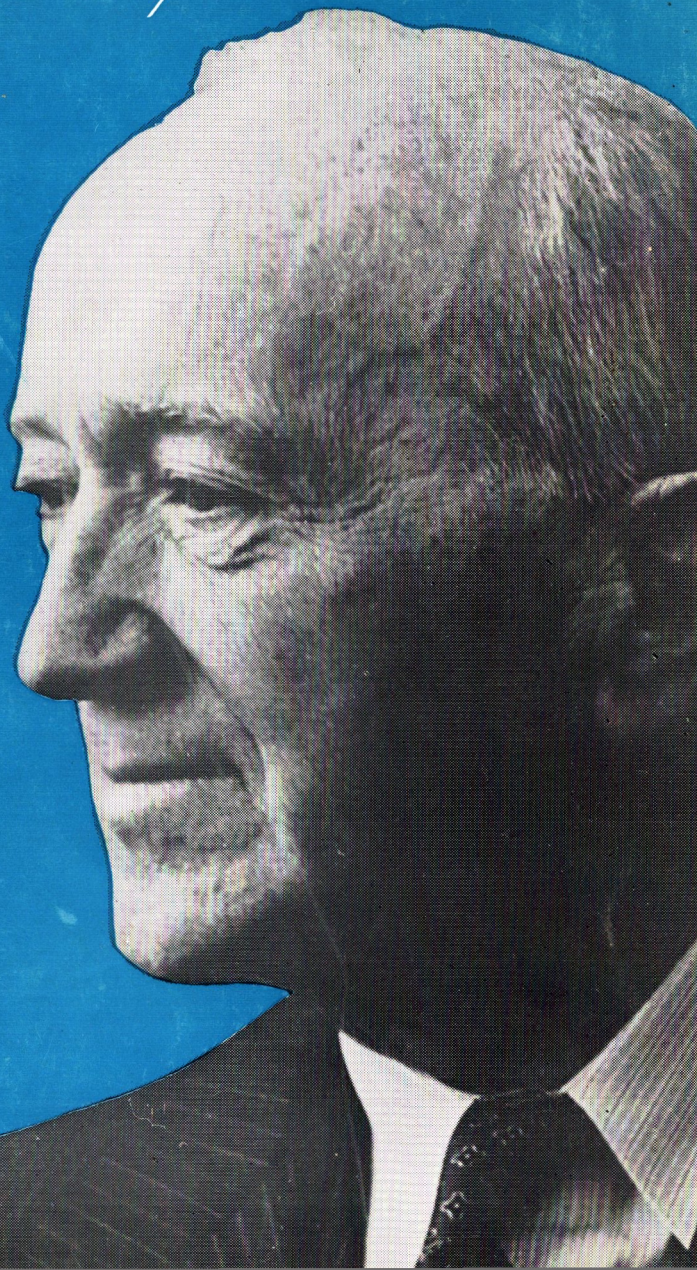


WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

An Appreciation / by JOSEPH NORTH



*For His
75th
Anniversary*

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by JOSEPH NORTH



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FORWORD

THIS IS THE story of an American whose life spans almost half the years since our nation became a Republic. William Z. Foster will be 75 years old, February 25, 1956. His years and achievements embody much of the history of American labor on which he has made an indelible imprint. He is the foremost Communist in America. The members of his party revere him as patriot, leader and exemplar of the power inherent in the working class into which he was born and to which he has devoted his life since the age of 14 when he participated in his first strike.

Americans could well examine his life and see for themselves the stuff of a Communist. It is wise, for serious people, to go to original sources regarding the truth about Communists and about Communism. This man, engaged all his years as a labor and political leader, has put down his ideas, his experiences, his theoretical conclusions in thirteen books and in more than a hundred pamphlets. The words that follow, in this booklet, are written in commemoration of his seventy-fifth anniversary and in appreciation of the man and his work.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

An Appreciation

Child of 'Skitereen'

THREE YEARS AFTER the Civil War ended, James Foster, a tall, blue-eyed immigrant born of peasant stock in County Carlow, Ireland, arrived in the United States and settled in Boston. Alert, combative, and yet virtually illiterate, he was a young man with an old dream. The Irishman fled his native land because he loved Ireland well, so well that the Crown's armed emissaries trailed him after a projected revolt to win Irish independence had failed.

