

The Great West Coast Marine Strike

PART 3.

RYAN.

Ryan's reputation reached the Coast long before he arrived physically. The militants prepared the ground for him before he arrived. For two weeks before his arrival, the West Coast capitalist press carried long and laudatory articles about him. The militants were not idle either. So a battle over Ryan raged until finally, two days before his arrival, on May 22, the San Francisco News featured the following item:

"That man (upon whom the outcome of the strike depends) is Joseph Ryan, International President of the I.L.A. He is due here Thursday night from New York after making considerable progress in the settlement of longshore strikes in that city, and in Texas.

"Due to his efforts, 1,000 stevedores returned to work in New York yesterday, but even before Ryan could start westward, there was a heavy bombardment of propaganda against him from Communist ranks in San Francisco.

"Even members of the longshoremen's strike committee openly cast doubt upon his powers in connection with the Pacific Coast strike."

Ryan arrived on Thursday night and, as we have already related above, was able to put over his sell-out proposals before the men could properly acquaint themselves with him. That Saturday, however, the I.L.A. local rescinded most of the actions. On Monday morning following, the police launched their fiercest attack on the picket line that had yet been witnessed. As a result of this attack at least two are known to have been killed, and scores wounded. The same afternoon, obviously timed with the police attack, Ryan submitted a set of sell-out proposals. Following this, Ryan's actions were a continuous policy of deception. He submitted the shipowners' proposals continually to the men. Each time, however, with a different wording, although the essence of the proposals remained practically the same. On three different occasions, in an effort to save himself with the men, he announced publicly that he had made mistakes. On one occasion he submitted a secret referendum to a vote of the men, and although he personally toured the coast in behalf of his proposals, most of the locals refused to vote. In San Francisco, where it was submitted, it was snowed under 2350 to 78. On June 5th, the situation for Ryan became so bad that when he appeared before a meeting of the strikers in Frisco, he was loudly booed. At this point he began to change his tactics. Every time the police attacked workers, he blustered about calling out the longshoremen of the East as an answer to police terror. Of course, he not only didn't call them out, but when through the efforts of the M.W.I.U. in New York, some longshoremen were influenced to act in sympathy, Ryan telephoned New York to order them back to work. In order to weaken picketing, Ryan continually oozed optimism concerning negotiations for the settlement of the strike. We were paying bitterly for the Strike Committee and rank and file not having taken over negotiations from the first. The see-saw character in the attitude of the strikers really shows the weakness of the militants at the early stages of the strike, and the stage of confusion which then ensued. But as the strike progressed, the attitude of the workers became more determined and clear.

OUR LACK OF SKILL IN WORKING WITH MASSES.

The final problem in maintaining the unity of the men was our own lack of skill in working with the masses. A few illustrations of this will suffice. In order that the Marine Workers Union should be aided to maintain its leadership of the seamen in the strike, it was

PROBLEMS IN BUILDING, MAINTAINING MILITANT LEADERSHIP

(By SAM DARCY.)

arranged that a hotel should house all the striking seamen while they were in port, and that feeding should take place in the seamen's hall so that pickets could be properly checked in and out. However, some very efficient comrades decided it would be "more practical" to feed the Marine Workers Union members in the joint feeding hall conducted by the other unions, and made the change without proper consultation on the question. As a result, this important and influential check on the Marine Workers Union picket lines was weakened. On the positive side of the ledger in this connection, however, the men did make a fight to force the City Administration to give relief to longshore strikers' families, and the Marine Workers Union initiated a fight for the government feeding of the single men, which was, however, disrupted by opposition from the I.S.U. officials.

In the early stages of the strike, the International Labor Defense, the Workers International Relief and the Western Worker all offered, unconditionally, to put their resources at the disposal of the strikers. On the whole, this made a very good impression and was accepted by the men. In some cases, as in connection with relief, there was some hesitation to accept the W.I.R. but we proceeded without official acceptance to feed the pickets, and the resulting favorable reaction made it possible for the W.I.R. openly to enter relief work on the waterfront.

DEVELOPING MILITANCY.

