



We Ask

JUSTICE

For Our Union Leaders!

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International Fur & Leather Workers Union

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AMERICAN RED CROSS CITATION


for Meritoric Achievement Awarded to

IRVING POTASH

by the
1943 Red Cross War Fund of New York City
In Recognition of the Distinguished Support of
Red Cross Services to the Armed Forces
on the Battle Fronts of the World



Date March 1943
Julian
...



United States Treasury Department
WAR FINANCE COMMITTEE FOR NEW YORK

Awards this

CITATION

Joseph Winogradsky

in recognition of outstanding service
to our Country in the War
Finance Program
World War II

President *...*
MALE CHAIRMAN

Nathaniel B. ...
STATE VICE CHAIRMAN



Honor certificate

This is to certify that
Jack Schneider
through his Unselfish Services
has contributed to the 1943 War Chest
Campaign of the Fur Industry a
joint effort of management and labor

Joseph ...

Fur Workers Union
The Emergency Fund of the Fur Industry

1. A Progressive Union

LABOR gets nothing on a silver platter. Labor has to fight for everything it gets. The history of the trade union movement, and particularly of every progressive trade union, is always the history of the struggles of its membership and the martyrdom of its militants. Such unions must face vicious attacks of employers, their stoolpigeons and their spies, and court persecutions, jail sentences, and frame-ups of reactionary governments.

Attacks against militant unions are most severe, most brutal in periods of reaction when arrogant monopolists and open-shoppers are in the saddle and make labor their main target.

The history of the labor movement, and especially of progressive unions, is replete with such examples.

The International Fur and Leather Workers Union occupies an honorable place in the labor movement as a democratic, militant and progressive organization. It has repeatedly had to beat back conspiracies, slanders, attacks and persecutions.

The American labor movement knows of the I.F.L.W.U. and its struggles. It knows what gains the I.F.L.W.U. has won for its members.

These struggles and achievements benefitted not only the fur and leather workers, but also the labor movement and the nation as a whole. It is a well-established rule that an attack against one union is an attack against all labor. And a victory of one union is a victory of all workers.

Yet very little is known—and all will probably never be known—of how many times this progressive and militant union, the I.F.L.W.U., was forced to carry on the most terrific struggles for its rights and very existence.

Fur workers and their leaders were persecuted, hounded, arrested, jailed, and physically beaten up time and again. Workers and their fighting leaders were maimed and even killed in these

battles. Men like Ben Gold, Irving Potash, Jack Schneider, Joseph Winogradsky, Myer Klig and others have faced jail, or threat of deportation, or denial of citizenship or other persecutions because they fought for the well-being of labor—for democracy and progress of the nation against fascist reaction. They fought on the picket line, in the streets and shops, in the courts.

The fur workers would never have been able to win these struggles and make such outstanding contributions to labor and the nation, were it not for the support of the labor movement.

Almost from the very day that fur workers first organized themselves into a union to fight for better working conditions, the bosses hired gangsters to smash the union. They sent their agents to disrupt it from within. They attacked the union through injunctions and court cases. They slandered and besmirched the union through the big-business controlled press. And as is their usual practice, they singled out trustworthy and militant leaders of the workers for frame-ups and persecutions—men in whom the membership had the greatest faith, leaders whose entire lives were devoted to serving the membership.

But the union survived and grew, despite violence and gangsters and lockouts of employers.

Why was it able to survive attacks as fierce as any ever aimed at a labor organization in the United States? Who were these men who could not be threatened, bribed, or slugged into submission?

The history of the I.F.L.W.U. answers these questions. We give here only a few highlights of that fighting history. In its pages are lessons that can help the labor movement beat back the Tafts and Hartleys and those they stand for.

Defeat Racketeers

In 1925, after struggling for years for union democracy, the fur workers defeated a combination of gunmen, employers, kick-back racketeers, grafters, and phoney union officials, by electing Ben Gold and a progressive administration to the leadership of the fur union. Working with Gold were Irving Potash, Jack Schneider, Joseph Winogradsky and other leaders of the militant rank and file.

This was not the end of the long fight for a democratic union. It was only the beginning of many history-making battles.

The furriers in those days worked long hours in miserable sweatshops. Unhealthy shop conditions brought disease and death to hundreds. Tuberculosis was a commonplace. Each night, no fur worker knew if he'd have his job next day or not. From 1912 on the furriers struck many times for union recognition. When the bosses hired gunmen to break these strikes, government officials were not at all neutral. As a rule, they were on the side of the employers and their gangsters. When thugs attacked and slugged the workers on picket lines, the strikers were the ones arrested while the gangsters went scot free. Underworld czars such as Little Augie, Lepke, and Gurrah, became familiar figures in the fur district.

The 1920 Strike

In 1920 the fur bosses fired thousands of workers, setting off a general strike of furriers. Faced with mass unemployment, the union asked the fur manufacturers to divide the work among union members. The president of the Fur Manufacturers Association replied to this request by saying, "*You can take your unemployed and drown them.*"

The fur workers wouldn't "take their unemployed and drown them." The strikers stood firm for thirty-four bloody weeks before ex-convicts, and mobsters broke the strike with bullets and clubs. Force and violence—bought and paid for by the manufacturers—ruled the fur market.

The gangsters didn't go home after the strike. They stayed, and they turned the fur market into one of the biggest rackets in New York City.

The bosses, of course, hoped that the fur workers would give up the idea of the union after the 1920 strike was broken. They made the mistake of all despots, thinking that American workers would be cowed into submission by force and violence.

The lessons of that broken strike made the fur workers realize that in order to defeat the employers and their agents in and out of the union, it was necessary to clean house. Far-reaching changes were needed. The union had to be run on the basis of



Morris Langer, martyred leader of fur dressers and dyers, brutally murdered by gangsters in March 1933.

trade union democracy. They had to have a progressive program. They had to secure an honest, able leadership courageous enough to put such a progressive program into effect.