The Fenian brought his wife Elizabeth, a tall, slender yet hardy woman of English and Scottish ancestry, a weaver whose young years were spent in the clatter of Britain's textile industry. She bore him twenty-three children.

Jim Foster was known as a fighting Irishman, forever ready to jump to the defense of the Ould Sod and his Catholic faith, but he could take his religion or leave it. Elizabeth, however, earnestly upheld the Faith. Eighteen of her children failed to survive to maturity. One of those who did, William, was the apple of her eye. Frustrated in this life she was determined that this son would become a priest of the more promising existence to come.

Theirs was the typical immigrant's life of gaslit America. Bounded by the deserts of illiteracy and the peaceful

seas of the Faith, a tempestuous existence flourished in the slums of the poor. Not only did they mark the seasons celebrating births and weddings and deaths, the ideas of the times agitated their days. The Foster household instantly became a center of Fenian disputation. If there was little food in the kitchen pot, there was ample sustenance for the mind and the spirit.

William Z. Foster was born in Taunton, Massachusetts, February 25, 1881, the same year that the American Federation of Labor was founded. When he was six the family left the town where the red flag of revolution was first raised in this land, in 1776—

*"We'll defend it with valor and virtue and votes
The Red Flag of Taunton that waves o'er the green."*

—and they moved to Seventeenth and Kater Street, Philadelphia, where the poorest of the poor lived. The Foster household stood on a cobblestoned street of weather-beaten, ramshackle dwellings. Many of the houses were tenanted by the half-starved, the diseased, folk who had lost hope in life. Casual labor, beggary, petty thieving were common. Yet given half a chance you could see how they yearned for more of the life than the brand they inherited. The boy's gang to which young Bill belonged, the Bulldogs, had a social club where they sang and danced, a rattling good baseball team, a fife-and-drum corps that was said to be the best boy's band in the country. And most of the youngsters came to manhood of industrious labor. Like Bill's father who earned the bread for his family washing carriages in the livery stables, they had a sturdy, unspoiled pride in their class.

And most, like him, never had a day's book learning. "I never went to school but one day," Jim laughed, "and that day school did not keep." And so Mother Foster. Yet she revealed an innate intellectual vigor and she was

desperately eager that young Bill would be at the books. She grieved that they could only give him four years of formal schooling, from the age of seven to ten, but she noted that he revealed a precocious aptitude. Often he sat down on the curbstone as a youngster selling papers after school to spell out the words in the Philadelphia *Evening Star*, the *News*, the *Item* and the *Call*, that told of big strikes in Pittsburgh and further West. It was a time of great social battles as the Robber Barons hogged a continent. He read the stories with an excitement born of some young glimmering of understanding and loyalty to the class into which he was born.

Mother Foster encouraged him to frequent the free public library which had, then, the aura of charity. Only the lower classes took books out on loan: the prosperous bought them, or rented them from private libraries. What did that matter to the tall, slender blue-eyed youngster who was drawn by the magic of the printed page. He became a veritable boarder at the library, and once when he brought the family priest, Father O'Connor a copy of *Irish Martyrs and Patriots*, the cleric straight-away decided that the promising lad must go to the Jesuit college where he had studied. At that time, young Bill had not yet decided whether to dedicate his life to the church or to Irish independence.

Apprenticed at ten to old Kretchman, a German sculptor and engraver, he continued reading whatever books his inclinations put into his hands. In the three years he worked for the old artist who helped to build the giant statue of William Penn atop Philadelphia's City Hall, he kept at the books. In his early teens he began to read the histories of the French and American Revolutions, heady stuff indeed. Then he passed on to Tom Paine's works, marveled at his *Age of Reason*, a little later to Lecky's *History of European Morals*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Herbert Spencer. He

topped these off with Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*. He read these books with a growing amazement. When he closed the covers he was through with his mother's dream of priesthood.

