranean passage which was a veritable arsenal. The Fascists were smuggling in firearms and ammunition. No arrests were made."

After the open rape of democracy in Spain, while France, England, and the United States, to their everlasting shame, hurriedly recognized the new Fascist regime which pledged its iron ore to Hitler, Franco's Moorish army was mopping up the remnants of the Loyalists. By tens of thousands the invaders shot them down in cold blood, not sparing old women and infants; hundreds of thousands of Spaniards were imprisoned for life, others sentenced to hard labor; children who remained orphaned were taken by the Fascists and their young minds were poisoned by inhuman doctrines, their bodies broken into the detested goose-step. And while many of the lower Catholic clergy in Spain aided the Loyalists, the hierarchy there openly sided with Franco and the infidel Moors.

Awareness of these brutal things pressed in upon the French people.

On the second day I found the vicinity of the best known burlesque house in Paris a bit too raucous and moved to a small but comfortable boarding-hotel, the *Trianon*, opposite the Sorbonne in Boulevard Saint Michel, which reflected some of the atmosphere of that famous university. When the conference sessions adjourned, I set out to explore the city in my own way.

Peace-time tourists in Paris generally rode in a lift to the top of the 984-foot Eiffel Tower, which offered a marvelous view of the city; visited the Pantheon, where most of France's famous men and women of the past repose in special vaults; saw the paintings and sculptures in the Louvre; were awed by the dim silence of Notre Dame Cathedral; made trips to Versailles, the Latin Quarter, the Luxembourg, and an endless list of historical landmarks pointed out by guides from the American Express, the tourists' best friend abroad.

But there were others who made pilgrimages to France and who were not interested in the conventional "sights." They came to visit the poppy-covered battlefields of the first World War — Chatea-Thierry, Belleau Wood, Rheims, Verdun, Argonne, Soissons, and the rest — and to lay flowers on certain graves in vast fields of white wooden crosses.

Mollie Fleshine had time to go wandering; and so I got to see places off the beaten track, without benefit of the stereotyped spiels of the professional guides. I

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<sup>2</sup> When our New York Italian dressmakers' local was organized in 1919 its founders named it Local 89 in memory of that revolution. A replica of the key to the Bastille hangs in its office.



had no time for the glittering show spots, but *did* visit the site of the Bastille, the ill-famed prison stormed by the people of the city, in the Great French Revolution of 1789, which set up the first Republic.<sup>2</sup> July 14, the day on which the miserable captives in the Bastille were turned loose by the revolting populace had ever since been celebrated like our Fourth of July. I saw the wall where more than 30,000 men, women, and children were shot in March, 1871, after the Paris Commune was crushed. And I made daily trips into the poorer sections of the city, interested always in seeing how the plain people lived.

Crossing the bridges over the narrow San Martin Canal, we would watch the heavy barges, loaded with sand, bricks, gravel, and wood, moving partly underground to the industrial areas of Paris. Men and women who owned these barges made their homes on board. They would push them from lock to lock, straining every muscle as they strode along the canal banks and mopping sweat from their brows with dirty rags. It was reminiscent of the *Volga Boatmen* of Russia's bygone days, or Seattle's *Tug Boat Annie* in the movie starring Wallace Beery and the late Marie Dressler; but no tourist would expect to witness such a scene in the heart of this city, renowned for its gayety.

Doubtless there were lovely women in the salons and show-rooms displaying luxurious gowns, stunning hats, and exquisite jewelry, but the women I met, with minor exceptions, were overburdened and overworked, their faces lined with worry. Only in Paris did I see women doing their morning shopping dressed in soiled bathrobes and dilapidated house shoes; with faces unwashed, hair disheveled, they did not appear *chic*. Considering that running water, let alone hot water, was still a luxury in many old houses where the wage earners of Paris lived, I wondered how they managed to keep clean at all.

Visiting the labor union offices, I learned that they had a different conception of trade unionism from ours. Talking with an official of the typographical union, I asked him how many members it had. He didn't know. "Can you give me an approximate idea?" I persisted.

"We in France," he replied, somewhat annoyed, "are not like you Americans, always interested in numbers. We are more interested in ideas."

I suggested that they'd better scrutinize the ideas of their members, or those ideas would become mere empty phrases. He looked at me bewildered.

"Far be it from me to lecture you," I ventured. "You will have to excuse my ignorance, but I have not yet seen any great enthusiasm among the working people here, and I am afraid it bodes no good."

Doubtless he thought that I, coming from another country, knew nothing about the forces that were undermining the foundations of the French labor movement.

Together with the Fleshines and a young American who had served for months as an English radio commentator for the Loyalists in Barcelona, we made a trip into

the interior of France over the Christmas week-end, visiting some of the famous chateaus in Orleans, Blois, Amboise, and Tour, birthplace of Balzac. En route I had an opportunity to observe how the simple French farmers lived — some making homes in caves — in the mountains and hills; but they looked much healthier and better fed than the city workers of the capital.

On a flying trip to Geneva, I saw the snow-covered Alps, and they did not live up to the claims I had heard made for them. I still believe that our Pacific Northwest is the most beautiful region in the world. The American tourist would do well to see his own country, its plains, mountains, and lakes, its broad expanse across a great continent, to appreciate its scenic beauty and vast spaces and heights.

But Geneva held my interest with its cleanliness and quaintness. It is the world's watchmaking center. Wherever one goes one sees faces of watches, small and large, some with moving pendulums, and many with all sorts of curious gadgets. Some which are priced at thousands of dollars, have taken years of craftsmanship to create. The watchmakers' trade there is handed down from father to son.

My chief reason for going to Geneva, however, was to visit the League of Nations in its imposing palace and the International Labor Office. Born at the close of World War I as an offshoot of the League, the self-declared purpose of the ILO was to serve as "part of a *revolutionary* machinery for making possible a better and securer world "

It came into being at the demand of the workers of Allied nations, who maintained that an international agreement was essential to bring about world-wide improvement in labor conditions, and help eliminate injustices to workers everywhere. In its constitution the ILO defined its principles as follows: 1. Universal peace can be established only if it is based on social justice; 2. The failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labor is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve conditions in their own countries.

I met with several American students who had worked for the ILO and who felt that they had wasted their time keeping neat records and statistics there on questions of hours, accident prevention, and protection of women and children in industry compiled in large neat volumes, simply to be mailed upon request.

Unfortunately the ILO functioned merely in an advisory capacity, lacking any authority to enforce its recommendations, like the League of Nations itself. Representatives of some 50 countries, in each instance one speaking for the employing group, one for labor and two for the government, held periodic conferences, adopting rules which were well meaning but useless and trying vainly to regulate working conditions through *moral suasion* from Geneva.

Yet this organization, as I saw it, might serve effectively as the collective bargaining agency between countries if it were given teeth to enforce its program.

Having recorded all the notable spots with my movie camera, my constant companion on such trips, and having seen the League of Nations interior decorations and the exterior of the palace, in which no sessions were then being held, I was in a hurry to return to Paris.

For the newspapers reported that the *Confederacion General du Travail* had ordered a general strike there of subway employees, street cleaners, and all in the municipal public services, to obtain a pay increase to meet risen living costs. Remembering the effects of the French workers' 1936 stay-in strikes which won better standards for them, I was eager to see for myself this powerful demonstration by organized labor.

But the strike was over before I could arrive. It had lasted less than 24 hours. Premier Camille Chautemps, successor to Leon Blum, had broken it by threatening to mobilize all the strikers into the Army if they did not return to work. The beaten wage-earners walked to and from their jobs with dull expressions on their faces, moving like automatons. Something vital was lacking — a soul, I thought. The human side of the movement was gone.

After a tour of cafes on New Year's Eve, I departed for London, keeping a promise to spend a few days as Emma Goldman's guest. She met me in Victoria Station, and together we rode to her flat. Located in a poor residential section, it was cold and dreary, as only a London unheated flat could be, but being ingenious, Emma had managed to give it an aspect of cheer with photographs and paintings from friends and admirers scattered across the world.

On her door was a modest card, bearing her legal name, *E. G. Colton* by which the neighbors knew her. We spent the evening talking about mutual friends, and then she showed me my room.

Try as I might, I found it impossible to fall asleep — the bitter cold penetrated from below through the mattress and from above through all the covering I could find to put on top of me. By morning I emerged from a mountain of coats, blankets, and the heavy plush window drapes, with my woolen hiking stockings and clothes on, but still shivering with cold. The only article I did not use was the bedroom door — but I felt as if it was on top of me, I was so tired and numbed. Washing in icy water was an ordeal. I did not take a bath, postponing that until I would be on the boat. Yet I did not in any way intimate to Emma my feeling of discomfort and remained her guest till my departure. But afterward I helped to hasten her coming to Canada, where she could live in simple comfort.

I had known Emma Goldman from casual meetings with her, but this was my first chance to study her closely, as a woman, a rebel, and humanitarian.

She had lived her life in full; spending her youth and middle age in the United States, she was arrested many times, while championing the cause of the underdog. Because she earnestly believed in free speech, free press, freedom of belief, and

freedom from want, she knew jail life at first hand. At the time of the A. Mitchell Palmer “red” raids, she had been deported to Soviet Russia, together with her life-long comrade Alexander Berkman and 247 other Russians.

There she and Berkman were commissioned to establish a Museum of the Russian Revolution. In her frequent trips across the country she had an opportunity to appraise the new regime and the resulting consequences to the Russian people. And still being *persona grata* in the higher councils of the Soviet Government she did not hesitate to speak her mind.

The result was a passport and free passage beyond the boundaries of Russia. Thence she had to shift for herself. She married an old comrade, a British miner — and became an English subject.

I found Emma busy with Spanish refugee children, visiting authorities, conferring with heads of numerous organizations in their behalf, publishing a newspaper, and lecturing. At the time she was busy preparing an exhibition to demonstrate pictorially what the war had done to the Spanish people. Declaring that the English newspapers had misrepresented their struggle, she had a collection of photographs of co-operative factories, and of co-operative farms with peasants working on them, that impressed her in Catalonia.

It was the first time in the history of social upheavals that constructive work was carried on in a war-torn country while continuous life-and-death fighting went on close by. Emma shuttled between England and the Continent, making frequent visits to Spain, where the people adored her. She visited every factory and shop and village and town from Barcelona to Madrid. She saw workers making motor cars, buses, railroad coaches, textiles, and a great variety of other things. Although the Spanish Republic was producing war supplies, however, it could not possibly match the quantities that Italy and Germany were sending to Franco.

In odd contrast to my mental picture of Emma as a public figure, I was pleasantly surprised to discover, in that miserable flat, that she was an excellent cook and a thoughtful hostess. On the second day she had for dinner roast veal, baked potatoes, and home-made cherry tarts. Too, there was memorable coffee, brewed in a contraption that I can describe only as a “coffee distillery,” this being a ritual in itself. That beverage had a delectable aroma and flavor.

After the meal, I offered to help her with the dishes, and began to scrape off the left-overs and bones.

She hastily stopped me. “No, no, don’t throw these out. Put them in this small dish — it’s our soup stock for tomorrow.”

No American would believe what she and others ate in Russia during the famine there, to sustain life. The memory of that period was still sharp in her mind.

“What’s happening now is only a beginning,” she said, as the talk reverted to Spain. “Any day war may spread across Europe, and it will be more terrible than

anything the world has ever seen. There will be suffering here and on the Continent comparable only to the days of the Black Plague.”

London’s fogs and the continuous drizzle made me homesick. Gladly would I have traded this scene for sunny California or New England’s white snow and cold. Nevertheless, I was able to cover a good deal of ground. I visited several factories, and the office of the Tailors and Garment Workers’ Union; but to my regret I could not make a trip to Leeds, where Anne Loughlin made her headquarters.

London Bridge held my interest closely, and Trafalgar Square, and the British Museum. And there was grim fascination in visiting the Tower, where a never-ending stream of the curious viewed ancient instruments of torture, the Block and Axe, used by a long succession of executioners, and the spot where Anne Boleyn and many political prisoners were beheaded. Afterward, too, I saw the site of the gallows at Tyburn, where everyday criminals were hanged. This was where pickpockets once were executed, I was told; but Tyburn, according to legend, was finally abandoned as an execution place because so many unhung pickpockets mixed with the crowds of spectators and plied their trade among them.

We went to other museums, and exhibitions, attended theatre parties at the Piccadilly, and had beer in the Cafe Royal, close to the table where Oscar Wilde often sat.

But I had contact with working people as well. A group of Welsh coal miners came to spend an hour with Emma Goldman. Over coffee and spice cookies made by her they told me what they had done to help the Spanish people. Out of their meager “dole” which the government paid them, most of the mines in Wales having been shut tight since the end of World War I, and in spite of their own dire need for help, they were willing to establish a camp for refugee children of the Asturias miners.<sup>3</sup> A group of young people on their way to Spain as volunteers also came to Emma’s flat. Among them was a young woman, a German physician, who had lived in the mining towns of France, England, and Spain, as a volunteer doctor.

Some of the Spanish group active in England urged me to go with them to Barcelona. I was keen to go, and cabled my home office asking if it could get me a six months’ visa for Spain. Instead of an answer to that request I received a message advising me to return to the States — that a job was waiting for which I was needed. All too obediently, it seems to me now, I responded to that summons. Boarding the Aquatania, I was met on the New York pier by my mother five days later. At home a group of friends — Clara and Christ Larsen, Gertrude and Joe Pis-

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<sup>3</sup> Establishing her residence in Toronto a little later. Emma toured Canadian cities lecturing in behalf of the Spanish refugees and Loyalist prisoners held by Franco. She died in Toronto in May, 1940, after a brief illness. Ironically enough, though she was barred from entering the United States while alive, the federal authorities readily permitted her body to be buried in Chicago’s Waldheim cemetery near the tomb of the Hay-market martyrs.

catelli, Rae Brandstein, Fannie Breslaw, and Sonia and Simon Farber — were eager to hear the latest news of Europe.

## Chapter 29. Graveyard: Boston is Boston

Refreshed after my holiday, I was ready for a new assignment. Two jobs were offered to me. Our small Dressmakers' Local 38 in New York wanted me to conduct a drive among the shops of the Fifth Avenue modistes. Women who made costly gowns, priced at hundreds of dollars, could hardly make a living on the low wages paid them. Firms which operated under union conditions on the Avenue could not compete with the open shop group. But Boston dressmakers pressed me to come there.

I chose Boston. At different times since 1916 I had lived in that city, working in season on waists and dresses and making my home with my sister Esther, who was raising a family. As a place to work, however, it had never appealed to me — production methods were complicated, machinery antiquated.

The ILGWU branch in Boston was one of our oldest. Once a strong union, it had had many ups and downs. The internal war in our ranks in the Twenties and the depression later had played havoc with it. I saw that area as a neglected field, overrun with weeds.

Three pioneer Boston members — Charles Jacobson, Benjamin Kurland, and Isaac Posen — had served on our General Executive Board. Jacobson was once the International's acting president for several months. Their GEB member now was Philip Kramer, a cutter by trade. He and I once worked in the same dress shop.

Kramer is a remarkable fellow, a local boy who made good. Prior to 1932 various national officers had been stationed in Boston, but none had stayed any great length of time. Kramer, however, has been repeatedly re-elected as Joint Board manager through twelve years, having been a business agent earlier. Young in appearance, and to my mind the handsomest man on the GEB, he is a member of the American Legion and widely liked in Boston. His great virtue as a labor leader is that he never makes any decisions until he gets the consent of the union elders, who like to be consulted on actions affecting their units. In civic affairs he plays a notable role, being appointed to many important state and municipal committees.

In 1938 the problem of the dressmakers in Boston was critical. The local's treasury was depleted, the small membership dejected.

Late in January, after a GEB session in New York, I went by plane to the new job scene with three other board members Luigi Antonini, secretary-manager of our big New York Italian Local 89, Israel Feinberg, Pacific Coast ILGWU director; and Kramer. We spoke at a meeting of Italian Local 80. Its president, Federico Borsa, amiable cloakmaker, who capably conducted the local's business while working in a shop, called upon the membership to give me its unstinted aid.

It was gratifying that first evening to have seven members of Local 80's executive board volunteer for the coming campaign — Mario Turco, Minnie Polito, Elizabeth Gangemi, Matilda Minigleri, Esther Antonucci, Anna Finnaciore, and Alfred Scola. And Antonio Di Maggio, the secretary, and Antonio Di Girolamo, the business agent, promised wholehearted help.

Next day I acclimated myself by attending shop, local, and committee meetings. In the evening I was officially introduced to the Joint Board by its chairman, Joseph Garber, tall slim presser. I reminded them that in the ILGWU there was a saying: "*Boston is Boston!*" — which was not complimentary — and that it was known as a graveyard for organizers. Those who had worked in that city reported that all they got from the local membership was lip-service.

Because I was a different kind of organizer, I declared, the members of all the locals must work with me or I would leave in a month. And if it came to that, my report would advise the national office never to send another organizer into Boston. Wolf Winer, cloakmaker and perennial recording secretary, took down my remarks, and I knew that these minutes would be read before every local.

Those meetings were held in union headquarters, a dingy run-down building on LaGrange Street behind the Hotel Touraine, a block from Boston Common. Formerly occupied by a continuation school, it had known no paint in eight years, the windows badly needed washing, and the pictures and charters on the walls were brown with smoke and grime. As I walked down from the fourth floor, I inadvertently clutched the banister for a moment, and dust clung to my hand like a dark gray glove.

Naturally my first demand was for renovation. Any non-union worker who attended one meeting here likely wouldn't return. The elders agreed to have the whole building redecorated when I pointed out that in the event of a strike we could use the upper floors for meetings instead of renting space elsewhere.

Carpenters and painters were hired and began work under my general direction. I had partitions torn out to enlarge small rooms, hitherto used chiefly for storing junk and for pinochle games. Toilets and wash-rooms, repellent with dirt, were scrubbed and put in decent shape. Furniture was brought from the basement, and I busied myself with cleaning and shellacking it to hasten our progress.

Old-timers, mostly cloak and skirt makers, looked on, shrugging their shoulders. Would this bring in new members? They recalled when a union meant something to



its members; when some of them gave their weekly pay envelopes to the secretary, or mortgaged their homes — the money going to defray union expenses. But now things had changed, they averred.

As soon as the paint was dry and the place took on a new and inviting complexion, I arranged an official opening, with plenty of salami, herring, corned beef, pumpernickel bread, sour pickles, and ample firewater to wash down the edibles. Executive members, shop chairmen and chairladies, and active rank-and-filers ate liberally and thawed out.

On Saturday morning a “committee” of three appeared at my office. Wouldn’t the new organizer treat them to a drink? Of course she would. I gave them a \$10 bill, expecting to get some change. They showed up again Monday evening, thanking me, having spent all the money.