It was by no means an easy task to oust the old, corrupted machine leadership. Finally in 1925, the fur workers won their first battle. Gold and the new administration were elected into leadership. Their rank and file following had become so strong that the corrupt leadership was unable to steal the election. Gold's administration immediately started housecleaning. The gangsters were thrown out of the union bodily. Rank and file committees were set up to check and control the union's activities and finances. Morris Langer, a young and talented organizer, worked with Gold in the dressers and dyers local, while Potash, Winogradsky and Schneider worked with the Joint Board.

Long-neglected shop complaints were attended to. Wage increases were won in shop after shop. The hitherto completely unorganized shops of Greek fur workers were organized. A strike of Greek workers quickly won their first union agreement. Within a year, the intensive organizational activities of the new administration had doubled the earnings of the fur workers in practically all shops.

The program and performance of the new leadership won the respect and high confidence of the workers.

The following year, when the employers locked out the workers in order to smash the new, democratic administration, the union conducted one of the most important strikes in American

labor history. The strikers had to fight the bosses and their scabs, police department and district attorney, court frame-ups and gangsters. They had to fight sell-out agreements that top A.F.L. officials tried to put over behind their backs. Thousands of fur workers spent five, ten, thirty days in jail, as the penalty for protecting the union against goons.

After seventeen weeks of strike, imbued with enthusiasm, discipline and unbounded confidence of the workers, and assisted in the leadership by Potash, Winogradsky and Schneider, Gold led the union to a complete victory. The contract provided wage increases, better working conditions, and most important of all, the 40-hour, 5-day week.

The furriers thus became the first union in America to have the 40-hour 5-day week written into a contract.

Gangsters' Return

The racketeering gangsters did not give up. Lepke and Gurrah set up the phoney Protective Fur Dressers Corporation, conspiring with many bosses and intimidating the others. Millions in tribute were extorted from the firms in the industry. Gang violence and bloodshed was let loose upon the fur market by the racket. Gang raids swooped down on the headquarters of locals that wanted democracy, not revolvers.

In March, 1933, Morris Langer stepped into his car and pressed the starter. A bomb exploded. Langer lay there, his leg ripped off. He died in a hospital a few hours later. The gangsters had murdered him. They planted the bomb in Langer's car because he was trying to organize an honest, democratic trade union without piccards, kickbacks, and under-the-table deals with the bosses.

The other union leaders were threatened almost daily with the same fate. But the furriers stood their ground. They had paid in the blood of men like Langer for a democratic union. *They were going to have that union.*

In the same year in which Langer was murdered, a group of notorious gangsters were seen entering the union hall where Ben Gold was working. They were going there to murder Ben Gold and other union leaders. Some fur workers spread the word

through the market. It was as though a great siren had sounded. Men dropped their work and poured out of the shops. Within a few seconds, they came from all directions, by the hundreds, running down sidestreets and along Seventh Avenue.

The gunmen opened fire wildly. One fur worker was murdered on the spot. The gangsters' wild crossfire even mowed down one of their own thugs. But not many minutes later, six gangsters lay unconscious on the sidewalk in front of the union hall, until ambulances carted them away. The fur workers had let them know that although they might buy Tammany politicians a dime a dozen, the terror against the union must end!

The activity of the racketeers was one of the most shameful scandals in New York history. Lepke and Gurrah did not confine themselves to fur alone. They dominated other industries, other unions. They killed without fear of the law. They murdered witnesses. They blasted their way into the food, garment and other industries, and made them pay tribute to their "protective associations." They bootlegged and trafficked in narcotics on the side. They bought protection from the cop on the corner, the judge on the bench, and the tin-box Tammany politician. They were above the law. Time and again they threatened the lives

Gangsters stretched out on sidewalk after fur workers repelled their murderous raid on union headquarters.



of Gold, Potash, Schneider, Winogradsky and other union leaders.

The battles of the furriers against these racketeers exploded the scandal into the open. The government finally moved in, and returned indictments against Lepke and Gurrah. The case was airtight—provided the government could find witnesses with the courage to step forward and testify. Thousands of people had enough on Lepke and Gurrah to convict them, yet to speak up in court was to ask for a bullet in the back.

When the trial of the gangsters came up three years later, the prosecution found its witnesses in the ranks of the fur union. Irving Potash, then assistant-manager of the Joint Council, and Samuel Burt, then manager of the Fur Dyers Local 88, had fought the gangsters in the shops and on the street. Potash and Burt stepped forward at the risk of their lives, and spoke up in court. Their testimony secured the convictions and ended gangster rule, not only in the fur market, but in food, garment and other industries as well. Other unions, too, were now free of the violence of gunmen. *Potash and Burt had set an example for every labor organization in which the racketeer and the thug had silenced the democratic voice of the membership.*

Persecutions Begin

The furriers already knew that the bosses and their agents, who used scabs, gangsters, and stoolpigeons against the union, would certainly not stop at using the courts. Legal persecutions of labor were already an old story.

Although the murder of Langer had gone unpunished, the struggles of the furriers against the gunmen had finally forced the authorities to indict Lepke and Gurrah. The union had been organizing dressing and dyeing shops in New Jersey. Some strikes had been called. Having indicted the gangsters, the government turned right around and also indicted the union leaders for violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Law.

The Sherman Act, passed 60 years ago, prohibits the restraint of trade in interstate commerce, and bans all agreements to fix prices or restrict a supply of goods. Obviously the people ex-

pected the Sherman Act to check monopolies, not labor unions. The Clayton Amendment to the Sherman Act also made this clear. *As the anti-trust law was applied in this indictment, the open shop, starvation wages, 19th century working hours were all "legal," but the closed shop, union wages, and security became a "trust!"*

To charge union leaders with violating the Anti-Trust Act was union-busting, conniving of the lowest order. The indictment of the union leaders was phoney, and the authorities knew it. They did not bring it to trial. They used it simply to annoy and harass the union. For seven years, this indictment rested in somebody's top drawer, but it wasn't forgotten. It was kept right at hand, for use when the bosses figured the situation was just right.

Phony Indictments

In 1939 and 1940, the situation was "right." These were years of hysteria aimed at American labor, and particularly at those unions which had a record of producing for the membership. The monopolies and the anti-union politicians ran hog wild. They had hopes of turning the labor movement into one big company union.