Possessed of an extraordinary inquisitive mind the youngster noted well the times in which he lived. The first fifteen years of his life was an era of great strikes, the heyday of the Knights of Labor, the years the American Federation of Labor was coming to the fore. Homestead and its Pinkerton invasion was in 1892; in May of 1894, in the midst of the industrial crisis of the time when breadlines became a way of life, Eugene V. Debs headed the American Railway Union's strike which only the Federal Government and treason by the aristocrats of the unions could crush. And young Foster plunged into his first strike, that of the Philadelphia street carmen in 1895, when he was 14. The company had summoned professional scabs who carried their deadly Smiths and Wessons under their coats to join the police violence. The youngsters of "Skitereen," as they called the working class community where Foster lived, promptly joined the strikers. Mounted police charged a peaceful parade in which the strikers carried brooms and the cursing men in uniform struck savagely at them with their nightsticks. The boys retaliated by spreading heaps of ashes across the tracks that utterly ruined the run of the brand-new electric cars. Though armed police accompanied the scab motormen the boys wrecked every car that ventured into the territory.

The strike left a lasting impression on the youngster's mind. Though he was but 14, and belonged as yet to no trade union, he was already a unionist in sympathy. Nobody, even at that age, had to tell him who initiated "force and violence." He had learned Primary Lesson One: that the individual worker is helpless against the employer supported by the government and that only by

unity with other workers could he make his strength count. One man alone was one man alone. That lesson did much to determine the life's course of this boy who was to become a generation later the labor leader most feared by America's mighty industrial dynasts.

Working and Reading

KRETCHMAN, A CRUSTY old German yet an artist of exceptional gifts was fond of the alert lad from the slums who had a way of catching on fast. He taught Bill lessons in all the arts he knew so well—clay modeling, plaster of Paris work, wood carving, stone cutting, drawing, painting, electroplating. But the son of "Skitereen," of Jim and Elizabeth, had no inclination for a life of art. Some impulse born of his class, of his associations and sympathies, drove his interests to the great, clamorous shops and factories springing up in Philadelphia as they were across the land. "I was drawn as by a magnet to the shops," he wrote later.

Endowed with a strong frame, an abundance of energy, and an insatiable curiosity about all the processes of industry, he found work in the American Type Founders Company. Three years there and his constitution was soaked with the poisonous lead. But you take work where there is work, a simple dictum of the workingman's life. After his dangerous years at the lead plant, young Foster—reading more avidly than ever in his evenings and on Sundays—found a job in a fertilizer plant, first as a common laborer, then, as steam fitter, fireman, engineer, and skilled fertilizer mixer. No job for the squeamish was this: the floor, as Bill has written, "was a creeping carpet of maggots." In the summer hundreds of tons of rotting swill festered outside the plant in the blazing sun. Here he worked, among the rotting disposal of a city, amid filth, his head filled with bright thoughts from John Stuart

Mill, Lecky, Paine, Darwin. After three years here he came down with the first stages of tuberculosis. Virtually alone now, his mother dead at 53, his father at 56, Bill quit the plant, worked at various jobs in the South, in turpentine forests where he caught his first glimpse of the Negro's horrifying lot, and then he went to sea, hoping that the open, clear air would cure his lungs.

Aboard ship he thought often of a soapboxer he had heard on the street near his home one day in his nineteenth year, who had talked eloquently of a time when the workers would own all the goods and the resources of the land through their state, a workingman's state. Socialism, the speaker had called it, a word that never again left the mind of the young listener. The speaker had distributed a leaflet which bore a cartoon Bill never forgot. A big figure labeled "Labor" cowered beneath a whip wielded by a puny figure, "the Boss." The whip was titled, "the Job." To young Bill, then a tall, slim, blue-eyed lad it seemed the most magnificent drawing he had ever seen. He joined the Socialist Party at the age of 19.

Now, at sea, the years from 1901 to 1904, passed quickly on the old, square-rigged sailing ships that fascinated him. Twice around Cape Horn, once around the Cape of Good Hope, he traveled some fifty thousand miles, assessing life in the squalid water-front towns of Africa, Australia, South America. He became an able-bodied seaman who could, as he wrote, do everything aboard ship from making a ratline on a spinning jenny to stepping a mast. Despite hard, unremitting work, unceasing rigors and danger, his sick lungs began to mend in the exhilarating open. And his mind continued to grow. There were his books, for seamen were reading men, and he read novels like Eugene Sue's *Wandering Jew* as he rounded Cape Horn, believing that no man could ever again write so profound a work.

