

Some Shortcomings of the Recent N. Y. Taxi Strike

Limited Activities To One Section of the City Only

By ROSE WORTIS
(Continued From Last Monday)

Against these strong points, the strike suffered from a number of serious shortcomings which proved very costly to the union. When the strike was called the union formulated a number of economic demands. However, in the course of the strike the leadership permitted the economic demands to be pushed to the background. While establishing themselves as the mass leaders of the strikers, Orner, Gilbert, Cantor and the other rank and file leaders permitted important positions, such as vice-president, secretary, treasurer, to remain in the hands of a group of Tamany henchmen who regarded the union as a business proposition to earn an easy livelihood. Administration of the funds were in this way taken over by the racketeers, Rubin, Cecil and Weiner, who misused not only the money paid by the taxi drivers in dues and initiations, but thousands of dollars collected by the Labor Committee organized to support the strike. It was only at the end of the strike that the demand for a financial account was made by the militant leadership. Through their control of the funds they have held statements intending to bring the back two issues of the union paper and also the printing of numerous statements intending to bring the cause of the strikers before the pub-

lic and to appeal to those workers who had remained on the job.

Orner and Gilbert committed the same error made by numerous other comrades even in some of our oldest unions, namely the idea that we cannot fight on two fronts at the same time, that while we are conducting a strike against the bosses it is injurious to take up a struggle against the representatives of the bosses inside of the union. They were guided by the same mistaken ideas as in the cloak strike of 1926 when, while aware that Sigman and Dubinsky were knifing the strike, we adopted the policy of "let us first defeat the bosses, then we will take care of the enemies from within." The leaders in the taxi strike just like the leaders in many other unions failed to realize that it is one and the same fight, that to carry on a fight against the bosses while permitting the representatives of the bosses in the union to undermine the strike would lead to the same results.

Another very serious shortcoming of the leadership was the fact that they limited their activities to Manhattan alone and left the mass of the workers of the Bronx, Queens and Harlem at the mercy of the misleaders, Smitty and Goldstein, who with the help of Panken helped to sell out the first strike. While the workers of Manhattan were familiar with every step in the developments of the strike and negotiations, the strikers of the other sections were kept in total ignorance. The militancy on the picket-line which helped to raise the spirit

of the strikers in Manhattan was discouraged in the other section where the leadership accepted the police regulations of picketing two by two and at times called off the picket line altogether.

In Manhattan the leaders welcomed the assistance of the Workers International Relief, which organized kitchens where thousands of strikers and their families were fed twice daily. But these same leaders failed to bring the question of organized relief before the strikers in other sections. Instead Smitty of the Bronx and Goldstein of Brooklyn were given daily checks of \$100 and \$200. No steps were taken to find out where this money was going to.

Failed to Expose Splitters

Even more serious was the failure of the Manhattan leadership to expose the splitting activities of the misleaders of the other sections who tried to array the workers of the Bronx and Brooklyn against the workers of Manhattan. Instead of bringing these matters before the workers they attempted to preserve a superficial unity. A striking example of this hesitancy to expose the misleaders occurred in the last days of the strike. Smitty and Goldstein called together their supporters under the slogan of going to Manhattan to oust the reds. When they reached Manhattan and sensed the mood of the workers they turned about front and began to call for unity. This was not exposed before the workers.

While demands for the Negro taxi drivers were sharply brought for-

ward, insufficient work was carried on among them to win them to our leadership.

To sum up the whole strike situation, the following lessons can be learned:

1—First, that contrary to the long established theory about the submissiveness of the American workers the workers once aroused to action are showing the greatest militancy.

2—That the idea about the unshaken confidence of the American workers in the capitalist government is so much capitalist propaganda, since we see in this strike as in many others that once the workers become disillusioned in the government on the basis of the concrete actions which involve their most vital interests, these workers will be just as ready to fight against the strike-breaking government as they will directly against the bosses.

3—It has exploded the idea that the American workers will not accept the leadership of Communists. This strike more than any other has shown that if the Communists develop the correct policy and tactics of leading the struggle of the workers, the workers are ready to disregard the red scare and the propaganda of the bosses and rally around Communist leaders.

4—This strike has also shown the importance of understanding the psychological moment for a retreat.

5—It has brought out more sharply than any other strike the need of continuously and systematically exposing the enemies within the ranks of the workers and to develop

Failed to Expose the Role of Those Who Would Split Union

simultaneously the struggles against the bosses as well as their henchmen within the ranks of the labor movement.

The strike of the taxi drivers, even though it has not attained its main objective, has nevertheless been an inspiring example to workers in many other industries of New York City, especially the city transport workers, who are beginning to move much faster toward organization. The taxi drivers have shown unmistakably their determination to build a union as the only weapon of defense against exploitation. The splendid leadership given by Orner, Gilbert and other rank and file leaders to the taxi drivers bids well for the workers in this field to establish their union in New York and to be the initiators for the organization of a powerful national union of taxicab drivers.

The first symptoms of this are already seen by the movement for organization in New Jersey, Boston, Chicago, etc., where the workers are calling on the New York leaders to assist them in organizing the union. The Communist Party, which has gained great prestige among the workers as well as increased membership, will continue to give its loyal support to help build a powerful section of the organized workers of this country.