

I.U. 440

METAL & MACHINERY WORKERS

BULLETIN



MAY 1935

For Members Only

The purpose of this Bulletin is to review organization activities of I. U. #440 during the past year; to weigh and consider our mistakes and weaknesses as well as plan for the future. We hope to exchange ideas among the several branches and map out our plan of activities for the coming months.

We feel that a part of any such program should include a regular monthly Bulletin to review activities and make recommendations. We urge every Branch to elect one member who is well posted on the local organization activities and opportunities to increase them.

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A REVIEW OF #440 ACTIVITY IN CLEVELAND

Cleveland, during 1934, has gained the reputation of being the center of labor unrest in America. This reputation was gained in large part because the employers of this city refused to obey the law in regard to collective bargaining and failed to keep their promises with the workers. In nearly every instance, the I.W.W. and its membership have retaliated with strikes. During the early months, the strikes were won without much trouble. The Ohio Foundry strike, last March, lasted 19 days with less than one hundred men involved.

The American Stove Strike lasted less than a week with over 1000 men involved. The Draper strike lasted from early June until September 1, but no attempt was made to operate the plant. All the strikes up to this time were won.

The first stiff opposition came with the Cleveland Wire Spring Strike. It was pulled when there was very little work and only half the force was organized. An injunction drastically limiting picketing was obeyed. This mistake caused the loss of the strike four months later without a fight and was a serious blow to the prestige of the organization. However, this blow was somewhat weakened because at the end the strikers switched to the A.F. of L., who called the strike off without gaining anything.

THE NATIONAL SCREW STRIKE

The National Screw Strike was pulled at the right time of the season; but with less than 20% of the 1200 men organized, it was impossible to hold them through a long siege. At no time was there over 400 on the picket line and after the first ten days, it was difficult to recruit over 100 pickets. The picket line was ineffective because it was only used for moral suasion and it was instructed not to interfere with cars hauling scabs into the plant. The most militant element left the peaceful picket line in order to stop the scabs some distance from the plant. When thus scattered, the strikers were easily identified and arrested or shot at and intimidated by armed thugs.

With inadequate finances and practically no defense organization, the strikers were soon demoralized. Less than 10% were active after the first six weeks. With a small picket line and practically no contact with half the force, the weaker element began returning to work. As in the C.W.S. strike, the skilled men felt they could not be replaced. They remained out, hoping that the management would be forced to call them in on the strikers' terms. In both cases, this proved to be a false hope. With machine production, the most skilled men can be soon replaced.

In the future, to avoid such defeats, two fundamental changes of policy are necessary. First: A strike should not be called until the plant is well organized. This is especially true in key plants in the machine industry. Second: When a strike in a plant is called, the steps to be taken to close it down completely must be planned in advance. If any attempt is made to operate, all forces should be concentrated at the plant to keep it closed. Where large numbers are involved, the employer finds it almost impossible to run scabs thru a picket line if a riot results from it.

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FLINT, Mich. - Ever since the backdown of the United Automobile Workers Union in the Spring of 1934, its membership has declined here. The approximate number employed in the Chevrolet, Buick, Fisher Body and the A.C. Spark Plug plants here is about 35,000 workers in the busy season. It is strictly a General Motors town. In its heyday, the A.F. of L. had these workers organized 85%. Since no action was taken by the U.A.W. of A., its membership in the factories here has shrunk to less than 15%. This latter figure is taken from the poll held by the Auto Labor Board. About the same number are affiliated with company unions. The overwhelming majority are not in any union at all. A small minority of about twenty-five registered for the I.W.W.

Since the failure of the MESA strike against the General Motors Corp., in the fall of 1933, most of the tool and die makers are unorganized if working, or have been blacklisted.

The I.W.W. membership in Flint is small and scattered among different unions. Some two-thirds are unemployed and the balance are in the auto shops. The I.W.W. plan of unionism has been under discussion by the workers.

To build I.U. #440 organization in the shops, and they are all big shops, will require adequate finances and organizers.

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TOLEDO, Ohio - This city is primarily an auto parts center. The employment fluctuates with that of the auto industry. Since the strike riots at the Auto Lite Plant in the spring of 1934, A.F. of L. unionism has not subsided appreciably. The Auto Lite was never fully organized and the A.F. of L. union local there now is very weak.

In some of the factories here, the MESA has been able to make considerable headway. This was due in part to its militancy and to the stalling tactics of the A.F. of L. unions after shop organization had been perfected. The I.W.W. has no real shop contacts here as yet and real organizational opportunities at present are lacking. The I.W.W. group here is mainly propaganda, and good.

