

What The Canton Steel Strike Means

By I. AMTER

ON August 6, 500 steel workers in Canton, working for the Central Alloy Steel Corporation, went out on strike. These 500 men comprised 400 chippers and 100 grinders.

They have quit work before. On July 25, they were getting 52½c an hour plus bonus and were earning between \$6-\$7 a day. Without a word of notice, they were cut 45c an hour and they laid down their work. On July 27, they returned to work, on the promise of Mr. Seldon, the superintendent, who raised the scale to 55c an hour, but modified the bonus. What this would mean they could not tell, till August 6, when, although they were assured that they would earn the same amount of wages, they discovered that they were earning \$4.40 a day—working eight hours—plus about 50c bonus. This was too much and they walked out again.

The men gathered in a hall, elected a strike com-

mittee of twelve, the strike committee elected a small committee of five, and they proceeded to strike.

The men have put up their demands which are: \$6 for an 8 hour day, abolition of the bonus system, removal of Mr. Seldon, the superintendent and recognition of the Mill Committee. Daily meetings are being held and the spirit of the men remains fine.

No Excuse For Cut

The steel industry is operating at between 75-80 per cent capacity. There has not been the usual summer lull, but production has kept up, and profits are made.

The Central Alloy Steel Corporation, where the strike is in progress, is in a unique position with two plants, one in Canton and one in Massillon, and is turning out steel for airplanes.

The airplane industry is one of the new industries,

whose significance cannot be underestimated. This year 15,000 airplanes will have been built in the United States. These airplanes are nominally for commercial purposes, but when, according to statements of leading airplane experts, a commercial airplane can be converted into a bombing plane in a few hours, then one understands that this industry is also a WAR industry.

The Central Alloy Steel Corporation produces 95% of all the steel required for countershafts and other parts of the motors for airplanes.

U. S. Government Gets In

This explains why the Department of Labor of the United States sent Mr. Foulkner, of the Dept. of Labor, to Canton to negotiate a settlement, but his attitude was so unfriendly that the men would not accept his proposals. He did consult with the company, and departing from Canton without seeing the men, he notified them from Cleveland, that he had consulted with the Central Alloy but they refused to deal with the Mill Committee.

Chippers and grinders are in a strategic position in the steel industry. No steel can be used for production unless it passes through the hands of the chippers and grinders. Their work is not only important but also difficult and hard. The men use compressed air tools with a pressure of 350 lbs. The use of the tool is difficult, and during the first two weeks when a man works in this department his hands swell up, and only a few men remain. The tool likewise rests on one leg, and it also swells up. For this reason, aside from the skill that is needed in getting smooth surfaces, it is hard to get scabs. The men realized their position and therefore did not hesitate to go out.

Not that the company has not tried to get scabs. They procured them in Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Cleveland. Six hundred have passed through the plant, but only 150 have remained. These scabs are afforded a protection from the law. Only six of the old men in the department remained at work, all others being imported. Still production has slowed down considerably, owing to the fact that no proper chipping and grinding work was being done.

Authorities Persecute Strikers

How have the city authorities acted in this strike? In the usual manner. Up to this writing, 29 of the men have been arrested, three of them fined and sent to the workhouse. There have been other convictions on the charge of "suspicion," which covers a multitude of sins and fake charges. The immigration authorities have been active, and held 6 men; of these two, whose status was dubious, they allowed out, while the others, who are active in the strike, are

under bond. On the other hand, Arabs who have been brought in as scabs, have been unmolested, although it is clear that the status of these men as regards legal entry, is no better.

The police have been on the job, as many as 50 being around the plant when the men picket. Picket lines of 250 march round the plant in the morning and afternoon, with banners voicing their demands. Up to the present there has not been much interference with the picket lines, although on one occasion Mr. Smith organized a crew of his scabs and as the picket line passed the plant, he ordered them to shower the pickets with stones. There was a regular melee, and the strikers, although the attack was not expected, did not come off defeated. There are other manifestations of the attitude of the city authorities, aside from the arrests. Mr. Smith, assistant superintendent of the Canton plant, walks up and down the road with a gun in his belt; he is continually with the police, and instructs them as to the men to be arrested. Thus the close collaboration of the police and the authorities with the officials of the company is clearly demonstrated. Not that this is anything new in strikes: it is a usual phenomenon, but is rarely done so openly as in Canton.

Sign Of The Times

Steel, which together with coal, is the backbone of modern industry, is beginning to move. The workers who are being speeded up and early thrown on the scrap heap, are no longer willing to accept the conditions imposed. Despite unemployment which is rampant throughout the country, despite the brutal treatment which is heaped upon the men by the police and the protection given to the scabs, who are even furnished with weapons by the company, which weapons they have used on the strikers, the men are out, and continue to fight, have organized, are trying to spread the strike.

Relief and defense have become necessary. The International Labor Defense is taking care of all court cases, the Workers International Relief is now starting a local campaign for the relief of about 50 families which are getting into straitened circumstances.

The Canton strike, is an indicator of the trend in the American working class. The American workers are beginning to strike back. Miners, needle workers, textile workers, steel workers: the omens are good. The Left Wing must more actively work among these unorganized masses of 600,000 steel workers in order to lay the groundwork for a formidable union in the steel industry. This will take work and energy, but the attitude of the Canton steel workers indicates that this is fertile soil and good results will come.