

Three Strategies in the New Bedford Strike

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THE thirteenth week of the strike in New Bedford has now seen the end of the preparatory period and the opening up of the more decisive stages of the struggle. The mill owners have decided to open up the gates of their mills and make an open test of strength.

The opening of the mill gates was forced upon the owners for the following reasons:

1. In the first place while the market has been very slow and while the mill owners had some stocks on hand, still the hundred percent shutdown in New Bedford was beginning to be felt decidedly in the fine-goods market. We must remember that 50,000 of the 110,000 fine-goods looms throughout the entire country is centered in New Bedford. Even assuming that the mills can supply the market till the late fall, still it was necessary for the mills to open up in July so as to have enough time to break the strike and get things in order for the full resumption of work.
2. Further, the political situation demanded that the mills make an effort to terminate the strike. The national campaign promises to be rather close. Massachusetts is threatened by the Democrats. The tariff issue is to be raised in the election. The most prominent mill owner is Butler who was campaign manager for Coolidge and the chairman of the Republican party for a time. Butler is also slated for an important post by Hoover if the latter is elected. This means that Butler would be a target for attack and he should be quite anxious not to have the textile strike in New Bedford drag out to election time.
3. Again, quite a number of the mills wanted to settle the strike, it seems. Originally there was quite an objection to the wage cuts by some of the efficiency engineers on the ground that the same reduction of costs could be accomplished in other ways. At the present time a number of mills have many orders on hand and they are putting pressure for a resumption of work as quickly as possible.

4. Further, the mill owners see that their original idea of starving out the workers has failed signally. Each week the New Bedford Textile Workers Union is solidifying its hold on the masses, entrenching itself on the picket lines, building up a substantial union organization. Instead of growing weaker the union is getting stronger. A test soon had to be made as to the relative strength of the different forces in the field.
5. Finally, the mill owners feared an extension of the strike into Fall River and other places and therefore desired to terminate the strike as quickly as possible.

The immediate strategy of the employers before opening the mill gates was as follows:

1. Intensive campaign in the papers announcing the opening of the mill gates and emphasizing the full protection that the scabs would receive.
2. Entrance into the situation of the State Arbitration Board. This was designed to effect the following results:
 - a. To weaken the morale of the workers. To make them feel that the employers were good fellows and wanted peace. That peace was near and that therefore it was not necessary to fight so hard, to go on the picket line, etc. Finally to mask the intensive preparations that the employers were making.
 - b. To give prestige and standing to the reformists and reactionary officials of the A. F. T. O.—U. T. W. who had become entirely discredited. Only the officials of the A. F. T. O. were invited to the parleys of the State Board and not the real representatives of the workers. This was openly stated and when the New Bedford Textile Workers Union sent a committee to the meeting as the representatives of the vast majority of the strikers, they were refused entrance and the meeting continued behind closed doors.
 - c. To bolster up the waning authority of the governmental forces. Since the municipal authorities had become discredited, it was necessary to show that the "State" was better, more impartial, and fair.
 - d. To unify all forces against the New Bedford Textile Workers Union.
 - e. To put out feelers to break the strike, to bring the workers back to work under the following alternative conditions:
 1. To go back to work and have the wage matter arbitrated.
 2. To go back to work under the old scale and then arbitrate.

3. To go back to work with a 5% or so wage cut.
4. To go back under the old scale but with the "labor extension" plan imposed, that is, under a great speed-up system.
3. While the mill owners talked peace they had meanwhile intensively prepared for war. The police force was increased by 60 mounted police to a force of 300. The National Guard was brought in by the Mayor. It is noteworthy that although every effort was made to get the National Guardsmen to volunteer as special police, it was impossible to make them do it. They were of the textile workers and said so, and they would not volunteer against their own people. Finally they had to be drafted.

The soldiers were called in: 1. to protect the scabs. 2. to frighten the strikers 3. to provoke disorder. 4. to give the impression abroad that anarchy and violence reigned supreme due to the entrance of left-wing leaders. And it must be said that the labor bureaucrats of the U. T. W. did everything possible to aid the military authorities in accomplishing these purposes. The bringing in of the National Guard was approved by Batty and the statement was made by him implying that the actions of the leaders of the union made this move by the military authorities necessary and correct.

4. At the same time the State moved to cut down relief to the workers. Hitherto the city had given some relief through its welfare and charity departments. The state now declared that moneys expended by the city for such purposes would not be reimbursed by the state, as such relief was to go to men who could not get jobs and with the opening up of the mills there were plenty of jobs and so no relief should be given. It should be noted that the sections of the workers that had applied to the city for relief were, of course, the most backward sections, those least affected by the influence of the union, and those which at the stoppage of relief would be most likely to return to work. Thus the state, at the time of the opening of the mills, had prepared as many scabs for the mill owners as possible.