And above all there were the men of the crew, rugged,

fearless, tough, thoughtful, a race of storytellers, a world of life behind their weather-beaten eyes. The rough camaraderie of the sea was attuned to his innate regard for his class, his people, working people. He learned much of men as he listened to tars like Ole the Norwegian who disappeared from his side in the furious blow rounding the hemisphere and was lost in the seas, and from men like Frenchy, who went down the same time, "just two more sailors, unknown and unsung," Bill said later, "lost off that great grave yard of deep-water ships and men, Cape Horn." Drama, tragedy and sometimes comedy, coursed through every day of his sea life. And he knew the dull pain of hunger that was scarcely alleviated by that daily pound of sea biscuit, the ration of salt beef, salt pork, pea soup. For often the ship's supplies ran short and the men subsisted on diminished starvation rations until they came to port.

The three years on the oceans stayed the consumption of his lungs, and taught him, more surely than ever, that only the combined power of the seamen, in strong unions, could alter the miserable life he had seen. On his return he joined the Atlantic Coast Seaman's Union.

And so a workingman's life, a workingman's thought, his fibre, was being fashioned. The consciousness of his class, strong at the outset, was becoming as much a part of him as the blood that ran in his veins. And yet he had more to learn, avid as he was for knowledge, for experience, for ideas, athirst for everything life had to reveal. He decided, shortly after his return from the sea, to go West. The mysteries of his native land must be plumbed, mastered, as he had the seven seas. What of the Rockies, the great Mississippi, the Far West that had, since Greeley's day, drawn so many of the previous generations of Americans and of his own? What was life like beyond the Great Divide? And off he went, as so many had before him, hoboing, as they called it, riding the freights, which

had brought many a good man to a horrible death beneath the grinding wheels of steel. But the young workman was in excellent control of his reflexes, had learned to stay among the quick and not the dead, and he mastered the knack of riding the fast freights, learned to travel in cold, often thirty degrees below zero, learned to avoid the brakemen who would beat you with brake handles and the railroad police who would shoot at you as though you were game.

Bill continued to travel across the nation, learning its special idiosyncracies as a Harvard professor might get to know his Yard, his campus green. And forever he talked and listened, listened and talked to the men known as floating migratory workers, the loggers, sawmill men, harvest hands, sheep herders, cowpunchers, fishermen, sailors, miners, railroad construction laborers. A hard, dangerous education but infinitely rewarding. And so, about the time upper-class Americans finished their studies at Harvard or at Princeton, he became steeped in the life and tradition of the American working class. He was graduating, *summa cum laude*, into a manhood that would reap unprecedented good for his class, his nation.

Socialist and Wobbly

IN MANY WAYS his political education began, or at least quickened, in Portland, Oregon, where he settled for the time. The city was a turbulent port near the turn of the century, lusty, argumentative, untamed, the frontier flexing its muscles. The streets were filled with seamen off the ships, brawny loggers down from the camps and the sawmills, the restless migratory workers in from the wheat-fields and orchards, all of whom talked long and earnestly of their lives and their work as they nursed a glass of beer or walked down the waterfront under the Pacific sun between jobs.

The ideas of Socialism were astir, and also other social and political ideas. Bill, now a sober twenty-four, serious yet companionable, worked at various jobs, logging, building, railroad construction, farming. And reading. Reading every spare moment, his quick mind sifting the ideas, his steel-trap memory storing them away: the *Communist Manifesto*, *Wage Labor and Capital*, *Value, Price and Profit*, *Capital* itself. If he read more than his fellows, they did not regard him as some kind of scholarly recluse, for he displayed a passionate interest in their lives. He was an ardent sportsman, a good mixer despite his penchant for the books, and he knew and shared their days as they lived them. He did not live apart, neither then or afterward.

This industrial worker had a passion, an absolute greed, for life. He must taste it all. And when a brother-in-law suggested that they stake a homestead in the foothills of the Oregon Cascades, he took him up, as much perhaps, to finally cure his tuberculosis as for any other reason. For three years, for several months each year, he lived in the piny wilderness among the magnificent cliffs and valleys, working at the immemorial chores of the farm-side, talking to the neighbors of evenings and Sundays, discovering their aspirations, their trials, their tribulations. And with that thoroughness that is his, he came to know the wild life and the plant life, studying them with his characteristic meticulousness. He hunted the cougar and the deer, the brown bear and the grouse, knew their ways and their habitats. That was during the summers. The other nine months each year during this time he worked at his industrial jobs, continued his political and labor agitation.