When they came the next Saturday with the same idea, I agreed on one condition — that they bring “the stuff” to union headquarters where all could share it. They accepted a second ten-spot and presently returned with drinks and food. We made another spread, and everyone who happened to come in joined us. These refreshments became a regular weekly feature.

And soon the members attending brought in non-union workers as guests. These visitors, joining up, gave me valuable information about shop conditions.

My special job was to organize over a thousand non-union dress workers. The dress pact would expire shortly, and we began making plans for its renewal — this time without the customary general strike.

In the past the system of organization in Boston was simple: Every two years the collective agreement would expire. Then a general strike would be called, its purpose being to unionize the open shops, which offered keen competition to the union factories. After about two weeks of conflict in February bitter cold, those who already had contracts would renew theirs, and the rest would either fight it out on the picket lines, or close their factories for the duration and leave for Florida. After the strike was officially settled employees with union agreements would return to work with better standards and wage increases. Workers in non-union shops also would be called back, under slightly improved conditions, only to find that the improvement soon wore off. It was a sort of tuneless merry-go-round.

Employers who actively resisted all attempts of our union to organize their workers did not understand that, by so doing, irreparable damage was done not only to their own business but to the garment market as a whole. Like ostriches burying their heads in the sand, they did not realize that as a result of their guerrilla tactics neither their group nor the union was the winner; that the Boston market was constantly shrinking, many buyers avoiding it because of inability to get orders filled on time. Moreover, when strikes occurred, they failed to see that they owed consideration to the community.

Our case had to be carried to the public at large. Seldom in recent years had we got a decent break in the Boston daily press, which rarely saw news in our union except when there were picket-line clashes or arrests in strikes. Fortunately, in earlier days I had made friends with several local newspaper men. Under the guidance of one of them, I wrote a carefully phrased letter to the editor of the *Boston Traveler*. It called attention to “the peaceful achievements” of the ILGWU, which usually did not get into the news columns, and its current campaign “to complete its organization in Boston without a strike, or even a threat of one, if possible.”

That letter, though 570 words long, was printed in full, and readers bearing well-known names wrote me, commending our respect for public opinion and our sane approach to a problem which so often had led to violent conflict.

The existing agreement was an old-fashioned cumbersome document of twenty-six pages, with supplementary clauses, some nullifying others. Invariably this would be signed by only one member of a firm. Owing to the high mortality of such firms, which lived from hand to mouth, partnerships would be dissolved at the end of a season, their responsibility under the contract ceasing.

Immediately I set out to have the agreement form streamlined. I took it to our attorneys, George E. Roewer and Frank Reel, and they reshaped and greatly shortened it.

When that had been done Phil Kramer made the rounds of the garment firms, and this time he had both members of every partnership in the union shops sign our simplified contract.

From the start I had urged each local to form its own organization committees, which would work under my direction. Discovering that I meant business, they actually rolled up their sleeves and went to town. Morning, noon, and evening they busied themselves talking with non-union workers around the market, in lunch-rooms, and in subways, visiting some in their homes, and brought them to the office “just to sign up.”

The question of the correct approach to prospective members also was discussed at length with Anne Sherman, president of Dressmakers’ Local 46, and various members of its executive board, including Rose Simkins, Manya and Anna Titelbaum, Mary J. Kearns, Jane Marra, Minnie Nathan, Agnes Nash, Mollie Nagel, Jennie Chiplovitz, Ruth Klarfield, Ida Gorman, and Rose Handelman. All these generated fresh energy for the campaign.

After work hours this group — Italian, Syrian, Irish, and Jewish women — went out of their way to urge non-members to visit our headquarters. At each meeting we would serve substantial sandwiches, sponge cake, and coffee to potential members, who admitted that this was their first knowledge that a union “also could be a nice place.”

The pressers had their own difficulties. As a closely knit group maintaining their union standards, their wage scale was \$49.50 a week. But new, small electric irons had lately been introduced in the big shops, replacing the old-fashioned large bulky gas irons and heavy electric irons, and employers found an ample supply of colored women pressers willing to work for \$14 or \$16 a week. These new pressers could turn out as many garments per day as the others, or even more, and offered keen competition in the industry. Naturally our appeal to them was mainly on the basis of wage-rates. We could not offer at once to raise their wages to \$49.50, but a sliding scale upward could be worked out. As soon as the women learned how they were being cheated, they began to sign union cards, hoping soon to be able to earn as much as our men.

Their cause was fortified by setting up a special pressers' committee headed by three progressive Negro members of Local 12 — Elena Clark, Ida Green, and Ethelle Andersen, who were supported by the leadership of their local — Henry Tokman, Abe Schwartz, Frank Foster, Hyman Newman, Joe Garber, Hyman Weisberg, Sam Kramer, Morris Fox, Mayer Karesky, and others. They saw that only by getting the underpaid women pressers under the union wing could they safeguard their own jobs.

In the cutting departments we also had a serious problem. This craft requires a certain amount of training and skill, for employers want to save yardage and to avoid wasting any material. Hence the cutters have long considered themselves the aristocrats of the industry. But in Boston, as elsewhere, the employers had learned a new trick. Lads hired as errand boys, shipping clerks, or sweepers, would assist at the cutting tables in their spare time, with the cutter in charge teaching them. Gradually they would take over parts of the skilled cutters' work — spreading material on long tables prior to having it cut to patterns, cutting the trimmings, making up the cut material into bundles. For this they received little remuneration. Meanwhile skilled cutters with families would be out of jobs.

The cutters' local, under the guidance of Joseph Rosenblatt, and Jacob Ames, vice-president and treasurer respectively of the Joint Board, and Morris Kramer, Louis Kriesman, Sam Goldberg, Tom Boulos, and Jack White, took up its task with determination. As soon as a cutting department in one factory signed up as a unit, designated our union as its collective bargaining agent, we would meet with their employer, who would reluctantly sign a memorandum agreeing that this department was temporarily recognized as an appropriate unit until the NLRB could rule on the question, and that the workers had a right to belong to Cutters' Local 73.

By the end of spring we had enrolled all the cutting departments of the shops on my list. Other crafts followed in line.

Our Boston branch of the International was divided into two distinct units the cloak, skirt, and dress joint board, which had to do with the higher priced women's wearing apparel, and the cotton dress and miscellaneous department.

Boston cloak and suit workers had an excellent collective agreement, with high standards. Harry Bergson, a fair-minded citizen, served as their impartial arbitrator. Morris Damarsky, Wolf Winer, and Morris Greenberg for the machine operators, and Jacob Schneider and Isaac Borenstein for the hand finishers, guarded their hard-won union conditions, and refused to be bulldozed.

For some intangible reason the higher priced dress business in this area did not grow. But New England factories producing cotton garments, blouses, skirts, and miscellaneous knitwear had flourished in recent years, though comparatively few of those were in Boston. Rather they were in other Massachusetts towns and in Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Most of these were runaway shops from New York, Boston, and as far west as Chicago, with grasping owners who were trying to dodge the minimum standards prevailing in the industry since the NRA's advent. Employing mostly housewives, women from farms, and school-girls, they maintained their sample rooms in the larger cities.

The cotton garment and miscellaneous department of the ILGWU in Boston was in charge of Jacob Halperin, former International vice-president, who had the assistance of Mary Levin, stately, level headed executive and former dressmaker, long with our Philadelphia office. That department had come into being after the 1936 dress strike in Boston ended with scarcely any gains; the union then began to concentrate on the runaway shops in other New England towns.

Linked to Halperin's division, the rainwear section of the industry, managed by Nathan Barker, was expecting a good season. Excellent reports came from South-eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, where William Ross was in charge. He had succeeded in checking the flow of open-shop manufacturers from Boston and New York into that area by building up a strong organization in his territory.

Upon my arrival in Boston, I had reweighed the ILGWU local educational program, and saw it did not meet the membership's need. Much concerned, I formed a joint educational council, with representatives from every local, and with a letter-head listing all their names. A budget was agreed upon, and all classes, except swimming and gym, were held in union headquarters.

Our aim was to win over the habitual critics who scoffed at "*education-shmeducation*." Whereas in other cities I often had to deal unionists workers who had no conception of trade unionism and our place in workers' education, here all of them were sincere unionists who simply had lost their perspective. They needed to be aroused from lethargy and stirred into constructive action.

We endeavored to give the Boston membership a clear understanding of the new labor legislation that had come into being since 1933, and what benefits they could

derive from it. That fall the Fair Labor Standards Act was to become effective, setting a floor for wages and a ceiling for hours. Hence I asked several local educators, lawyers, and officials of the state and federal labor departments to enlighten them on these topics.

Timidly some of those who had scoffed at us earlier began to show up at these sessions. Going a step further, I announced that we would send members that summer to Wellesley Institute, some on two weeks' scholarships.

I selected for those special studies certain individuals whom I thought would get large value out of them. They included Jacob Schneider of the hand finishers' local; Joseph Garber, chairman of the Boston joint board; Hyman Newman, pressers' chairman; Sarah Greenspoon, Rose Simkins, and Hazel Dobbs, dressmakers, and Ethelle Anderson and Ethel Neblett, Negro pressers. Ann Baden, dressmaker, was sent to Bryn Mawr Summer School.

Some of our older members needed to learn that they as well as the youngsters must be trained in new techniques for conducting the union's affairs. Toward that end I arranged with Mark Starr, director of our educational department in New York, to send us speakers with important messages for this special audience. Starr himself came to speak, and others were Fannia M. Cohn, pioneer in his department and its executive secretary; Simon Farber and Serafino Romualdi, respectively editors of our Jewish and Italian publications; and Charles Zimmerman, secretary-manager of my own Local 22. Arturo Giovannitti and Frank Liberty, on several occasions, delivered rousing addresses to the Italians; and Frank Crosswaith, member of our staff and head of the Negro Labor Committee, with headquarters in Harlem, came from New York repeatedly to help line up his co-racials.

To create new opportunities for workers who were jobless because some sections of the garment industry were overcrowded, I set up a sewing school to retrain them for work in other sections. That school was equipped with five machines, with all sorts of attachments for special types of sewing. Mary Le Blanc, skilled sample-maker from Maine, served as instructor.

At a cloakmakers' meeting I listened to speeches by men who harked back across four decades to days "when a union was a *union*, when elected officers had real consideration for the rank-and-file."

When called upon to speak, I said that after hearing those speeches, I was sure they were lucky people. In the basic industries, few men could sit at such a meeting and recall what had happened in their union forty years earlier. And in some industries, a man forty years *old* was out, and hardly could find employment. The fact that these workers in Boston could take part in a union meeting, damn the leaders, and get away with it, I held, was ample proof that theirs was a good union.

When I noticed a bright looking youth hanging around our office, I asked who he was, and learned that he was Leo Karesky, a presser. His father, Mayer Karesky,

I knew as one of our most valuable members. Sounding the boy out as to his ambitions, I was enough impressed by his intelligence to offer to send him to Wellesley Institute, and promised to train him as an organizer.

“What’s in it for me?” was his first question.

“Nothing at present,” I said, “but if you have a head on your shoulders, you can learn things, become a somebody, and live like a human being.”

The two weeks at Wellesley were an eye-opener for him, and on returning to Boston he began to supplement what he had lately learned by systematic reading and observation of union procedure. In due time we placed him as an organizer in the skirt division.

The following summer I sent him and other members to attend our week-end Institute at Hudson Shore Workers’ School in West Park, N.Y. Later he became chairman of our Massachusetts Educational Council, serving thus until January, 1942, when he volunteered for war service. Today Lieutenant Leo Karesky is using his talents in handling rookies in the Army Air Corps.

I was fortunate in those days in having the assistance of my niece, Dorothy Rubin, and a young woman from our Philadelphia office, Rebecca Berg Born in Boston, Dorothy had attended both high school and business school, and knew shorthand, typing, and mimeographing. She was eager to follow in my footsteps.

Later, when Winifred McDonald, a vivacious young teacher, came in as recreational director, the three girls worked in fine harmony and union headquarters soon was gay with theatricals and parties. In the fall we branched out further and made many new friends by holding dances, style shows, and a gay Hallowe’en festival — all in the Bradford Hotel.

In the summer months we arranged various outings, including excursions by steamer to Provincetown, on the tip of Cape Cod, where the Pilgrims first landed from the *Mayflower*, and in cars to Plymouth, where they finally settled. We made jaunts, too, around Boston and to nearby towns, where historic monuments greeted one at every turn. Making it a point always to have some one along familiar with happenings in colonial days, we learned some history not taught in the public schools.

The more I saw and heard of Boston’s oldest families, the more I was convinced that they had little sympathy for the working masses, immigrants, and children and grand-children of immigrants, with whom I was concerned.

During my years in Boston I met not a few Daughters of the American Revolution. They liked to recall that that city was the Cradle of Liberty, but I never found any willing to admit that they had descended from outlaws, who had won independence for a new nation by breaking the laws of England — their mother country.

Once when a local newspaperman told me that his grandmother, a D.A.R. member, had upbraided him for the company he kept, I asked whether his people came on the *Mayflower*.

“Hell, no!” he said. “My ancestors were brought here in chains — for non-payment of debt.”

Labor organization got an early start in Boston. As far back as 1809 the printers were unionized, and a seven months’ strike was staged by 600 carpenters in 1835 to cut their working day to ten hours. Shortly after the Civil War an Eight-Hour Day League was in action there. The Boston Tailoresses’ Union, formed in 1869, provided in its constitution that any member doing more work than allowed by the union’s bill of prices would be fined for the first two offenses, and expelled for the third.

But labor had some of its toughest fights in Massachusetts. None was more bitter than the 1912 woolen strike in Lawrence. Out of that grew the trial in Salem of Arturo Giovannitti and Joe Ettor, IWW organizers, accused of being “accessories before the fact” in a murder case, because of speeches alleged to have incited a riot. Both were acquitted when it was shown that Anna Lo Pizza, one of the strikers, was killed by a bullet from a policeman’s gun.

Mention of the Boston police strike of 1919 could still make conservatives there see red in 1938.

One was impressed by the tender regard for children shown by the state legislature in 1866 when it prohibited employment of any child under 10 in any factory. But in 1940 the State Federation of Labor, the Consumers League of Massachusetts, and the League of Women Voters were still trying to prevail upon the legislature to ratify the child labor amendment to the national Constitution, proposed by Congress in 1924. New hope of such action had been aroused in the breasts of optimists in 1939, when, after 148 years, the newly elected Governor Leverett Saltonstall prevailed upon the legislature to ratify the ten original amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights.

For me Boston held bitter memories of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. I remembered talks with the two Italian radicals in jail and prison, correspondence with them, speaking tours of industrial cities in their behalf, and picketing the State House in the last days before Governor Alvin H. Fuller gave the decision that sent them to the electric chair.

With a hostile judge and a hand-picked jury, they had been convicted in 1921 of a payroll holdup and double murder; actually, to any one knowing the flimsiness of the prosecution’s evidence, they were doomed because of their social opinions. Members of a group of philosophical Anarchists, they had had the misfortune to be arrested at the height of the A. Mitchell Palmer “red” terror. August 22, 1927

— when they were executed — stands as the blackest day in the history of Massachusetts. For years afterward, I stayed away from Boston.

As soon as the factories opened for the autumn season, certain manufacturers began to discriminate against our cutters and pressers, while non-union persons took their places. After futile efforts to meet with these employers, we declared their factories on strike.

It was something new in Boston to find Kneeland Street crowded with pickets on a bright sunny morning in mid-August. Never had any of the Boston dressmakers had such a good time on a picket-line. Scores of them who had been in winter strikes recalled snow and biting winds. The union voted to pay substantial sums as strike benefits, the pickets were fed at a cafeteria around the corner, and all were satisfied.

But employers who had closed their factories “temporarily” as in the past, now had unfilled orders piling up, and had reason to worry. This time, it became evident to them, they might have to stay closed a long time.

When the situation reached the boiling point, Anna Weinstock, New England conciliator for the United States Department of Labor, arranged a conference at the Parker House.

Julius Hochman, general manager of the New York Dress Joint Board, now came to Boston at my request. Large and bulky, heavy eye-browed, baritone and first-rate orator, he is the dean of negotiators in the dress field. In the mid-Twenties he had been the ILGWU representative in Boston, and knew the caliber and habits of the group with which we were dealing.

As our spokesman he argued to the employers that only by their signing an equitable agreement with us could Boston regain its lost prestige as a dress market. He cited pertinent statistics to back up that contention. For three days the discussions went on.

Meanwhile many of our pickets were arrested, with brutal handling by the police. But this time we had public opinion on our side. The press had been enlightened, and gave a true picture of the struggle.

No settlement had been reached when Hochman returned to New York for the Labor Day week-end. By Tuesday, however, the employers had realized that there was merit in our position, and consented to sign a provisional agreement to run for six months. Under this all the workers got wage increases.

Employers who hitherto had shunned our union became more friendly, and not only met with us now, but later called upon Manager Kramer and our business agents to consult them on general problems in the industry.

With the first group out of the way, we set out to line up the remaining non-union firms, tackling each shop individually. No two groups of workers could be handled in the same way. Moreover, having to deal now with a new and younger



element that had been kept out of the union through employer-maneuvering, we needed to make a different approach.

Calling together the business agents, Abraham Hollenport, Alfred Scola, and Saul Wallace, I explained to them that when a customer bought a dime's worth of ribbon in a five-and-ten she naturally expected to hear a cheerful "Thank you." The same girl coming to our union would look for a cordial welcome and was entitled to it.

Day after day, new shops would be signed up. It was necessary to meet with the incoming members and explain to them the functions of the union and their own obligations to it, and to enlist them for some active part in bringing in others.

Toward the end of the first year, practically the whole group of firms on my list, all on Kneeland Street, were under a two-year union agreement.

Early in December I received word from Hilda Worthington Smith that on a recent trip abroad she had visited the national conference center and workers' school in Pontigny, two hours from Paris. This school, established two years earlier by French and Swedish trade unionists, already had created a stir in workers' education circles. In April a new term would begin there, a three months' course to be taken by trade unionists from various countries.

The directors were eager to have an American worker participate. Hilda Smith arranged to have an invitation to attend sent to me, and urged me to make the trip. I would have gone gladly but for the job before me. The Boston drive was moving with such momentum that I did not want to take any chance of slowing it down by being absent. Regretfully I had to decline this opportunity to meet with European trade unionists. I've been sorry ever since, for that was the last labor school in operation on the Continent.

At the end of two years in Boston, I had completed my task. The dressmakers had a strong, healthy union. With my mind at ease I went to a GEB meeting in Atlantic City with a report of which I was proud. Then President Dubinsky announced that he had reorganized our Los Angeles branch, and would ask me to go there and take over the organization department.

Though other board members congratulated me on my "luck" in being sent to Sunny California, I was not elated. For I felt that nothing but trouble was to be expected there.

