

# Foster Reviews New Book on Hotel Union

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

One of the weaknesses of the educational work of the labor movement is the lack of detailed histories of the respective trade unions. Very few, indeed, of the organizations, especially the old AFL unions, have such accounts of their origin, policies and struggles. In consequence, the membership is vantage of a sound knowledge of the historical background of the unions that now mean so much in their daily lives.



An important contribution towards counteracting this general weakness is the book, *Growth of a Union*, by Jay Rubin and M. J. Obermeier. This 320-page work is at once a history of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Alliance and Bartenders International League, and a biography of Edward Flore, who has been the General President of that organization for 33 years. To the 250,000 members of the union, which is the fifth largest in the AFL, this book will be welcome educational material and the student of the general labor movement will also need it in his library.

The *Growth of a Union* is not only the life story of the union organization of the hotel and restaurant workers, but it also outlines the general course of the labor movement since the time of the Civil War. In our days

when organized labor, with its 13,500,000 members, has won for itself a position of wide acceptance in our economic and political life, it is particularly valuable to review the hard and bitter pioneering struggles through which the organized workers passed in order to reach their present stage of development. And the authors of this timely book make it very clear that the fight of the hotel and restaurant workers for an organization and livable working conditions ranks alongside of the classical struggles of other vital sections of the working class.

In the book there are many excellent chapters, which testify to the care and diligence of the authors in collecting the facts. There are recitals of the early coming together of the pioneer unionists of the industry, of the outrageous conditions of exploitation of the workers by the employers, of the ruthless policies of the bosses to prevent unionization, of the many hard-fought strikes in various cities, of the experiences of the union in World War I, in the "prosperity" period of the 1920's, in the great economic crisis of the 1930's, in the years of the New Deal, and now in the prosecution of World War II. Among the best of these many chapters, I should say, are those dealing with the struggle against and the elimination of gangsterism and racketeering in the union.

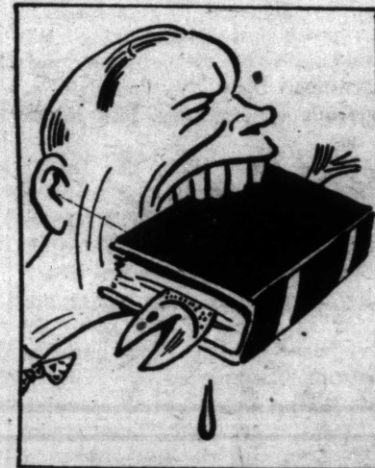
While signaling these valuable features of the *Growth of a Union*, it needs to be said, how-

ever, that the authors might well have dealt more critically with many major questions of labor policy, particularly those in which the leadership of the AFL has played, and often continues to play, a conservative role. Among such questions may be included the long-continued reluctance of the AFL leaders to organize the great masses of unskilled workers, their generation-long fight against industrial unionism, their deeply-hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union, their present-day refusal to join forces with the Soviet trade unions, their many years long gross neglect of the rights of Negroes, their ultra-conservative attitude towards labor's political action, etc. etc. It is true that the authors touch upon many of these controversial questions, but in general they do not deal adequately with them.

After more than 50 years of struggle, the hotel and restaurant workers have built up a powerful union, one which is now playing a progressive role in the AFL. Rubin and Obermeier tell how this big job was done, and they also point out the road for the further development of the union. Their work is doubly important because they speak as the outstanding leaders of the union in New York. In this book the authors have accomplished a task that clear-thinking young leaders of other unions would do well to pattern after. Every labor union in the country should have its history fully compiled and in book form for the benefit of its

members and for such others as may want to acquaint themselves with the epic struggle of the labor movement.

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