After three years he sold his grubstake, the only property he had ever owned in his life, for something within him stirred with repugnance at the sense of privately owning that which all men should have in common.

His primary interest was in the Portland, Oregon, branch of the Socialist Party. He had plunged into its discussions and its activities with characteristic ardor, distributed the *Appeal to Reason*, the organ of the Socialists, organized, read everything on politics and political economy that came to the West Coast: Paul Lafargue, George Plekhanov, Karl Kautsky, August Bebel. News of the 1905 Revolution in tsarist Russia quickened his imagination and led him to think and study more of the ideas that the European Marxists expressed. And there was virtually a library of reading to do in the books and pamphlets of American labor writers, primarily, in that time, of Daniel De Leon's works, the leader of the Socialist Labor Party.

When the Industrial Workers of the World, the "Wobblies" as they came to be known, was born in 1905 Bill studied its program with great interest but he decided, at that time, not to join it because he could not agree with its scorn for parliamentary, electoral struggle. Working, about this time, as a fireman on a West Coast railroad, he decided, after six months, to join the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers as prelude to becoming an engineer.

The engineer on his train, an elderly man of wide reading and an ardent Shakespearian (not unusual for the time), liked the knowledgeable youngster and one day gave him a play of the Bard's to read. Foster sat up all night, after the twelve-hour working day, reading, entranced. The engineer could not believe his assistant had read the work when Foster returned it to him the next day and only when the young fireman quoted extensive passages was he convinced. The incident is significant for it revealed the wide cultural tastes of young Foster, the archetype of the industrial workingman, and it throws light on the relatively high cultural development of so many proletarians in the time before Hollywood, the

radio, and the television worked their deadening influence.

While Bill was a fireman the panic of 1907 broke. A week before, it was boom-time, then overnight the armies of the jobless filled the streets desperately seeking work. Money literally disappeared in the economic hurricane, an indelible example to Foster of capitalism's insane method of production and distribution.

Bill, twenty-six then, totally immersed in the theoretical problems of Socialism, surveyed the scene. His party was rent with dissension even though it grew from a handful in 1901 to some 42,000 in 1909. Many of the urban middle classes, disillusioned with the two major parties, distrusting the monopolies, had joined the Socialist Party. More articulate than the workers they siezed the party's leadership, influenced its policies which they watered down to something, Bill felt, that was akin to the views of William Jennings Bryan. "Their maximum program was a thin gruel of government-owned industries duly bought from the capitalists and called 'Socialism'," he wrote later. The Socialist leaders resisted the desire of the working class members for a party that would genuinely lead the nation's wage workers into combat for a better life today, as well as for total liberation later. The leader shied from collision with Gompers' union bureaucrats, sabotaged the struggle for industrial unions for which Debs had long since pioneered in his American Railway union and for which the I.W.W. had been formed.

Discontent with the Socialist leadership was strongest in the West and Foster shared it deeply. Capitalism could not be defeated by the policies of his party's leaders. He shared the views of the left, the radicals, that the Robber Barons, who loved wealth more deeply than they did their own grandmothers, as a Marxist had put it, would only yield to the superior power of the working

class. You had to fight hard for every single inch. He fought for his views along with other Socialist left-wingers of the Coast, and in 1909, he and others like him, were expelled from the party in the state of Washington. The event was of historic importance, for it marked the beginning of the process from which a left-wing Socialist movement crystallized in America.

The ardent Socialist worker needed a political home. But where do you go from here? The Socialist Labor Party? But De Leon's narrow political views repelled him, for the leader of the S.L.P. disavowed the importance of every-day struggle for partial, immediate demands. Concessions wrung from the employers, De Leon argued, were only so many "banana peels under the feet of the proletariat." Furthermore, he espoused dual unionism, which Foster was to regard, not long afterward, as a baneful influence upon the left-wing working class fighters of America.