The Boston crowd objected strenuously to my leaving; and Jacob Ames, joint board chairman, and Phil Kramer were sent as a committee to New York to protest. I went with them, and learned that my trip to Los Angeles would be an emergency mission — because Louis Levy, the International's new Pacific Coast director, was ill in bed.

With this knowledge, my Boston friends gave in gracefully. In voicing appreciation, the spokesmen for the various groups touched me deeply when they thanked me for returning to them their self-respect.

Shortly before I left for the West Coast, Winnie McDonald married and resigned, and at my suggestion Myriam Sieve, who earlier had been connected with the educational department, came in to take charge of that end. Our ever-blooming office secretary, Judith Friedman, graduate from the dressmakers' ranks, promised her full co-operation. I was satisfied that my work would be carried on conscientiously.

## Chapter 30. Return Engagement in Los Angeles

Back in Southern California land of sunshine and starvation wages, stronghold of the open shop!

The sun was bright as I stepped from the *Chief* on a Saturday in January, 1940. To my gratification the little old smoke-begrimed Santa Fe depot was gone, in its place a modern station of Byzantine design. Soft music came from an invisible organ; out in front was a broad garden with trees and flowers. Los Angeles “a good place in which to live”!

But that picture was deceptive, as false a front as a Hollywood stage set.

The ILGWU’s Pacific Coast director had been in bed six weeks, and was in no condition to discuss union problems. He might be out in six months, *if* he didn’t have a relapse, his wife had said.

That evening, at a house party in the home of Fanny and Bayrach Yellin, I was told things I needed to know by Clara Krasnofsky of the L.A. dress executive board, and several rank-and-file members.

Our dress local, which I had organized in 1933, had got off to a flying start and functioned effectively for a couple of years. But now the dress industry in Los Angeles was going to the dogs; almost every manufacturer was switching to sportswear, which from a budding industry in 1933 had grown to enormous proportions. Nonunion factories competed with the few union shops left by working longer hours and paying less than the union minimum. Something must be done this season, or the remaining union workers would lose their jobs.

There was mismanagement in the union, the girls complained; discord and petty jealousy among the officers, peanut politics. Some of the most devoted and active members, snubbed or neglected, had dropped out in disgust.

When during our GEB sessions here in 1936. committees of workers had come seeking aid, I had warned the local’s officials and our national office that more attention must be paid to the membership, and particularly to the Mexicans and Italians. The Mexicans had been told that when 600 of their number enrolled as members they would be given a separate charter, but this promise had not been kept; the Italians had their own grievances. Close friends felt that the dressmakers’ local was beyond rehabilitation. My immediate concern was to pinch-hit for a sick

colleague, I told those who commiserated with me. I wouldn't stay long in Los Angeles.

As I listened, however, my interest was aroused. I began to visualize a sweeping drive in the new sportswear industry, which our president had not even mentioned.

On Sunday I had breakfast with Earl Hampton, newly appointed publicity man. Going over the office scrapbook of news clippings, I realized that regaining our lost prestige would not be easy. Most of the stories about the ILGWU in the Los Angeles dailies had been unfavorable. The reactionary press had gone out of its way to drag our union in the mire. Pictures of arrested girl strikers, some with blood streaming down their faces, were featured.

Next day the semi-annual Market Week and Style Show was to open in the Biltmore Hotel. The union had planned to picket it, and at once I saw an opportunity to do something dramatic and effective. So I asked George Wishnak, the dress local's manager, to let me handle that affair.

Each garment manufacturer, union or non-union, had taken a suite of rooms in which his products were displayed on racks and modeled by beautiful girls. Hospitality was dispensed in the form of drinks and cigars. Market Week drew buyers from all over this country, the Orient, South America, Australia, Hawaii, and the Philippines.

Wednesday evening would bring the gala event of the week — the Spring Style Pageant, presented by Hollywood's foremost fashion designers — Adrian, Irene, Dolly Tree, Gwen Wakeling, Orry-Kelly, Omar Kiam, and others. As Paris had been arbiter of fashions on the Continent, so the cinema capital now inspired line and color for the clothes and accessories worn by America's women.

At dusk on Wednesday I was in a room at the Biltmore with a dozen union girls in evening clothes. All good looking, they took on glamor with the change of attire. Some were in dazzling white with black velvet coats, others wore different colored gowns and furs. Several, from their appearance, might have been Park Avenue debutantes.

While guests were streaming into the hotel for the fashion pageant; the twelve girls and I went down in the elevator, through the lobby and out into Grand Street. Two of the union staff were in a parked car with picket-signs. Taking these, we began a slow procession in Indian file. Our high-held banners told people coming in via the Biltmore's three entrances — on Grand, Fifth, and Olive Streets — which exhibitors were unfair to organized labor.

By the time we got around the block, reporters and photographers were on the scene, bulbs flashed, and a crowd gathered amid a hum of excitement.

We traversed our route several times. Then a policeman barred my way.

"Ma'm, the Biltmore Hotel has complained against your picketing. Have you a permit?"

“But we’re not picketing the hotel. We’re picketing the style show. We simply want the buyers to know which garment firms are unfair to labor.”

“You’ll have to get a permit, ma’am.”

Without regret I told the girls that we would have to stop our picketing. If ever I wanted to embrace a cop who stopped a picket-line, it was then. I had been searching in my mind for some excuse to end the march before it became mere routine. We had stayed within the law, and the whole thing was in good taste, beside being photogenic.

Next day the local papers carried pictures of our picket line in evening garb, alongside those of Hollywood models wearing gowns our members had made. And the pageant manager hailed me – with bogus cheerfulness.

“Congratulations!” he said. “That was a clever stunt. You stole the show.”

Actually it was more than a clever stunt – it was the first tactical move in what is now termed “psychological war.”

Our stock in the community had gone up materially. Newspaper clippings of the picket-line pictures flowed in from many parts of the country. Discouraged members began to take heart again.

In the evening, some executive board members of Local 96 put me on the carpet. Among the dozen women present was an old hand, Vice-President Levy’s sister Tillie, a bitter Communist, who in 1933 had done her utmost to keep the Mexican women and girls out of our union; Sarah Dorner, former New York dressmaker, and Ethel Goldstein from Philadelphia. All three belonged to the inner circle of the same party and served as its “steering committee” on the dressmakers’ executive board.

“Before you take the floor,” one declared, “I’d like to say this: Rose comes from a small town, and probably does not know that we in Los Angeles locals have executive boards to make decisions. Since we decided to picket the Style Show, why did Rose Pesotta take it upon herself to change our plan without letting us know?”

“I did it deliberately,” I replied. “If your crowd had had its way, the demonstration would have been a flop, like many other undertakings. Some one would have tipped off the Red Squad beforehand. It is true that I came here from a small town, Boston, but I’ve organized for our international in other small towns – New York, Montreal, San Francisco, Cleveland, Seattle. And it was I who organized this local in 1933 – Tillie ought to remember that; her crowd distributed those *Smash the Sell-Out leaflets* after we settled our first strike here!”

I added that I had come to Los Angeles at the invitation of the rank-and-file and at the urging of President Dubinsky; the International had sent me to do a job and I intended doing it.

My attitude made me an eye-sore to the Communists until the summer of 1941, when a new line necessitated by the Nazi invasion of Russia changed their tactics and caused them to praise anyone who spoke up for the “suffering people” of Russia.

After our International was rebuilt in 1933–1934 out of the ruins left by the Communists, their Needle Trades Industrial Union was officially “liquidated” and its remaining members were ordered to join our ranks en masse. To the uninitiated, a sudden influx of new members appears harmless. But the party’s order to enter a labor organization in a body, large or small, is tantamount to an invasion. That is what happened in Los Angeles.

I. Lutzky, manager of the combined cloak and dress joint board, who was a former Communist Party member, chose the path of least resistance. By placing party members in the best shops, giving them key positions and putting some of their leaders on important union committees, he was immune from their baiting. But leaders who would not make peace with them and rank-and-file members who were kept away from union activities by their terrorizing tactics finally reached the end of their endurance.

In 1939, the Moscow policy was to co-operate with Hitler — a nonaggression pact had been signed by the two dictator countries, and Poland had been partitioned anew. Those who had infiltrated our ranks delivered impassioned orations at union meetings against capitalist England and the United States, attacking President Roosevelt and his policies of “war mongering” and filibustering till the rest, tired and fed up, left.

Israel Feinberg, since 1933 the ILGWU Pacific Coast director and the Communists’ chief opponent, was called East to manage the New York Cloak and Suit Joint Board. Then President Dubinsky journeyed to Southern California and made drastic changes in the Los Angeles staff. At the request of the membership, he removed Lutzky and others who had done the union much harm.

In Feinberg’s place, Dubinsky sent Louis Levy, formerly of New York Cloak Operators’ Local 117, to direct all our West Coast affairs. George Wishnak, sometime chief clerk of the New York cloakmakers’ union, came to take charge of the dress local, mostly comprising women and girls. Before they could orient themselves, Levy, never strong physically, and lately ill for months in the East, again took to his bed. From his sick room he was trying to run the ILGWU’s Pacific Coast affairs while being constantly prodded by a red-haired wife with a yen for power.

Wishnak sought vainly to stem the growing dissatisfaction of the rank-and-file. They felt that they had been let down, because a man physically unable to carry on the union’s arduous duties had been dumped upon them. No organizer could be optimistic over the prospects of restoring order in such an atmosphere.

Pondering the task before me, I found several individuals on the payroll whose functions were undefinable. In New York our president had shown me a letter of resignation signed by two organizers, and asked me to look into the matter. The two were Nick Avila, Mexican, and a young Spanish girl. Nick was a good speaker, was much liked by his co-racials, but the girl was more interested in enrolling members in a Communist splinter organization than in our International. Being on the union payroll gave her the financial means to carry on propaganda outside. Neither knew much about our industry.

When Wishnak assigned them to routine duties – to adjust shop complaints, settle prices, hold shop meetings – they decided to resign lest they be found incompetent. Avila subsequently had a change of heart and remained on the job.

He and the girl had been appointed by Vice President Feinberg to assist in the Joint Board organization drives. They established their headquarters in the cloak-makers' office. Lutsky, as general manager of that office, gave them instructions, but they also had to report to Feinberg, who often gave them different instructions. If Nick protested that he was acting under Lutsky's orders, Feinberg would say: "Never mind Lutsky's orders; you're paid by the International, and you do as I tell you." With this he was apt to depart for some other city in his far-flung territory, leaving both Mexican organizers in a befuddled state of mind.

They soon found that the easiest way to keep out of trouble was to do nothing. The membership was left speculating and would assail Feinberg for inefficiency. Others would cite this vivid example of lucky "good-for-nothing" outsiders, who sat around and were paid salaries out of union dues. Critical members asked: "Why pay dues at all?" Cynical oldsters shrugged their shoulders. "As long as the general office sends payroll checks, it's O.K. with us." Then they would return to their chief passion – pinochle playing.

I set out to clean house with a vengeance. At a dressmakers' meeting, I saw the party members arrive early, take the front seats, and filibuster until the others walked out. The "faithful" remained and carried through their whole program.

Calling in various women who had formerly been active in the union, I urged them to consolidate their ranks and regain control. They responded with a will. Lola Patino, Bessie Balin Abrams, Rose Harrington, Ethel McGhee, and many other good unionists of other days came back.

At the next meeting, they were on hand when the doors opened, and grabbed the front seats. No sooner had the session begun than the members of the Communist clique loudly raised points of procedure irrelevant to the order of business. I took up the gavel and ordered them to sit down. Announcing that I, as an International officer, would conduct that session, I served notice that future meetings of the local would be run democratically and under the rules of the ILGWU constitution. The

disrupters became confused and subsided, and I went on to outline our program for rehabilitating the local.

Returning unionists swung into action with fresh verve. In the elections several weeks later, a new dressmakers' administration was voted in.

More old-timers came into my office with greetings of welcome. Others brought complaints. I urged those with grievances and stories of discrimination and neglect, to return to the union fold and take over, since managers alone could not save a union. Some at once became exceedingly busy, bringing back others who had stayed away.

My main task was to plan and direct a new dress organization campaign. George Wishnak said the groundwork had already been prepared — the dressmakers were anxiously awaiting the time when we would begin organization in earnest. But no one in our office could give me any tangible information about conditions prevailing in the shops to be organized. Girls visited by our committees described the pressure under which they were now working. We were able to negotiate with a few employers, after their workers held meetings designating the union as their collective bargaining agent.

In one shop at 719 South Los Angeles Street, scene of so much conflict in our 1933 drive, we were forced to call a strike. But only a limited number of cutters and pressers walked out. The firm involved belong to the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association. This, like the Iron and Steel Institute, had a rule that if any of its members had labor trouble, the others must come to its rescue. Employees in that shop were mainly ex-union members. Some remembered me from 1933, but generally they nursed a hatred for certain union officers, and had vowed to keep away from us. Newcomers were unaware of the value of joining a labor organization.

One scab cutter with whom I talked had come to Los Angeles at his doctor's bidding to find a cure for his son of eleven, who had asthma.

"When the strike is over, the boss will discharge you," I argued. "Why don't you join the strikers and gain job security?"

"I don't care what happens later," he answered. "He pays me now — that's all I need, to keep my son and the rest of us fed."

After several weeks of picketing, we found it advisable to call off the strike. Some workers were reinstated; others got better union jobs elsewhere.

The change in character of the workers in Southern California's garment industry struck me forcibly. Mexican women and girls were no longer in the majority, although some of the younger generation were still favored in certain factories. The working force in this region had been vastly augmented since 1936, because of the changing trends, and the manufacturers had taken on a great number of women from newly migrant families, largely American-born whites and Negroes, former



tenant farmers who had gravitated to California from burned-out and wind-torn land East of the Rockies. Generally referred to as Dust-Bowlers, and made famous as Ma Joads through John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, they had no conception of the meaning of unionism. Some had long been on county relief and WPA, with meager rations and were glad to work for any wage and to put in any number of hours.

And the employers had discovered a new exploitable group — the Molokans, members of a Russian sect which dissented from the Greek Orthodox Church and refused to bear arms in the Russian-Japanese War. With the aid of Count Lyov Tolstoy, some 5,000 of them migrated to America in 1905–07, and settled in Southern California, a large percentage going to Los Angeles.

During the depression many more of them drifted into that city, adding to the colony of Russiantown. The first generation of these Molokan women were peasants, the second did housework; the third, American born, mostly tall good looking blondes, had found their way into the large non-union garment factories. Difficult of approach, they were a distinct phase of our organizational problem.

The labor situation was complicated further by so-called sewing schools which catered particularly to Mexican and colored girls. Enterprising former shop owners, sensing an opportunity to embark in business, had opened “schools” to teach garment-making. A tuition fee entitled each student to put in six weeks on regular contract work, with no remuneration. The “school” heads, however, were paid by the factory owners, who supplied raw materials, and used these centers as subcontracting shops, for which they assumed no responsibility. Having gained some experience in the six weeks, the students would be turned loose to grab any job at hand, at any wage offered.

Sewing projects launched by the National Youth Administration also gave instructions in machine operation to girls, the government paying them \$5 a week while they were in training. After a few months those girls were sent out on jobs, where employers magnanimously consented to continue paying them at the \$5 rate.

Later I arranged with the NYA to appoint several teachers from our ranks, who taught the students the prevailing shop system of work, so that when they had been trained we could place them in union shops at the established minimum wages for beginners. Claudia Benco, one of our most faithful members, who served as the joint board's secretary, was among these teachers.

Many an American city owes its face-lifting to the long lean years which followed the Wall Street panic of 1929; during the depression and subsequent “recession,” what with the WPA, PWA, and kindred federal and state help, Los Angeles was one of the communities that got the utmost from New Deal subsidies. It had grown beyond all bounds geographically and industrially, with a population ex-

ceeding 1,250,000. Its garment manufacturing also had expanded and overflowed, like quicksilver on the loose.

Most of its hills, formerly sparsely settled, were rapidly being transformed with new streets on which automobiles could climb to their summits. Many new dwellings, of bright Spanish designs, now adorned these hills, and Hollywood boasted new streamlined boulevards, highways, and parks, new cinema palaces, and brightly lit and invitingly decorated department stores and public markets, the pride of the community.

Yet with all the face lifting, which improved the city's physical appearance generally, Los Angeles in 1940 was still the nation's chief center for people with fantastic political and economic cure-alls.

Southern California climate was conducive to outdoor life and the wearing of casual feminine attire, "sun-inspired." So manufacturers had flocked into Los Angeles in recent years and had taken to producing such merchandise. Utilizing various materials — silk, wool, rayon, cotton, knit-fabrics? gingham, denim, seersucker — they turned out an ever-increasing volume of sportswear of every description — slacks (both knock-about and tailored), cruise, resort and beachwear, pajamas for all occasions, play suits, fancy bathing suits featured in bathing beauty contests, shorts and halters, overalls, coveralls, dungarees, pinafores, "broomstick" skirts, and dirndls, peasant blouses, and tailored shirts, bright colored and elaborately embroidered Mexican and South American outfits, gay Hawaiian garb, jigger coats, as well as formal dinner and dance frocks, and silk, rayon, and cotton underwear and children's wear. Retail prices ranged from \$1.95 up into high brackets. All these products came under one name, sportswear.

By 1940, more than 5,000 persons were employed in this industry alone, and almost every garment manufacturer turned out large quantities of such attire. Los Angeles had become the nation's leading resort and sportswear center, and the large factories were generally operating under the close supervision of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association on an open-shop basis.

Smaller mushroom-growth shops were akin to the old-time sweatshop in New York; often they occupied buildings intended for garages, abandoned stables in alleys, and back rooms in the slums. Home work continued as in 1934; the State Industrial Welfare Commission issued permits, particularly in the cheaper lines of cotton dresses, children's wear, and sportswear, to those who claimed to be either physically handicapped or busy housewives.

In contrast, the dress trade was getting its bulk merchandise from New York and other Eastern markets. Local dress manufacturers filled special orders on short notice and dared not stock up with materials, lest these remain on their shelves. They would buy piece goods by the yard as orders for limited quantities came in. But their customers demanded quality and individual style; and the workers lost more

time than if they had been working on one style for which a price had been adjusted at the beginning of the season. Our officers of the dress local were constantly on the go, adjusting piece rates on new styled garments. Non-union shops had no such problem; paying the state minimum of \$16 as the maximum wage and working long hours on an open shop free-for-all basis, they were undermining union standards.

Cloak and suit making, to which sport cloaks had been added, still comprised an industry in itself, employing mostly skilled tailors and women finishers. There was a big miscellaneous production in the smaller plants, and a large knit-wear industry in the outlying district, employing hundreds of workers.

During the six years of my absence from the West Coast, antiunion forces in Southern California had been steadily in action, with little to stop them.

