

THE YOUNG WORKER

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Organize the Young Workers!

By MAX SHACHTMAN.

THREE months have elapsed since the day when representatives of the Young Workers League of America held a conference with Mr. Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor, for the purpose of finding ways and means of bringing the young workers into the organized labor movement of this country so that they might fight side by side with the adults for better conditions of work.

At that conference we handed Mr. Gompers a letter of proposals, which after pointing out the situation for which a remedy would have to be found, suggested that the following step be taken by the American Federation of Labor:

That there be created in the American Federation of Labor a special Young Workers' Bureau or Secretariat for the purpose of stimulating the trade union education and organization of young workers, this Bureau to have, among others, the following functions:

1. To point out the importance of the young workers in industry and to encourage all branches of the Trade Union movement to carry on a vigorous campaign to organize them.

2. To compile and publish statistics dealing especially with Child Labor and other features of industry, particularly relating to the young.

3. To issue a regular News Service to the Labor Press, and to induce the various Labor papers to develop special Departments devoted to the problems of the young workers.

4. To issue Organizational and Educational pamphlets especially written to appeal to youthful workers, and pointing out the philosophy, the achievement and the goal of the Labor Movement.

5. To carry on a special campaign among adult unionists showing them the dangerous "Open Shop" tendencies their children are exposed to, and providing them the means wherewith to educate their young to the necessity of Labor organization.

Gompers read the proposal, commented on it, argued over it, but nevertheless, he promised definitely that it would be given close consideration by the Executive Council of the Federation. Indeed, he was quite indignant that anyone should question that. Of course it would be given serious attention: that was his reason for coming to the conference.

A month passed after the holding of the conference and no word was received by the Leagues as to any action that Mr. Gompers or the Executive Council might have taken. Having allowed sufficient time for either favorable or unfavorable action, the Secretary of the League was obliged to write on July 17, another letter of inquiry to Mr. Gompers, which said:

"Dear Sir and Brother:

A month ago you held a conference with a delegation of the Young Workers League of America in Chicago at the Morrison Hotel. We discussed the matter of a campaign by the American Federation of Labor for the organization of the young workers and the establishment of a Young Workers Secretariat in the American Federation of Labor.

Would you please inform us what action has been taken?

Fraternally yours, etc."

And two months have passed since then, and Mr. Gompers has not even thought it necessary to be courteous enough to reply.

It has become evident that Mr. Gompers, or the Executive Council of the Federation, does not intend to do anything with this problem, which is of such immense importance to the American workers. It appears that they do not care whether the young workers are organized or not, whether they are scabs or not. Is this problem so unimportant, so insignificant that the American labor movement can afford to ignore it or pass over it in such easy-going fashion?

No! A thousand times, no!

In all parts of the country child labor is on the increase. The action of prostituted Supreme Court in declaring the Child Labor Laws unconstitutional, gave a tremendous impetus to the

greed of the capitalists. In Connecticut, child labor increased 57% in the first quarter of this year. In the cities of Baltimore, Bridgeport, Detroit, Hartford, Indianapolis, Jersey City, Manchester, New Britain, Newark, New Haven, New York, Paterson, St. Louis and Waterbury, the percentage of increase during the first quarter of 1923 over 1922 was 24%; and in the last named city 80% more children were given work permits than in June,

1922. Five cities reported increases of more than 100 per cent. In a report, made by Grace Abbott, director of the Children's Bureau of Federal Department of Labor, on conditions in two average mining towns, she says that half of the boys from 13 to 16 have left school for the mines. Eight hundred New Jersey children between the ages of 8 and 14 are engaged in factory work at home, according to an estimate made in a state-wide survey by the N. J. Department of Labor; and some of the cases which the survey details are sufficient to convince any one that is not blind, that the situation is a grave one.

All over the country, instances can be seen of the terrible results which are brought about by ignoring the problem of the organization of the young workers.

Officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union have been blocked in their efforts to organize the factories of New York, because the bosses evade union control by sending their work across the river to New Jersey, where "contractors" maintain slave pens in which young workers are employed to an alarming extent. A press report says:

"These manufacturers are not violating a New York law because they are not employing child labor in New York, nor operating sweatshops in New York. And the law of New Jersey is powerless against them because they are not directly and technically employers in New Jersey."

During the summer vacation university students from up-state New York colleges were used to break the strike in the railway shops of the Pennsylvania R. R. at Olean, N. Y., Har-

risburg and Altoona, Pa. And the shame of the labor movement is the fact that it was the Church League for Industrial Democracy, a milk-and-water organization of sky pilots, which took the initiative in writing, printing and distributing a leaflet calling upon the students to play fair, not to "violate the American college spirit and affront their own self-respect."

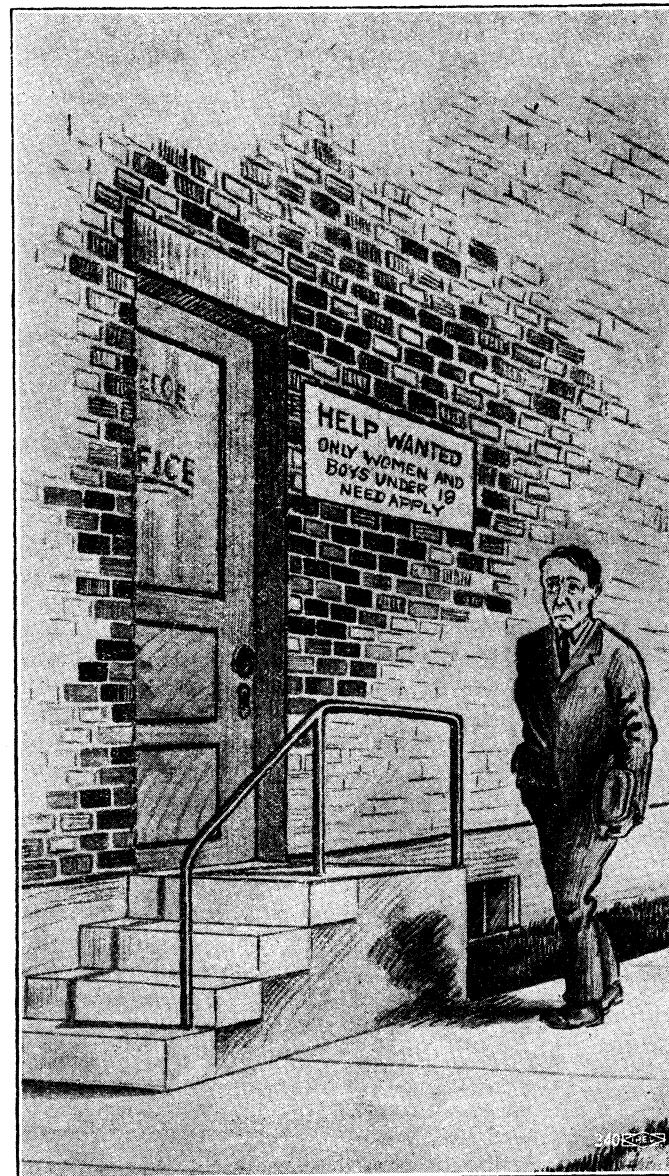
A couple of months ago, young boys were used as strike-breakers in the plant of E. Wiener Co. when 60 upholsterers left the shop after an announcement that thereafter the piece-work plan would prevail. "Besides the piece-work grievance," says a Federated Press dispatch, "the strikers charged that the company was turning the plant into a kindergarten, a claim that was verified when it was found that children even below the permit age were being put into the labor treadmill."