MILWAUKEE, Wis. - The I.W.W. had organizers and speakers in this city and in Racine from June until December of last year. Time was divided between the two cities. The limited amount of finances necessary to carry on this work was supplied by the G.R.U. and the Chicago Branches.

Milwaukee is a city of diversified manufacture. There was little unionization in any line until 1934. This lack of acquaintance with unionism on the part of the workers, gave the A.F. of L. the advantage. With impressive talks on the great moral and financial backing of the Federation, coupled with the socialistic slant, made it easy for the A.F. of L. organizers, who were often socialist party members, to triumph where we failed. The A.F. of L. sent about 150 organizers into the city over the summer.

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Factory gate speaking is permitted here and regular noon meetings were held at a number of shops, principally in the metal trade industries. At several shops, many applications were obtained, but at two plants, Briggs and Stratton Co., and the Square D. Co., further progress was blocked by a combination of the A.F. of L. and the employers.

For the most part the A.F. of L. has provided little action for the workers after they have had them organized in shops here. This was due partly to the craft union forms of unionism and partly to the stalling tactics of the A.F. of L. After a period of desultory action on the part of the A.F. of L., the I.U. #440 will have its opportunity here. Much preparatory work has been done and is being carried on.

J.M.D.

RACINE, WIS. - In the summer of 1932, the I.W.W. had a splendid chance to build both an unemployed movement here and a #440 organization. They muffed it. Racine is predominately a metal trade city. Union organization in a majority of the shops is divided between the A.F. of L. craft and federal unions and the Wisconsin Industrial Union. The latter is a socialist sponsored independent union of about 3000 workers in Racine. Most of their members, 2000, are in the J.I. Case Co. now on strike. In structure, it is a mass industrial union with county locals composed of shop branches from varied industries. Attempts have been made in the last year to have this new union merge with the I.W.W., but without much success. There are some ex-wobblies in it.

J.D.

A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH NECESSARY
TO BRING INDUSTRIAL FREEDOM

When an engineer plans on building a dam across a river to generate power, he does not start by ordering the machinery for the power house. A great deal of preparatory work is necessary.

First: The corporation must get a legal claim to the dam site. The engineer must then begin by gathering information on the stream itself. He measures its depth, the velocity of the current, the width of the stream, to find out how much power it is capable of developing. He must know how this changes from year to year and season to season. Before setting a price on cost of construction, the contractor desires to know if the stream at the dam site has a stone bed or is of quicksand. Every bit of information is taken and recorded before the blue print can be drawn and construction started. The contractor gathers information on the "labor problem" as well as on the freight charges on materials to be sent to the dam.

Organizing a factory or an industry in the I.W.W. might be compared to damming a stream. In both cases men are trying to harness and control blind forces. As a corporation first gains undisputed possession of the dam site before building, so the I.W.W. must consider what other organization is active in the plant and industry before starting an organization drive. Either we must wait until the workers discover the weakness of their present organization and drop it, or else have our members gain control of company unions, etc., and swing them into the I.W.W. To agitate for a revolutionary union where there is already a
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company union or an A.F. of L. local usually causes the company to grant the union in control demands which they would not otherwise get, thus causing the workers to believe that it was their own organization which won the victory and not the I.W.W.

The metal and machinery industry is like a river with a constantly changing course and with a channel capable of carrying four or five times its present flow. And even this small flow is forced into short seasonal downpour. For this reason, it is a problem to start organizing the right factory at the right time so that you are not in a weak position. If a shop is organized, that is in a weak financial position, little can be gained for the men and other unorganized shops that are strong financially may pay higher wages than your union shop. If organization is pushed when production is falling, the union men are quite certain to be the first laid off. As a dam is always built at a point in a stream where it cannot change its course, so the I.W.W. should be started in the factory which stands in a key position in the industry.

In building a #440 job branches the key departments and best union men in these departments should be contacted first. The men in these departments are more difficult to replace and they have a great influence on men in other departments. These contacts can be made during slack periods, but the real drive should not start until the production season begins.

To build a strong #440 Branch the organizer must not only know the men, but he must have exact knowledge on the industry and the plant. All the information gathered on the plant should be recorded for reference as needed. Only by careful study and preparation can a strong union be built in industry. Only by education will it strengthen and grow.

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Chairman, G.O.C. of I.U. #440