In that January a searchlight was thrown upon the workings of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association and other enemies of organized labor by a United States Senate sub-committee, popularly known as the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee.<sup>1</sup> That body held hearings in Los Angeles on charges that the accused had violated the Wagner Labor Act and other laws by organizing company-dominated unions (434 were formed in Southern California in two years), coercing employees, impeding organization of workers, operating industrial spy systems with intent to blacklist, conspiracy, and threatening assault.

The M & M, notorious open-shop alliance, serviced strike-bound plants through its own free employment agency. Supported by the Chamber of Commerce, it struck directly at our union in 1936 while a general strike was on in the dress industry. As members of the Southern California Garment Manufacturers' Association, nine of the city's outstanding firms signed a pact drawn up by the M & M's legislative counsel. The lengths to which this crowd would go, to prevent any of the signers from recognizing the ILGWU, were indicated in the terms of their agreement, exposed by the LaFollette inquiry, so ably directed by Senator Robert M. La Follette, Jr.

Section 3 provided that the contracting companies "shall not enter into any agreement with any labor organization." Section 4 specified that each firm "shall deal directly with its own employees and shall not recognize or deal with any person not on the company payroll in matters of individual or collective bargaining."

To make these clauses stick, M & M attorneys threw in a penalty: "In the event that the company shall violate Section 3 or 4 ... before October 1, 1938, the company agrees to ... make a contribution of four per cent of its total sales for the preceding 12 months, minimum \$5,000, to the association."

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<sup>1</sup> Hearings before a Subcommittee on Education and Labor, U.S. Senate, 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, Third Session, pursuant to Senate Resolution 266 (74<sup>th</sup> Congress)...Part 52...Washington: 1940. Pages

Nelson R. Wolfe, former secretary of the association, admitted before the LaFollette Committee that in August, September, and October, 1936 — during the IL-GWU general strike — he had paid \$769.50 to Police Captain “Red” Hynes, head of the Red Squad, *for lunches and dinners for police details*. Cops have large appetites. Wolfe also admitted paying \$1,085.28 to the Glen E. Bodell Detective Agency for special detectives. The Los Angeles garment manufacturers were not averse to spending money; they just didn’t want to spend it in increased wages.

Southern Californians, Inc., was founded in 1937, ostensibly to promote the welfare of Los Angeles and its environs. Byron Hanna, its president, when questioned by the LaFollette Committee, admitted that its sole purpose was to maintain the open shop. In less than two and a half years it collected \$523,325 to fight the unions, the bulk of which came from 12 large corporations and the city’s banks.

The Southern Californians spent \$48,140 to put over a new anti-picketing ordinance in Los Angeles. A group called The Neutral Thousands, formed by a Mrs. Bessie Ochs at the instigation of Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times* and others, was a front to put pressure on business men in the anti-union fight. It professed “to safeguard helpless women,” “to protect the bread winners,” and “to fight labor racketeers.” T.N.T., as it was called, died a natural death when the Southern Californians stopped financing it. Chandler withdrew his support when The Neutral Thousands began organizing company unions which, he insisted, were just as much. closed shops as any union shop could be. Later Mrs. Ochs was exposed as a fraud; the 109,000 women members she claimed turned out to be only about 250 members. Names on the T.N.T. register had been *copied out of the telephone book*. This racket was supplanted by the Women of the Pacific, headed by a Mrs. Edwin Selvin, who had been a strike-breaker on the *Seattle Star* when the American Newspaper Guild was on strike there.

Another expense item of the Southern Californians was \$123,225 given to a fund to hack Proposition No. 1 — to forbid picketing anywhere in the state — which was overwhelmingly defeated at the polls.

Additional thousands of dollars were distributed through various organizations, such as the State Associated Farmers, the Los Angeles Associated Farmers, the Farmers’ Transportation Association.

Employers’ Advisory Service; a front organization for the M. & M., especially designed to set up company unions, had, as organizer Clay Rittenhouse, a tall broad-shouldered young man from a Philadelphia. Social Register family. During the combined LaFollette Committee and NLRB investigation, the M. & M. crowd was put on the spot when Rittenhouse, fed up with the anti-union drive, appeared as a gov-

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19058–19066, 19076–19079.

ernment witness after supplying the investigators with voluminous documentary evidence. Later he came to my office looking for a job.

## Chapter 31. Back in the American Federation of Labor

In the face of this octopus-like opposition, the ILGWU's local leadership had failed its members miserably. Apparently it had thought that a union "just grew," like Topsy, from fresh air, California sunshine, petty squabbles, and political bickerings. And little effort was made to win the confidence of the newcomers in the sportswear industry, which had become a threat to the diminishing dress trade.

Like a household, a labor union office must have some one responsible on the job to take care of routine. If the house-keeper is long absent, dust and mold accumulate and disorder grows! There, if the general membership is neglected too long, it is in no mood to serve a union loyally.

Of the several miscellaneous locals chartered in Los Angeles, all but one, Cotton Dress Local No. 266, had given up the ghost. This feeble local, presided over by Alice Ingraham, who had Opal Alvarez, Mexican organizer, as her assistant, was located at 116 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street, headquarters of the former Pacific Coast director. The new director merged both offices — moving the cotton dress local, with its scant membership, into the Cloak and Dress Joint Board office at 215 East 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

The cloakmakers occupied the ground floor, while the dressmakers and sportswear workers were quartered in the front of the second in that cold and dreary two-story building. The rest of this floor was a large, barnlike loft, with a kitchen and a small stage at the end. Younger male members of our union used the floor space here for a gymnasium and a boxing ring. Card-playing members competed with them, and monthly membership meetings also were held here.

The place had lately been repainted, but was bare. So I hung bright window drapes, and pictures, flags, and posters on the walls; put in book shelves, a table for newspapers and magazines, benches for those who cared to use the library section for reading; and bought several electric heaters to provide comfortable warmth. For pinochle players I assigned rooms on the floor below — among the cloakmakers.

I took stock, too, of our educational department. In 1933 I had initiated social and educational activities in line with the customs of the workers we had then organized. Succeeding organizers had made changes in the method of entertainment, each trying for something new, which might be discarded by the next organizer.

Miss Ingraham, had brought in some of her own ideas. One was a monthly Friday afternoon tea and style show. Club women were invited to attend as the union's guests, tea and cookies or small sandwiches were served, and they were entertained by our girls, who modeled their own products. They were told about the making of those garments, and the conditions under which such merchandise was produced in union and non-union factories.

This and other small affairs were the only ILGWU social activities in Los Angeles. I learned later that Miss Ingraham had been planted in our office by an outside group; during local elections, she openly canvassed members to vote for the Communist candidates. Before we relieved her of her duties as an organizer, she admitted to me that she knew nothing about the union apart from what she had learned from the girls in the miscellaneous local and from books. But to be known in certain circles as the ILGWU representative made her *persona grata* where otherwise she would have had no entree.

Finding a shortage of machine operators in the new type of work and a surplus in others, I set up a re-training school in our headquarters, similar to the one I had established in Boston, as one way of combating unemployment and the "training school" racket. Our school comprised a completely equipped modern garment shop, with special machines for overlocking, pinking, blind-stitching, button hole making, felling, and general sewing. Concepcion Cisneros, a skilled operator, expert in using 32 different kinds of special machines, volunteered her evenings and became chief instructor of more than 200 workers.

Manager Wishnak also inaugurated a price-adjustment class to re-train shop chair-ladies and shop committees in up-to-date methods of settling piece rates on garments.

For the children of our members there were Saturday classes in clay-modeling, painting, music, dancing, singing, and general recreation.

I took full charge of the organizing department and had Miss Ingraham explain her methods to me.

Having inherited various cases pending before the National Labor Relations Board, she spent hours daily at the NLRB office, usually returning empty handed. These cases were in widely scattered sections and but remotely related to our industry. What struck me as odd was that in several practically the same group of girls was involved. We called them together now and offered to retrain and place them in union shops.

One case was that of the Hollywood Maxwell Company, makers of corsets, brassieres, and "who-can-tells."

"What are 'who-can-tells'?" I wanted to know.

"That's what the trial examiner asked Dr. Bowen, owner of Hollywood-Maxwell," Millie Goldberg, an organizer, said.

“What did Dr. Bowen say?”

“They look natural, and feel natural – but they aren’t natural!”

These hand-made, soft, full false breasts, “gay deceivers,” which made the figures of slim, flat-chested movie stars look so attractive in the films, were produced mostly by home workers. Movie queens of the Paramount studios were serviced by Hollywood Maxwell, others by Westmore Brothers, with foundation garments and who= can-tells.

“How did we happen to get mixed up with them?” I asked.

I was told that Bill Busick had organized the Hollywood-Maxwell factory a few years before, and later the union had been drawn into NLRB proceedings.

That factory was far outside our geographical range, in the heart of Hollywood, on Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue, a few blocks from the famous Hollywood Bowl. About a dozen girls appeared at a noon meeting in a rented hall near by, and our organizers served sandwiches, soft drinks, and cake. The affair savored of a small town “social” rather than a serious union meeting. Back at the office, I took out the Hollywood-Maxwell file and began to study this strange case.

Bill Busick, brought into our organization at the time of the 1933 dressmakers’ general strike, had remained as educational director and general organizer, under the supervision of Vice-President Feinberg.

A happy-go-lucky fellow who could get up in the middle of the night and make an inspiring speech to any group of workers, Bill was invaluable during the upsurge of organization in all labor fields in Southern California.

He had a variety of hobbies cultivating marine gardens, collecting books, tinkering with inventions. To patent a new kind of tooth brush, he needed more money than his ILGWU salary, so he began borrowing from friends and ended by obtaining loans from “friendly employers.”

After his drive among the Hollywood-Maxwell workers, the firm signed a collective agreement with Local 266 in September, 1937, providing for maximum hours, minimum wages, and improved working conditions. But meanwhile the firm fostered a company union, and when the agreement expired a year later, refused to renew it. We were compelled to appeal to the NLRB.

At the hearing it developed that Dr. Bowen, head of the firm, also had invented a toothbrush, and that he and Bill Busick had formed a partnership to finance Bill’s invention. Apparently Dr. Bowen wanted to influence the union official.

It was revealed that Dr. Bowen had agreed to pay Busick \$25 a month to have the ILGWU defeated at an election conducted by the NLRB.<sup>1</sup> About January, 1938, he lent Busick \$275 after Bill had told him that his wife was ill and he had to

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<sup>1</sup> NLRB hearings Hollywood-Maxwell Company, Case No. C1489 decided June 12 1940. Pages 645–678 Vol. 94, May-June, 1940.



pay doctors' bills. Bowen hoped to create "better feeling all around" and win the expected NLRB election for the company-controlled brassiere workers' group.

Busick, no longer connected with our union, testified that when offered the bribe he had consulted the NLRB regional director, who had approved his acceptance of the money, which was to be produced later as evidence that the firm acted in bad faith. Unfortunately, the records of these conversations, taken down by an NLRB stenographer, had disappeared, and Busick couldn't prove his case.

The contract terminated and no election was held. The firm agreed to bargain with the ILGWU if a comparison by the board proved that our membership tallied with the firm's payroll as of February, 1939. Meanwhile the inside company union renewed its activity and the firm reneged on its promise.

The NLRB ruled that the ILGWU was the appropriate collective bargaining agency for all Hollywood-Maxwell employees and found the company union guilty of violating the National Labor Act by fostering an inside, company-controlled organization. But the company refused to obey the order.

I told the union members that it was better for us to drop the case. I was too busy to travel out to Hollywood Boulevard during the day to meet a handful of shop workers when they could come to our downtown office, as did others after work hours.

We tried to get the right to bargain for our members only, but the firm's attorney, Watkins, who was also chief counsel for Southern Californians, Inc., refused.

I filed that case and proceeded with the others.

In the next one, I. Youlin, maker of American Legion insignia, after prolonged hearings, was ordered to take back employees discharged for union activity and give them two years' back pay. Of the ten workers involved, one now lived in New York, one woman had become a mother and was occupied at home, several had got other jobs, and some were already hack with the firm. But they all accepted the back pay checks!

Other pending cases concerned a knitgoods firm, a chenille factory, a sportswear firm; some involved only one or two workers. The case of Evelyn Frocks, makers of cloaks and suits in Vernon, an incorporated village owned by the Southern Pacific Railway outside of Los Angeles, I turned over to the Cloak Makers' Union.

We also called together those girls who were involved in some of these cases, offering to re-train them and place them in union shops.

Our 1940 convention was to open May 27 in New York, and I was anxious to clear up all tag-ends before leaving. Dressmakers' Local 96 had elected me by acclamation as one of its delegates. Ethel McGee, new local president, was the other, and Virginia Barazza, California-born Mexican member of the local, was alternate.

Every one of the 18,000 seats in Madison Square Garden was filled at the opening of the convention. Governor Lehman of New York spoke, and the cultural division

of our educational department, with Louis Schaffer as its enterprising director, staged a stupendous pageant, *I Hear America Singing*. Based on Walt Whitman's heroic poem, it presented a rousing cavalcade of American history. More than 1,000 were in the cast, many coming directly from the shops to participate in the performance.

On a Sunday 120,000 ILGWU members were convention guests at the World's Fair, crowding into the Court of Peace to hear a musical program and addresses by Eleanor Roosevelt and Senator Robert F. Wagner.

Business sessions were held in Carnegie Hall. Appointed secretary of the education committee, of which Harry Wander was chairman, I divided my time between its conferences and the convention floor, making it a point to hear the outstanding speeches by governmental, civic, and labor notables.

Always our conventions are different from others; surprises are frequently sprung by delegations from various areas. When Meyer Perlstein, our Southwestern director, made his report, the delegation from that territory marched into the hall dressed in regional costumes — Texas cowboys and cowgirls whooping it up; San Antonio Mexicans in gay attire, singing Spanish songs; Kansas farmers in overalls, wide straw hats, and red bandannas, their women in sunbonnets and voluminous skirts. Matching this, a bevy of beautiful girls from the knitwear group held all eyes as they appeared in bathing suits of the latest styles, made by their own members.

President Roosevelt was indorsed for a third term, and the delegates paraded around the hall, cheering wildly. The assemblage voted condemnation of the Stalin-Hitler pact; demanded liberation of all working-class political prisoners in Soviet Russia, and particularly the freeing of Ehrlich and Alter, Polish labor leaders; urged passage of the LaFollette-Thomas bill to outlaw labor spies, strikebreakers, and gunmen in industrial conflicts; and called for a federal health insurance system, to round out the national social security program.

There were days when that conclave was saddened and subdued by the news from Europe: the surrender by the King of Belgium of his army of 5,00,000, the British retreat to the Channel at Dunkirk, the disintegration of France as the Nazis marched across that country, the impending fall of Paris. Word of those successive appalling disasters colored the speeches, and gave pause to every delegate. A continent was breaking up. The Hitler blight, more terrible than the Black Death of the Middle Ages, was spreading at undreamed-of speed. Countless thousands of working people were being massacred or plunged into brutal slavery. Where would it all end?

The climax of the convention was the appearance of President William Green of the American Federation of Labor, welcoming the ILGWU back into its ranks. Our International had been suspended from the A F of L in 1936 for aiding the

Committee for Industrial Organization in its campaign to organize the unskilled mass-production workers.

In 1900 the ILGWU was chartered with 2,000 members. The passing of forty years saw our membership fluctuate like the course of a roller-coaster. After 1933 it steadily climbed. To maintain decent conditions for our members it was necessary to raise the standards of others; conditions in all industries are rightfully the concern of all organized labor. Hence we helped to form the Committee for Industrial Organization, designed to organize unskilled mass-production workers into industrial unions. For this offense we were suspended from the A F of L. From the beginning our president and various members of the GEB tried vainly to bring both groups together, and re-establish peace in the labor movement.

During the formative stages of the CIO, our International closely co-operated with it, giving generous financial and moral assistance. But when the committee called a constitutional convention in 1938, with the purpose of forming an organization which would rival the American Federation of Labor, we refused to take part. For two years our union remained an independent body.

Repeatedly the A F of L heads had invited us to “come back home,” and such an invitation came before the GEB while we were in session.

Overnight we of the GEB had weighed the advisability of accepting that invitation to return to the parent fold. Upon assurance from Mr. Green that our proposals for the future of the national labor movement would be taken up at the next A F of L convention, we voted to recommend reaffiliation.

When Mr. Green handed our old charter back to President Dubinsky, there was great jubilation among the six hundred-odd delegates. But at that moment, as I stood on the platform with the other members of the GEB, I found myself touching the scar above my left eye, souvenir of the razor slash inflicted by an A F of L zealot in the Cleveland knit-wear strike. Near me stood Abe Katovsky, who had nearly been killed, and on the convention floor I could see Louis Friend, cruelly knifed in that same violent period. So I could not join the others in their unbridled enthusiasm — the thought of those nerve-racking days haunted me.

At the close of the convention I was unanimously re-elected for a third term on the General Executive Board, as the International’s “only woman vice-president.”

That spring I was invited to attend an informal meeting at the home of Melvyn Douglas in Hollywood, at which James Carter, our attorney, told me current political problems would be discussed.

Driving along Hollywood Boulevard, enroute, I wondered what sort of a person Mr. Douglas was in real life. In the films he usually depicted an easy-going, teasing lover, whose one thought apparently was to get his girl good and sore and then marry her.

His home, an old Spanish house, stands on a hilltop near where John Charles Fremont signed the treaty with the Mexicans in 1847. At night, from the broad veranda can be seen the shimmering lights and multi-colored neon signs of the world's film capital.

Mrs. Melvyn Douglas, a slender, charming woman in evening dress — better known as Helen Gahagan — introduced us to her husband.

I was agreeably surprised. Douglas was the antithesis of the types and character he generally assumed on the screen. Tall, handsome, broad-shouldered, and light haired, with a twinkle in his eyes, he proved to have a serious concern about the nation's social, economic, and political trends. At the moment he was serving on a relief commission appointed by Governor Olson.

Helen Gahagan, herself a capable actress, had left the stage to raise a family, yet busied herself in behalf of the migratory agricultural workers, whose lot was still tragic. She and her husband were active New Dealers, and were soon to depart for the Democratic national convention, to which Douglas was to be a delegate from California.

In this gathering at his home were men and women from many walks of life, lawyers, educators, social service workers, state and federal employees, movie folk, labor union officials, and liberals with various affiliations.

Douglas gave those present an outline of pending social reforms in a clear, informative way that would have done credit to a professor of political economy. The ensuing discussion, lively and illuminating, showed that his guests were deeply solicitous about the issues that would come up in the election campaign. A get-acquainted session followed, and it was pleasant to find friends from various parts of the country. Among them were Dr. Oliver Carlson, authority on labor problems and Governor Olson's public relations director, whom I had known when he was on the faculty of an Arkansas college; James Carter, soon to be appointed California Motor Vehicle Director; John Packard, well known lawyer and chairman of the State Welfare Commission, formerly a prominent Socialist; Bill Seligman, Brookwood Labor College student, who was now Los Angeles representative of the United Shoe Workers' Union; Louis Ellit, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; A. A. Levitt of the Jewish Daily Forward; and representatives of several newly formed industrial unions, linked with both the A F of L and the CIO. Here, too, I met people connected with Jewish and Catholic welfare groups, whom I enjoyed cultivating later.