Gold, Potash, Winogradsky, Burt, Schneider and twenty other fur union leaders, were hailed into court to answer "anti-trust" charges. In private, representatives of the Department of Justice admitted that there was no case against the union. The dressing and dyeing plants had already been organized, had signed contracts with the International and were working under peaceful relations. The anti-trust division of the Department of Justice chose to ignore these facts, dusted off the old phoney indictment and brought the case to trial.

The trial lasted two months. The union challenged the use of an anti-monopoly law to deprive unions of their constitutional right to organize and strike. They defended not only themselves, but every organized worker in America, and the millions of workers who have yet to be organized.

If there was ever any doubt about the character of the trial

New York Post

Nov. 11, 1936

Labor Victory Over Racketeering
It is important that the precise significance of the Federal Court convictions of Louis ("Lepke") Buchalter and Jacob ("Gurrah") Shapiro be understood.

There is a danger the man-on-the-street will carry away only the confused impression that the trials had something or other to do with crooked labor unions.

The danger is, therefore, that the Lepke and Gurrah convictions will hereafter come to be cited as examples of labor-union racketeering, happily ended in the courts. We are told that is happening already.

The truth is that the Lepke and Gurrah convictions are outstanding examples of racketeering ended by courageous cooperation of trade union leaders with the United States prosecutor.

Lepke and Gurrah were convicted of racketeering in the rabbit skin industry largely on the testimony of Irving Potash, assistant manager of the joint council of the International Fur Workers' Union and of Samuel Burt, manager of the Fur Dyers Union, Local 88.

These two filled in the outlines of the Government's story of how Lepke and Gurrah had terrorized both labor and employers in the fur industry, gaining effective control of the rabbit fur trade, amounting to \$10,000,000 a year.

The courageous testimony of Potash and Burt gave backbone to the Government's case. It directly linked these two gangsters with the notorious Protective Fur Dressers Corporation, which dominated the industry.

Potash and Burt have set examples to other unions with house-cleaning problems on their hands. It should be a matter of pride to the labor movement that it has done what local law enforcers were never able to do; that it has helped break the amazing immunity enjoyed by these two thugs for so many years.

The Lepke-Gurrah convictions are labor's pride, not labor's shame. It will be a pity if enemies of union labor are allowed to broadcast the opposite impression.



Irving Potash, Manager of the Furriers Joint Council and International Executive Board member. New York Post editorial commending Potash and Sam Burt for their courageous testimony which put Lepke and Gurrah behind prison bars.

of these men, the Federal Judge made it perfectly clear when he said:

"I have held these defendants on this theory: that I believe there is evidence in the record, on which the jury has to pass, that in 1931 there was a conspiracy TO UNIONIZE THE ENTIRE INDUSTRY, which conspiracy might have included the dyers and dressers in New Jersey. If in 1931 the jury finds that was the con-

spiracy, the agreement that they were going to industrialize the whole union, including the dyers and dressers in New Jersey, whom the courts have held to be engaged in interstate commerce, then the fact that they started only local strikes becomes a relevant fact as an act which they undertook to carry out in their conspiracy."

A conspiracy "TO UNIONIZE THE ENTIRE INDUSTRY!"

Under the hysterical conditions that existed, it was impossible to win the case in the lower courts. Eleven of the defendants were found guilty. Their sentences ranged up to one year imprisonment and \$2,500 fine.

The case of Julius Weil (one of the defendants) made clear the attitude of the authorities toward wage workers. Weil had been a union member. Since then, however, he had gone into business. *The court suspended his sentence and fine.*

This was one of the most disgraceful anti-labor convictions ever handed down. Union men were sentenced to prison during a period in which the Drug Trust, Standard Oil, General Motors and other gigantic trusts, all under indictment for violations of the same Sherman Anti-Trust Act, were given a pat on the wrist and *let off with light fines.* The law had then been in existence for fifty-two years—and *no employer had ever been sent to jail under its provisions.*

Unions, civic organizations, individuals, liberals, raised a huge protest over the sentencing of the fur union leaders. Some government authorities got the jitters. They suspected that the higher courts would have to reject this obviously unconstitutional interpretation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. And so they dug some more and came up with something new. They returned new indictments against the union leaders, this time charging them with "conspiracy to obstruct justice" in the anti-trust cases.

The first trial blew up in the Department of Justice's face when a government witness admitted that government agents had engineered his testimony. The judge declared a mistrial.

The second trial again brought a parade of scabs, stoolpigeons, and union-busting bosses, who testified against the defendants. A typical government witness was a man named Tzaras, a thief, an escaped convict who re-entered this country illegally after

he had once been deported. This same thug, who accused honest unionists of "conspiracy," was later caught red-handed in a holdup!

The court, however, listened to the stoolpigeons. Four defendants were found guilty. Irving Potash and John Vafiades were each sentenced to two years' imprisonment; Louis Hatchios received a year and a day; and Joseph Winogradsky a sentence of 15 months.

The judge denied the defendants bail pending their appeal. They were compelled to begin serving their time on July 17, 1940, even while the appeal was being made.

The fur market was a gloomy place on that day. Every fur worker felt as though the jail gates had closed on his best friend. And this was true. These "criminals" were rank and file workers who had grown up with the fur union, who had battled for democracy in the union, had driven the racket gangs out of the industry; men who had helped win relief for fur workers during the depression. They had made the lives of the fur workers happier, fuller. They had fought for, and won, higher wages and better conditions in the shops. Every fur worker knew that whenever he had a problem, whether in his shop or his home, whether directly connected with the union or simply with his personal life, he could go to any of these men being jailed and find help.

Two Kinds of Law?

The denial of bail outraged progressive America. Ten thousand New York fur workers signed a telegram of protest to President Roosevelt. Delegations of union and civic leaders visited Washington to protest. Educators, ministers, writers, joined them. One hundred and fourteen A. F. of L., C.I.O. and Railroad Brotherhood officials wired Roosevelt to urge the release of the prisoners. The C.I.O.'s 1940 Convention and other union conventions went on record for the release of the fur union leaders.

The higher courts reversed the ruling on the "anti-trust"

case, but after long delay sustained the convictions in the "conspiracy" case.