Every day brings another instance of the necessity to organize the young workers into the trade unions. If only for their own protection, the union men of this country should see to it that special efforts are made to enroll the working youth, to make it easier for them to enter the unions by lowering the entrance fees in accord with the ability of young workers to pay. It is not only for their own protection that labor unionists must do this, but for self-preservation. The young workers are being used to lower the wages of the adults and to break the control of the unions everywhere. It is absolutely essential that they be organized into the unions together with the older workers.

While we recognize the fundamental principle that all child labor must be abolished without compromise or evasion, we also recognize the fact that while it is more profitable for the capitalist to employ the child instead of the older worker, he will do so. We also recognize the fact that children are being used as producers to an enormous extent, enormous enough to warrant their being organized.

Even the smallest can be organized. The very psychology of the child and the young worker promises well for organization. They have the clannish spirit, the spirit of the "gang," "stick-to-itiveness" and all the other necessities of a good organization. Newsboys have been organized into A. F. of L. unions in at least two cities: in Seattle where John Northern was the leading spirit, and in Chicago, where young Robert Buck was active until his recent death. If only the trade unions would take a more sympathetic attitude towards the young workers, there is no doubt of the possibilities for organization. Only recently, in New York, eight hundred plumbers' helpers who had been receiving from \$2.50 to \$4.50 a day went out on strike for a uniform wage scale of \$6.00 a day, and recognition for their recently formed union, the United Plumbers' Helpers and Assistants Union. They organized their own union, and demanded recognition of it by the Master Plumbers Association, because the regular A. F. of L. union, the Journeymen Plumbers, REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THEM!

The vast majority of trade unionists do not yet seem to see the importance of the young workers in the fight against the boss. But the boss has been more farsighted in this respect. The American Newspaper Publishing Association for example, at its recent meeting in New York, went on record in favor of sponsoring printing trades schools for the instruction and printing trades; favoring the establishment of regional schools in several sections of the United States and Canada, to be financed by newspapers in their own sections, and creating a printing trade schools fund to be collected from the membership of the national association, for the purpose of promoting the school plan throughout the United States and Canada. And the official organ of the International Typographical Union remarks that this is "a direct slap at the printing trades unions." Is it necessary to add that young workers will be practically the only ones trained in these scab nests?



Drawn by James Stoker

"Who is getting your job, union man?"

Mr. Gompers and the officialdom of the A. F. of L. have not shown that they are in the least inclined to take even the most elementary steps towards coping with this problem. It therefore becomes the duty of every worker, young and old, who has the interest of the labor movement at heart, to begin an immediate campaign of publicity and action to eradicate this evil. There are enough organizers floating around in this country to begin an intensive organizational drive, not only among those generally called the "unorganized" but particularly the young workers.

We agree with the Minnesota Union Advocate when it writes that

"the organized workers are struggling against the most shameful odds, fighting with every ounce of their strength to retain what few conditions they have and establish a better day—not alone for ourselves, but for all. We appeal to all members to drive this situation home to the unorganized, and to show them if it were not for their apathy the enemies of the people would be helpless. There are many who can be aroused, who are thoughtless and can be made to change their course. Every member must help."

But when we speak of "apathy" let us not forget the apathy of those who are already organized, and think that when they

THE YOUNG WORKER

[3]

have joined a union, that is all they need to do, that they have fulfilled their duty.

We call upon all members and sympathizers of the Young Workers League of America who are already in organized unions to bring this matter to the attention of their fellow unionists. We call upon all good trade unionists to agitate this question in their locals. We ask that all members of the Workers Party, all members of the Trade Union Educational League, all radical and progressive unionists raise this issue in their unions.

We ask, furthermore, that this be not only brought up for

a thorough discussion, but that all the workers mentioned see that definite ACTION is taken. This must not, this cannot, become an academic issue for hothouse discussions only. It must be brought into action in every local union, in every district organization, and in every national and international convention.

For the organization of the unorganized!

For the organization of the young workers!

For the preservation, the protection, and the strengthening of the labor movement!