Sensing the crass sectarianism of the S.L.P., unable to accept fully the views of the I.W.W., Bill and his associates formed a new anti-capitalist party, "The Wage Workers Party." Ever groping for an adequate program, he was never fully satisfied with the program of this group. Its reply to the middle-class dominated Socialist Party was to exclude all members of the middle class from its ranks. It regarded industrial unionism as its ace card, but it also opposed parliamentary action. The organization was dead a few years later. The big fights in the Socialist Party were still to come—in 1912, and the national split in 1919 which led to the formation of the Communist Party.

And so Bill found himself in the ranks of the I.W.W. He was later to write, in his typically courageous self critical manner that his failure to return to the Socialist Party was a sore political error. It would have been far better, he came to feel, if he had remained within the Socialist Party, allied himself with its left-wing which

was to mature in the party he sought, the Communist Party.

Years of Search

THE NEXT DOZEN years were years of intense search, crowned by his ardent and arduous labors on behalf of the working class. He had joined the IWW's brave fight for free speech in the Northwest, reporting it for the *Workingmen's Paper*. Heartily he endorsed the splendid fighting spirit of the IWW at that time, which filled the prisons with the proletarian champions of their constitutional rights, many of them "voluntary" prisoners, demanding to be put in jail when their comrades were arrested. In the course of this struggle he met Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who was to become a comrade-in-arms for much of their lives. He served two months in jail during the free speech fights and it was while he was in prison that he took out a Wobbly card.

Late in the year of 1909, his head full of the ideas he had read of the European radical labor movement, he decided to travel to the Continent to study the experiences of labor there, most specifically, the syndicalist movement of France. He had a slim pocketbook, \$100, for the long trip but his fortune was his powerful will, his intense curiosity, and his boundless resourcefulness. He hoboed his way to New York and from there worked his way across.

In Paris the French Syndicalists heartily welcomed the alert militant from distant America. Living with working class families, he learned the language with remarkable speed; little escaped his eye in this era of labor's tumultuous growth in France. He studied the nationwide railroad strike the Syndicalists led and he was impressed especially with their basic trade union practice. It made mighty good sense to him. They stayed *within* the conservative unions to spread their ideas and influence, shar-

ing the life and struggles of the rank-and-file members of the reformist-led unions and, in time, he saw, they acquired the leadership of France's trade union movement. This procedure answered the many questions on trade union strategy that had been growing in him for some time. It was to play an enormous part in his future activities for he determined he would bring this concept back to the IWW and fight for it.

In Germany where he interviewed Kautsky, Legien, and other leaders, he became convinced, during his six-month stay, that right-wing Socialism, here as in all lands, was a roadblock to the progress of the working class. Penniless, a condition scarcely novel to him, he walked the dusty roads 150 miles to attend the national congress of the German trade unions in Dresden and what he saw there confirmed his previous impressions. He went on to Budapest to represent the Wobblies at the meeting of the International Trade Union Secretariat. On his arrival, Franz Josef's gendarmes arrested him for sleeping in a moving-van on the city's outskirts. The French delegates induced him to accept a small loan of a few francs, and after a day or two Vincent St. John, head of the Wobblies, cabled him to return immediately to report his findings to an IWW convention.

Back in Chicago, September of 1911, he pressed his ideas of joining the big unions and working from within. That became his central, overriding objective and he stumped for it with all the vigor and persuasiveness he owned.

It is hard for progressive Americans today to realize what this meant in that time. Merely to air this idea damned you as an opportunist of extraordinary degree. Hadn't the giants, De Leon, Eugene V. Debs, Big Bill Haywood denounced the old AFL unions? The most militant in American labor regarded the AFL with profound mistrust, mistaking the value of the organization for its

leaders so many of whom were hopelessly corrupted by the fat salaries and who preached collaboration with their oppressors, the lords of Big Business. But, Bill argued in return, you are playing into the hands of the misleaders, of the employers themselves, if you drain away the bravest, the most far-sighted into dual unions. Stay inside the big organizations, he pleaded, persuade the members to fight for stronger unions, honest leaders, better wages and working conditions, and for the advanced ideas of ultimate Socialism.

The heresy of this persuasive young leader did win him a number of outstanding workingmen, men touched with the genius and fire he had, men like Jack Johnstone, like Earl C. Ford, like Frank Little (the brave unionist who was lynched by vigilantes in Butte, Montana), like Joe Manley. Even Bill Haywood was shaken, and came to agree, at least in part, with Foster. The significance of Bill's fight on this issue is of critical import in the history of American labor, doubtless his single greatest contribution to the strategy and theory of trade unionism.