But the case against the fur union's leaders was itself a conspiracy, a conspiracy to wreck the wage levels and working conditions of the furriers. H. D. Glicksman, lawyer for the Independent Fur Manufacturers Association, wrote to Morris Ladenheim, chairman of the Board of the Association, saying:

"The Attorney-General feels certain of a conviction against Gold and the others and that this will be sufficient pressure to force the Union to give us the agreement we seek. . . . There are other avenues of approach and pressure which we have not as yet exploited. I feel that it is unnecessary to discuss at this time since we have so many coals in the fire right now."

Is there one law for Americans? Or is there one for the bosses and one for the workers?

Joseph Winogradsky

Joseph Winogradsky came to the United States from Bessarabia in 1920. He left behind a wife and daughter who waited until he found his place in the new world.

When he arrived, Winogradsky applied for his first citizenship papers. He found work as a finisher in a fur shop. He has been in the fur industry ever since—28 years a fur worker! After two years, he sent for his wife and child.

Joseph Winogradsky was an active unionist from the day he started work. In 1922, workers in his local elected him a rank-and-file delegate to the union convention. Like most of the young fur workers, he fought alongside Ben Gold and the rank and file against the corruption of the machine clique and the gangster rule.

In the next five years Winogradsky won the confidence and respect of his union brothers. They elected him Secretary of the Finishers Local, Executive Board member of the local, and delegate to the Central Trades and Labor Council.

After the victorious strike of 1926, Winogradsky worked as a full-time Business Agent for the Joint Board.

A year later he received his final citizenship papers. In the same year his second child, a son, was born.

In 1940, Winogradsky was railroaded to jail on the "conspiracy" charge which followed the "anti-trust" case. Immediately as he came out of jail, he began to serve as a member of the fur industry's War Emergency Board, and Chairman of the Union's War Bond Drive. Many war and relief agencies have awarded citations to Winogradsky for his outstanding contributions to war work. He has also found the time and energy to lead the union's widespread philanthropic program.

Today Joseph Winogradsky is Assistant Manager of the Joint Council, Manager of the Finishers Local 115, and a member of the International Executive Board. Both his son, a veteran, and his son-in-law are active members of the I.F.L.W.U. Neither Hartley Committee hearings nor further legal threats will ever weaken Winogradsky's loyalty to the union that has been his life.

Any honest trade unionist would be proud to have as splendid a record as Joseph Winogradsky.

Joseph Winogradsky, Assistant-Manager of the Furriers Joint Council and International Executive Board member, with his wife, Pauline, and two children, Ann and Harry.



2. Unity Achieved

A STRONG, united International Fur and Leather Workers Union stood behind its leaders who were jailed on the "conspiracy" charge.

This strength, this unity, did not always exist. In 1932, the fur workers had little left of their organization. Workers in some branches of the trade slaved from sixty to eighty hours a week. Thousands were out of jobs. Other thousands were on relief. Men walked the streets of the market, their bellies twitching with hunger. Some saw no way out, and turned on the gas. The union was split into two "wings." Disunity robbed the fur workers of their fighting strength. At the expense of the workers, the employers exploited this internal strife to the hilt.

Then the gangster racket was smashed. But even as the jail gates closed on Lepke and Gurrah, a greater racket threatened not only the fur workers but all the American people. It was an international racket run by the most notorious gangster in history: Adolph Hitler.

Labor all over the world needed unity to meet the threat of Hitlerism.

In 1935, Ben Gold made an historic visit to Toronto, where a convention of the "right wing" fur union was being held. There he proposed unity to Pietro Lucchi based on a democratic organization devoted to the fight for a living wage and decent conditions for the fur workers. Pietro Lucchi, then president of the "right wing" union, agreed with Gold's proposal. A. F. of L. piecards and die-hard splitters pressured Lucchi, but he defied them all and stuck to his pledge of unity of all fur workers.

In Chicago, Illinois, in 1937, the International Fur Workers Union met in an historic united convention. It was a new kind of union. Not new in name, but new in its united, democratic, solidified, fighting character. The division which had split the fur workers from 1927 to 1935 was officially at an end.

Dual unions no longer threatened the fur workers' wages. The furrier's pay envelope became fatter, his hours shorter, his working conditions more human. To the unity convention came Negro and white, Gentile and Jew, Italian and Greek, in a

stirring demonstration of working class solidarity. Unity and democracy had placed the union back in the hands of the membership.

Nineteen thirty-seven was a great year for the American trade union movement. The Congress of Industrial Organizations was leading the labor movement by organizing the mass production industries, and building unions on an industry-wide basis to fit the conditions of modern American production. Without such forms of organization, workers would have been left without weapons strong enough to meet the boss.

An overwhelming majority of the delegates to the I.F.W.U.'s unity convention voted to affiliate the union to the C.I.O.

At that convention Ben Gold was unanimously elected President. Pietro Lucchi was unanimously elected Secretary-Treasurer. Both have been unanimously re-elected to these positions at every two-year Convention since then.

Building the Union

The proof of the power of unity and democracy was not just in the speeches of the delegates, nor even in the resolutions. The real proof came when the convention adjourned and the furriers went back to the shops to build the union.

In the years that followed, scores of locals in the United States and Canada reported rapid growth. Wage and living standards reached new heights. Inside the union, barriers between Negro and white, between men and women workers, were disappearing.

A handful of I.F.W.U. organizers covered the country organizing fur workers everywhere. In Philadelphia, Chicago, Milwaukee, Atlantic City, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Detroit, Boston, shops unorganized for thirty-five years and more, signed closed-shop contracts. A typical example was Local 71. Organizer Myer Klig went to Minneapolis to help organize Local 71. Within a few weeks of his arrival, Klig's skillful organizational work and negotiations enabled the fur workers to win a closed-shop contract with equal division of work, and wage increases that ranged from two to ten dollars a week. Not a single worker lost one minute's working time in the process!

The biggest open shop in the fur industry was the firm of A. Hollander & Son, the largest fur dresser and dyer in the world. This outfit had operated on a company union basis for twenty years.

Resolutions of ten previous conventions had called for the organization of Hollander's—but only the last resolution (1937) was passed by a united union. That union, under Gold's leadership, did the job.

