

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

"I'm Going to Fight Like Hell": Anna Taffler and the Unemployed Councils of the 1930s

The Communist-led Unemployed Councils mobilized jobless men and women in hundreds of local communities to demand jobs and better treatment from relief authorities. In these excerpts from a recorded interview, Anna Taffler, a Communist activist and a Russian Jewish immigrant, described how her own experience of facing eviction pushed her into organizing the unemployed. She also talked about the focus of local councils on issues like fighting for more relief and stopping evictions.

"The courts are no good, the system is no good, everything is no good!" And I says, "I'm going to fight like hell!" And I started in...

I still had no home, so I started looking for help, asking around. And I had some friends, and they told me that...they're organizing unemployment councils...So I told myself, "You need to be in the organization of the unemployed councils."

Their policy was to give as little relief as possible...It was a constant struggle. So we would come to the relief bureau at that time, and we would stay in the auditorium and we would ask people, you know, "We are from the unemployment council. We are from the Workers Alliance. What are your needs?" and so on and so forth. And people were only too glad to get help, you know. I'd go around and sign them up for membership. But if they didn't have the quarter, it was all right, too, you know. But, we would represent them. Some people were denied rent, and they were facing evictions. Some people were cut off of food. And you know how we did it? To open-air meetings, putting up platform right in the front of the relief bureau getting up and letting the people in the whole neighborhood know what's going on."

Source: Interview done by Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Library, New York University, for the public radio program *Grandma Was an Activist*, producers Charlie Potter and Beth Friend, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/31>