And he crusaded for it, together with like-minded Socialists and militants in the labor movement. Rebuffed by the IWW, Foster organized the Syndicalist League of North America in 1912, modeled after the French Confederation of Labor. As Foster wrote later, while its position against dual unionism was sound, the League petered out in two years primarily because of its incorrect anti-parliamentary and semi-anarchist program.

Birth of a Labor Leader

HIS TRADE UNION theories were later tested in the crucible of the biggest strike ever held in the packinghouse industry which he and Johnstone led for the Chicago Federation of Labor in 1917. Most veteran union leaders did not be-

lieve this industry could possibly be organized. Did it not consist of illiterate foreign-born workers, each segment of which could scarcely communicate with the other, Poles and Slavs of other nationalities, Irishmen, as well as many Negroes. The owners, Armour, Swift, the others of the Big Five were as arrogant a set of industrial cutthroats as ever met a payroll. They had refused to grant even a penny's raise in thirteen years. Wages had sunk so low as twelve and a half cents an hour for the unskilled. Families, by the thousands, were undernourished and lived dreadfully in shacks around the stockyards as many came to know from Upton Sinclair's novel. *The Jungle*, the material for which was collected by the Socialist Ella Reeve Bloor, later a founder of the Communist Party. The profits of the big packers spiralled to unequalled heights as they batted off the world war.

A dozen AFL packinghouse unions were involved in the movement Foster, and his friend, Johnstone, led. The packers, the topflight AFL leaders, the Government, fearful of the strike, maneuvered the movement into arbitration early in 1918. The government arbitrator agreed to hold meetings to hear the workers' side of the story. For three weeks the workers Foster brought out of the stockyard slums testified, one after another taking the stand to tell simply, and irrefutably, of their hardships. They spoke of children who went to school hungry, thinly clad for the harsh Chicago winters, told of work that devoured health, of accidents that took a horrifying toll in the great plants. The multi-millionaire owners sneered at the testimony, one remarking that two pairs of shoes yearly for a worker's child was more than enough: a child only had one pair of feet. A Polish woman worker came to the stand, her plain, peasant countenance ravaged by years of hard work, an old-world kerchief over her head. Yes, she replied to the examiner's question, she did once own a hat but that was back in Poland. "Since I came to

America it got worn out and I've never been able to buy another."

When the ghastly parade ended, the arbitrator was compelled to decide in favor of the workers. He granted the eight-hour day with ten hours pay, wage increases, better working conditions and a partial recognition of the union. Foster and his associates organized the industry of 200,000, the first American mass production industry to be solidly organized. The union included native and foreign-born, white and Negro. Not only was the victory a milestone in American labor organization, it set a precedent for the organization of Negroes into the AFL. Foster's insistence upon the inclusion of Negroes in the same unions as whites had a major and pioneering effect. This was the largest Negro trade union membership ever organized in any American city—and this at a time when very many AFL craft unions barred Negroes from membership.

The victory, naturally, brought Foster merited prestige. Samuel Gompers, who ruled the AFL like a tsar, respected Foster's abilities even as he feared his accomplishments. The AFL bureaucracy had tried to undermine the national packinghouse campaign from the outset, working in collusion with the employers.

If they were shocked at this advance, they were scarcely prepared for what was to come. Nobody had an idea that Foster carried, at the conclusion of the packinghouse campaign, an outline in his pocket for the organization of steel. He envisaged a whirlwind campaign that would involve all important steel centers simultaneously, to be carried out by all the unions claiming jurisdiction in that industry. His proposals to propel the masses of workers into motion were realistic, his idea of federating the unions was practical, as the packinghouse campaign had proven. He had a simple plan for financing the campaign, twenty-five cents per capita from each member of the

fifteen initiator AFL unions. The plan had scope, grandeur, and a meticulous care for detail.

