

The New War on Progress in the Trade Unions -- By Wm. Z. Foster

A Dual Unionist Reports -- Repents

THE reactionary trade union leaders have begun a fresh campaign in their ceaseless war against progress in the labor movement. The keynote for the attack was sounded by President Green in the December *American Federationist*. Green, singling out the Communists as highly active leaders in the various progressive oppositional movements in the unions, demands their ruthless extermination. The other bureaucrats, following his lead, have begun a bitter attack against the left wing on all fronts, details of which shall be pointed out as we go along.

The basic causes of this unprecedented attack on the progressive forces in the unions are to be found in the position and interests of the employers. An important contributing factor in creating the somewhat hysterical atmosphere accompanying the attack is the uncertainties and dangers for American capitalism at home and abroad.

Cause of Alarm

All Europe is organizing against the United States on the war debts and other issues; Germany and other countries are "rationalizing" their industries, which means more intense competition in the world markets; the Chinese situation is highly alarming; the British general strike was a great shock; the organization of the European Steel Trust is a menace.

At the home the prospects of continued prosperity grow more uncertain; the railroad workers are deeply discontented and are demanding wage increases; a great coal strike looms for next Spring. The union bureaucrats making the attack against the left wing in the unions reflect all the nervousness and interest of the employers in this situation.

Bureaucrats Surrender

Then there is the great urge of the employers for increased production. They are constantly introducing new and more effective speed-up systems. They also make war against strikes and all forms of militancy. The trade union leaders are in step with this movement. Until the defeat of the Railroad Shopmen in 1922, they made some show of fighting the bosses. But now, convinced that the employers are too strong to resist, they have surrendered to them altogether and become their agents.

With their B. & O. Plans, trade union capitalism, Watson-Parker Laws, and similar schemes, they are company-unionizing the trade unions and turning them into agencies to speed up production. It is significant that in the same issue of the *Federationist* that declared open war on the Communists, Green also had another article openly proposing to turn the trade unions into company unions.

The bureaucrats have in mind, in this process, primarily their own interests as a group. They abandon the interests of the workers. But all does not go smoothly for them. The workers, especially the unskilled and semi-skilled, demand a struggle against the employers. Serious revolts take place amongst them, and even in the ranks of the trade union bureaucracy.

Membership Revolt

The rank and file upheavals have become especially significant in the last two years. The left wing of the New York Furriers captured the local Joint Board. The same thing happened in the New York Joint Board of the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. In the Machinists' Union the combined progressive elements defeated Johnston. In many sections of the Carpenters (Detroit, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia) deep-going

oppositional movements developed.

The historic Passaic strike was a challenge and a threat to the whole system of present-day trade union leadership. The left-led New York Furriers' strike resulted not only in a victory that made the 40-hour week a real issue, but also in a sharp personal defeat for President Green. In the ranks of the upper bureaucracy itself a split occurred over the question of the recognition of the Soviet Union and steps



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were taken, in spite of official opposition, to send a Trade Union Delegation to Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, the New York Cloakmakers embarked upon their historical strike.

The Campaign of Reaction

The reactionary trade union leaders become genuinely alarmed at all these developments. Their policy of company-unionizing the trade unions and subjugating them to the employers was threatened; their position as leaders of the unions was endangered. Something had to be done. Hence, the A. F. of L. Executive Council at its meeting just prior to the recent convention, made it a special order of business to develop a new war against the left wing.

Several specific actions were taken. Among them were a ruthless condemnation of the Passaic strike, a categorical repudiation of the proposed delegation to Soviet Russia, and the appointment of a special committee to investigate the Fur Workers' strike for the purpose of discrediting its leadership and cleaning the soiled skirts of President Green.

The Miners' Struggle

Meanwhile, a big upheaval was developing amongst the miners. Incensed and aroused by the treachery and terrorism of Lewis, and seeing their union rapidly going to pieces, the progressive forces among the miners organized themselves, under the leadership of Brophy and with the slogan of "Save the Union", for a struggle against the Lewis machine in the elections in the district and national conventions, and in the approaching bituminous strike. The great mass of the miners support this movement.

The upheaval amongst the miners galvanized the reactionaries into action. It was a blow at their very citadel. It threatened the defeat of a vital section of their machine, the spreading of the fight to other parts of the labor movement, the repudiation of their class collaboration by the development of a militant strike among the coal miners next spring. They determined upon a war to the knife against the left wing.

The reactionaries struck their first big blow during the A. F. of L. Convention. Never in any American labor convention has there been such a wild campaign of "red-baiting". Wilson, Frey, Furost, Walker, Lewis, and Green flamed against the left. The occasion was a committee report condemning the recognition of Soviet Russia and the sending of a Trade Union Delegation.

