

RUBBER BARONS RUN CLOSE RACE WITH FORD IN EXPLOITING MEN TO SUPPLY TIRES FOR FLIVVERS

By I. AMTER.

THE situation in the rubber tire industry of Akron is beginning to develop. Both the rubber manufacturers and the rubber workers realize that the situation is getting more intense day by day.

Perhaps the best evidence of this is the fact that a member of the rubber workers' organization who ran for election as member of the Good-year "Industrial Assembly" was immediately fired when his success in the primaries was announced. Why did Goodyear resort to this act of terrorism in this "parliament of the workers?" The reason is that Goodyear realizes that the workers know what is going on in the industry and are beginning to sense the need of organization in order to put an end to the effrontery of the bosses.

43,000 Workers in Akron.

WHAT is the situation in Akron?

There are 43,000 workers in the rubber tire industry of Akron, representing the vast majority of the rubber workers of Ohio—the biggest rubber state in the country—and producing 52 per cent of the rubber tires of the country. More than half—30,000—of these workers are employed in two plants—the Goodyear Rubber and Tire company and the Goodrich Rubber and Tire company, the remainder being in the Seiberling, Firestone, Mohawk, General, etc.

These rubber workers are among the worst exploited in the country, that is, regarding exploitation from the point of view of production and remuneration. In 1923 the average pay of the workers was \$1,586. From 1923 on, the profits of the rubber barons increased, until in 1925 they earned the highest profits in the history of the rubber industry. At the same time, the production increased from \$391,000,000 to \$556,000,000 or 42 per cent while the wages declined from \$1,584 to \$1,519 or a decrease of 4.1 per cent.

The Workers Know.

THE workers in the shops know what the exploitation is. Thus, in one department, they used to employ a mold turning out one tire, the handling of the tire requiring three workers. Now they employ six molds turning out six tires, and only four men are required.

Speed-up is the curse of the rubber industry. The foreman and supervisors stand behind the men, driving them on. But there is something more coercive than the foreman's warnings: the fact that if the workers do not work at maximum speed, they will not earn enough to live on.

"Base" Rate Scale Used.

THE work is based on the base rate—a scale established arbitrarily. That rate, however, has no meaning whatever. A worker knows that he must turn out products for that scale, but the amount changes from day to day. Thus by speeding up the workers, and demanding an ever greater production, the base rate will remain the same, but the worker is exploited to an ever higher degree. The experiment is tried out on one worker, and when it is discovered that he can produce a larger quantity than hitherto, all the workers are compelled to equal that production.

Scale Also Reduced.

THERE are instances, however, in which the base rate itself is lowered. Thus a year ago a worker received \$1 for an operation, three months ago it was reduced to 82 cents, and now amounts only to 66 cents. Production has increased, for the rubber barons use this stimulus, in addition to the one mentioned above, to force the men to work harder in order to earn the money that they did before.

THE rubber industry is working at a fast pace, owing to the fact that the spring season was slow and now

the demand must be met. In spite of the fact that local men are being discharged, more men are being put on. The companies prefer southerners—men who know little about organization, and who will "appreciate" the "fine" conditions in the Akron rubber industry. These men are amenable to the foremen and bosses in the shops for a while, but then they too begin to understand the cutting system under which they are working.

These men are fighters—individualists, who have been compelled to rely on their own resources, and when they find that the "Eldorado" that they expected is only a plain field of battle, on which the workers at the present time are getting worsted, they turn to the same methods that the northerners are using.

WHAT are the workers doing to counteract the effect of the situation? The workers are organizing, and the Rubber Workers Union of America is the goal they have set themselves. A large number of workers have already found their way into the union, despite the terrorism of the bosses, and the other intimidating methods that they employ.

Thus, for instance, the men on one shift are sometimes told that there will be little work, whereas the company takes on more men on another shift. The reports of the rubber company officials indicate at times that conditions are not what they should be. The purpose is clear: to create a spirit of insecurity in the minds of the workers, so that they will accept any conditions in order to hold onto their jobs.

Men Are Militant.

THESE reports, however, have no effect on the workers. Many of them are disgusted, and do not hesitate to express their disgust. A sharp spirit of discontent gave rise to the union, and now the union is giving organized expression to it in the form of a weekly paper called "The Rubber Worker." This paper has created a sensation among the workers, and according to reports, even the rubber manufacturers recognize that the rubber workers are on the right path.

The "Rubber Worker" has formulated the demands of the workers—demands that arise out of the situation in the rubber industry itself.

Formulate Demands.

THESE demands are \$40 a week minimum wage, equal pay for men, women and young workers for the same 8-hour day, 40-hour week, no speed-up, guaranteed full year's work, right of organization. These demands are meeting with a lively response from the workers, who in 1925 helped to make the \$21,000,000 profits for Goodyear, \$17,000,000 for United States Rubber, \$17,000,000 for Goodrich, \$3,500,000 for Miller and \$1,244,000 for Seiberling. What has been the workers' share in this prosperity? A reduction of wages and intensified speed-up.

WHAT is going to be the outcome?

The "Rubber Worker" states that without organization nothing will be accomplished, and therefore the right of organization and recognition of the union by the employers is the central demand. From all appearances and judging by the manner in which the rubber workers are carrying on their work, they will soon realize it.