Myer Klig directed the drive in Hollander's large Middletown shop. Potash, Winogradsky and Schneider of the Joint Council mobilized New York fur workers to give full support to the strikers when the union finally struck one of four Hollander plants. The carefully planned strike and the solidarity of every other section of the I.F.W.U. soon convinced the Hollander firm that the day of the company union in fur was ended. The firm signed an agreement with the International.

The open shop was rapidly becoming past history in the fur trade.

Surging Ahead

In 1937 and 1938, thousands of fur workers were without jobs. Ordinarily, this would have been an ideal situation for the bosses, a chance to use the unemployed to slash wage standards and smash the union.

But the I.F.W.U. did better than stand its ground. It taught American labor a priceless lesson. It proved that workers don't have to foot the entire bill for a crisis.

In 1938 the fur bosses arrogantly locked out the workers when the agreement expired. Then something happened that was extraordinary in the history of the trade union movement. A brilliant new strategy was devised by the union, a lesson for other unions—made possible by the discipline, experience and unity of the fur workers. The union delayed answering with a strike, conserving the resources and energies of the workers and the funds of the union for the strategic blow. After seven weeks of the lockout, the union declared a general strike which lasted nine more weeks. Gold, Potash, Winogradsky and Schneider led the Joint Council in this struggle.

Despite all the free "take-it-easy-in-hard-times" advice the fur workers were receiving, the Council won the sixteen-week lockout and strike. The victory gave the fur workers the best agreement in the history of the industry, including wage increases, improved job security and other gains.

The women in the union played a splendid role in the strike, fighting as only good union women can fight and inspiring every picket line with their devotion and militancy. And for the first time floor workers, designers, foremen and Greek fur workers, marched side by side with the main body of fur workers in the streets of the fur market.

Victories such as these, organization and successful strikes, achieved almost 100 per cent unionization of the fur industry in the two years up to the convention of 1939.

The young Fancy Fur Dyers Local 88, for example, reported wage increases averaging two hundred percent. Local after local told of better organization, more unity, heavier pay envelopes.

The union was proud that at this convention Lyndon Henry, Negro organizer from Local 88, could say—as only too few unions could say:

"Our local is a veritable league of nations—every nationality under the sun works in it, in close harmony. Never was a voice raised against any race that is found in our local. They have elected a Negro organizer, that is myself, and I am proud to be able to serve my local. This is especially significant when only ten per cent of the membership are Negroes."

The hand of the I.F.W.U. also stretched across the sea to aid Spanish workers in their armed battle against Mussolini and Hitler. The union gave generous financial contributions to the Loyalist armies, but more precious still, it gave the blood of young furriers who had volunteered to fight fascism in Spain.

Bosses' Vengeance

After the victory of the union in the 1938 lockout and general strike in New York, Jack Schneider, one of the leading officers of the Joint Council was arrested on a charge of "coercion."

The trial was the same old story. For witnesses the prosecution relied on people whom decent Americans would not permit into their own homes. One witness was a foreman who was an open, self-proclaimed Nazi! This foreman had even had the nerve to appear in his shop dressed in a Hitler storm trooper's uniform. Another witness was an employer whom Schneider had caught in repeated contract violations.

Five others stood trial with Schneider, but they were acquitted. Schneider was the main target. He was found guilty. The sentence had nothing to do with justice. It was vengeance, pure and simple. Coercion is a misdemeanor for which the usual sentence, for people who are truly guilty, averages three to six months. Schneider got the maximum sentence—three years!

They wanted to keep Jack Schneider out of the fur market as long as possible.

Jack Schneider

Jack Schneider is a foreign-born American (just as Tom Paine was). Schneider was born in Bessarabia in 1897. He migrated to Palestine, and then to the United States, arriving here in 1921.

In New York City he went immediately to work in the fur industry as a cutter. He has been in the industry ever since.

When the progressive administration in the fur union was elected in 1925, Schneider became a delegate to the Joint Board. He retained that post until 1928, when he was elected Chairman. He married his wife, Sonia (a citizen) in that year. The Schneiders now have a 16-year-old daughter.

Two years later he became full-time Business Agent for the union, a post which he has held ever since. He is now Manager of Cutters Local 101 and a member of the Management Committee of the Joint Council.

A few years after his arrival in the United States, Jack Schneider took out his first citizenship papers. In 1927, he went to the Immigration Department for his final hearings. Before he was to call for his papers, which were ready, he took sick. When he recovered and visited the immigration offices, he discovered that the papers, already issued, had been stamped "Cancelled." No explanation was offered.



Jack Schneider, Manager of the Cutters Local 101 of the Furriers Joint Council, with his wife, Sonia, and his daughter, Mona.

Later he again applied for his final papers, and again received a curt rejection without explanation.

In 1932, when the union leaders were defending themselves against the attacks of the racketeering gangsters, Jack Schneider attended a mass meeting in Cooper Union. Suddenly two immigration officials seized him, dragged him from the hall, and took him to Ellis Island. There they held him for deportation. An inspector on Ellis Island gave Schneider a hearing. The only witnesses were two scabs who claimed that Schneider had ordered them to join the Communist Party! The testimony was so obviously ridiculous that the inspector took no action. The bail was returned.

But the labor-baiters didn't forget Jack Schneider. They waited until the 1938 general strike when they framed him on the charge of "coercion."

As recently as 1945, Jack Schneider again appeared before the Naturalization Service to ask for his final papers, and again submitted to an examination. This time higher authorities stepped in and held his papers back. On Nov. 23, 1948, Schneider was again arrested by immigration authorities for deportation.

War Emergency

Many of these attacks against the union came on the eve of America's entrance into the war against the Axis. The union membership refused to let these frame-ups interfere with their fight against Hitler. The persecutions could not demoralize the membership. If anything, their fighting spirit was stronger than ever.

One has the right to ask questions of those who attacked the union at the very time the country was arming for the war.

If these union-busters had succeeded in their schemes, would the fur workers have been able to make such outstanding contributions to the war effort? Without the union to organize them, inspire their patriotism and mobilize their efforts, would hundreds of fur workers have volunteered on the very day after Pearl Harbor—would the fur workers have given over two million dollars to the Red Cross, to British, Russian, Chinese and other war relief agencies?

