

state of labor

Rockefeller Escalates Lockouts and Forced Strikes

June 29 (IPS) — The current wave of lockouts and forced strikes sweeping through Western Europe and North America represents a decisive escalation of Rockefeller's offensive against the working class. While the press continues to refer to such activity as "strikes," attempting to portray them as the same kind of battles that have been fought by the world labor movement over the last 20 years, intelligence evaluations of prominent "strikes" in key national sectors reveal that there has been a qualitative shift in terms of the battle.

In Italy, where the bankrupt economy can no longer afford to meet its wage bills, nearly 300,000 hospital workers in the Bologna region have been given forced vacations without pay. Meanwhile, the construction industry, top-heavy with debt, collapsed — laying off 15,000 workers in the Turin region and 10,000 around Rome. Companies on the verge of bankruptcy are "reorganizing" (rationalizing) their operations to stay afloat. These firms have begun selective layoffs while enforcing brutal speed-up. The results have been predictable. The API refinery, occupied by workers fearing the loss of their jobs, was immediately ordered closed by the management. Workers who thought they were staging a brief protest suddenly found themselves locked out.

Futile Labor Militancy

The pattern of Rockefeller's attack indicated here is relatively simple. While ferment over collapsing economic conditions continues to build regardless of precautions taken, these same depression conditions have foredoomed all trade union struggles to brutal defeat. Though the fighting spirit of the class is at the present time very high, there exists no political leadership save the Labor Committees that has even the foggiest notion of what to do. The Labor Committees are acting rapidly to fill this vacuum while Rockefeller, through agents in the labor movement, is trying frantically to control the ferment by pushing it into futile outbursts of trade union militancy.

Faced with the necessity of reducing both employment levels and total wage bill by nearly 50 per cent and with the collapse now just weeks away, frantic capitalists have backed the working class up against the wall. They intend to force a fascist labor policy down workers' throats and are willing to savagely crush anything that gets in their way.

On the North American continent, the construction, auto and municipal sectors have thus far been hit the hardest. Nearly 25,000 construction workers have been forced out on strike since the beginning of this month. This coordinated maneuver is designed to set up the

continent's construction industry for the resettlement development projects of the Fourth Reich (see IPS, this issue).

Meanwhile, in the collapsing auto industry, the CIA-controlled UAW leadership of Leonard Woodcock has been using the deteriorating shop conditions as a springboard for a reign of terror against its own workers, pulling confusing and demoralizing Apache-type strike actions. In a recent strike at the Ford Stamping plant in Chicago, workers across town in another Ford plant did not know about the strike.

At the same time, auto workers have been sent home early, after being told that the two-week process of retooling and changeover for the new model year would take nearly two months this year.

Workers laid off over the last eight months are being told that they will be rehired soon, maybe after changeover. Simultaneously, rumors are being circulated that new waves of layoffs are coming as well.

Faced with enormous debt and falling tax revenues, municipalities and major urban areas have declared open season on municipal workers, giving fair warning that they simply do not have enough money to pay increases. Larger numbers of contracts come up in the next few weeks making it likely that the counterinsurgent municipal union AFSCME will be leading hopeless strikes. Workers need only look to the results of the recent strike of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers to see their future. Whole sections of the textile industry, especially in the South, are closing down, saying that they cannot afford to pay wages. Workers in other plants have been given the choice of taking wage cuts or being laid off.

In Belgium, small isolated strikes have swept the country. Typical is the strike of workers at the bankrupt Bouffiolux plant. After being on strike for weeks they agreed to go back to work so that the company will not fold completely. Equally pathetic is a strike in the bottling section of a near-bundrupt brewery. The forced strike over intensive speed-up was used as an excuse to lock out the rest of the company workers, halting all production. The company has not bothered even to indicate when they would begin bargaining.

Meanwhile, workers have occupied a number of bankrupt textile plants in a desperate attempt to hold on to their jobs. In France, hellish working conditions have produced numerous small strikes. Workers at the Unsinor-Dunkerque steel plant have been forced to work for eight days straight, while large numbers of workers already have been laid off. Two exhausted workers were

recently burned to death. All union confederations joined to shut down the plant; management responded by calmly putting a padlock on the place and sitting tight while the press circulate rumors of a "catastrophic steel shortage."

Simultaneously, the French trade unions CFDT and CGT have ordered their workers on futile sit-in occupations like the one at the Zenith Aviation plant.

Caution Where Needed

In West Germany Rockefeller forces have moved far more cautiously. Though collapse of the entire German industrial sector is just months, and possibly only weeks away, massive layoffs have not yet begun. Realizing that such layoffs would bring about a total confrontation, capitalists are trying other tricks. Volkswagen, suffering in the depressed auto market, is itself on the verge of collapse and has announced plans to reduce its workforce by more than ten per cent. Workers have been subjected to a layoff rumor campaign that has everyone looking over his shoulder.

Not satisfied with this attack, Volkswagen has attempted an old trick. It offered its workers a full year's salary (9000 marks) if they would make their summer vacation permanent and fire themselves. The last time they tried this 40,000 workers left.

The story being passed around the huge IG Metal union says mass firings won't start until autumn. Meanwhile union leadership, true to its counterinsurgent history, has made no official statement. Behind the blank stare of the German worker is the common knowledge that the process of capitalist collapse has already halved auto production, wiped out the con-

struction industry, and bankrupted small machine tool firms.

Britain

In Britain, more than 100,000 workers are out on strike, mostly white collar workers. As in Italy, hospitals cannot afford to pay their workers and have forced a series of strikes. Two weeks ago Clive Jenkins, head of the white collar section of the AUEW, paid a surprise visit to Rockefeller labor agent Jerry Wurf of the United States' AFSCME to pick up some last-minute instructions.

The fight in Britain is being staged around the issue of threshold pay increases. Companies are simply refusing to pay negotiated wage increases. British Leyland, Britain's largest private employer, said it could not afford to pay the increase. Only the clerical workers (Jenkins' boys) got angry enough to do anything and walked out. The strike has already caused 8,000 additional layoffs.

Similar fights over the threshold pay issue are now breaking out across the country. Meanwhile, industry intends to provoke the demoralized workers even further. The same day that it announced its inability to pay wage increases, Leyland also announced that it was undertaking a productivity study to develop plans for systematic layoffs. The Engineering Employers Federation, representing 5200 companies, has indicated that there should be no further wage increases without increases in productivity, helping Rockefeller to force a Brazilian-style cost of living index down the throats of British workers.