



## A METHOD MADE TO ORDER

By ALICE SHOEMAKER

It is ten years since the first little group of eight Madison industrial girls stormed the doors of the University of Wisconsin and got permission to attend the classes of the regular summer session. The Summer School for Workers in Industry is now an accepted part of the University; it is strongly backed by organized labor and cooperates with local labor and community groups in a program of winter institutes and classes in addition to providing the six-week summer session. The intervening years have seen a long struggle to work out the best ways of teaching industrial workers how to acquire facts and how to do their own thinking. And the struggle has only begun.

Consider the problem! Here is a heterogeneous group of men and women, from twenty to fifty years of age, from a dozen states and a score of cities; some have had eighth-grade schooling only, some are high school graduates with perhaps a year or two of technical school training. Here they are on a university campus for six weeks. What can a university do for them, untrained, ungraded, some of them wondering what it's all about, and where is the catch?

The resolving factor, the common denominator, of course is industry. These are all industrial workers, and as such they are in the grip of a system that is challenging the thinking of our times as nothing has challenged it before. Is the machine to be our master or our slave? Are the workers to do their part in

thinking out the problems that the machine raises, and share in the responsibility for its control? If we have any faith left in the tenets of democracy, we answer yes. Nor is the question an academic one. Workers are being called upon increasingly to serve on government boards, to set up agreements which shall govern a whole industry, to vote on questions of great economic significance. And upon the Wisconsin School for Workers, and others like it, falls the tremendous responsibility of giving training that will help the workers to meet these problems effectively. We attempt to train not only good rank-and-file members, but also leaders who will be labor statesmen, qualified to sit down with employers and representatives of government and work out a more adequate program for industry.

Six weeks! Of course it is too short. But it is long enough to indicate a scientific approach to problems, a method of study, a concept of industrial society that can be and is followed up through individual and group study in the years to come.

### II

With such a dynamic problem, is it any wonder that old teaching methods seem inadequate, and that the faculties each year have struggled to find new ways of doing their huge task more effectively. We tried for an atmosphere of freedom, of informality, so that workers could overcome their awe of a "high-brow" environment and think naturally.