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Note: George W. Alger to Ida M. Tarbell, March 2, 1933

Alger, George W.

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Alger hands first relief check to Mike Baronofsky, unemployed presser. Left to right—Isidore Nagler, David Dubinsky, Samuel Klein, George W. Alger (standing).

The cloak industry again pioneers! While the nation resounds with talk of technological unemployment and its harmful effects upon society, cloak manufacturers and cloak contractors, together with the workers' union, made a practical contribution to a solution of the problem when George W. Alger, impartial chairman, presented the first check from the presser's relief fund to an unemployed presser at the headquarters of local 35 of the International Garment Workers Union yesterday.

Behind the payment of that check yesterday lies the story of the displacement of an indeterminate number of pressers over the past few years by the introduction of the pressing machine. With this machine two workers can do the work of three hand pressers. Driven by the need of taking care of its members, the union demands a double-time week for machine pressers, as against a 40-hour week for hand pressers.

Suggests Compromise.

A strike threatened, and it was then that Mr. Alger, as impartial chairman, suggested a compromise that the machine be taxed, and the proceeds used for the benefit of the men it displaced. Here was a solution acceptable to all parties, and despite the depression, a relatively large sum has been raised within the industry through this tax.

Under the terms of the plan, machines are taxed $4 a week while in use. If the machine does not do a full week's work, then the manufacturer pays 14 per cent of the machine pressers' wages into the fund. Machine pressers receive a minimum scale of $25 a week, hand pressers $18 a week.

A total of 250 members of the union have registered themselves as unemployed at any shops. These men are to be eligible for relief, for a period of eight weeks, unless they find employment meanwhile. Yesterday's checks were for $10 each, as will be the seven checks still to come.

Praises Employers, Union.

Before presenting the first check, Mr. Alger highly praised the leadership of the union and the social vision of the employers that made the development of this fund possible. He said that when the news of its establishment first came out, he received inquiries from many newspapers and employers, so widespread was the interest in the industry's attempt to meet the problem of technological unemployment. He said he hoped that the principle laid down in the cloak industry, that the machine must take care of the men it displaces during a period of transition, will be a precedent in other industries as well.

David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, spoke highly of the progressive fund, but added that the union's unemployment insurance must be installed in the industry as a whole.

Samuel Klein, executive director of the Industrial Council of Cloak and Skirt Manufacturers, and H. Uviller, general manager of the American Cloak and Suit Manufacturers Association, participated in the ceremony of handing out the checks.

Joseph Breslaw, manager of pressers' local, presided.