Would the union-busters match the 34,000 pints of blood that the Red Cross took from the veins of union fur workers? Would they have purchased forty-two millions of dollars worth of War Bonds? Would they have produced 119,000 fur vests for the Navy and for American and allied merchant seamen then on the cold and dangerous run to Murmansk?

Those who attacked our union were, in effect, attacking the war effort.

Fifteen thousand of our members fought with honor in the Army and Navy. The union had taught them to be fighters.

Men such as Klig, Potash, Schneider and Winogradsky headed our Win-the-War Committees which coordinated and inspired the union's war work.

The same Irving Potash whom the courts framed and rushed to jail in the "conspiracy" trials, was co-chairman, with Mr. Louis Fenster, of the Fur Vest Project in which more than 20,000 fur workers contributed over 150,000 hours of voluntary unpaid labor. Baron Leathers, British Minister of War Transport, and Rear Admiral E. S. Land, United States Administrator of the War Shipping Administration, were among the many who congratulated Potash and the union for this work.

Our union and our union leaders will match their war record with that of any union or civilian organization in the country. Let us hear from the scabs and stoolpigeons who testified in court against the union's leaders! Let them tell us what they did for America during the war years!

By the time of the 1942 Convention, all the union leaders who had been jailed were free, with the exception of Jack Schneider. When these men were released, the fur workers received them like heroes, hoisted them to their shoulders and carried them in triumph through the streets of the market.

Those who suffered the long months in prison did not come back embittered by their experiences. They had every right to be bitter, to resent the deadly hours in their jail cells, the hard and monotonous life of their unjust imprisonment. But they had no time for resentment. These men greeted their thousands of friends, and then rushed into the work of organizing war activities in the union. The fight against fascism left no room for personal bitterness.

Hailed by Union

Ben Gold welcomed these leaders to the 1942 convention, saying:

"To us, you are not convicts. To us you are members of our union, leaders of our union, who deserve the honor and recognition as champion fighters for the people, for the people's rights. Your contribution in the fight against fascism and in the short time that you returned from jail, your record as fighters against the nazi monster, speaks for itself."

And Irving Potash, not many days out of his jail cell, said:

"Let this union of ours be a strong weapon for winning the war, a strong weapon that will also set the example to the entire labor movement how a union organized for the welfare of the workers, is also organized for the welfare of the entire nation."

3. Organizing Leather

IN 1939, the Leather Workers Union had only a handful of locals, and a membership that numbered less than five thousand. Ninety per cent of the industry was unorganized. Even in the few organized shops the bosses told the union they would not renew contracts because non-union shops were creating unfair competition.

Company unions and the spy system kept down the standards of the leather workers. Their wages averaged 61 cents an hour and as low as 40 cents in the South. No paid holidays, no minimum rate, no reporting time pay, no free boots, aprons and gloves, no grievance machinery, no job seniority, no security, no health insurance.

The furriers have always had a tradition of aid to other unions. The union has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to brother unions in times of stress. Furriers brought money inside auto plants to aid the sitdown strikers of the U.A.W. They gave financial assistance to unions in steel, auto, maritime, farm equipment, packinghouse, furniture and mine. This has always been union policy. Therefore it was natural that even prior to its convention of 1939, the International Fur Workers Union pitched in to help the struggling leather workers in such key spots as Chicago, Newark, New York, Gowanda, and other leather centers.

The 1939 convention placed before the delegates a proposal approved by C.I.O. to merge with the leather workers. A merger with leather workers would be a logical extension of the principle of industrial unionism. It would strengthen the position of workers in both leather and fur.

The delegates accepted the merger proposal, and the International Fur Workers Union became the International Fur and Leather Workers Union.

A merger with the leather workers would be meaningless unless the International helped unionize that industry. The union called upon the organizing genius of such men as Myer Klig. Klig traveled from one end of the country to the other,

from leather center to leather center, and he left behind him strong and active locals which at last were in a position to speak for all the workers in the industry.

By 1942, Augustus Tomlinson, President of the Leather Division of the I.F.L.W.U., could report the organization of 30,000 Canadian and American leather workers.

But the union's numerical growth was only half the story. The leather workers now began to win wage increases, vacations and holidays with pay, health and hospitalization plans, life insurance, more sanitary shop conditions, free protective clothing and job security.

In 1944 Tomlinson, and Isador Pickman of the Leather Division, wrote to Philip Murray, President of the C.I.O., saying:

"... We feel that the great gains of the leather workers' union are consolidated, the democratic rights of our local unions and membership are safeguarded, and the leather division strengthened immeasurably as part of our unified International Union.

"In the growth of our union since the merger with the fur workers in 1939, we have made great progress in organizing the unorganized, raising the wages and working and living standards of our members. This was made possible by the experienced and capable guidance and assistance of the officers and members of the fur division, organizationally and financially, who have helped us build a healthy, democratic, functioning trade union organization, developed a loyal and experienced leadership among the leather workers, devoted to the progressive principles of the C.I.O."

IFLWU Contributions

The I.F.L.W.U. always contributes to the lives of the communities in which it operates. Because leather workers began to bring home a living wage, the conditions of all the people in leather centers improved.

The union's paper, *Fur and Leather Worker*, recently re-

printed an editorial from the Peabody (Mass.) *Times* which assesses the value of the I.F.L.W.U. to the community:

"A decade ago when the National Leather Workers Association, then so-called, were getting under way, employers at contract sessions begged them to go out and organize the country.

