

Mill Workers Seek Wage Arbitration

Continued from Page One
committee of twenty-five of the Philadelphia Central Labor Union, a committee appointed as a measure of defense against the so-called "open shop" campaign being waged throughout the country.

I have talked to the leading labor union officials of the city and have found them very outspoken; quite willing to "put their cards on the table" and meet the situation halfway on wage reductions. If—and here is the stumbling block—reductions are necessary to get the mill wheels turning. These leaders emphatically state that a survey conducted by the Labor Bureau, Inc., of New York, specifically proves that wage reductions are unnecessary to meet competition.

There is no question that the textile workers are fully convinced that the mill owners have made exorbitant profits during the last few years. The labor leaders are emphatic in their declaration that textile labor did not share in these large profits to the degree that it should. They specifically point out that throughout the entire industry in 1919 wages could have been doubled without affecting a just return on the capital invested. In fact, the Labor Bureau report definitely shows that each worker in Philadelphia could have received an average increase in wages for that year of about \$240 and yet left enough to pay the owners 6 per cent on their investment.

They point out that the textile workers in 1918 could have received an average wage of \$240. The labor leaders do not believe prices have dropped to such a degree as to wipe out this great profit and compel a sweeping reduction in wages.

The textile manufacturers of the entire country are proposing a 15 per cent reduction in wages, which the textile workers, in their present mood, are unwilling to accept. The labor officials state that they will be perfectly willing to have an impartial board make a survey of conditions in Philadelphia and if this board finds that a wage cut is necessary they will abide by the decision.

They not only are willing to do this, but are extremely desirous of such an action being taken, and assure me positively and definitely that should this impartial commission declare that it was necessary to take a marked reduction in wages to enable the manufacturers to start the mill wheels going they would be perfectly willing to meet that cut, provided that as values increased wages would automatically increase with them. They stipulated, of course, that the manufacturers must also abide by the decision, even if it should leave wages where they are.

There is no question about the claims of many idle textile workers that actual want exists in Kensington homes. I have seen many cases where entire families were working when the next week's groceries were coming from hundreds of families are subsisting on "rations" that are not sufficient for proper nourishment. There isn't the slightest doubt that a general resumption of the textile mills would be hailed with wild acclaim.

Frank McKosky, vice president of the United Textile Workers, emphatically assured me that he was willing to cooperate and give co-operation in every way possible; that he believed in co-operation between workers and management, but he stated:

"We want a fifty-fifty co-operation. We don't want all the co-operation to be carried out on the side of the workers alone. We will meet the operator halfway any time. We know full well that sincere co-operation will benefit labor just as much as management. We want to meet the management. We want to talk over our differences. We want a thorough understanding. We don't want to be in the dark. The most effective way to engender confidence in industry is for both sides to put their cards on the table and talk it over. Efficiency is built on confidence. Without confidence to the employer, no man can be 100 per cent efficient."

The secretary of one of the leading unions said:

"The textile workers of Philadelphia have had a long, hard struggle for decent living conditions and for wages that would permit a fair living standard. The trouble with Philadelphia is that we have many old factories that should have been in the discard years ago, where conditions certainly are not up to the standard, nor are wages near the standard. The Philadelphia textile employer as a rule is different from the average American plant owner. Here ownerships have been handed down through families, and necessarily the viewpoint of the restricted private owner is narrow. He



SHERMAN ROGERS

Contributing editor of the Outlook and authority on the settlement of labor problems, who is presenting a series of three articles in the Evening Public Ledger on the textile crisis in this city. The first of the series appears today

has been brought up to see the textile working conditions as his father had them. He can see no reason for a change. He has no board of directors to point out to him the necessity of more democratic rule in industry, and he sees no reason for co-operating with the worker and he seldom does so. We have no trouble with the progressive employer.

"All we are trying to do as a union is to establish a working condition that will enable the worker to see a light that will eventually get him out of the woods. We have no desire to compel arbitrary wage conditions that would put the employer out of business. We want him to make money, a reasonable profit, and if he will put his cards on the table and show us where it is necessary, we will meet him, but we

"The worker does not propose to lose the benefits he has won by years of ceaseless struggle," he added. "He will not go back to old living conditions. Go talk to some of the workers who have been through the old conditions

and then you can judge for yourself why we are so jealously guarding against any attempt to bring the old standard back."

A textile worker out of employment, who had grown up with the textile industry, graphically described the conditions that existed in the "old-time" mills when he was a young man. He was deadly sincere, and if half of his statements were true there have been a great many very progressive changes in these same mills in the last fifteen years. His last place of employment was in a mill erected since 1914.

"Boy," he said, "I cannot get over the feeling that I am in a ballroom. There is as much difference between the sanitary conditions prevailing in the modern plants and the old mills as there is between the moonlight on the Sahara desert and midnight at the North Pole."

"I was back in one of the old plants I used to work in a few days ago and I could not get out of it fast enough. A lot of the old factories have been 'renovated' from top to bottom and sanitary conveniences installed, and believe me or not, we have got to thank the union for the great changes that have taken place throughout the industry. That's why I stick to them even though I do not agree with everything they do."

Says Facts Are True

When asked if the labor bureau report was founded on fact, a prominent labor leader cryptically remarked: "The facts are there in black and white—if there is any misstatement of profits the manufacturers have not said anything. We stand on those figures until they are disproved. There is little chance of a contradiction. Figures and facts are what we want. We do not want to fool ourselves—that does not pay—we know that the employer must earn a reasonable profit to keep the wheels turning; if they are not earning a profit now why not tell us about it? But we cannot be fooled with 'phony' smiles. They will have to put out the cold truth—and that's what we are looking for. Truth will mean a square deal all around. If the bosses will 'come through clean' we

will have little trouble in straightening matters out."

So much for the workers' side. Tomorrow I will report in detail what I learned on the manufacturers' side.

Will Not Go Back

Mr. McKosky pointed out that until the shop committees have failed to get an adjustment and to arrive at an actual settlement, the business agent has nothing to do with the case at all. Due to this democratic form of labor organization management, Mr. McKosky said, the employer had been greatly benefited by the suggestions of the shop committees in speeding up production by eliminating unnecessary loss of time in the various departments. He also emphatically stated that the standard of the workers had been raised to an amazing degree since his organization had started in Philadelphia, and that the conditions inside the mills had been vastly improved because of union co-operation.

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