We found that the secret of developing the militancy of the strike was to keep the men active, and doing something at all times. The danger spots were usually the week-ends, when there was a tendency to take the Sundays off. In order to counteract that, special activities besides picket lines, mass parades, meetings and strike affairs were arranged. Strikers were continually sent to outlying areas, particularly where college students, or unemployed, might be recruited as scabs. In one respect, we failed to carry through our policy. This was in connection with a small railroad operated in California by the State Government, called the State Belt Line. It is a typical example of Socialist Party "public ownership." The men on this line operate under a yellow-dog contract with the government, which prohibits them from striking for any cause under penalty of losing their seniority, insurance, etc. A number of efforts were made to pull them out. But the weakness of these efforts made for the continued scabbing of this road. A few half-hearted attempts were made, through marking up the freight cars with the slogan "Scab Goods, Don't Haul," but this proved to be very insufficient. In fact, there was a feeling among the dockers that we should not go too hard on the State Belt Line men because there was some justification in their failure to act in sympathy. Of course, another important factor which prevented effective picketing, especially in relation to the State Belt Line, was the terrific terror which devel-

oped. San Francisco Police Chief Quinn issued the slogan "Clubs Are Trumps," and under this slogan, mercilessly clubbed down and shot into strikers' ranks. In one way, this helped the fight against the "Red scare." On Wednesday, May 30, following the Monday when the police made the big attack on the picket line, a Y.C.L. National Youth Day demonstration was held on the waterfront. The police attacked it even more ferociously than they had attacked the longshoremen's picket line previously. As a result, the men immediately showed a spirit of solidarity, and the I.L.A. issued an official statement in sympathy with the Y.C.L. In some isolated ports, particularly in Portland, it was reported that a dozen or more policemen had to be suspended because of their sympathy with the strike, and their refusal to act as thugs for the shipowners.

WRONG WAYS OF ATTACKING THE MISLEADERS.

We have spoken before of our own lack of skill in working with masses. Because we have seen the same errors committed in so many struggles, a few illustrations of this lack of skill would be instructive. The outstanding example is the ineffective way in which we attacked the fakers. Even the Daily Worker, which certainly knows better, allowed, at the very beginning of the strike, a title to be written to one picture at the top of the front page, reading:

"The Marine Workers Industrial Union has called on striking longshoremen to resist the strike-breaking efforts of the I.L.A."

In view of the fact that the local I.L.A. strike leadership in San Francisco were militants, and that the real intent of the Daily was to warn against the possible strike-breaking tactics of the District and National officials, certainly this featured sentence was a very careless and harmful one. The writing of such a careless sentence almost cost us our unity with the men. When the first copies of the Daily went down to the waterfront, there was immediately a resentment amongst the men, and the reactionaries took advantage of it by raising the cry, "This is Communist strike-breaking."

We had to resist the tendency of some comrades who thought they fulfilled their revolutionary duty when they issued a few leaflets calling the fakers bad names.

We followed the tactic, instead, of continually putting the fakers in a position where they had to come out against certain militant policies, and defend their own reactionary and treacherous actions. It was through such a process that we gradually won over the membership. In fact, whereas at the beginning, the men did not listen to any criticism of Lewis, Kinnegan and Ryan and Company, and even voted this crew full power to negotiate and settle the strike, only ten days later Ryan was booed off the platform, and driven out of San Francisco. Some opportunist elements might take courage from this criticism, and justify their frequent resistance to

exposing labor fakers in their unions. In answer to any such possible reaction, we want to emphasize here that even we were not energetic enough in exposing the fakers at the beginning, among San Francisco longshoremen. Our criticism is not of a too energetic exposure of the fakers, but of a too unskilled and therefore ineffective exposure. Mere name-calling may satisfy the record so far as carrying out our policy to discredit the fakers, but it does not necessarily achieve the purpose of discrediting them. A skilled handling of the situation, however, an aggressive militant policy, and especially a continuous drive towards greater militancy in the specific situation, will eventually achieve that purpose. Exposing Ryan on the basis of what happened in the Gulf ports and on the East Coast, helped with but a few men. But when we were able to expose Ryan's actions, and mobilize the men against him specifically on the West Coast developments, Ryan was completely discredited.