Driving home, we agreed that movie stars might be just as misunderstood and misrepresented as labor leaders. Reading the slush in movie magazines and scandal sheets about Hollywood life, who would believe that such meetings actually took place?

When our educational department was functioning to my satisfaction, I invited Helen Gahagan Douglas to address a meeting at union headquarters. I wanted the local membership to meet the wife of a movie star and to hear the inside story about “glamor girls of the films.”

“When you read a sensational story about an actor or actress,” she said, “remember that’s merely the studio’s conception of a Hollywood publicity build-up. Movie players are for the most part earnest and sincere in their efforts to provide entertainment. They are usually not responsible for choosing film stories nor for the direction.”

Artists had to work hard, live normal lives, get adequate sleep, and be physically and mentally fit to keep up the grind, Miss Gahagan told us.

“If they habitually stayed out nights, drinking and fooling around in night clubs, their voices would crack and record badly, and their faces would look haggard and worn on the screen.”

The few who did such things had short-lived careers.

Our contacts with the movie colony grew closer, and some of the stars showed eagerness to meet with our members. We found that just as the enemies of organized labor used any unfavorable publicity about a minor union official as an excuse to smear all union leaders, as grafters, racketeers, and “jobholders,” so the film people suffered because mediocrities happened to get reams of publicity, which overshadowed those who were capable and fine-grained.

When Melvyn Douglas walked into the meeting room to take his seat as a member of the State Relief Commission, he heard a biting comment from an idling spectator: “I suppose this is one of the few sober moments in a drunken Hollywood actor’s life.”

Seeing him constantly on the go, always ready to serve other people, I often wondered when he had time to rest. This was true also of his friend, Edward G. Robinson, and of many others. Top-rank players usually were generous in giving their time and money to worthy causes. Once Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and John Garfield, scheduled to speak at a home for the aged, spent the afternoon sitting on a platform, as I did, waiting for their turn to speak, and there was no publicity in it, either!

I had ample opportunity also to meet the smaller fry, extras and stunt performers who worked on a day-to-day basis, and whose names never appeared on the marquee of any movie house. Without their support few pictures would be complete. I met competent actors who served as “doubles” and performed hazardous stunts with their backs to the audience. Then the faces of the featured players were shown in brief close-ups. In one case, a stunt man who doubled for one of the best known actors in spectacular films, after performing breath-taking falls and dan-

gerous fencing, took to drink because of the nerve-strain, became unreliable, and found it difficult to get jobs.

Mike Donovan, whose daughter Mary was on our Los Angeles staff, had been connected with the film industry in Hollywood for years as an extra. A sturdy Irishman, well over fifty, he portrayed a cop, a miner, a pioneer, at \$11 to \$20 per day, depending on the type. But daily Mike had to sit chained to the telephone and the wire had to be kept open at all times for studio calls. Hence there were two phones in his Hollywood home. His wife was a wardrobe woman, and their younger daughter, Helen, a shapely apparel model, occasionally got odd jobs in scenes requiring formal wear.

Once Mike announced that a film had just been released in which he had a big part — a locomotive engineer. So all of us at the union office went to see *When The Daltons Rode*. We sat through it twice, and saw no one who resembled Mike. “That part was cut out,” he explained sadly.

Some players with real talent never got to the attention of the proper people and fell by the wayside; a few, despondent, took to dope. Newspaper stories about the sudden death of one of these would note that he or she took an over-dose of sleeping tablets.

What was most gratifying was to meet reputable movie stars at union meetings and conventions as delegates from their locals. Some of the outstanding “glamor girls” and male idols of the screen were active union members. Robert Montgomery was an early president of the Screen Actor’s Guild. Central Labor Council meetings were attended by representatives of the motion picture industry as well as of the variety artists, who mingled on equal terms with less affluent bricklayers, garment workers, and truck drivers. At the convention of the California State Federation of Labor that fall, the delegation from the Movie Actors’ Guild included Lucille Gleason, Frank Morgan, and Kenneth Thompson.

When the ILGWU musical comedy hit, *Pins and Needles*, came to Los Angeles for a second engagement in the spring of 1941, the International took over the whole Biltmore Theatre for the opening night. During the three weeks’ run, leading movie players were well represented among the guests, encouraging our young actors, mostly recruited from the garment industry.

On our return from the ILGWU national convention, our campaign was intensified. We had to get straying members back before we could even attempt to organize others. Alienated unionists were the biggest obstacle.

Concha Andrews, who had served conscientiously in the 1933 strike, came into my office “to apologize for listening to a lot of gossip.”

“Concha darling,” I told her, “there’s no need of that. Roll up your sleeves, as in the good old days, and let’s clean up this town.”

She brought other Mexican women back and they made the place hum.

I began arranging Saturday and Sunday outings, renting buses at the union's expense to take our crowd to points of interest. One of these was Long Beach, famous for the Townsend Plan, which called for the payment of \$200 a month to every jobless person of good moral character over sixty years old. Money for this was to have come from a national two per cent tax on every financial transaction. But it never went through because Dr. Francis Townsend, real estate dealer, was unable to persuade Congress to appropriate \$2,000,000 to cover the initial outgo.

Long Beach had an institution called the Spit and Argue Club, largely composed of retired Iowa farmers and their wives, who held forth on a broad platform at one end of a lagoon formed by constructing an oval breakwater in the Pacific Ocean. Each afternoon an open forum was staged there, with speakers discussing all sorts of social panaceas. Hymns and IWW songs were sung, and usually there would be square dances to fiddle-music. In a quiet corner, too, some of those present made bets on horse races.

We heard some of the speeches and debates, which dealt with such subjects as Technocracy (still a live issue then in California), the high cost of living, the moral state of the nation, juvenile delinquency, Upton Sinclair's EPIC (End Poverty in California) plan, and the Ham-and-Eggs plan. Both of these latter proposals had rocked the state.

After thirty years as a Socialist Party candidate, Sinclair, world-famed writer and crusader for social justice, changed his political affiliation in 1934 and ran for Governor as a Democrat. "Production for use" was the keynote of his program. It called for abolition of the sales tax, which hits the poor hardest; a tax on idle land; tax exemption for small homes and ranches; a \$50-a-month pension for all needy persons; and widespread creation of jobs for the unemployed by the State. Despite massed assaults by reactionaries upon him and his platform, Sinclair rolled up 879,000 votes, being defeated by Frank Merriam, Republican, who got 1,138,000.

Sinclair's campaign carried Culbert Olson into office as State Senator, and four years later, running on a similar platform, he became Governor. Immediately after his inauguration he set Tom Mooney free in a dramatic ceremony in the State House in Sacramento, thus keeping a campaign pledge.

Following his defeat, Sinclair went back to his study and resumed writing books, turning out a notable series of novels dealing with international events and circumstances of three decades which led up to the present carnage.

Almost \$1,000,000 was collected and spent in less than a year by the promoters of the Ham-and-Eggs plan, fostered by Robert Noble, "an obscure politico-economic lecturer," and two brothers, Willis and Lawrence Allen. They proposed to have the State pay \$30 in one-dollar warrants every Thursday to every resident over fifty. These were to be redeemed by stamp selling, holders attaching a one-cent stamp to

each warrant each week to use it as cash That plan got 1,043,000 votes, not enough to make it a law.

The one tangible benefit to California's elder population from these agitations appears to have been an increase in old age pension payments from an average of \$21 a month in 1934 to \$38 a month in 1941.

We also staged an excursion to Santa Catalina Island, three hours away in the Pacific Ocean. For this I began by renting a "watertaxi" a large junk with tarpaulin canopy, seating 60 or 70 persons. We issued a leaflet setting the trip rate at \$1.75 – the regular steamer rate was \$3.50 and our garment workers jumped at the opportunity. Chartering one water-taxi at a time as the tickets were sold, by Sunday morning I had seven filled to capacity, seating nearly 500 men, women, and children.

Our excursion was a big success. Santa Catalina Island, twenty-eight miles long, is owned by the Wrigley chewing-gum family and has become a base for the motion picture industry, most South Sea pictures being produced there. Its hills and winding trails and tropical verdure made the island a popular vacation place. A never-ending fascination for visitors was the glass-bottom boats, through which marine life could be seen in great variety.

Carrying food for the day, our members brought their whole families. For each water-taxi our educational department supplied song sheets and a leader with a good voice. Next day the garment market buzzed with talk about that holiday.

The organization campaign proceeded steadily. Our educational activities, widely popular, included re-training of hand-workers whose jobs had been blotted out by introduction of new machines; advice about unemployment insurance and other forms of social security, filling out tax returns, placing children in camps, and helping women in maternity cases. Timid recruits became ardent organizers and missionaries for us.

America Iglesias Thacher, one of the six daughters of Santiago Iglesias, late Resident Commissioner for Puerto Rico in Washington, came in one day bringing regards from her sister Laura, whom I had known on the island. America's husband was working for Douglas Aircraft in Los Angeles. I hired her as my secretary, and could not have asked for a better one. She had been active in the Puerto Rican labor movement, served as translator in President William Green's office at A F of L headquarters in Washington, worked for the Pan-American Union, and for two years had been secretary of the Central Spanish Relief Committee for Republican Spain.

Her experience had given her a clear insight into Latin-American economic and social problems. At once she plunged into the new work with the zeal of a propagandist.



That fall we were invited to enter a float in the A F of L Labor Day parade. We cheerfully accepted and got busy designing our own. Julius Bohlen, our handy man, undertook to build it, in sections, at union headquarters. Over the week-end Julius, his assistant, three of my friends – Sue Adams, John Donovan, and Melvyn M. Jones – and I did the painting and decorating. On Sunday we assembled the sections in; a parking lot opposite the union offices.

A broad platform was placed on a big truck. Above the driver's seat arose a tall structure simulating a garment factory building. In the back the platform became a stage for a style show, showing the evolution of women's wear.

Joint Council members were fearful that our quota in the parade would be small; members often left town on such a long week-end. But I planned to circumvent that – we would publicize a children's float. What parents would miss the opportunity to have their offspring ride in a parade?

The idea clicked. On Labor Day, the children, all dressed up, milled around their mothers, beaming with excitement. Their float was the hit of the parade. A big red Mack truck covered with red, white, and blue bunting carried fifty youngsters who sang union songs at the top of their lungs, while crowds on Broadway sidewalks cheered them. Signs on both sides of the truck proclaimed those kids "100% union made."

Next in popularity was our style show float, with fifteen union girls dressed in ancient and modern garb, the older garments being rented from the Western Costume Company, which services the motion picture industry with period clothing.

Here were the primitive leopard skin, the low-necked Marie Antoinette gown, the bustle skirt, and the old fashioned bathing suit, flanked by simple and glamorous modern attire. After the floats marched hundreds of our members, headed by a brass band. Dr. Carlson, who watched the parade from a Broadway window, says our crowd stood out "like a victory thumb."

The following year we entered two floats, built by a commercial firm. Julius Bohlen noted, with professional jealousy, that these weren't nearly so well made as ours the previous year. But we were then in the midst of an organization drive, and we had no time to build our own. Sportswear and cotton dress workers gathered for the parade by thousands, and we had two children's floats and several brass bands.

The spring of 1941 was notable for our fashion show and ball in the Biltmore Hotel, where Robert Montgomery came unannounced and thanked our union for its contributions to the Bundles for Britain campaign.

At the State Federation of Labor convention that fall in Santa Monica, I was one of the ILGWU delegates. The arrangements committee invited us to display our products and to stage a style show at a dance. We brought several dummy models and various types of garments manufactured in the Los Angeles factories,

and worked up a window-type exhibit, with literature and posters from our educational department.

The style show went off with flying colors, the United Garment Workers' Union (A F of L) sending several male models to display men's furnishing. The delegates and guests made it clear that we would have their whole-hearted support in any conflict with the employers.

## Chapter 32. Dust-Bowlers Make Good Unionists

But our main concern was organizing the field. After the unsuccessful attempt the previous spring, I decided to let the few nonunion silk dress factories in Los Angeles alone, and reach out for the workers in the growing sportswear industry. When a sufficient number had delegated our organization as collective bargaining agent, we would approach their employers to confer and discuss union terms.

The sportswear workers, mostly of American stock from all parts of the country, needed special treatment. Some had entered the garment industry as a temporary means of earning a living, hoping to resume their former professions and trades. Among them were teachers, librarians, saleswomen, musicians, and nurses, who thought factory work too degrading to remain in long. Watching them hurry in and out of the garment buildings, I realized how they would benefit by union standards of work.

The opportunity to meet them face-to-face and analyze their problems soon came. A Ninth Street sportswear manufacturer decided to break with our union. When our agreement was about to expire, he moved his shop to Broadway, a few short blocks, and turned over the business end of hiring new help and ditching the union to a foreman. But he did not reckon with our strength in the shop. Workers who had avoided our office came rushing in, asking the union to save their jobs.

Calling together all those listed in our files, I suggested that they meet our organizing staff next morning near the new address and urge the others to come to our office to decide on some plan. But at the Broadway shop the foreman and those lately hired raised a commotion and we had no alternative but to declare the shop on strike. A formal complaint with the Regional Labor Board charged the firm with discrimination against its union employees and demanded their reinstatement. We had to act quickly, for it was now mid-December, and Christmas isn't a propitious time for a strike.

I hired a sound truck and stationed it at noon in front of the Broadway building where our girls had formed a picket line. Through the mike we told the story to the lunch-time crowd in Spanish and English.

The employer involved was really a peace-loving man. Embarrassed by the publicity, he realized that his attempt to ditch the union would not work. At my sugges-

tion Anthony G. O’Roerke, successor to Father Cunningham as impartial chairman of the dress industry, called both sides in and soon we had an air-tight union contract. All our members got a raise, and to maintain peace, the employer insisted that others join us or leave. They took part in electing Mina Shepard chairlady, with Florestella Vila Real as her assistant, and became eager participants in union affairs.

Women from other cotton dress and sportswear shops visited my office. Mostly American-born, they wanted to know more about the ILGWU, of which their husbands, union men, had spoken. We issued a weekly *Shop News*, commenting on conditions in the different factories, described by employees whose names we withheld.

Presently new members reported that they had been discharged ostensibly for bad workmanship, but actually for union activity. The Regional Labor Board ordered them reinstated, and more women signed up with us, individually and in groups.

One cotton dress shop, to which we gave special attention, was the Mode O’Day, run by the three Malouf brothers. This firm owned the twelve-story building from which it operated, another plant in Salt Lake City, and more than 300 retail outlets, known as Mode O’Day stores, in 20 states and in Honolulu. Mode O’Day garments, made in dozen lots, were in the low-priced brackets. Employees were chiefly Americans from various states, many of them farm women from the Dust Bowl.

One of these, Hazel McKown, Nebraska-born mother of two, was discharged and later reinstated through union efforts. Others requested that we bring together the rest of them “to hear all about the union.” They were afraid to be seen at our headquarters, so I arranged a dinner-meeting in a conference room at the Rosslyn Hotel on lower Main Street. No one could expect a union to meet there!

The hotel management insisting on a minimum guarantee of plates, I ordered enough to cover the cost, and asked our dress and sportswear executive boards to have dinner with us. But all the Mode O’Day workers who had promised to come were present, some bringing their husbands. Our executive members had to dine in a cafeteria nearby.

At first we of the ILGWU did most of the talking, to eager listeners. Some of the men present, members of the welders’ and aircrafts’ unions, asked questions. The women listened. From then on we held weekly meetings, serving dinner first to take the “edge off their hunger.”

Later we shifted to the Cabrillo Hotel at Broadway and Eleventh Street. A hundred or more persons came regularly to these meetings.

We met the workers near their shops and escorted them to the hotel. After dinner a guest speaker — some one from the Wage and Hour Division of the United States Department of Labor, the California Industrial Welfare Commission, or the

National Labor Relations Board, a representative of the labor movement, an attorney, or a shop chairlady — would inform newcomers about their right to organize and bargain collectively for better standards of living. Only a few ventured to ask questions orally; others wrote and sent them up to the chairman. The first question, of course, was about the dues. They were gratified when they learned that no initiation fee was being charged during that campaign, and that the dues were only 25 or 35 cents a week. It was an evening out for these women, who came to know one another for the first time, even though 500 were employed in that shop.

Soon we began issuing a special weekly, *Mode O'Day News*, the workers writing and editing it.

After several months, the number of workers enrolled made a majority sufficient under the Wagner Act to warrant a request for a conference. We proposed a contract containing cardinal union demands, the union stating that no stoppage of work was contemplated.

Mode O'Day's management was well aware that its many retail stores would expose it to wide public attention through picketing in the event of industrial conflict. Wisely its counsel, Charles S. Cressaty, advised the Malouf brothers to sign a pact with the ILGWU

The firm agreed on one condition: that a separate local be chartered to include all Mode O'Day employees, and that in addition to our local representatives the president of the International attach his signature to the contract.

George Wishnak, manager of Dress Local 96, and I, as spokesmen for the negotiating committee, readily saw the point. We realized that enrolling all workers in the plant in a "vertical" local union would simplify matters greatly, preventing the possibility of an incident like that at a large knit-wear mill in San Francisco. There our local union had had an agreement covering only mill operatives, but when the firm dismissed a union janitor, our members stayed out in solidarity and a long, bitter struggle followed.

President Dubinsky not only consented to sign the contract, but also agreed to charter a special local.

We read the pact to Mode O'Day employees, and made it clear that unless it was fully acceptable to them we would not sign it. Our attorney, Charles Katz, read it point by point, and they nodded approval. Then I asked for a motion to approve the contents as read. Dead silence.

"Won't someone make a motion to approve the agreement?" I asked the assemblage.

"We'd like to but we don't know how," replied Verla Tepley, one of the original members now serving on the negotiating committee. Only an honest person could have made such a statement in public. I explained how a motion should be made, seconded, and taken to a vote. The vote was unanimous.

The contract was signed and sealed at a dinner meeting at the Park Manor, where members of the management sat at the head table with the union leaders. I had the satisfaction of reading to the several hundred workers present a telegram sent me by President Dubinsky:

“Extremely pleased to learn of settlement reached with Mode O’Day, which is an important advance in our organization efforts. I will visit Los Angeles early in May and look forward to the pleasure of personally welcoming these workers into the ranks of our international union. It is my earnest hope that the agreement just concluded will be the beginning of a satisfactory relationship with the firm which will bring to the workers the full benefits of union organization. Congratulate you and Brother Wishnak as well as our membership for the splendid accomplishment. Confident it will have salutary effect on our organization activities throughout the country.”