The immediate strategy of the labor bureaucrats, Batty, Binns, Riviere, & Co. of the A. F. T. O.—U. T. W. can be summed up as follows:

1. In the first place it was very necessary for them to put on a more militant aspect, if they were to make any semblance of controlling the situation at the time of opening the mill gates. The proposition of the arbitration board suggesting arbitration gave these labor skates the opportunity to reject

publicly such arbitration and to appear in the role of militant fighters. At the same time a policy was carried out of having more frequent language meetings than before and to bring in a number of organizers from New York City who were trained in fighting the militants there. The work was more greatly departmentalized. Children's and women's work were begun, etc. Finally these officials definitely attempted to take the leadership away from the new union on the picket field itself.

2. In the second place the Socialist Party was brought into most intimate collaboration. The Socialist Party was useful in accomplishing the following tasks for the labor bureaucrats:
 - a. In providing expert agitation and propaganda, oral and written.
 - b. In coordinating the work. It was the Socialist Party that helped to bring together the two bureaucratic machines of the U. T. W. and the A. F. T. O. and it was the Socialist Party that saw to it that these two cliques operated in harmony and worked together.
 - c. In forming the special mask of the bureaucrats and giving them better opportunity to sell out.
 - d. In bringing expert knowledge on how to fight the Communists better.
 - e. In mobilizing the widest sections of labor movement and petty bourgeoisie around the bureaucrats.
 - f. In nationally aiding the fakers to get more money in relief.
- Against this strategy of the employers and the labor bureaucrats, the left-wing leaders put forth another strategy. This was the strategy of offensive on both fronts, increasing struggle both against the employers and against the labor bureaucrats.

1. In the strike field, the leadership of the picket lines was not relinquished. On the contrary, the picket lines grew larger and more militant and under our control completely dominated the situation. The labor misleaders of the U. T. W. had decided to picket too late. The leadership now belonged to the left wing.

To prepare for the event of the mill gates opening, the New Bedford Textile Workers Union launched a big parade. A permit was asked for and refused. The parade was attempted anyway but was broken up by the police and 31 union leaders were arrested. This only reacted against the authorities. The workers grew firmer. The middle elements swung to the new union. Following the parade a huge picnic was held. This too built up the morale of the strikers. When July 9th came around not a scab entered the mills!

2. The strike-breaking attempts of the State Board of Arbitration

were completely exposed so that it had to withdraw from the situation at least for the time being. No Arbitration! No Compromise! These were the slogans and these were successful.

3. Against the entrance of the soldiers the new union launched the slogan "Oust the Mayor, Withdraw the Soldiers." This offensive slogan became so powerful that in two days the soldiers were withdrawn. A signal victory for the strikers.

4. The arrests of the 31 union leaders who had led the parade forbidden by the police and who had been sentenced to six months in jail each for "rioting," were countered by the following moves:
a. The cases were appealed to the November term. b. A committee went again to the Mayor for a permit to parade. And this time the Mayor could not refuse and was forced to yield.

5. Against the move of the State to cut off municipal relief the union started a campaign of publicity which resulted in the city being forced to declare it would continue relief as before. At the same time, the union, with the aid of the Workers International Relief, has launched a national textile relief campaign. This should aid the strikers materially.

6. A great offensive was launched in winning new masses to the new unions:

a. Work was intensified in Fall River and many hundreds enrolled in the T. M. C.

b. Intensive organization work was launched among the tire, fabric and silk workers in New Bedford who had not yet received a wage cut but who also are ready for struggle. Excellent results have been obtained.

c. New strata of strikers were won over. Women, youth, and children's work was intensified. Over 2,000 Polish workers rallied to us through the efforts of our Polish organizer.

d. Definite inroads were made among the honest skilled workers of the U. T. W. A special meeting was called for them at which several hundred attended. A definite break has now occurred in the ranks of these misguided workers away from Batty and over to us.

e. More vigorous attempts were made to win over the petty bourgeoisie. A New Bedford Relief and Defense Conference has now been organized.

Thus as the battle continues in its decisive phase, the workers are moving to the left, the left wing union is growing. The attacks of the enemy on both fronts have been successfully countered. The strike is still on the upgrade. The union has pushed forward a new offensive. With the aid of the left-wing forces nationally, the strikers will yet move forward to victory.