

Capitalist Efficiency "Socialism"

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THE EMPLOYERS' OFFENSIVE AND THE TRADE UNIONS

THE CHARACTERISTIC of the present situation in the United States is a tremendous movement by the employers for the rationalization of industry, for the development of cheaper, standardized, mass production. To accomplish this they require a docile, demoralized working class which can be cajoled or driven into acceptance of the general program of industrial speed-up. Consequently, the employers are pushing through on all fronts for the liquidation of the workers' class ideology and the breaking down of all their organs of class struggle, economic and political. In this fight, they are using not only the demoralizing capitalist efficiency "socialism" to weaken the workers and their organizations, but also the inevitable methods of frontal attack.

In this drive of the employers the trade unions are rapidly being broken down. From 1919 to 1928 the attack has gone on with varying degrees of intensity. There was the great offensive of 1919-23 to strip the workers of the wages, conditions, and unions they had built during the war. This covered nearly all organized industries, and resulted in heavy defeats for the workers. Finally the great attack has climaxed in the long drive against the Miners' Union and by the breakdown of that organization during the present bituminous strike. The whole offensive of the employers has been marked by an unprecedented use of the various branches of government by the employers against the trade unions. The entire trade union movement is undermined and threatened by this successful offensive of the employers. Its numbers have been seriously reduced; it has been driven from the heavier, key sections of industry; its morale has been greatly lowered; its leadership has become more reactionary and corrupt. The crisis is far-reaching and fundamental.

The trade union leaders, instead of adopting the elementary measures of resistance necessary to check this great open shop drive by amalgamating the craft unions into industrial unions, by the organization of the unorganized, by the formation of a labor party, by carrying through a militant policy, etc., embarked at an early stage upon a program of progressive surrender to the employers,

especially after the disastrous national strike of railroad shopmen in 1922. With their B. & O. Plan, trade union capitalism, and other phases of their newer class collaboration, which they developed in 1923-26, they walked right into the capitalist efficiency "socialism" trap of the employers. They set out to turn the trade unions into adjuncts of the employers' producing forces and instruments for the support of capitalism generally.

But the employers and the trade union leaders are not fully in agreement as to the methods to be employed in dragooning the workers into the mass production speed-up program. The trade union leaders have accepted in principle the increased efficiency program. Ideologically they have surrendered almost completely to the capitalists. They have absorbed most of the illusions and practices of capitalist efficiency "socialism." But upon one point they have deep disagreement with the employers. The trade union leaders, having in mind before all else the defense of their own group interests as a bureaucracy, lay down as their principal condition for complete support of the employers' speed-up program that the employers practice their capitalistic "industrial democracy" and "co-operation" with the workers through the instrumentality of company unionized trade unions formally independent of company control. The trade union leaders want a dues-paying organization wherewith to feather their own nests. To accept company unionism in its present forms means to liquidate themselves as a national bureaucracy. They, therefore, ask for "union-management co-operation"; that is to say, the spread of unionism in the industries on the basis of a general application of the employers' speed-up by collaboration of the employers and the unions. Presumably the workers are to share in the increased returns from this "co-operation." This is the so-called "new wage policy."

On this basis the trade union leaders are making the welkin ring with appeals and calls to the employers to develop a general system of industrial collaboration with the unions. They are eager to help the employers drive the workers. In return they agree to make their unions of the yellowest—the notorious Watson-Parker railroad law shows how far they will go in this direction. Their whole proposition, as shamelessly stated by themselves, is to make the trade unions even more efficient instruments for exploiting the workers than are the company unions. All they ask is that they be the recognized leader of the employers' organizations of workers.

THE EMPLOYERS AND UNION MANAGEMENT CO-OPERATION

But this proposal does not stop the frontal attack, union-smashing campaign of the employers. The great body of employers reject

the union leaders' offers. Only in industries where the unions are actually or potentially strong do the employers accept the new wage policy of union-management "co-operation" such as in the railroads and in the anthracite coal fields. And in these instances they accept it only as a means to still further weaken and demoralize the existing unions as preparatory steps to breaking them up altogether if and when they deem it advisable.

In the great unorganized, trustified industries the answer of big capital to the "union-management co-operation" proposals of the A. F. of L. leadership is an emphatic "No." This was strikingly illustrated in the automobile industry when the employers completely rejected the offers of the A. F. of L. leaders to establish "union-management co-operation" whereupon the "organizing campaign" of the unions was completely abandoned. In not a single instance, despite three years of intensive propaganda by the A. F. of L., have the employers in big, unorganized industries agreed to organize their workers in accordance with the A. F. of L. program. They go right ahead with their open shop campaign, smashing such fragmentary unions as may now exist and taking drastic action (see Colorado) against any unions that may develop. The new wage policy has made a monumental failure to extend even the weakest, yellowest form of unionism among the unorganized workers.

Various considerations impel the employers of the great unorganized industries to reject the A. F. of L.'s "union-management co-operation" proposals: (1) Absence of great mass pressure from the workers. Were large masses of the workers in movement, or were the unions solidly entrenched in the industries, the employers would tend much more, for their own protection, to accept the A. F. of L. program as a means to demoralize them. As it is, these powerful employers feel able to control their workers on "open-shop" basis. (2) Disbelief of the efficiency role of unions in production. The employers do not in the main subscribe to the idea behind the new wage policy that the workers in the shops have to be organized into unions in order for the greatest industrial efficiency to be developed. Even their company unions they have built rather as bars against the spread of trade unionism than as direct adjuncts to production. (3) Danger of left wing capturing even yellow unions. The employers fear that were broad unions, formally independent, created the left wing would find ways of developing mass pressure through them against the employers. They feel safer with no unions at all, or at the most, company unions which are entirely in their hands.