That spring some of our ILGWU leaders came to Los Angeles to attend the convention of the National Cloak and Suit Recovery Board, which had been formed by employers and our union after the NRA was declared unconstitutional, to prevent unfair labor practices. A national label, blue with white print, was adopted, to be attached to every woman’s coat and suit as a guarantee that it was made in a sanitary union shop under fair labor standards.

Then we installed the Mode O’Day local at a gala celebration, with President Dubinsky officially presenting the charter. On it were inscribed the names of the employees who had signed the first union cards — Leola Beason, Ruby Berard, Grace Blancett, Jennie Cefalia, Lela Coulter, Lorraine Esterbrook, Emma Haglund, Ruth Lavalleur, Maude Leezy, Della Lindeman, Hazel McKown, Margaret Moore, Zaida Muren, Florence Pierce, Ethel Powell, Lela Reed, Violet Reese, Alberta Richards, Lupe Rios, Mabel Russell, Geneva Schell, Grace Stauffer, Ethel Sullivan, Helen Upton, and Gladys Wilcox.

Some of them had tears in their eyes as they looked at this document, which marked a new chapter in history for them.

“I think,” said Geneva Schell, “that I have some idea of how the signers of the Declaration of Independence felt.”

Many of this group being Dust-Bowlers, who had been dislodged from their lands, and who had had to break up homes and migrate to the Far West — they rightly felt themselves pioneers in labor unionism, even as late as 1941!

In Los Angeles no one had imagined that our union would ever reach an agreement with this firm And no previous organizer had tackled it. When that pact was won, “without any loss of working time,” it was pronounced unique in press

and radio comments. Employers telephoned congratulating us. Some hypercritical members who had whispered in our ranks that I was wasting my time, "sitting around the union office doing nothing," apologized. "Why didn't you tell us what you were doing?" they asked. "We would have helped you."

But I had not wanted to spread word of any activities prematurely, lest they fizzle out. The members undoubtedly would have expected quick action, and I saw it as a long range campaign, needing great patience and care.

Now we had to begin educating the new unionists. I appointed Susan D. Adams, one of our staff, as business agent. Descendant of Samuel Adams of American Revolutionary fame, and granddaughter of a Missouri abolitionist family, Sue Adams was born and raised in Cripple Creek, Colorado mining town, where her father served as organizer for the Knights of Labor and later for the Western Federation of Miners.

A graduate of the University of Colorado, now in her early thirties, she had had much experience in handling our type of workers. She had been an organizer, an A F of L convention delegate, had worked in the newspaper field, and had been a research worker for the WPA NYA, and for federal housing projects in the South and on the West Coast.

With her husband, John L. Donovan, brilliant economist, she came to my office offering her services. I had her take training in our sewing class, and later placed her in a union shop. When the sportswear local began to develop, she became one of our organizers and later I placed her in charge of the new Mode O'Day local. Miss Adams is now with that group as its business manager.

As I had promised at the ratification meeting we arranged twice-a-week classes in parliamentary procedure to teach the new unionists how to conduct a union meeting. John Donovan, then on the California Employment Department staff, Dr. Oliver Carlson, and our own officials, were teachers, and members were required to attend at least one class a week.

We selected Ruth Lavalleur and Virginia Thompson for special training, and sent them to the University of California Summer.

School for Workers in Berkeley. Others took intensive courses at union headquarters.

Under Sue Adams's supervision, the Mode O'Day local blossomed into a full-fledged labor union, with its own leadership elected in democratic fashion by secret ballot. Ruth Lavalleur was chosen president, Grace Blancett vice-president, Jennie Ferrer secretary, and Hazel McKown treasurer.

This local being a vertical union, all sections of the company's working force were represented in it. Thus Harry Mountain, cutter, Marvin Bower and Stanley Wilson, merchandisers, Abe (Pop) Adams, maintenance man, Oscar Rizotto, John Fowler, Sammie Simon, and Louis Gomez, from the display, elevator, and other

departments, were elected on the same board with the women from the sewing, pressing, and inspection divisions and office staff. With commendable ardor these workers plunged into union activity.

When some of them moved away from Los Angeles or entered the armed forces, there were others to take their places. Ruth Lavalleur and Jennie Ferrer leaving, they were succeeded as president and secretary respectively by Frieda Ross and Pauline Mazzini Holguin, while various duties were assumed by rank-and-file members including Carmen Schramm, Marie Peggs, Nora Wleker, Frances Sharp, Leona Blaine, Nora Van Buskirk, Serena Shurstein, Margaret Clark, Evelyn Giam-bostiani, and others.

An older union official whom the crowd disliked tried to inject himself into their affairs. Members protested on the ground that he knew little about their local.

"I've had 35 years' experience in the union," he flared. Grace Blancett, a Mormon girl from Utah, presser in the shop and vice-president of the local, answered:

"I'm sorry it took you 35 years to learn what I learned in a year."

Cotton dress and sportswear workers from various shops had begun enrolling with us, the Mode O'Day girls doing house-to-house canvassing and speaking to others near their homes. With Sue Adams taking over the business routine, I was free to negotiate with other sportswear manufacturers.

The local silk dress pact was to expire that summer, and Los Angeles dressmakers, anticipating strong employer objection to renewal, planned to call a general dress strike.

I was sharply at odds with others on this plan, pointing out that the dress industry was steadily diminishing in scope, and that our attention must henceforth be concentrated on the rapidly expanding sportswear market, of which Los Angeles already was known as the national center.

"Organize this new industry" I urged. "If we win a collective agreement in this field, the smaller dress group will have to join them or face extinction."

My superior, the ILGWU's Pacific Coast director, was still "recuperating." A hen-pecked husband, he meekly submitted to the whims of his wife, a domineering person who ruled that our union's business must be conducted from the Levy home, and who injected herself into affairs of which she had not the slightest understanding. At first I went to their house for conferences, but when I discovered that it had long been Levy's habit to run his office by remote control, and that it had nothing to do with his illness, I refused to continue going there. Then the director managed, not too subtly, to eliminate me from the dress situation, Manager Wishnak taking over that phase. This, while unpleasant, left me at liberty to devote all my time to the sportswear field.

When the news about Mode O'Day appeared in our official organ, *Justice*, it was erroneously stated that the pact included the Salt Lake City factory under the



same ownership. We already had decided, however, that that plant also must be unionized, because of the danger of competition from unorganized workers, to whom the firm could divert orders in case of a dispute over prices.

Alice Bagley, member of the new local, offered to do some missionary work for us on a visit to the Utah capital, her home town. Two weeks later I followed her there, and we met with the heads of the Salt Lake City Central Labor Council (A F of L). They agreed to let us use the Labor Temple and pledged their full moral support.

The plant with which we were concerned operated under the name of the Malouf Manufacturing Company. Early in the morning Alice and I distributed leaflets inviting its workers to a meeting, with refreshments. I observed that Hollywood-Maxwell, maker of corsets, brassieres, and “who-can-tells,” had a branch in the same building. It employed girls lately out of school, at twenty-five cents an hour, learner’s pay under the federal Wage and Hour Law. One of the Hollywood foreladies taught them, but no girl ever graduated from the learners’ class. They were discharged and replaced with others on the same basis.

Some 30 women came to the meeting. They had sought aid in the early NRA period, and the Central Labor Union had assigned an organizer — a metal miner unfamiliar with the garment industry. Most of those in the forefront of the movement lost their jobs. Would it be the same way now?

This time, I replied, they would have to take the initiative, but they would have the backing of our international. We would negotiate and help them establish a local. They signed up and took cards to the factory to pass around.

We established quarters in two fairly large rooms in the Atlas office building, close to the garment shops. I learned that in Salt Lake City people used their furniture and other things for generations; so it was hard to get needed equipment at second-hand stores. At a Salvation Army salvage store, however, I bought a huge double desk — the only one available. In a dozen other places I obtained chairs, files, and other office necessities, and cooking utensils.

We held open house in the new union office, now invitingly decorated. The dressmakers came there from work and helped themselves to the buffet supper we provided.

They listened attentively to my plan, and elected a provisional committee whose names were sent as charter members to national headquarters. A smaller committee was to work with me on a proposed contract, similar to the one signed in Los Angeles. They would have to enroll the rest of the workers, and then proceed to the next factories.

The charter members included Clara Adams, Lillian Bromley, Jennie Brown, George Budd and his wife Eva, Clytie Edgel, Margie Edgel, Jennie Cappelucci, La Rui Gardina, Sanona Hart, Mrs. Hackwell, Lena Hepworth, Thelma Larcen, Emma

Leslie Virginia McCulloch, Laura McKinley, Sam Mike, Mrs. A. Notti, Mrs. M. Newman, Rose Lynn Schmidt, Dorothy Walton, Afton Weaver, Mrs. Wood. Some had been casualties during the previous attempt to organize, but were willing to take a second chance to establish a union.

They needed an experienced organizer, and I thought of my friend Esther Peterson. Several months earlier, during a pleasant lunch hour with her in New York, she had expressed a wish to return to Utah, her native state, and help establish unions. I wrote her now and she suggested that I meet her kin. So her sister and her husband, George E. Baliff, an attorney, came to see me at Temple Hotel.

Esther was descended from a Danish-born Mormon, Simon P. Eggertsen, who trekked across the plains with the hand-cart brigade in 1850 to settle with his young wife in the Mormon empire. He had helped establish the town of Provo, some 45 miles from Salt Lake. Esther's father was superintendent of schools in Provo and active in educational affairs of that State.

The Baliffs took me to hear an address by Governor Herbert Maw, at the State University. From his report on a mission to Washington I learned that Utah was so poor that the average farmer's family lived on a \$200 annual income. The state was receiving far more per capita in federal relief than other states, and he had pleaded that defense work he diverted there to enable the unemployed to earn a living, instead of depending on government relief.

Salt Lake City, fifteen miles across a valley from the inland sea after which it was named, is the cleanest town I have ever seen. Its streets are washed daily by water running down from mountain springs. Some landmarks that impressed me were the majestic Mormon Temple, the great oval Tabernacle, with its world-famous hand-made organ and auditorium which can seat 8,000 people; the Monument to the Pioneers, which depicts Brigham Young in a striking pose; the Lion House, once his home; the Sea Gull Monument, tribute to the birds which saved the Mormons from starvation in 1848 by devouring crickets which were ravaging the grain crops; and statues of Joseph Smith Jr., the prophet and founder of Mormonism, and his brother Hyrum.

Visitors to the capital were treated cordially and I was comfortable in the well appointed Temple Hotel. No complaint could be made about the reception given to a guest there, yet one was conscious of an invisible wall that rose between the towns-people and strangers within the city's gates. Somehow one felt that the hand of the Mormon Church was everywhere. And at every turn, in the stores, one saw merchandise marked with the letters ZCMI, initials of the state-wide enterprise, Zion's Co-operative Mercantile Institution, founded by Brigham Young in 1868.

Alice Bagley told me of one oddity connected with knitgoods manufacture in Utah. A bride-to-be had to wear Mormon-made under-garments which bore a certain secret religious symbol or she could not be married in the Mormon Church.

I learned in Salt Lake City that many women then working in the garment factories there had come from the local WPA sewing projects, so I paid it a visit to observe the training system. Led into a large loft, I saw some 200 sewing machines of ancient make, foottreadle type, on which women, both white and colored, were busy making men's work clothes and children's wear.

"Where did these machines come from?" I asked, for I knew that usually the WPA bought equipment according to advertised specifications. They were bought from the state penitentiary, which had discarded the machines as obsolete, I was told.

And how did they manage to get all these women to work here?

The answer was that when women applied for WPA jobs, they were classified, and those who could not fit into any other project were sent to the sewing center.

After one sojourn in this citadel of the Latter Day Saints, I had as fellow-passengers on the train back to Los Angeles about 200 young men and women, graduates of schools and colleges. Some of them told me they were going out as missionaries, to locate in various communities along the West Coast, and in China, Japan, and other countries in the Far East, with the purpose of spreading the Mormon faith.

That summer I was appointed to serve on a federal Wage and Hour Commission, which was to set new minimum rates for the cotton garment industry. E. J. Jaqua, president of Scripps College for Women, in Claremont, was the other California representative. In June, while attending its sessions in Washington, I visited New York, and arranged with my chief for Esther Peterson's departure. On July 5, she arrived in Salt Lake City and got busy at her new job. Bringing her children, Karen, three, and Eric, two, she made her home temporarily in Provo with her mother and commuted daily to the capital.

Educated in Brigham Young University in Provo, Esther Eggertsen Peterson had taught at the Agricultural College and served as city recreation director in Provo. She became recreational head of the fashionable Windsor School in Boston, and worked in the same capacity at Bryn Mawr Summer School. In between she also had worked part time on our Boston staff. Her husband, Oliver Peterson, of Norwegian stock, was now connected with the WPA Education Project in Washington.

Employing our usual routine — radio, home visits, personal and social contacts — she was in a more favorable position than any other "outside agitator." Through her family associations she knew the "right people," being on friendly terms with the Governor, Labor Department, and various other government officials, the Mormon Church, and the press.

We were busy then with the sportswear situation in Los Angeles and Esther proceeded to lay the groundwork in Salt Lake City. She was to line up workers,

make preliminary approaches to the local management of the firm, but leave final negotiations to me. We kept in close touch by mail, telephone, and telegram.

In less than six weeks the job was done, again without any loss of time by the workers. Esther and I ironed out the last detail of the agreement with the senior member of the company.

On August 23, with a delegation from Mode O'Day Local in Los Angeles, I journeyed to Salt Lake to attend a triple celebration: official signing of the new union contract there, installation of the new local's executive board, and appointment of their first manager, Luther Eggertsen, one of Esther's two brothers. The ball room of the Utah Hotel was the scene of this joyful gathering, including workers, management, and notables in the government and labor movement.

The women had made a good start under Esther Peterson's supervision. Her brother was left to line up the rest of the garment industry — which produced knitwear, cotton garments, and work clothes in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Logan, and other Utah towns.

## Chapter 33. End of an Era

Returning from the Mormon capital, I found that Jennie Matyas, our San Francisco organizer, had been brought to Los Angeles to direct the dress campaign. The Pacific Coast director had assigned four of my staff of six to assist her. America Iglesias Thatcher and Mary Donovan, however, had held aloof pending my return. Calling together the whole six, I urged all to co-operate fully with the dress drive, holding that it was entitled to every possible chance.

Jennie wanted a line on the local dress situation, and we had dinner at the Brown Derby. I explained, taking the position that the only building to be organized — 719 South Los Angeles Street, which was dominated by the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association — ought to be left alone while we concentrated on a bigger problem, sportswear.

But the arrangements for the general dress strike went ahead, regardless, and I was left in the dark about them, while Jennie and Wishnak held frequent conferences at the director's home.

At this point I successfully negotiated and signed an agreement with Louis Tabak of California Beachwear. But because Levy insisted on being in on all such things, it was necessary to have him present when the "official contract-signing" was photographed for *Justice*. At home taking his usual siesta, he kept us waiting long past the appointed time.

Mr. Tabak, scheduled to leave town that night by plane, grew impatient. "Why do you need this guy? What in hell does he know about the contract that you and I worked out?"

"He's the head of our Pacific Coast organization," was my reply.

Phoning the director again, I begged him to hurry. He didn't even suggest that the picture be taken without him, but arrived two hours late. The photograph shows him holding a pen on the dotted line, though he hadn't read a line of the agreement.

Having come all the way from Boston to help dig a colleague out of deep mud, I wasn't pleased by his attitude. But I made no outward sign, simply continuing my daily rounds of the sportswear shops, hunting out new prospects.

The union office was busy with final arrangements for the dress strike. A committee from the Ben-Har Chenille factory, whose NLRB case I had put aside be-

cause the workers were unwilling to testify when called, came to see me. Some twenty boys and girls dropped into my office in mid-afternoon.

All Mexicans in their teens, they looked like school kids rather than workers in industry. I told them that unless they took the union seriously, I wouldn't get involved in another NLRB case for them. If they wanted our help they must get busy at once and enroll the rest of their co-workers into the union, designating us as their collective bargaining representative. Their answer was a collective giggle. One of the girls spoke up. They were all ready, but we must come early in the morning with leaflets and invite the rest to a meeting.

The factory, in the garment section, made chenille robes, beachwear, and kindred articles. Before 6 a.m., when the first shift of workers reported, Mary Donovan and I stood near the entrance, handing out the leaflets inviting them to a meeting in union headquarters at 3 p.m.

Some unemployed girls already had been inside looking for jobs. Eagerly all took our literature. In mid-afternoon they had noisily arrived at the meeting hall, where we served cold soft drinks; the day was beastly hot. They made themselves at home; someone turned on the "juke box" I had rented for dances, and slick young jitterbugs enlivened the scene.

Most of these workers were employed by the week, some getting less than the state minimum wage. A few had worked in the Ben-Har plant long enough to get sick from the dust of the raw cotton that goes into the making of chenille. The boys were used either as floor helpers in the dye house (the product being turned out in a raw white state, and dyed later in specified colors), at the cutting tables, in the shipping department, or as machinists. The girls operated special sewing machines, some with as many as sixteen needles. Now that they knew that the "*junior*" could help them, they were ready for action — they wanted to strike.

But before we went any further in this affair, I stipulated that all the others must sign up with the union. We would meet their employer, urge that discharged workers be taken back, and demand a union agreement. In the event our efforts failed, would they stand solidly behind their co-workers?

Their lusty shouts in English and Spanish — "Yes!" and "Si!" — gave proof that this time they were ready. Not until the union office closed, after 7, did they disperse dancing to juke-box music was too great a temptation.

Next day Sue Adams, Mary Donovan, and I went to see the boss. We had an appointment, but he kept us waiting in the outer office I told his secretary that if he had no time for us, he might have plenty of time to himself later. Immediately he called us in and asked if I had been correctly quoted.

"Yes," I answered. "Are you ready to talk business with us? Otherwise you'll find us with the rest of your employees — dancing at our headquarters!"

It developed that the head of Ben-Har Chenille, who, coming from Canada, had established this profitable business only three years earlier, was ready to sell it and go into another field. Because of lend-lease, the government would use the cotton that went into chenille for Navy ropes, he asserted. Furthermore, he was being underbid by Southern chenille manufacturers, who were not bound by any State minimum law to pay more than 25 cents an hour.

We told him it wouldn't be a great loss if he did go out of business, since every girl and boy working in that dusty atmosphere was a potential candidate for a tubercular sanatorium.

"But just now we want the discharged workers reinstated," I added. "And you sit down with our committee and negotiate a contract!"

"What'll be in it?" he inquired.

We gave him the terms: there should be only one shift, with all workers on a sensible day-time schedule. His was a non-essential industry, making nothing for national defense. There was no excuse for these youngsters going to work at such ungodly hours.