This lack of skill in working with masses was illustrated in the following points. The rumor reached San Francisco that Peterson, an I.L.A. faker in San Pedro, had made a separate agreement with some shipowners to loaf, thus breaking the united West Coast front. In my own mind, I am convinced that it is easily within Peterson's character to have done such a thing. However, there was no proof of the assertion. Despite this fact, one of the comrades (not a longshoreman, but active in another capacity), thinking to strike against the fakers, took it upon himself to send out news releases in the name of the Western Worker relating this rumor, but leaving the impression that it was official and confirmed. The strikers immediately came to the conclusion that this was a story spread by shipowners to demoralize the men. When they found out that this notice had some connection with the Western Worker, they were so enraged that the close relation between the strikers and the Western Worker hung in the balance by a thread. The most loyal militants on the Strike Committee succeeded in holding in abeyance a motion to break with the Western Worker for a few hours, during which time the matter was straightened out. In this, one can see an illustration where mere zealotness in exposing fakers is not effective. One must be responsible in such a situation for what one says. To date, despite strenuous efforts, we have not been able to find adequate proof that this rumor concerning Peterson was true.

FALSE CRITICS.

The source of much of our lack of skill in working in the situation came from an oppositionist and minority ideology, which some of our comrades have. These comrades had a tendency to become professional critics and "line givers" from the outside. They examine the struggle, not for its action but for perfection in its phrases. Real mass movements do not reach absolute perfection of phrase or thought. Their revolutionary character is there nevertheless. A few comrades who knew little or nothing of what went on were the worst offenders. In many cases, this criticism was extremely supercilious, based on ignorance and an academic approach. It came largely from comrades who were not involved in the practical strike activities, but who had read, previously, resolutions of other strikes and tried mechanically to transfer that criticism to this strike. A case in point is the question of picketing. For several days in the course of the strike, especially following the two outbursts of terror on May 28, and 30, the longshoremen yielded to the pressure of the police, and instead of picketing directly in the entrance of the docks, picketed across the street. The Strike Committee worked frantically against this tendency and succeeded in over-

Saviors of America Are Still Unpaid

SACRAMENTO, Aug. 16.—National Guardsmen who did the dirty work of the Industrial Association and the shipowners during the recent waterfront and General Strike are now realizing that, unlike the Chicago gunmen they don't even get paid.

State officials yesterday admitted the militia hadn't gotten their feds money and the chances of getting it soon are very slim. At the same time the officials publicly announced that the total cost of using the Guard to protect the worthless hides of the scabs, and help break the strike, was \$353,000. The estimates, made by State Director of Finance Roland Vandegrift, includes: cost of salaries, supplies and other bills.

Many of the guardsmen were thoroughly disgusted with the job they did, and learned a strong lesson of the class struggle in the weeks they were on the front. Now they are learning another.

No wonder Plant, of the Waterfront Employers' Union, claimed it was cheaper to use the state and city forces and complained to the San Pedro shipowners that they should quit paying high wages to the thugs, when they could count on Governor Merriam instead.

coming it only several weeks later. Yet, the "wise" know-alls demanded that the Western Worker issue a criticism of the Strike Committee because the men were picketing on the other side of the street. To issue such a criticism, not only did not correspond to a fact and would have been sheer idiocy, but would have put us in a position of sectarian isolated oppositionists. Instead of doing that, the militants helped the Strike Committee which was trying to overcome the situation.

RED SCARE.

