

Automobile Wages

An automobile union leader is reported to have said: "We are organizing ourselves out of jobs."

By this he meant that wages in the union parts-supplying plants were being driven up to a point where further raises are impossible because competing plants, with non-union help, paid much lower wages and were capturing the markets from the unionized companies. Until the non-union plants are organized, it is claimed, jobs and wages in the union shops are imperiled.

But, if these non-union plants are organized, if every means (including, say, government sanctions and supervision) were used to prevent the operation of non-union shops, and if the scale of wages were raised to whatever limits the union leaders determined, what would be the result? Simply that the organized workers would be unemployed—unless the general economy of the nation warranted the arbitrarily fixed scale.

Only the buyers of automobiles can determine what scale of wages will be paid to the automobile workers. Neither the union leaders nor the manufacturers are determining factors. If there are many buyers, if there are many producers of other things, who because of their increased production are able and willing to exchange their earnings for automobiles, the workers in these plants, organized or unorganized, will receive higher wages. If there are no buyers, if the productive power of workers is lowered by ignorance, unjust laws or the rapacity of monopolists to that of Chinese coolies, then the sale of automobiles will disappear, and with it will disappear all wages.

It is a pity that union leaders are so ignorant of the character of wages. All the internecine warfare, the wastefulness of useless strikes, the misery endured by the workers

and their families would be avoided if these leaders would direct themselves to the problem of raising all wages—for the wages in any one industry cannot be raised unless the wages in all industries are simultaneously raised. And this cannot be done unless production in general is accelerated.

The problem of wages is a problem of production—not organization.