Mr. Garlick became abusive. "Why, these chippies," to whom he had been like a father — how dared they complain against him? He'd make them eat their words! Sue resented his reference to "chippies" and I told him he'd better stick to the point or we would leave. Mr. Garlick quieted down and wanted to consult his lawyer.<sup>1</sup>

"Fine!" I said. "Our attorneys will find a common ground for a union contract."

"Send the workers back," he pleaded, "or let me talk to them. They'll come back. I have a large Christmas order that must go out this week."

"Come to our headquarters this afternoon."

When Mr. Garlick walked into the hall, he was greatly surprised to find his employees engaged in gay dancing.

A shout greeted him. The youngsters, each with a bottled soft drink, took their seats as the meeting was called to order. Garlick, a bottle of Coca Cola in his hand as he sat with us, might have been one of our staff.

We let him talk to his heart's content, but he left convinced that his employees would not return under the old conditions. He agreed to reinstate the discharged workers and negotiate in good faith with the union.

It was understood that he would retire from business in six months, but meanwhile we obtained substantial wage increases, regular union hours, and at the end of the six months one week's vacation with pay for all who had been in his employ for one year or over. All pending NLRB cases involving the Ben-Har plant were withdrawn. The pact was signed for one year, in case Mr. Garlick decided to reopen his establishment before its expiration.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of Mr. Garlick and Mr. Runkin, as well as that of the Sun-rose company, men-

Returning to work in holiday spirit, his employees came to headquarters daily to dance as well as for union business. Immediately they elected as shop chairlady Frances Chavez, a young machine operator who was an Aztec princess. Slant-eyed and with olive skin, she looked like a figure in an Orozco fresco.

Our department forged steadily ahead. I carried on negotiations with several sportswear employers, a majority of whose workers we had enrolled. One day Levy called up while I was busy with a shop committee. What would I say if the sportswear industry was included in the call for the general dress strike?

“Let me think it over,” I said. Neither America Thatcher nor Mary Donovan had ever been in a strike before and Sue Adams had her hands full with the Mode O’Day local and the newly organized Ben-Har Chenille group, the two totaling 600 workers. Would such a step benefit the workers concerned? I thought it worth venturing substantial gains might be made.

So I told Levy it would be all right, provided the call was issued only to *dress* and *sportswear* workers.

That was on Friday, July 18, and I had to provide my own headquarters with all the strike paraphernalia. During the week-end nothing could be done; on Monday I got in touch with a friendly real estate agent, seeking temporary strike quarters within walking distance of the garment center.

I had been negotiating for two vacant floors in the Cabrillo Hotel, at Broadway and Eleventh Street, for union headquarters. We had held regular meetings there with the newly organized sportswear workers. The second floor was used by the *Los Angeles Examiner*, located across from us on Broadway, for its coupon service, and the basement had recently been vacated by a night club. Our Pacific Coast director was supposed to close the deal, but he could not “find time.” The agent had offered the place rent free for six months if we would renovate it. I had held out for six months’ free rent and renovation by the owners.

Now with a strike impending, we took the place on a month-to-month basis. The coupon clip service would move into a corner giving us the rest of the space.

America and Mary were horrified when they came to help put the place into shape. On the basement walls were paintings of nudes in suggestive poses. Washing off the water color pictures, we covered others with flags and posters. We rented folding chairs, recently used by a circus, and had a phone put in. A mahogany bar was turned into a commissary.

I asked J. L. Goldberg, former manager of the New York Knit Goods Union, who was now employed in a Los Angeles cloak and suit shop, to give me a hand.

My associates didn’t understand how we could work with the coupon clippers from the *Examiner* listening in.

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tioned later in this chapter, are fictitious.



“They won’t stay,” I assured them.

The general strike committee for the dress industry hired the Labor Temple for its headquarters. An elaborate commissary was to serve meals for the dress workers; I would have to take care of my own.

Two nights before the strike, I was told casually that the Joint Council had unanimously elected me secretary of the General Strike Committee.

“I don’t want to serve as secretary,” I protested. “I know nothing about your plans.”

But the council would not meet again, and during the strike only the strike committee would meet, so there was no way I could withdraw.

On Wednesday, July 23, eve of the general strike, I went to the Eighth Street office to get badges for the committees, strikers’ cards, shop lists, and writing material.

“We didn’t prepare any for you,” Jennie Matyas said. “We have just enough for our own committees.”

Rose Harrington, chairman of the commissary committee, called out: “I can’t see how it will be possible to feed your strikers also.” My rejoinder was that we would get along by ourselves — taking food from a nearby lunch-room for the first few days.

I phoned the printers that evening to send over a package of strike calls as soon as they were ready.

“I have an order,” the foreman said, “to print 5,000 circulars and to deliver them to a lady at the Alexandria Hotel.” That was where Jennie was staying.

“Five thousand? Why, that will cover only a few blocks, not the whole garment section!”

“I’m only working here, Ma’am. That was the order.”

Goldberg telephoned the printer’s agent at his home to instruct his pressman to print 5,000 more leaflets and deliver them to our new strike headquarters. He wasn’t sure he could get enough of the same paper at this late hour, but he’d try.

The pay-off came at midnight when the strike call, warm from the press, the ink still wet, came in. I was busy with the sign painters getting the picket signs ready for the following morning.

Opening the first bundle, I was dumfounded. The leaflets called out all *dress, blouse, skirt, sportswear, and lingerie workers* for a general strike in their industries. Only a few days before, I had specifically informed Levy that I could be ready with the *sportswear group only!*

Those who had written the strike call had not consulted me, and no one ever assumed responsibility for its contents! Well past midnight, my staff and I went to our rooms, rented for the duration, in the Cabrillo Hotel.

The staff was now augmented by chairladies from recently organized sportswear shops, the executive board of Local 266, with Edith Mann, its slim, small, seri-

ous minded president, and some Mode O'Day members. George Wishnak's wife, Masha, an excellent manager, came in as office secretary in my headquarters.

At 6 a.m. all of us were up, bright and eager for action. The committee members went to their assigned places with the leaflets. At 10 a.m. about 500 strikers assembled for shop meetings. A loud speaker boomed, the crowd milled around, and there was a continuous shuffling of feet. The coupon clippers quickly vacated their quarters, 4 and we had the place to ourselves.

The union dress shops came out, but not the non-union shops. In a few days, Mayor Bowron appointed a committee of three to bring both sides together. Since the non-union shops resisted organization in line with the program of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association, and only a few workers had quit, the going was tough.

I had been pulled into the strike at the eleventh hour, and had not been consulted about the strike call. "A woman vice-president has to have nine lives to survive — I'll give them a lesson they'll never forget," I assured a colleague. But this was easier said than done. A hot potato had been thrown into my lap. The job proved the hardest I had ever undertaken.

Each staff member was given typewritten instructions to learn by heart before holding meetings with strikers. John Donovan and Dr. Carlson continued holding classes even during the strike — preparing the newly organized for union duties.

The girls had to be trained in the difficult job of holding masses of strikers in line. There was always danger of "stooges" coming in for other purposes than helping win the strike, and we had to be on the alert. In addition to handling all these unorganized workers, I had to negotiate with the employers and be on hand at the picket lines.

J. L. Goldberg, experienced in organizing pickets, staging demonstrations, and other strike details, was a great help. Our rented sound truck, with signs on both sides, cruised around the garment district, speakers explaining in English and Spanish the cause of the strike.

The sports-wear manufacturers formed an association and indicated willingness to negotiate a collective agreement with us. But in the lingerie and blouse shops, where only union members walked out, there were fights on the picket lines and arrests. The employers had their usual hired thugs to "protect loyal workers," who came and went under guard.

As the police frequently threatened the strikers with arrest, and the thugs tried to provoke fighting, our committee had to be present constantly to keep order. Armed with song sheets, the pickets sang loudly. At the slightest deviation from the rules set by the police, they would be arrested.

W. R. Woodard, a blouse manufacturer, got an injunction prohibiting picketing. He was willing to negotiate with the union, but his attorney, Mr. Watkins, who

was also Hollywood-Maxwell's lawyer, advised him against it. Woodard's workers, some of whom had been with him as long as six years, issued an open letter to the firm, saying they would like to return to work.

"We think it's about time that you use your own judgement and settle with the union," they wrote, "so we can come back to the shop and your regular schedule of shipments can be resumed."

They reminded Woodard that he had repeatedly referred them to his attorney, but that the lawyer had returned their proposals with a curt note.

Information came in letters from non-striking girls. One of these, used by us in a leaflet, read:

"I have been one of the workers at Woodard while you girls have been striking. I was too slow, so I was laid off.

"So many young girls work there that never sewed before, so they cannot get their work out. I hope for your sakes you win out; then when the shops are all union we might have a better chance to work...

"I heard they gave all the old girls a raise so they won't strike."

Several of us were arrested one morning in front of the Chick Lingerie Company's factory. At Lincoln Heights station, we had to wait three hours for a judge to set bail. I played rummy with other prisoners.

Women kept arriving. Several more of our crowd, among them Edith Mann, were brought in, carrying jail bedding. By 11 o'clock we "transients," both colored and white, had increased to about 30.

Among the newcomers was a red-haired girl about 18, who walked in drowsily. A dozen women, evidently "regulars," surrounded her.

"How was it, Margie?" they inquired.

"Wonderful," she answered, fixing her bedding in an upper bunk. "I lived every minute of my twenty-four hours and now I want to sleep."

Her friends hushed the others as she undressed and got into bed. She was a dope addict, and this jail was practically her vacation place between frequent flings.

The rummy game went on. A slim blond girl in slacks sat reading a book. I asked what she was in for.

"Soliciting," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

How did it happen?

Well, going home after a day's work, she was approached by a man outside the hotel where she lived.

"So I thought to myself: another five bucks are not to be sneezed at," she went on. "But what do you think that bastard did? He showed me his police badge and arrested me when we were both stark naked."

Hailing from the Dust Bowl, she had been in Los Angeles two years. Her trial was to take place in a couple of days, and she wanted to send word to her "boy friend"

to get her a good lawyer. Would I be kind enough to phone him that afternoon when I get out?

When I telephoned the downtown hotel and asked for *Chick*, he had checked out, leaving no address.

Lunch was served at long tables in the jail dining room Anaemic looking navy beans with almost no taste, on tin plates; white bread that was like wads of cotton in the mouth, coffee akin to dishwater. Hungry women grumbled in whispers.

“For the taxpayers’ money,” I told my neighbors, “this jail could afford to give you decent food. This is outrageous. People could get sick from eating this bread alone.”

The attendants cast unfriendly looks in my direction.

Released on bond before noon, I hurried by cab to our headquarters, for a conference with the employers’ negotiating committee. At 2 p.m. I must be in police court.

I barely had time to grab a taxi to get there. Traffic was heavy and we were three minutes late. My case already had been called, and I had forfeited my bond. So I had to return to jail until another bond could be posted.

They led me through a side door to the back detention room where I had spent the morning. A matron began to ransack my handbag, shaking every article — powder puff, address book, and all — as if to ferret out a weapon.

“You saw that stuff this morning,” I protested. “I’m in a hurry to telephone my bondsman.”

“We’re running this jail, not you,” the head matron barked.

“And damned inefficiently, too,” I told her.

“We don’t like your kind around here,” she retorted.

Then I was shoved into the inner waiting room. After a couple of hours, the bondsman succeeded in having my new bail set and I went straight from jail to the picket line.

I was keen to get the strike settled. Signing of a new dress pact was about to be announced and I knew that the general public, and some of our sportswear strikers, wouldn’t understand that two separate groups were on strike and that different agreements must be reached.

We worked long gruelling hours, negotiating, planning, organizing. Goldberg assisted me, and Masha Wishnak took notes for the record at our conferences with the employers.

One of them asked me where Levy was. I was about to answer when a messenger came in and asked me to phone our director. Goldberg went to do that, and he returned saying that Levy wanted me to bring the employers’ committee to his house to continue the session. “Forget it,” I said. “We’re too busy. Let him sleep.”

Our conference became snagged over the immediate 10 per cent wage increase we had asked for. All other provisions had been agreed upon. With the dressmakers awarded a 15 per cent wage raise by the mayor's commission, we felt that the sportswear strikers also were entitled to a substantial increase.

The spokesmen for the other side argued that there had been a general raise of pay in the spring. We knew that; it had been given because-the employers feared a strike.

"But, gentlemen," I exclaimed, "surely you don't expect your workers to return without any immediate wage increase. Our demand is still 10 per cent the day they go back to your shops."

"We offer five per cent," Jack Takiff replied.

"Agreed!"

While this increase was small, we were sure that it would be acceptable to our members because of the other points we had won for them. They were protected by a clause providing that in the event of a six per cent advance in living costs, they would be entitled to a corresponding lift in pay. Other gains were a 37 1/2-hour work-week, a week's paid vacation, a four weeks' trial period, and minimum wage rates as established in the trade.

And there was little doubt that the whole employers' group would approve of our tentative agreement. Los Angeles was a critical area, with acute labor shortage. Dozens of skilled garment workers already had shifted to defense, notably aircraft, after brief training, and the demand for others was growing.

"The nimble fingers of the garment workers," a local engineer commented, "especially qualify them for delicate precision instruments."

The dressmakers also returned with a union contract — all but a few who walked out from one factory — in the 719 South Los Angeles building, which promised to give us a long drawn-out fight.

In the sportswear group Chick Lingerie and W. J. Woodard Blouse had held aloof from negotiations. They had determined, under the influence of the M & M, I was convinced, to fight it out. Picketing at these three buildings continued militantly.

At another sportswear factory, the Sun-rose, in the Harris-Newmark Building, we tried to reason with Mr. Runkin, its head.

"You'll have to join up with the rest eventually," we contended.

"All right, try and get my workers into your union," he taunted me.

Opal Alvarez, now staying at home to take care of her family, reported that several of Runkin's workers were "sick and tired of walking to and from work like thieves" with thugs protecting them. They were inclined to join the union. But Runkin had given them an increase during the strike, when they had not walked out with the rest, and they felt duty-bound to stay on the job. Opal promised to let me know of any new developments.

Meanwhile we called off the pickets at the Harris-Newmark Building with the idea of giving Runkin enough rope to hang himself. Soon he began to intimidate his “loyal” workers, and discharged one of them. Opal phoned me at midnight, and I had the discharged girl, Eva, come to see me. At seven next morning she was in my room at the Cabrillo Hotel.

I learned that the workers were so incensed with Runkin’s actions that they would do anything I might ask now.

“Even if I ask them to strike?”

“Yes, they’re waiting for a signal.”

I went down to confer with Mary and America. But they were somewhere in the market and would not be back before 10. I had a plane reservation to leave at noon to attend a GEB meeting in Philadelphia

Without wasting time, I had Eva follow me straight into the Runkin factory. The doors were wide open, the thugs gone.

Planting myself in the middle of the big workshop, I began in a soap-box voice:

“Girls, do you know that your co-worker, Eva, was discharged last night by your boss, Mr. Runkin? Have you asked yourselves why? Because she was too loyal to him during the strike, so loyal to him that she forgot that God helps only those who help themselves... Why do you sit here like slaves? Get up and come with us to the union. Mr. Runkin won’t dare discharge any one of you if you’re smart and join up with the rest... What happened to Eva last night might happen to *you* today or tomorrow...”

The boss, the sweeper, and the forelady rushed over to where I stood, and tried to push me out. Not until I had finished the last sentence did they succeed. They managed to get me into the office, but Eva remained in the work-room.

Pale and shaking with rage, Runkin shouted: “What are you trying to do to me?”

“You asked for it — and you earned it!” I said. “You heard me — we’re not going to let any chiselers run the garment market in Los Angeles.

We could hear movements outside — the office staff running in and out, stamping of feet in the hall, shouts and laughter. Facing Runkin, I asked: “Will you sign that collective agreement, like a good boy?” I left him fuming. Outside more than half the factory workers, with Eva triumphantly at their head, were waiting for me. Then I took a minute to look in on Goldberg, who had lately returned to work at a machine in the same building, and announced that the Sun-pose workers were on strike.

He could not believe his ears. “They finally decided to come out?”

“No, Mr. Runkin decided it for them.”

I asked him to come back and take over, as I was in no position to negotiate with an enraged employer to whom I was like a red rag to a bull.

The picket line paraded in front of the Runkin shop, and it was with deep satisfaction that the workers carried their signs proclaiming that they were striking because their employer was unfair to them. That strike was brief but effective. The girls enjoyed themselves, confessing that they had been most uncomfortable walking through the picket lines during the big strike. They had felt that they must keep their word to the boss. But he had failed to keep his.

Runkin finally consented to sign, on one condition — that one of the Mexican women who had been especially militant, must not return with the rest. Goldberg didn't mind agreeing — there was an acute shortage of special machine operators in the industry, and he was happy to send her into an established union shop.

After the strike I asked Rebecca Holland and Goldberg to join our staff. Rebecca, a capable organizer and business agent, had for years been connected with the ILGWU in Chicago and New York. A former University of Wisconsin student, she had gone to work in a garment factory in Chicago, joined the dressmakers' union, and served on important committees. Later she supplemented her education at Brookwood Labor College. In private life she was Mrs. J. L. Goldberg, proud of her husband and of Zami, their fine, intelligent son, then about 12.

I attended our quarterly GEB meeting in Philadelphia and had a brief visit with my family in New York. Before returning West, I stopped over at Unity House, the ILGWU's vacation resort in the Pocono Mountains. President Dubinsky was spending a week-end there, and Louis Levy also was there. D.D. called us into his cottage to discuss the Los Angeles situation.

My report was short and went straight to the point. Now that the sportswear union, newly-established in a rapidly expanding industry, had grown to nearly 2,000 members, with many more in prospect, permanent offices had to be set up and a staff organized to conduct their affairs until the new membership was qualified to carry on without supervision. Unlike our old-time members, these California workers needed special care. Los Angeles was one of the fastest growing cities on the Coast, and more women would pour in to work either in defense industries or the garment trade. I was willing to finish the job on one condition; that I be given full charge of the sportswear group.

Levy interrupted me to say that there was not room enough on the Pacific Coast for two vice-presidents; he would not remain there if I returned. That was a new one on me; I recalled that when he was ill he had demanded that I be transferred with all possible haste from Boston to Los Angeles.

Dubinsky turned to me. "Do you want to go back to Los Angeles?"

"Under the present set-up, no I " I answered emphatically. But I agreed to return there and clear up certain unfinished details, after which Levy and his wife could run the International's Pacific Coast affairs from their home without my annoying presence.

Dorothy Rubin, who had been my secretary in Boston, was transferred at my request to Los Angeles, having had experience in that type of office. I asked her to install the check-off system for the new locals, while we went ahead with the election of officers and fitting out the new headquarters. These, the finest in the city, were set up under my supervision on the same two floors in the Cabrillo Hotel that we had used during the strike.

