

Increase of Building Trade Apprentices Being Used by Contractors to Beat Down Wages of Organized Construction Workers

By MAX SHACHTMAN.

CHICAGO.—Commenting on the increase of apprentices in the building trades, especially among the bricklayers of this country, the American Contractor, organ of the big constructing interests of America, urges that the building trades bosses should look more and more to the young workers for their labor material.

"Contractors will be doing a wise thing if they lay down a law to their foremen and demand the hiring of apprentice boys be encouraged instead of frowned upon," says the magazine.

It is pointed out that the bricklayers' union reports 10,000 apprentices now registered on its books in contrast to the 4,000 it had a few years ago, an increase of 250 per cent, and the American Contractor shows the tendency among foresighted builders to use the young workers instead of the older ones when it says that the former "can usually lay more brick per unit of wage than can the regular mechanic" and that their efficiency improves every month, making them essential to the future of the industry.

(Continued on page 2.)

APPRENTICES USED BY CONTRACTORS TO LOWER WAGES

(Continued from Page 1)

That these observations are not isolated is shown by the statements made by F. F. Meyne, of Chicago, at the last convention of the National Association of Building Trades Employers:

"What is required is the initiative of determined groups of contractors in each locality to organize, support and demand the installation of preliminary courses in the building trades, so that boys may be interested in these crafts and have a background of familiarity with them when they come on the job. If the schools provided these courses, our trades would get economically valuable material for further training."

And Mr. Meyne goes on to suggest that the burden of educating the youth to take the places of the adults be shifted from the shoulders of the bosses to those of the "public," that is, making the public schools direct agencies for the training of workers to become "economically valuable material"—for the bosses.

The American Construction Council, also, has undertaken to inaugurate a national program for apprenticeship training in the construction industry, and its apprenticeship committee met at Buffalo December 5, 1923, to discuss plans. Plans were laid for a nation-wide survey of the apprenticeship needs of the industry.

The Young Worker has previously pointed out the menace that uncontrolled apprenticeship training presents to the organized trade unionists of this country. In many cases apprentices, who do just as much work as the adults, are paid lower wages, and the bosses, quick to see the advantages to them, are using apprentices to an ever greater extent to displace the journeyman mechanic.

The trades unions of this country must immediately take cognizance of this danger and move forward to a better relationship between the regular mechanic and the apprentice. The unions must no longer regulate apprenticeship jointly with the bosses, but must make it a strictly union affair. The bosses look after their own interest well enough without the unions helping them. The fundamental principle of equal wages for young and old workers must be made a part of the unions' laws and agreements.

The apprentices themselves must help their brother unionists against any attempt to have the youth used to break down the union conditions brought about by long years of hard struggle. The united front of old and young workers is the only solution to the malicious schemes of the organized bosses to break the union shop in industry.