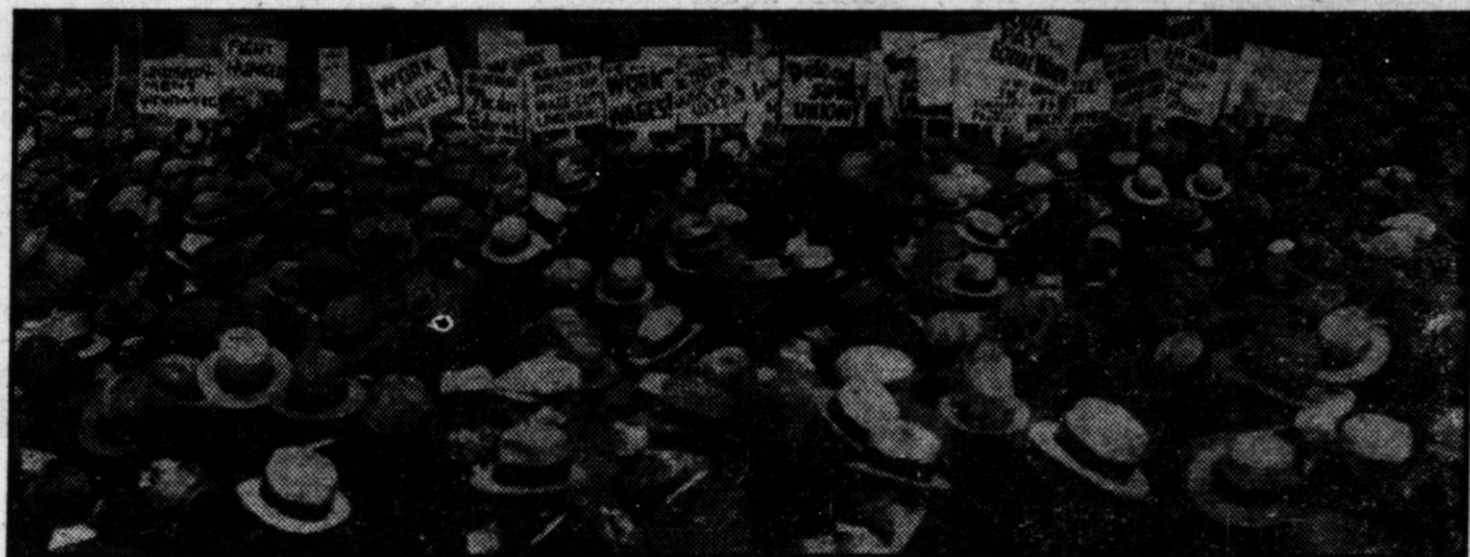


# March 6: When the Jobless Marched



A section of New York's Union Square on March 6, 1930. One hundred and ten thousand attended. Throughout the country, one and a quarter million demonstrated for unemployment insurance and relief.

By ISRAEL AMTER

IN November, 1929, I returned to New York to become the New York district organizer of the Communist Party. Hoover was President at the time. In October, 1929, there was a terrific break on the stock exchange. On the basis of conditions existing in the United States and abroad, we Communists had predicted that a crisis was coming and would soon be upon us. Hoover declared the economy sound. But suddenly in October the crash came, and millions of workers and farmers faced starvation.

The Communists immediately got on the job. We mobilized the workers and put up demands to ease the growing critical situation. We demanded immediate relief and jobs to be provided by both federal and state governments; that there be no evictions or foreclosures; and we called for unemployment and social insurance. We at once took steps to organize the Unemployed Councils.

Councils grew up in every part of the country. They mushroomed right out of the soil. Day after day more thousands of workers were thrown out of their jobs. Starvation was growing. This apparently was to be the worst crisis that capitalism had suffered at any time in its history.

At the beginning of February, 1930, the National Committee of the Communist Party called for nation-wide demonstrations on March 6. The purpose of these demonstrations was to make a coordinated national demand for jobs and relief, for unemployment and social insurance.

The employed and unemployed workers were stirred. Trade unions pledged their support to the demands raised by the Communist Party.

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ON MARCH 6, there was a tremendous outpouring of workers in all parts of the country. One hundred and ten thousand in New York, a hundred thousand in Detroit, and thousands more in other cities. Throughout the country the press tried to rouse the fears of the American people that a revolution was coming to the U.S.

In New York the demonstration was held in Union Square. We had received permission to hold the demonstration on the Square,

and asked for a permit to march to City Hall to place the demands before the City Administration. Thus we attempted to exercise the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, as guaranteed by the Constitution. But the Mayor at that time, Mayor Walker, and Police Commissioner Grover Whalen denied us the permit.

On Union Square the huge crowd spilled over into the park. Three speakers' platforms were erected.

There were no loudspeakers in those days and three meetings had to be held simultaneously. William Z. Foster spoke at the central platform, Robert Minor at Fourth Avenue, and I at Broadway.

All of us presented the demands which had been endorsed at innumerable unemployed and union meetings and were unanimously adopted. At the Square we held only a short meeting. Then we told the crowds that the City Administration had refused us a permit for the march to City Hall. We proposed that a delegation of five consult with the then Police Commissioner Whalen, who at the moment was in a small temporary shelter which had been erected on the Square.

The proposal was adopted, Foster, Minor and myself, Harry Raymond (the Daily Worker reporter), and another worker went to confer with Commissioner Whalen. Police opened a lane for us to the hut. Before we were allowed to enter, however, we were frisked by detectives. As we entered the hut, we saw Whalen standing there, ashen-faced, with his hand in his pocket, unquestionably holding a revolver. And of course he was surrounded by detectives.

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FOSTER acted as spokesman for the group, and presented the single demand that we be permitted to march to City Hall. There was a little discussion on the question, but Whalen categorically refused to give in. Then Whalen asked:

"Well, what do you intend to do?"

"We returned to our platforms. Foster made a report of what had happened. He then asked the crowd what we should do.

"Shall we march?" The answer was a roar—"YES!"

Then with a sweep of his hand, Foster shouted, "Let's go!"

Heading the march were the

five of us, but we reached only as far as Broadway. There the mounted police and police on foot, together with a host of "dicks," moved against the crowd of workers. They swung their clubs and blackjacks, and tried to break up the lines. We in the front ranks were pushed in all directions. Scores of mounted cops, held in reserve on 18th St., were thrown into action. The march was broken up. Nonetheless, thousands of the unemployed made their way to City Hall, which was surrounded by a cordon of police.

In advance, we, the committee of spokesmen, had decided to get to City Hall come what may. In case the march was broken up, we had previously agreed to meet at a certain place. We met, and decided to make an attempt to present our demands to Mayor Walker in a different way. We allowed sufficient time for thousands of workers to reach City Hall, we knew that they would march with or without permit, even though their ranks might be disorganized. Then the four of us (the fifth man was lost in the shuffle) walked over to Mail St., and told one of the cops who surrounded City Hall, that we wanted to see the Mayor.

He told us to wait a moment, and came back with a sergeant who marched us across the park toward City Hall. But we did not notice the patrol wagon standing on City Hall Square. As soon as we got into the grounds, police surrounded us, shoved us into the patrol wagon, and hurried us away even before the crowd saw us.

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THE SMASHING of the demonstration by the police and the arrest of its leaders caused widespread indignation, not only among the unemployed but among all sections of the population.

Similar actions were taken against the unemployed on that famous March the 6th in many parts of the country. But the unemployed councils continued to grow. And that is the reason that unemployed workers receive unemployment compensation today.

(This account of an historic New York City jobless demonstration is taken from an unpublished paper by the late Israel Amter, for many years a work-class leader).