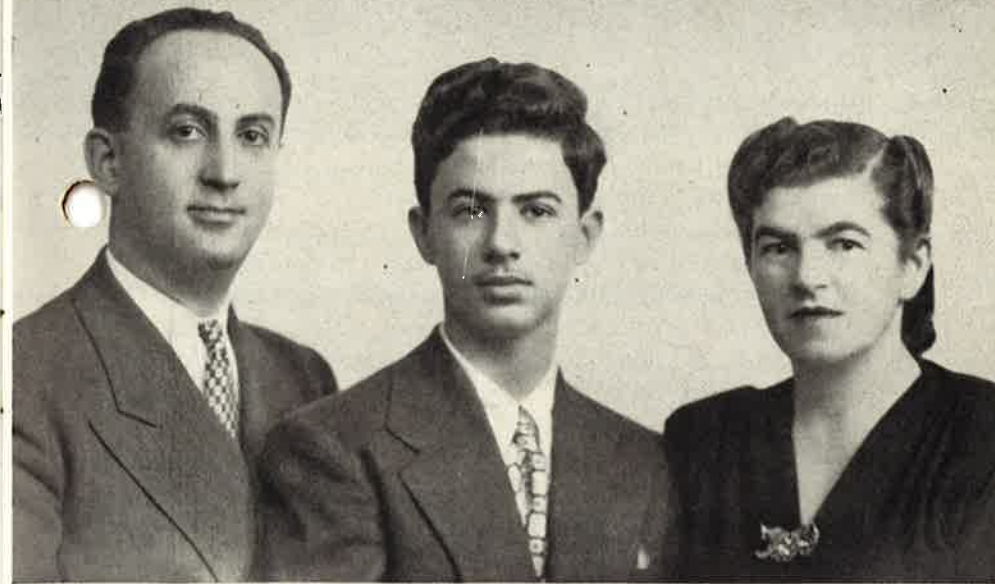
"The Massachusetts Leather Manufacturers Association then said in effect: we want to pay fair wages and, as you know, have always paid more than any other section of the country. But this cannot go on indefinitely. Today we are at a competitive disadvantage with the South, the Midwest and a good section of New England, where poorly paid non-union help produces leather. If you don't go out and organize the leather industry, you will force us out of business.

"Many union leaders recognized the truth of this point of view. The organization was centered in Peabody and had all told 6,000 members. An organization drive was begun, and some locals established in Philadelphia and New York State. But the dent in the number of unorganized shops was small.

"Six years ago the union amalgamated with fur workers into the International Fur and Leather Workers Union of the United States and Canada. The fur workers, then 40,000 strong, put up the money for the organizing. Today there are 60,000 CIO leather workers—more than the fur workers! Peabody union leaders have kept their word to local manufacturers: they have organized the South, the West and the East. And Peabody again is the 'leather city of the world' in the best competitive position it has enjoyed in 50 years."

Myer Klig

In Canada, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey and many other states, Myer Klig worked tirelessly and with amazing effectiveness to build the Leather Division. In recent years, he has devoted practically all his time to the New England District.



Myer Klig, IFLWU International Representative and International Executive Board member, with his wife, Bessie, and his son, Victor.

Klig, who is Russian-born, migrated to Canada at the age of seventeen. For a few years he held odd jobs. He was a farm hand, a welder's assistant, a railroad section gang worker. In 1925, he worked as an operator in a Winnipeg fur shop and met and married his Canadian wife. Although only a few men then held fur union cards, Klig immediately joined, and immediately started to organize the shop. He soon became secretary of the Winnipeg local.

In 1926 he received his Canadian citizenship papers. He continued his work in the fur trade, and as a union official, until 1930 when he began a period of six years with the Canadian I.L.G.W.U. dressmakers. In 1936 he returned to his trade as a fur operator.

At the 1937 Convention of the I.F.W.U. in Chicago, the new International Executive appointed Klig to the post of International Organizer at the request of President Gold. For a few years he divided his time between the United States and Canada. Toward the end of 1940, he decided to make America his per-

manent home, moved here with his wife and son (now 16 years old). The very day after he had received his permanent visa and was admitted to the United States as a permanent resident, he and his wife applied for first papers.

After the required lapse of time, Klig applied for his final papers. His wife received her final papers. But Klig was never called for a hearing, although that is the usual procedure. The Naturalization Service had other plans. When they did call Klig, it was to press deportation charges against him. The charges implied that Myer Klig advocates "the destruction of property."

The Naturalization Service would have us believe that Klig advocates the "destruction of property." Yet, this same Myer Klig has one of the most remarkable records of peaceful negotiations in the American labor movement! In eleven years of organizing and negotiating for the International, *Klig has succeeded in reaching hundreds of agreements without recourse to strikes*. In fact, there are only two exceptions to this record. In both these cases, the workers had to strike after the employers had rejected arbitration. The union won both strikes.

Klig has never participated in political activities in the United States. His time and energy have been devoted solely to his union work.

The attacks on Klig, like all the attacks on the union's leadership, were aimed at the things for which he fights: higher wages and better living conditions for the fur and leather workers.

4. Under Attack Again

TIMES have changed.

Today the American people have a Truman in place of a Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

They have the Taft-Hartley Law in place of the Wagner Act.

They are threatened with a new world war, planned by big business for profit.

There is a time to stand firm, and a time to fight back. The I.F.L.W.U. is fighting back. As far as the union is concerned, it will not allow the Taft-Hartley Law to disrupt its organization. The most recent convention unanimously refused to submit to political blackmail, rejected the yellow-dog affidavits and decided to by-pass the Taft-Hartley Labor Board.

In spite of Taft-Hartley, the I.F.L.W.U. still grows. It wins wage increases. It gains better working conditions. It stands firm and united despite every challenge and attack of the employers.

Some people cannot stand the sight of a strong united union. Today the Department of Justice, Congress and the "bi-partisan" Administration, are giving employers encouragement and active help in their attempts to break peaceful relations with organized labor.

But the American trade unionist has too much pride and too much fight to be a company man.

In February, 1948, the New York Furriers Joint Council contract with the Fur Manufacturers Association expired. Attacks came from all sides. As in 1926 and 1938, the bosses locked out the fur workers, again forcing a strike upon the Council. This lockout and strike lasted seven weeks. The union won again. The F.B.I., always anxious to step in where profits are concerned (but indifferent when it comes to stopping a lynch mob), arrested Irving Potash, the manager of the Council. This time the charge was that he is a member of an organization charged with believing in and advocating overthrow of the United States Government by force and violence.

Not satisfied with having arrested Potash, with eleven other leading Communists, on a phoney "force and violence" charge, the Department of Justice is also pushing his deportation for political reasons.

Irving Potash

It is impossible to separate the history of the I.F.L.W.U. from the history of Irving Potash.