Soon after we reached the Coast, a committee from Hollywood-Maxwell came to see me; the whole group was now anxious to join the union. "Call a meeting right after work near the factory," they urged.

Realizing that something extraordinary had happened, I went over and found 70 people waiting. Fearful of losing their jobs, they signed membership cards authorizing the ILGWU to negotiate with their employers. They were ready and willing to do anything I asked.

Two days later I had to disappoint them. They had held out too long.

Hollywood-Maxwell was going to close its "who-can-tell" factory in Hollywood, and was shifting to other sections of the country, where it could pay learners' wages indefinitely. If the girls joined the union, we would place them in other sportswear shops.

When I came back from the East, C. J. Haggerty, president of the California State Federation of Labor, informed me that upon his recommendation I had been appointed as a member of the State Council of Defense, to serve on its health, welfare, and consumer interest committee. Haggerty was head of the human resources and skill committee.

The Council had been set up by the Legislature in September, 1941. Attending one of its sessions on January 8, 1942, only a month after we entered the war, I made note of what was happening there. Obviously the Republicans in the Council were intentionally gumming up the works, confusing the issues, and endeavoring to thwart every constructive move made by Governor Olson. At the head of the opposition stood Attorney General Earl Warren, close friend of Herbert Hoover, protector of the reactionary Associated Farmers and big business generally, and later Governor.

From the beginning of Olson's Governorship until the end, virtually every worthy measure proposed by his administration was defeated or emasculated in the Assembly or Senate.

*Saturday, December 6, 1941* — Not a cloud appeared in the sky as we stood marveling at the sight of Boulder Dam. There was no sign from any quarter that overnight the lives of millions would be disrupted. On Friday I had driven 350 miles from Los Angeles to Boulder City, Nevada, with four companions. We were thrilled deeply as we contemplated this triumph of modern engineering — the gi-



gantic curving wall of concrete, 726 feet high, which had harnessed the wild Colorado River and created 180-mile-long Lake Mead.

From openings high on the face of that wall, tremendous jets of water poured unceasingly, with a never-ending roar. In the great power-house at the base of the dam, the world's largest electrical generators produced current which would run machinery and provide light for industries and homes in numberless cities and towns in California, Arizona, and Nevada. That power-house was operated by the City of Los Angeles and the Southern California Edison Company. And beyond the turbines through which it flowed, the water would move on to irrigate a vast stretch of land in Southern California which only a little while ago had been a desert – the Imperial Valley. Now it was one of the giant food baskets of the nation.

We were intrigued by the bright colored new houses, the fine hotel, and the well equipped stores in the city which had sprung up from nothing in a boundless waste of sand, to provide housing for the 5,000 or more workers on the dam-building project.

Evening found us in Las Vegas, another boom city, which boasted of being “wide open.” Streamlined, brilliantly lighted, its drinking and gambling places were never closed. And the red-light district operated without disguise or apology.

In one swank bar a blond beauty sang an old-time minstrel Song, I'm As Happy As a Big Sunflower. Lingering over cocktails and affected by the care-free opulence of our surroundings, we felt that way too.

*Sunday, December 7, 1941* — We got an early start back to Los Angeles. Fine weather, our heads clear, and life was good. I was driving my 1940 Packard, with an almost noiseless engine, and a tank filled with ethyl gas. We were traveling on a wide concrete road, with well banked curves, a nearly perfect highway. Fifty-five was just a nice easy gait for that car, my proudest possession.

Desert country. Emigrant trains of covered wagons had come this way, and prospectors for gold. Men had lost their bearings in the old days, went mad with thirst and fever, and died under the broiling sun. But the desert held no menace for us on that tranquil Sunday morning. We could stop for a drink or a meal at any one of innumerable roadside places, in pleasant atmosphere. Proprietors of neat cabins offered Ostermoor mattresses, cooking equipment, shower baths, “all the comforts of home.” Sleek cars from a dozen states flashed by. We sang one song after another, with light hearts.

Around 11 o'clock I turned on the radio. What I heard was like knife-thrust:

*... Pearl Harbor bombed ... American soldiers and sailors killed ... treacherous attack by Japanese planes ...*

“Listen!” I called, and the others stopped singing.

My heart seemed to stand still as that dark news continued. We all were silent, intent on every word.

Automatically I stepped on the gas, disregarding the speed law. My one thought now was to get back to Los Angeles. It was as if some terrible storm had overtaken us in the open, and we must run for shelter. I had a curious apprehension that some disaster might befall my sister Esther, then visiting me, before we could get home.

When that broadcast ended, and music came on, I turned it low, waiting for more bulletins. Between flashes from the commentators, we speculated on what lay ahead. Where would the enemy strike next?

There had been plenty of warnings about the Japanese, with their bowing, grinning envoys doing double-talk to our State Department, but these had gone unheeded.

Only a short time before, in San Pedro, I had spoken with several pump-men who were filling an oil-tanker soon to sail for Japan. "I'd rather sink the goddam thing than let her shove off," said one of them. He was outspoken about his feelings toward the nation that was getting the bulk of our scrap iron and most of our West Coast oil, to war on the Chinese. Bitterly he spoke of "some Senators" who had referred to Japan as "our best customer." But he was a poor man working for wages — and he had to fill her up.

Los Angeles was quiet, as if stunned. On the boulevards, going into the city, we passed through the big markets, usually scenes of great activity. The Japanese boys and girls who manned most of the invitingly arranged fruit and vegetable stands there were on duty, but there was little business now. I wondered what would become of them. Nearly all were American-born.

At other times First Street, the main thoroughfare in the Japanese quarter, was brightly lighted, with youngsters strolling arm in arm and the Tomio Hotel and the restaurants crowded, the latter chiefly by white Americans. But this evening that street was deserted, and police in pairs were on guard at the corners.

Esther met us with strained face when we got to my apartment. She, too, had been concerned about us.

Far into the night our ears were glued to the radio. Repeatedly the story of the sneak attack was told, in different words, by various newscasters.

Next day at the office little work was done, everybody listening to each new report over the air, climaxed with President Roosevelt's speech calling for a declaration of war and the swift action by Congress which followed. I closed my eyes for an instant then, and seemed to hear the beat of drums and the tramp of marching feet. And I remembered again what my father said in the market-place in Derazhnia after Russia was defeated in 1905: "*... Mark my words, the Japanese war lords will not stop at this —*"

That evening, as we drove to Long Beach, where Governor Olson was to address a mass-meeting about the crisis, we encountered the first total blackout. It was pitch dark on the roads, as we moved along feeling our way. The towering oil derricks, with the red lights topping them extinguished, looked sinister as their silhouettes were outlined against the sky. This blackout lasted throughout the night, and the scheduled meeting was cancelled. Few people in that region slept, alert to all noises. The Japanese might land secretly on the California coast at any hour.

All day I had been turning over in my mind a question: What effect would the massacre far away in the Pacific, and the action in Washington, have upon my own life? Out of that pondering came a decision.

Working here in the last two years, despite all the obstacles set in my path, I had felt that what I was doing had importance. The long neglected and scattered dress-makers' local had been made whole again and was thriving, and the sportswear and cotton dress groups were solidly organized. More than 2,000 women workers had joined our ranks in this city in those two years and could be counted as good unionists.

But in the light of the tragedy that had plunged us into a world holocaust, my job was no longer important.

## Chapter 34. Labor and the Road Ahead

Manhattan skyscraper. From the shop where I am working, on the thirty-fifth floor, I can look down into the teeming canyons of the midtown garment industry. On the walks below the lunch-hour crowd moves to and fro in sweltering heat. Coatless workers, shoppers, members of the armed forces. And in the streets there is a constant flurry of motor traffic. Buses, trucks, and taxis — yellow, white, red, orange, and green — dart hither and thither like restless bugs.

Eastward we can see Bryant Park, in the rear of the Central Public Library, where people of all ages seek coolness beneath its symmetrically laid-out rock-maple trees; the needle-pointed Chrysler tower, industrial smokestacks, the East River, and Long island.

To the North, Radio City, Central Park, a shimmering lagoon, Essex House, and Columbus Circle.

Westward, huge warehouses, the Hudson River, ferry-boats, cargo ships, Army transports, barges, the Palisades of New Jersey.

To the South, the Empire State Building, tallest man-made structure in the world; lower Manhattan's skyline, and the point where the Hudson and East Rivers meet to flow down the bay into the Atlantic Ocean.

Across 200 feet of space a window cleaner works, held on a narrow sill by a leather safety belt. Pigeons sit on balconies feeding on bread crumbs left from workers' lunches. High above an airplane, silver-winged, zooms somewhere with passengers and mail. What if it were an enemy plane, dropping bombs? I shudder at the thought.

For centuries the human race searched for some formula, magic or scientific, to extend its life-span, to eliminate disease, to develop strong, enduring men and women. And after long striving yellow fever, tuberculosis, and other scourges were conquered and the average life was materially lengthened. But now all these gains have been set at naught. For scientists with drugged consciences have devised lethal weapons, designed not only to wipe out the manhood of this generation, but to destroy whole cities and whole nations. Robot bombing planes, the latest invention, coming seemingly from nowhere, wreak havoc among defenseless peo-

ple. Hospitals no longer are spared. For a few years of promised full employment, human skill is lured into making such weapons to annihilate the flower of mankind.

World War I, so-called, was fought to make the world safe for democracy. Yet democracy has suffered far greater assaults than ever before, from new totalitarian dictatorships that came into being since then. Now, on August 1, 1944, thirtieth anniversary of the beginning of that conflict, more than 11,000,000 men, most of them born after August 1, 1914, have been quickly molded into soldiers, sailors, marines, paratroopers, bombardiers, plane engineers, pilots, navigators, medical service attendants, construction workers who rebuild bridges, railroads, and highways destroyed by the enemy, jeep and truck drivers, and armed guards for convoys. One hundred and forty thousand women and girls have become members of the Women's Army Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, Marines, and the national air forces. Each has released a man for active combat duty. On the home front men and women have enrolled in numerous activities in civilian defense, Red Cross, nurses' aides, and other services.

Remember Pearl Harbor!

Whose blood will save him? Give a pint of yours! It may mean a life!

Use it up ... Wear it out ... Make it do ... or do without!

Zip your lip and save a ship!

They give their lives. You lend your money.

Such slogans stare at us everywhere so that we cannot forget that a savage war is going on with millions of lives at stake.

In my shop some 50 of us are aiding national defense by working on a Government Issue order. On this lofty floor of a Broadway garment factory building, we turn out WAC uniforms: pongee for summer, beige wool for winter. Precision work, exacting, with the finest possible stitching. I count 16 stitches to the inch. (Quartermaster's specifications: Side seams on dress and sleeves — one inch; skirt panel seams — three quarters of an inch; seams on waistline, shoulders, and armholes — one half inch; seams on neck and trimmings, collar, pockets, pocket flaps, and shoulder tabs — one quarter of an inch.) For each pocket flap and each shoulder tab there is a buttonhole and a brass button. This is the only decoration. These uniforms, of new design, are smart and dressy in both weights. Nothing is too good for GI Mary Jane, the Wac.

After Pearl Harbor I gave up organizing and returned to work at a sewing machine on the production line in a New York garment factory.

At the 1944 convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, held in Boston in May and June, I declined to accept a fourth term on the General Executive Board. Speaking from the platform on this question, I contended that

the organization ought to reconsider its old established rule of having only a single woman in its high council. Ten years in office had made it clear to me that a lone woman vice-president could not adequately represent the women who now make up 85 per cent of the International's membership of 305,000.

Continuing to serve on the GEB until the convention, attending its quarterly meetings and carrying out other routine functions connected with the office of vice-president, I had opportunity to observe what was happening both in our own industry and in the labor movement as a whole.

The job of every International union now was to hold its ranks solid, and to safeguard gains of recent years in the face of systematic attempts of employers to disrupt and tear down labor unions in war-time. Day after day the attacks on the unions have gone on, under a variety of pretexts.

At no time has organized labor in this country played such an important part as in the period since Pearl Harbor. And at no time has it faced greater responsibilities. Labor is represented in three major agencies — the War Labor Board, the War Production Board, and the War Manpower Commission designed to keep essential production at its peak.

Unfortunately, only about one fifth of the nation's working population is organized into unions, but millions of non-union wage-earners have benefited from organized labor's insistence upon decent living standards for all. Those millions remain opposed or indifferent to unions through sheer ignorance of their merits.

Labor has supplied the vast bulk of the man-power and woman-power on the fighting fronts; has filled most of the blood banks, thus saving the lives of countless thousands of wounded men; and bought war bonds until sales totals have become astronomical. Fifty-five million workers in industry and agriculture, including about 17,000,000 women, have kept vital supplies streaming in unprecedented quantity to the United Nations, who are at death grips with the Axis powers.

Labor has built ships, tanks, bombing and transport planes and motor vehicles, and produced ammunition, food, clothing, and medical supplies for the fighting forces, lend-lease, and home consumption. Almost overnight housewives and farm-hands have been transformed into technicians, among them plane and ship-builders, welders, draughtsmen, precision instrument makers and testers.

Immediately after we entered the war organized labor relinquished its strongest weapon — the right to strike for the duration. In return it got the Little Steel Formula from the War Labor Board. That formula was designed in a case involving four Little Steel companies, notorious for violent hostility to unionism. It determined that, with certain exceptions, there should be no wage increase beyond 15 per cent above the level of January, 1941. This 15 per cent was intended to cover an increase in living costs officially reported by the United States Labor Department

Index. Despite Office of Price Administration (OPA) regulations, however, living costs continued to rise, but wages remained frozen.

Hence there have been strikes, some of wildcat nature, some forced upon workers because their wages would not meet the rising cost of living. Some were deliberately provoked by management to demoralize the ranks of labor and to discredit union leadership. Other strikes developed over racial issues, for in the North as well as in the South there are still white Americans who refuse to accept their colored co-workers as equals. Vehemently condemned by union officials, these strikes appear to have been skilfully directed by outside forces interested in dividing Americans on one issue or another.

Employers, too, have slowed down production when it suited their purposes, but this seldom if ever got into the headlines.

Despite all the outcry against organized labor by its critics, the actual loss in man-hours in strikes was negligible. Department of Labor statistics show that the number of man-hours lost through strikes in 1943 was only 15/100 of one per cent of the total available working time.

The coal miners, who staged the largest of the war-time strikes, had strong reason for walking out. Beside the low wages paid them, under the Little Steel Formula, they had to buy their groceries and other necessities from company stores in the mining towns, at exorbitant prices; in some instances those prices had risen 100 per cent since 1941.

That strike made them the target of a wide-spread campaign of vituperation. They were pictured as "pawns" in the hand of John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, although their actions were governed by a Miners' Policy Committee of 225 men from all parts of the country.

It is of course true that Lewis, through his stubbornness and his faculty for making enemies, has brought the UMW into disrepute in the minds of many people. At the beginning of the New Deal he was an ardent supporter of President Roosevelt. Today he is his bitter foe.

One of the largest single international unions, comprising 600,000 members, the UMW was suspended from the A F of L in 1936 because of its part in building the CIO, in which Lewis was the prime mover, and of which he was the first president. Having declared that he would resign as the CIO's head if FDR won a third term, Lewis carried out that intention. And after Philip Murray was elected in his place, Lewis caused the UMW to withdraw from the CIO. Since then he has tried repeatedly to have the A F of L take the United Mine Workers back into its ranks, but without success. So his organization remains an independent union.

Generally the mine workers have followed Lewis's advice on economic matters, but being individualists like himself, they have gone their own ways politically.

In 1940 Lewis swung to the support of Wendell Willkie; the coal-diggers largely voted for Mr. Roosevelt...

When they went on strike in 1943, they knew they had mined a huge reserve — 79,000,000 tons of bituminous coal. But those who assailed them as “unpatriotic” generally failed to mention this great stockpile.

And I don’t recall seeing any headlines in the newspapers for Mrs. Esther McCabe of Lilly, Pennsylvania, miner’s widow, who has 10 sons in the armed forces — nor for other miners’ sons on the fighting fronts who didn’t succumb to newspaper propaganda about their fathers being “traitors,” but who urged them in letters to keep up the demand for decent wages and working conditions now, so that when they returned from the battlefields they would not have to start the battle with their employers all over again.

To my mind, too, painfully little space was given in the daily press to recent coal mine disasters in which miners perished through underground fires or explosions. For dynamite is still one of the tools of a miner. Gas still accumulates in coal mines. And inspection is often faulty. No miner knows when he goes into a pit in the morning whether he will be alive that night — not any more than a soldier in a combat area knows whether he will be alive or dead tomorrow.

Various labor leaders joined the reactionaries in assailing the miners for striking. But their militant stand against the Little Steel Formula gave the others courage and strength later to demand that that formula be revised to meet prevailing conditions.

Soon after the coal strike Congress passed the Smith-Connally bill, which provided drastic penalties for persons promoting or encouraging strikes in essential industries in war time. Under this law the government can “seize any war manufacturing or production facilities threatened with or suffering from strikes.” Sponsored by Representative Howard W. Smith of Virginia, and Senator Tom Connally of Texas, both Democrats and both anti-labor, that bill’s passage marked the beginning of an organized effort to wreck bona fide unions through legislation.

A bill recently introduced provides for a year of military training and four years’ reserve service for every male citizen and alien resident, at the age of 18. Another bill calls for the induction into military service for one year at the age of 17 or immediately upon graduation from high school, and subsequent reserve service for eight years.

Thus some legislators in Washington are paving the way for a standing army — for the next war — and also for post-war home use. In the event of a strike, the younger strikers could be called up for service and forced to serve as strike-breakers in uniform against their own brothers and fathers and against their own economic interests. Such things have happened in other countries under dictatorships, against which our youth has been sent to wage the present war. Compulsory



military training is conducive to waging wars rather than to the maintenance of peace.

Much has been written and said about labor enjoying excessive pay, but little has appeared in print about low-paid workers, such as those in hotels, restaurants, and laundries, being frozen to their jobs if they were employed in “locally needed activities.” And scarcely anything is being said about the munitions makers who are amassing huge profits in this war as in those of the past. Profiteers of a new class also have sprung up, reaping fortunes in the black market and in various other illegitimate ways.

The House Military Affairs Committee has revealed that the government has been defrauded of millions on cost-plus contracts by labor-renting concerns. Those outfits, posing as engineering companies, recruited workers at wages ranging from 50 cents to \$2.75 an hour, and rented them out to industrial corporations at rates varying from \$2.60 to \$12 an hour. Some of them made a labor charge per man of from \$250 to \$350 a week. The committee found, too, that in various instances the men rented out “were inexperienced and incapable of performing the duties for which they were hired.”

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Rose Pesotta  
Bread upon the Waters  
1945

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