

The Passaic Spirit

By CYRIL BRIGGS.

(Strike Publicity Director)

"We would go to work in hell if there's a union there, but we would not go to work in heaven without a union."

That's the way one of the Forstmann-Huffmann strikers put it the other night at a meeting of Forstmann-Huffmann strikers called in Ukrainian Hall to consider whether it would be advisable to call off the strike and attempt to build a union upon the basis of the concessions so far wrested from the stubborn and reactionary Julius Forstmann, president of the company and die-hard leader of the five mills which are still refusing to concede their workers the right to organize and do collective bargaining.

"Union or Nothing!" came another voice from the crowd and the demonstration that followed proved that both speakers had properly interpreted the sentiment of the packed gathering.

"Union or Nothing!"

"Union or Nothing!" It was the Passaic spirit speaking. The courageous Passaic spirit which in its flame-up in January, 1926, lighted up one of the darkest periods of labor history in this country and served as a beacon light to the workers in every trade throughout the country. The Passaic spirit, which held out month after month against the bosses' starvation offensives, against the poison gas propaganda of the kept press, against all sorts of underhand attacks upon their leaders, against the clubs of the police cossacks and the fines and jail sentences of judicial tools of the millionaire mill bosses. The Passaic spirit, which rallied the workers in the most exploited trades to resist the wage-slashing, union-smashing campaign of the bosses, which was in full swing at the time. The Passaic spirit, which by its tenacity and steady courage, finally forced four of the nine original struck mills to back down and concede to their workers the right to organize in a union of their own choice, and not in the hated company union.

"Rather Starve Than Surrender"

Faced with diminished relief contributions, with food stores that are almost empty, and for months now living on a monotonous diet of cabbage, potatoes, beans and bread, the Passaic spirit declared its readiness to starve rather than surrender. "We would rather starve than surrender," a tall, angular woman, who carried a baby in her arms, called out after hearing the report of Relief Chairman Wagenknecht.

The Forstmann letter, while putting the company on record as dispensing with the silly fiction that there was no strike in its plants, does not concede recognition of the right of workers to organize in a union of their own choice or to do collective bargaining. It merely declares, against all evidence to the contrary, that the company had never and does

not now object to membership of its employes in outside organizations "whether religious, social or otherwise."

Meeting Two Weeks Ago.

The letter was first presented to the strikers on January 19. The crowd cheered wildly as their local leaders spoke in favor of the resolution to treat the letter as a basis for negotiations, not a basis of settlement. Chief Organizer Coco, Relief Chairman Wagenknecht, Gustave Deak, Ellen Dawson, financial secretary Local 1603, U. T. W., Thomas Defazio and Joseph Magliacano, Italian organizers; Emil Gardes and Ben Lawinski, Hungarian and Polish organizer, respectively, Felix Pancres and the members of the F. & H. committee, were elected some weeks ago to negotiate with the bosses as occasion presented.

Two weeks later, however, on February 2, another meeting was called and Vice-president Starr reported that every effort at further negotiation with the labor-hating Julius Forstmann had failed.

This time the local leaders, faced with a most serious relief situation, still opposed acceptance of the Forstmann letter as a basis for a settlement, but offered a resolution to call off the strike and let the workers return to work and strive to build up a union inside the mills.

The resolution had been passed earlier in the day by the strike executive committee and the delegate body. It declared that while the Forstmann letter was unsatisfactory, nevertheless it was a distinct retreat on the part of the mill owners and might be made the basis for building a real union within the F. & H. plants.

In addition to the two F. & H. plants, there are three other mills, New Jersey Spinning, the Gera, and the United Piece Dye Works, involving some 4,500 workers, who, with 3,000 from the four settled mills, who have not yet been returned to their mills, make a total of about 7,500 still out. Of these some two thousand have temporary jobs outside the mills, and contribute weekly to help give relief to their fellows. In spite of this the strain on the relief machinery is very severe.

Must Rush Relief.

No one can tell what the outcome will be, but such a determination as these strikers show should rouse a response among workers elsewhere. They must have relief at once. The organized labor movement must hurry them food, clothing, or money to buy this. And organized labor must act quickly, if the situation is to be saved, and the splendid spirit of the Passaic strikers utilized to make the victory complete.

Just Another Corpse.

HACKENSACK, N. J., Feb. 21.—The identity of the bullet riddled body of a well dressed man in Englewood cliffs near here on Feb. 14, has mystified the Hackensack police.