The trade union leaders are banking everything on the acceptance of their "union-management co-operation" policy. They have surrendered ideologically to the employers' speed-up program. They are taking no steps whatever to strengthen the unions by consolidating and extending them. Their programs, much heralded, of organizing the unorganized, depend upon such acceptance. It is not impossible that they would, in the event of such an acceptance, also then tend to amalgamate the unions—for most company unions are industrial in form. These measures would be to control the workers better for the capitalists, not to unite them for struggle.

But the great employers are disregarding the A. F. of L. leaders' pleas and are going ahead with their anti-union campaign. The new wage policy program cannot build up even the weakest unions in the unorganized industries, nor maintain even the existing unions. The employers demand a still more complete surrender, or even entire liquidation of the trade unions. How far they will go in breaking up the unions was seen in the 1919-23 open shop drive when even such organizations of skilled workers as the building and printing trades unions were forced to fight for their very lives. The employers consider the reactionary labor bureaucracy as an asset in their struggle to exploit and control the workers, but in the present objective situation they are unwilling to pay for them the high price of the organization of their workers. The American trade union movement is in danger. The intensified open shop attacks of the employers, culminating in the smashing of the Miners' Union, and the reliance of the autocratic and deeply entrenched trade union bureaucracy upon the utterly futile program of "union-management co-operation" jeopardizes the economic organizations of the workers. The slogan "Save the Trade Unions" becomes a living watchword to rally masses for struggle against the employers and their henchmen, the reactionary trade union leaders.

THE INDUSTRIAL DEPRESSION AND THE EMPLOYERS' OFFENSIVE

In American industries a deep recession now exists. At least 3,000,000 workers are unemployed. The perspective is that the immediate future will see the extension of this depression. The employers are taking advantage of the depression to push their offensive with renewed vigor against the workers' standards and organizations. In many industries, such as shoe, textiles, automobiles, rubber, etc., wage cuts are being made. This wage-cutting campaign is upon a far wider scale than is generally recognized. Often in piece work industries it results in increased speed up, the workers trying to make up by faster working what they lose on

piece prices. The pressure against the unions is being intensified in various ways, by more militant anti-union policies in the shops, by extensive application of injunctions, etc.

Under this added pressure the upper trade union leadership goes further and faster to the right, typical of their policy being the hopelessly reactionary attitude of the miners' officials in the present deep crisis of their union. The A. F. of L. officialdom, instead of developing a fighting policy and building up the unions, will make even greater concessions to the employers unless checked by surging mass movements of the rank and file workers. They will find ways to travel still further in the direction of company unionism, of capitalist efficiency "socialism," of becoming slave drivers for the bosses. They will fight the left wing more viciously. They will become even less responsive to the pressure from their rank and file. Their policy must result in more development in the direction of independent unionism, on the one hand by their splitting off militant sections of the unions that demand a fighting policy, and on the other through the increasing necessity for the left wing to organize new unions where the leaders of the old organizations refuse to unionize the masses. This by no means indicates that the Communists should desert the old unions. On the contrary, the left wing will never surrender these organizations to their reactionary leaders. We can and will work successfully in them. But the organization of the great unorganized masses remains our central task and it must be accomplished either within or without the old trade unions.

INCREASED RESISTANCE OF THE WORKERS

Among the workers increasing currents of discontent and resistance are plainly discernible. In the textile, automobile, shoe, needle and other industries as well as far and wide among the miners, this is in evidence. Low wages, wage cuts, the speed-up, mass unemployment, are at the bottom of this discontent. The industrial depression is sharpening these tendencies and further predisposing the workers to struggle. During the past years of high industrial activity the real wages of the workers, especially in the skilled trades, advanced somewhat. But these gains are being rapidly wiped out in the present industrial depression. The attending resentment of the workers will be directed not only against the capitalists, but also against the reactionary trade union officialdom who refuse to defend the workers' interests. To develop and lead militant struggles against wage cuts, against the speed-up, and against lengthening of the workday is of fundamental importance. We must raise slogans of the shorter workday and social insurance to

combat unemployment as well as for the organization of the unemployed. We must unite both the organized and the unorganized to defend their threatened living standards.

A favorable factor in the present situation in the United States tending to break down the relative isolation of the left wing is the tendency of the progressives, or middle group, to break its united front with the right wing union officialdom. This united front was formed in the years following the big 1922 railroad strike and was built around the various phases of the "new orientation" or "higher strategy of labor." But trade union capitalism is a manifest failure, as demonstrated clearly by the B. of L. E. debacle, the B. & O. Plan is even more of a failure, the La Follette movement is dissolved and the right wing has fled back to the two old parties. All of which tends to disillusion the best elements among the progressives about these class collaboration policies, to cut them loose from the right wing, and to predispose them to making united front movements with the left wing on the basis of elementary programs of struggle. It is the task of the T. U. E. L. to unite these elements in the unions, for struggle against the union leaders and employers, for the organization of the unorganized, for the labor party, etc. Such united front movements, however, must be based upon mass contacts and with the left wing emphasizing its leading role. The disillusionment of the progressives is intensified by the spread of the industrial depression which emphasizes the bankruptcy of right wing leadership.

The employers are carrying through a great offensive against the ideology, standards, and organizations of the workers. The workers are developing the mood and spirit to resist this offensive. It is our Party's task to organize their fight and to give them leadership to strive to develop a counter-offensive. They are becoming increasingly responsive to our slogans for a Labor Party, for the organization of the unorganized, amalgamation, etc., as well as to our general party program of struggle against all phases of American imperialism. In the United States it is a period of increasing discontent and struggle in which, with proper policies and Communist aggressiveness, we can make real progress in building our Party, the T. U. E. L., and the various organs of our movement.