

# What Is Coming in the Rubber Industry?

By I. AMTER.

THE rubber industry is intimately related to the auto industry. Altho there are numerous rubber products outside of tires, none the less the production of tires dominates the industry. The production of new cars has a determinative effect on rubber, even tho the use of all cars necessitates plenty of tires.

That auto production determines tire production may be gathered from the figures of production. Thus the production of cars and trucks amounted to about 2,200,000 in the first six months of 1296, or about 14 per cent ahead of the same period of 1925. In May the production declined, but picked up again in June. This decline and revival was reflected in the production of tires, the situation being due also in part to the abnormal climatic conditions. The auto factories are curtailing production at the present time, owing, as is reported, to inventory taking and to the preparation of new models.

ALLOWING for the fact that in times of prosperity autos are bought and are again sold in times of decline, so that at the present time many own cars which they will dispose of when a depression begins, still it is a fact that the auto and truck have become a national institution. Hence, with ups and downs, the rubber industry does and will keep pace with the auto industry—or better, with the increasing use of cars. The railroads are beginning to note the competition of bus lines, and many of them are installing lines of their own, in recognition of the fact that bus lines and short hauling by auto trucks are catching the public favor.

THAT conditions are not what they should be from a capitalist point of view on profits, is to be noted in the fact that there has been a considerable reduction in the price of tires—corresponding with the reduction in the prices of cars. Is this due to over-production—or to the fact that new cars are being introduced which will mean a discarding of the old models? Both may be the reasons. Suffice it to say the automobile manufacturers are also complaining about

the amount of money is tied up in instalment buying and about the number of used cars in the hands of branches.

THE same may be recorded about the tire industry. On May 1 there were 9,345,000 casings in the hands of the manufacturers as compared with 6,800,000 a year ago, and 6,600,000 two years ago. Over-production. What is happening in the rubber industry? Did the increased production necessitate more workers? It did not. The rubber industry has gone thru a revolution—the same revolution as in the auto industry. Every day there is an improvement in production, which means a new method of exploiting labor more effectually. New machinery, greater and more scientific division of work, efficiency in every motion—and speed-up. This latter is the secret whereby the manufacturers have reduced the cost of production and have obtained more work out of the workers.

HAVE the workers benefited by the greater production? They have not. They have given more labor power—and have received nothing in return. Less men are being employed, but the production has increased. Profits rose in the past year from 35 to 100 per cent, but the workers have not received one penny more in return for their work.

On the contrary, the speed-up process eliminates many men, who form an army ever ready to take away the work of those on the job. The rubber industry is not a skilled industry. Practically any department of work may be learned in a few hours. The result is that one finds miners, steel workers and every other category of worker in the rubber factories.

THE number of young workers and of women in the rubber factories is also very large. No skill being required, and as the manufacturers are intent upon making the highest profit possible, young workers and women are employed, thus lowering the standard of the industry owing to their acceptance of lower wages.

The rubber industry is one of the best fortified industries in the country. Whereas it is intimately bound up with the auto industry, together they are on close financial relations with

## EDISON'S INVENTIONS HAVE HELPED PROFITS IN RUBBER INDUSTRY



THOMAS EDISON.

the banks of Wall Street. There is the same relation between all the rubber manufacturers as there is between the steel manufacturers: a gentleman's agreement as to prices, etc. Hence, as far as the workers are concerned, they face one enemy in the rubber industry, even tho the different plants show divergences as regards modernity of plant, etc. A powerful organization faces the practically unorganized workers.

SOME of the rubber barons, recognizing that the workers are becoming conscious of this situation have taken time by the forelock. The workers feel that they are entitled to a word in the determination of their conditions. Good. We will establish an "industrial democracy" plan, wherein the workers will sit in consultation with us, thru their chosen representatives, and we will talk. The workers may think that they are making decisions,

but the final word rests not in the assembly and senate, where their representatives function, but in the hands of the board of directors of the company. The word of the latter body is final.

TO entice the workers still more, the companies have provided tennis courts, ball grounds, libraries, rest rooms, etc. Everything they will give the workers except higher wages. Everything they may have—provided they do not infringe upon any of the company rules, in case of which they may be disciplined: they may be forced to give up the homes they have erected on the ground that they have bought from the company on "splendid" terms, because the company favors its own workers, etc. Company unionism is believed by the manufacturers a substitute for real unionism.

THE companies know that the workers are becoming conscious of the hypocrisy of the situation, and are demanding the right of organization. Proof? The workers are trying to form a union. Any worker talking union organization in the shops is reported to the office by the thousands of spies in the "flying squads"—common rats—in the employ of the company. Workers joining the union are discharged if discovered. They are followed round the town, spied upon and reported. The company therefore realizes that its plants are fake and that the workers know it.

A REAL trade union is imperative in the rubber industry. There are some industries that are of long standing and conditions have only gradually been changed. But the rubber, like the auto industry, is an infant industry and is growing with the speed of a child. Rapid changes are made, new processes are adopted—and all of them mean greater and greater exploitation of the workers.

A real trade union is in the making in Akron and is bound to embrace all of the workers. It is the only hope of the rubber workers and the only safeguard against greater robbery. The rubber union is bound to come and will be one of the most powerful unions in the country, being representative of the workers who are working in an industry that has become an "essential" industry.