

People's Rights Bulletin

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Civil Rights Violated in South Carolina Strike

Fifteen hundred textile workers in South Carolina are striking in protest against an increase in the machine load and working conditions that are harmful to the health of the workers. Six plants in the region around the city of Spartanburg, South Carolina, have shut down and interest is now centered on the Spartan Mill, where it is reported that only one hundred and fifty of the more than nine hundred operatives are working.

The strike at the Spartan Mill followed an unsuccessful effort on the part of the Union to arbitrate its differences with Walter Montgomery, President of the mill. Although Montgomery had repeatedly refused to submit to arbitration, he professed surprise at the strike. In spite of his surprise, he had the mill well guarded on the first morning of the strike. An old city ordinance was invoked to allow the police to rope off the street around the mill and prevent close picketing.

On the second morning of the strike, one of the union officials was arrested for asserting the legal right to peaceful picketing. He and six others were locked up and charged with inciting to riot, disorderly conduct and conspiracy. Among those arrested was John Pollard, State President of the United Textile Workers.

On their way to picket, eighty-one workers riding in trucks along the public highway were arrested. They were charged, curiously enough, with "conspiracy to violate people's constitutional rights."

According to Rebecca Harris, South Carolina correspondent of the Southern Committee, a large number of unemployed farm laborers have been deputized to help local police break up picketing. The methods of the rural policemen have been unnecessarily brutal.

There is the case of Myrtle Fowler Timmons, wife of one of the striking Spartan Mill operatives, and herself a former worker, who was arrested May 18. Mrs. Timmons was still a block from the mill when she was accosted by Clarence Hill, rural policeman, and ordered back. When she asserted her right to go on, she was beaten by Hill, and afterwards was pushed and kicked into a car.

When she reached the jail, Mrs. Timmons was refused a doctor although she was suffering from the ill-treatment she had received, the effects of which were aggravated by her condition of pregnancy.

According to our correspondent, the strikers "need money to buy lard, fatback, and milk."

The Southern Committee has been requested to urge its members to send funds for relief. Address, Box 665, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Memphis Teachers Denied Right to Organize

For seventeen years the teachers of Memphis have had an organization which, says one of the local newspapers, "was at least tolerated if not encouraged." On March 19 the Memphis School Board suddenly gave notice that all teachers who retained their membership in the A. F. of T. after July 1, 1936, would automatically lose their contracts. On April 13 the teachers asked a reconsideration. Of this incident the same paper says, "Rubber stamps work fast. It took the Memphis School Board thirty seconds to reject a 2200 word plea of the Memphis Teachers Association."

Since the opponents of the teacher's union have not even hinted at "radical affiliations" or "subversive tendencies", and since the teachers have protested neither their own nor any other group's wages or working conditions, such drastic action is a little puzzling. The Memphis paper already quoted supplies part of the answer. "The major politicians had a row with President McCann of the Memphis Trades and Labor Council. Since then they have been trying to injure McCann and everything that has any connection with him and his organization. The unwarranted action of the school board in banning teachers belonging to the organization was simply the action of politicians in trying to get even with McCann. It had no principle or concern for the schools' welfare behind it." A similar view is expressed by a prominent citizen of Memphis who says, "It is widely claimed that the action against the teacher's union arose from the fact that their representative on the Central Trades and Labor Council voted for Mr. R. S. McCann who opposes the policies of the local political machine. There seems to be little doubt that this is the original cause for the action of the School Board. It follows a prior action of our administration in which they discharged fifteen of the city firemen because they had joined a union." This citizen, not himself one of the teachers, gives a depressing view of the general situation. The city itself is "beaten and cowed." "Even the ministers are tied hand and foot." The writer implies that the teachers cannot put up much of a fight. Of course not. Organized employers write the check that buys the meal ticket.

Another cause for the determined effort to smash teacher organizations in Memphis may lie in the desperate economic condition of the teachers forced to maintain the semblance of middle class respectability on astonishingly slashed salaries. When the depression began, and those in authority looked about to see

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