

# Steel Turns South

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By TOM JOHNSON.

Under pressure of the growing crisis and the stiffer competition coincident to it, the giants of the steel industry are again turning their eyes to the South.

Republic Steel of Youngstown is the latest to announce an expansion program in the South. Republic already has a controlling interest in Gulf States Steel whose main mill is located in Birmingham, and which is now completing a new plate mill in Gadsden, Alabama. Now it is reported that Republic is negotiating for the purchase of the Woodward Iron Co. at Birmingham.

One does not have to look far to find the reason for this migration to the South, particularly in a time of crisis when price cutting is the order of the day. It is to be found in these figures:

In 1927, the last year for which government statistics were available, the year's wage of the average steel worker in the Birmingham district was \$932—some \$175 under the national average. For the state of Alabama as a whole average wages in the manufacturing industries of the state in 1927 reached the unbelievably low level of \$885 for a year's toil.

This was two years ago. Since that time wage cuts in the steel industry have become common place. Today the going rate for Negro labor in the Woodward mills, on which Republic casts an envious eye, is 24 cents an hour. In other mills single men are paid 25 cents while the "generous" company pays married men 30 cents. In all mills wage rates for Negro workers range from 4 to 8 cents per hour under the rate paid the white workers.

Along with these starvation wage rates the

big companies force the workers to pay exorbitant rent for filthy little shacks one cannot dignify by calling houses, and insist on the worker spending at least a fixed portion of his pay at the company commissary. Prices in these "pluck me" company stores can be well imagined.

As wages go down hours are lengthened and the speed-up is increased. The 8-hour day, won by thousands of steel workers in this district as a result of the 1919 strike, is a thing of the past. 10, 12 and even longer hours are the order of the day now. Production per worker mounts steadily—and mainly at the expense of the hard driven workers and not thru use of improved technical processes. In the manufacture of cast iron pipe in this district the value added by manufacture increased 429 per cent in the past 10 years while the number of workers which produced this added value grew only 83 per cent. Many similar examples could be cited.

In the face of these attacks the southern steel worker has but one recourse—organization and struggle. Already the Trade Union Unity League and the Metal Workers' Industrial League are gaining a substantial foothold in this open shoppers' paradise. The dream of the steel magnates of unlimited exploitation of a docile working class in the Sunny Southland will be shattered by the shock of approaching class conflicts.

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