A word is here in point, concerning the "Red scare," and how the Party appeared before the workers. In order to get the proper background, you should know that our Party in California has been under a terrific anti-Red barrage for almost a year. Hardly a day passes without 8-column headlines, feature stories, and editorials in the capitalist papers, containing provocations against Communists. The State government, through both the late Governor Rolph and present Governor Merriam, has issued statements justifying and provoking lynch terror against Communists. As is well-known, for the past year, this terror has been widespread indeed. From the cotton strike in the Fall of 1933 to this moment, seven California workers have been murdered in strikes, over 900 jailed, close to 600 tried, scores convicted and hundreds wounded. This terror, also took the form of an ideological campaign, with lectures to students in the schools, lectures before churches and clubs of various sorts, etc. It was, of course, the reaction of the capitalist press against the increased ability of the Party to lead determined strikes and other struggles. When the longshore strike opened, the capitalist class at first gloated over the fact that the Communists were being kept out. They were able to do this on the basis of assurance from the labor skates in the District Executive Committee that the militants would be eliminated. Before the strike was several weeks old, the papers were howling with "Red scare" stories, typical of which was: "Strike Out of Hand, in Control of Communists."

Despite this fact, the I.L.A. Strike Committee kept the Western Worker as its spokesman; we were able to fight down the "Red scare" against the Marine Workers Industrial Union among the seamen; and after a bitter fight, gave it a place on the joint Strike Committee. We have recruited to date, in San Francisco alone, about 25 longshoremen, and over

L. A. Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial to Be Anti-Fascist Rally Aug. 22

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 13.—Memorializing the seventh anniversary of the murder of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti by the capitalist class, the International Labor Defense in Los Angeles will hold a mass meeting at 8 p. m. on Wednesday, August 22, at the Cultural Center, 230 S. Spring street.

The meeting will be a rally against increasing fascist terror of the vigilantes in California—in San Francisco, San Pedro, Imperial Valley, throughout the agricultural areas of the state—and for the unconditional release of Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro boys, Ernest Thaelmann, Tom Mooney, and all class war prisoners.

The murder of Sacco and Vanzetti in the electric chair followed a seven-year campaign of legal and mass protest in the course of which the International Labor Defense was organized. The two workers were framed for murder in South Braintree, Mass., during labor struggles in 1920 at the height of the post-war red scare.

50 seamen in San Pedro about 40 of both categories together, and in the Northwest ports, many more, although we have not the figures at hand at this moment. In connection with showing the Party's role to the strikers, and working class generally, we had another example of the stupid sectarian tendencies that yet persist. When the men took certain militant actions, these comrades insisted that the District Committee issue leaflets saying in effect: "We told you to do so and so." This would have been an excellent weapon in the hands of the shipowners. The men were grateful that the "Reds" gave them help and leadership without bombast. At several strike meetings, representatives of the Western Worker were officially invited to, and did speak from the platform. At many mass meetings, especially those held against the terror, and not directly under the I.L.A. auspices, Communist candidates spoke side by side with the best known I.L.A. and seamen strike leaders. At one point the reactionaries became especially menacing with anti-Red agitation, urging having nothing to do with Communists. However, the popularity of the Party was shown the next day when the Party sent an official donation of \$25, to the Strike Committee. After a short discussion, this was warmly accepted, and with considerable applause at the mention of the Party, and the reactionaries found themselves in a very uncomfortable position. The leadership of the strike in San Francisco by Communist and other militants is well-known and accepted. All through the strike, the Communist participants have become increasingly better liked by the other workers. This was accomplished, not only by the Party, but also—needless to say, much against its intentions—by the Police Department, which thought to frighten the strikers by showing them the political police records of the Party members who were strike leaders. However, by that time, the ground had been well-prepared, and these comrades gained all the greater prestige for this. In one strike demonstration, the police with a handful of misled strikers, stopped the sale of the Western Worker. In the next I.L.A. membership meeting, Ryan tried to follow up with an attack on the Communist Party and urged to expel anyone selling the Western Worker. The men answered by unanimously voting to "apologize to the Communist Party because the sale of the Western Worker was stopped" by unauthorized members.

(To be continued next issue.)

VOTE FOR THESE COMMUNIST PARTY STATE CANDIDATES

For Governor	SAM DARCY
U. S. Senator	JOHN E. WILLIAMS (PAT CHAMBERS)
Lieutenant Governor	PETTIS PERRY
Secretary of State	HAROLD ASHE
Controller	ANITA WHITNEY
Treasurer	ARCHIE BROWN
State Board of Equalization, 2nd District	PETE GARCIA