But the center of the attack was against the left oppositional movement, especially in the Miners' Union. The piece de resistance was the Coyle letter. Left wing activities in the needle trades, Passaic, and elsewhere were hardly mentioned in this attack. The fight turned around the heart of the American trade union movement, the United Mine Workers.

Fascist Methods Appear

Since the convention the reactionaries have developed the fight on many fronts. In the December *American Federationist*, Green calls for a general attack upon the left wing. Sigman, President of the I. L. G. W., took this cue and illegally seized control of the Cloakmakers' Strike and removed from office the regularly elected trade union officials of the New York Joint Board and its affiliated unions, an action that suspends some 50,000 workers and splits the union.

In the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Hillman-Beckerman machine has intensified its campaign of expulsions and terrorism. Meanwhile preparations are being made, under A. F. of L. supervision, to deal a blow at the Furriers' New York Joint Board. Throughout the needle industry the officials of the unions are rapidly developing genuine fascist tactics; smashing up left wing meetings, blacklisting workers, etc. They are determined to force upon the unions the company-unionization process insisted upon by the employers.

On Many Fronts

In other unions and industries the attack also proceeds apace. Lewis has stolen the election in the Miners' Union by wholesale frauds, and is now preparing to terrorize the approaching convention of the Miners' Union. In the Machinists' Union, Wharton, the new president, is supporting the expulsion policy and the reactionaries of Dist. 8, Chicago, announce that they will put it into effect.

In New York the Socialist leaders of the trade unions have organized "The Committee for the Preservation of the Trade Unions", whose avowed purpose it is to drive the left progressive elements from the unions. It proposes to carry out a national campaign on this basis.

Progress Cannot Be Crushed

But this bitter attack will not succeed in crushing the forces of progress in the unions. The company-unionization of the trade unions by the speed-up of the workers, the abandonment of an active strike policy, and the transformation of the leaders into an American brand of fascists, constitutes an abandonment of the workers' interests which they will not brook. They will find ways and means to register their resistance against these policies and to put into effect a real struggle against the employers.

The expulsion policy, which the bureaucrats are now threatening so loudly to put into effect on a wholesale scale, will prove futile. It failed utterly in the needle trades, Machinists, Carpenters, and other

Their Great Drive Got Them No Members

RECENTLY an election and combination of the General Construction Workers' Industrial Union, No. 319, and the Building Construction Workers' Industrial Union, No. 330 of the I. W. W., ended the term of E. W. Latchem as secretary-treasurer of the latter "industrial union", which averaged 500 members during its last year, ending September 30, 1926. Fellow Worker Latchem submitted an extensive report, telling the whole 500 what is the matter with the I. W. W. in general and the Building Workers' I. U. 330 in particular. In part the report says:

"Our only attempt or pretense at an organization drive in the building industry was during 1925, when we tried to use the situation within the Bridge and Structural Iron Workers' Union, as an entering wedge, for the purpose of spreading I. W. W. propaganda and organization among the building trade unionists.

"In this campaign, was spent the sum of \$1,411.92, and the only returns to date was the total of \$81.50 in cash, which was remitted by the organizer in New York. Of the 25 new members initiated, only two have paid dues the second time and none the third. Five organizers were sent out."

As to what to do about it, Latchem recommends a course of action that verges near, if it does not wholly accept the policy of the T. U. E. L., which the I. W. W. has always termed in depreciation, the policy of "boring from within." He says:

"For some time to come, the I. W. W. in the building industry, cannot expect to be more than an agitational and propaganda body, except in a few isolated places. Therefore, we must so conduct ourselves that our enemies cannot isolate and detach us from direct contact with the workers, both inside and outside the craft unions."

THE principal farm crops of the U. S. A. in 1926 represented a decline in total value of \$1,448,000,000 from the same crops in 1925, the chief declines being in cotton and corn. There is an 8.4 per cent loss in grain production. This reflects the continued agrarian crisis.

Nowhere was it more ruthlessly applied than in the Miners' Union. Left wingers were expelled on all sides. No doubt Lewis thought he had gotten rid of them completely. Yet now see the big opposition movement he has to confront. The urge for progress and an aggressive defense of the workers' interests will find expression in spite of every attempt of the reactionary leadership to suppress it.

The Effective Answer

The answer to the present war against progress in the unions is an intensification of our work in every union. The left wing and progressive elements must unite more firmly than ever for a militant strike policy, for the organization of the unorganized, for the amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial organizations, for the labor party, and for the democratization of the trade unions. If this is done intelligently and persistently the present attack against the forces of progress in the unions will shatter itself in the vain effort to hold back the rising tide.