Potash was born in old Russia in 1902. He was only ten years old when his parents brought him to the United States. After finishing high school, he attended City College of New York for two years.

When his second college year ended he, like many college students at the time, looked for work in the fur industry to earn money for his fall tuition. He went to Ben Gold and asked for a job. He had worked in fur shops years before, but no jobs were available at the moment. Potash called at the office several times. Gold put him to work, helping out, until a shop job would come along.

A few weeks' experience with Irving Potash's work was enough. Ben Gold never let him go. In 1926, Potash was at Ben Gold's side, contributing his youthful energy and his courage to the great fur strike of that year. Potash fought that battle with the furriers from the very first day of the lockout to the day of victory, seventeen weeks later.

His work especially during the 1926 strike showed that he had outstanding contributions to make. From that day in 1925 when he first entered the union office, until the present, Irving Potash has been flesh, blood, and bone of the I.F.L.W.U.

Potash was associated with Gold, Schneider, Winogradsky and the progressive wing of the union. With them, he helped guide the union through the period of disunity and the fight against gangsterism.

His entire record in the organized labor movement is that of an outstanding patriot. He has won innumerable citations for his valuable war work.

Irving Potash is an American. If he is not a citizen, let the Naturalization Service and some of our courts explain why such

a man has been denied this privilege. As far back as 1918, Potash applied for his papers. But he was never granted citizenship.

In 1919, when the Lusk-Palmer raids forced labor to the wall, Potash was arrested. He was charged with having attended a dance given by a progressive students' organization. The law upon which he was jailed was later repealed because of public protest. When he was released, he sought citizenship. His efforts were rejected, and no one offered an explanation.

Potash's attorneys discussed this question with some Federal judges. Their answer implied that had Potash been convicted of burglary, it wouldn't have stood in his way. But a man with a labor record—that was something different!

Quite an admission! Citizenship papers might be finagled for a Lepke or a Gurrah, but not for a man who helped send Lepke and Gurrah to prison where they belonged!

After he had testified against Lepke and Gurrah, doing what few other Americans had the courage to do, Potash again sought citizenship. It was the same old story. Rejected without explanation!

This man, whose 20-year-old daughter is American-born, is considered by the Department of Justice as a dangerous alien.

The 17th Convention of the I.F.L.W.U., indignant at this shameful treatment of Potash, unanimously declared:

"For 25 years, Irving Potash has led the fur workers in militant strikes and bitter struggles for better working and living conditions. He was one of the leading representatives of the fur workers in the general strikes of 1926, 1938 and 1948, as well as in other innumerable struggles.

"Time and again he has been elected and re-elected by the union membership to his high positions in the union—positions that he has filled with ability, sincerity, integrity and responsibility. Under his leadership today, the New York fur workers have achieved the highest wage standards of any group of industrial workers in America.

"His experience and ability have not been confined to serving the fur workers alone. He has helped the leather workers. He has helped workers and strikers in many industries. He has played an important part in the building of the C.I.O., particularly in New York City and State.

"It is no wonder that Irving Potash is beloved by scores

of thousands of workers who recognize in him a fearless and able leader and champion in their struggles for a better life. . . .

"And now, in March 1948, at the very moment when negotiations were deadlocked between the union and the manufacturers in the conferences for renewal of the New York collective agreement, and as the employers were preparing to lock out the workers—just at that moment Irving Potash was arrested upon orders of the Attorney-General and held for deportation. . . .

"This Convention goes on record as follows:

"1) We condemn and protest the monstrous efforts of the Attorney-General to deport Irving Potash and deprive the organized fur and leather workers of one of their most beloved and experienced leaders.

"2) We demand that the deportation proceedings against Potash be dropped altogether.

"3) We demand the restoration to Potash of all his full rights and that his activities in the labor movement be no longer held as a bar to his obtaining his citizenship papers. . . ."

Today Potash is out on bail to the tune of \$5,000 in a case in which bail is usually set at \$500. Yet even his freedom on bail he owes to his fighting spirit. When he was recently arrested with other trade union and political leaders on deportation charges, they were all denied bail. He joined them in a hunger strike on Ellis Island to force the granting of bail. At the bail hearing, the U. S. District Attorney admitted in court that he was not charging that Potash committed any unlawful act!

While Potash awaits hearings on the deportation charge, the Administration is dropping charges against Ilse Koch and Ludwig Merz, professional murderers of Hitler's Buchenwald.

Figure it out for yourself.

Backed by Workers

The I.F.L.W.U. can wonder whether these persecutions would have been leveled against the union's leaders had they

not built a democratic union, helped organize the leather workers, raised wages, improved living standards, fought for progressive principles.

Perhaps the I.F.L.W.U. could have saved itself the expense of trials if it never did anything but collect dues and send its officers around in limousines, their pockets lined with fat expense accounts.

Perhaps, but America would have been a lot worse off.

The furriers know good Americans, good union men, when they see them. That is why, year after year, Irving Potash, Joseph Winogradsky and Jack Schneider are re-elected to their Council posts by the highest votes on the slate.

Hands Off Union!

The persecution of these men is no accident. It is a plan. Ben Gold was thrown in jail for leading a hunger march on Washington and demanding relief for the starving during the depression days. Then gangsters attacked the union, and murdered Morris Langer. "Anti-Trust" trials followed. Then lock-outs. More arrests. "Coercion" cases. Hartley Committee "investigations." Threats of deportation.

The persecution of I.F.L.W.U. leaders is a systematic attack designed to help the bosses break the union!

It is part of the attacks of open-shoppers and their agents in government against all labor. It is part of the witch-hunts against the democratic liberties of all Americans. It is part of the deportation persecutions which are victimizing many foreign-born and particularly progressive union leaders.

It is up to the entire American labor movement to demand justice for our union and for our leaders.

The open-shoppers are out to get Gold, Potash, Schneider, Winogradsky, Klig. We appeal to the labor movement to win justice for these men. We want an end to these phoney charges and witch-hunts. We want citizenship for those who have asked time and again for the privilege, who have earned it by their constructive record of activity on behalf of the workers, and whose families and American-born children are testimony that this is their home. We want the threat of deportation stopped