Gompers was indeed an unwilling horse to be led to this trough. He pretended agreement in general but he and his satellites threw every conceivable roadblock in Foster's way, sabotaging everything but the principle of a federated campaign. Certainly the steel workers, sweated to death by the twelve-hour day, were ready to organize. That Foster knew and his generalship had conceived a swift, mass campaign, a concerted lightning offensive that would bring the workers into the union *en masse*. For a long time he had scorned the halting, cautious, dry-as-dust methods of the swivel-chair bureaucrats who considered it a triumph to get workers into the unions singly, or in a small trickle over inordinate lengths of time.

Foster requested one hundred organizers for the campaign: Gompers' men granted him six. His proposal for a twenty-five cent assessment was simply ignored. His idea of a national campaign executed simultaneously in all districts was whittled down to one area, the Calumet region around Chicago. The AFL national headquarters pledged not a single red penny; the fifteen unions voted a measly \$100 each. Many a lesser man would have recoiled at the task before him, feared the loss of face if his plans went awry under such deliberate handicaps. Yet, Bill calculated, the time was so ripe, the employers raking in fantastic profits on wartime steel, the workers were so eager to move, that he was confident of the outcome. Union work began in Gary, South Chicago, Joliet, Indiana Harbor.

The very first meeting in Gary amply confirmed Foster's analysis of the workers' mood: fifteen thousand steel workers stormed their way into the halls. Similarly in the other steel towns of the region that same week. By the thousands the workers of every nationality streamed into the union halls to take out union cards. The barons

of steel, the mightiest in all the land, were horrified. They had regarded the threat to unionize the industry lightly, knowing well enough how Gompers felt about matters. But they had not reckoned on a maverick, a radical, a man named Foster.

United States Steel, the greatest corporation in all the world and the mightiest in all history, struck back. Its general staff of crafty advisers, its unlimited assistance from the government of the mightiest power on earth, its treasury of wealth were marshalled to defeat the plans of the man from "Skitereen" whose father was a carriage-washer. John Pierpont Morgan's armies used every tactic of force and guile, every wile of concession and stroke of naked violence.

To stymie the surge toward unionization, they granted four successive national wage increases and finally conceded a basic eight-hour day. They set up a bewildering profusion of company unions, and fired 30,000 workers for holding cards in the trade unions. They fostered terrorist outfits like the Ku Klux Klan, sent spies out by the thousands, mobilized the town, county and state officials to grind out repressive decisions.

And yet, after fourteen months of hard, unremitting grueling struggle the union was firmly established in nearly all key plants of the main steel districts. At least a quarter of a million workers joined, Negroes, native-born, immigrants and the sons of immigrants. The impossible had been achieved.

The strike for which the workers pressed to gain union recognition and to rivet down the gains their surge toward organization had achieved, was called September 22, 1919. Some 365,000 workers in fifty cities walked out: a giant blow against a giant enemy. Judge Elbert Gary, head of U.S. Steel, fought remorselessly with all the brute power money can buy: armies of scabs, private gunmen, police departments wholesale, soldiers. Civil rights were scorned:

the newspapers ground out false reports in every issue. The AFL national office sabotaged the strike every conceivable way.

For it must be remembered that Foster had begun preparing this strike during wartime, when the policy of the AFL leaders was "social peace" and collaboration with the war-mad profiteers. They carried this policy over into the immediate postwar period when the strike occurred. To Foster, World War I was clearly an imperialist war for the division of the world's markets and the only interest the workers could have in it, he argued, was to bring it to a speedy end upon the most democratic terms possible. He had opposed the outbreak of the war and United States participation in it. His Syndicalist League of North America and the International Trade Union Educational League had condemned imperialist war and world war in particular. After the conservative leaders of the workers had betrayed them into the war, Foster decided that the best course he could take was to exploit the war situation in order to organize the great masses of unorganized workers. Similarly, Foster's views on postwar problems clashed with the continuing class-collaboration perspective of the AFL bureaucracy.

So the chips were down: yet despite the daily sabotage of Gompers' lieutenants, the strike continued against enormous odds. Twenty-two strikers were murdered, like the beloved organizer, Mrs. Fanny Sellins. Hundreds were slugged and shot, thousands went to prison and yet more than a million and a half men, women and children struggled on for three and a half months. One of the reasons it could continue this long was that a new system of providing food, collected from many areas, had been devised, which for a time saved the workers and their families from being starved out. Foster was everywhere in the thick of the battle, speaking in company towns where the Legion's officials assured him in advance

his life wasn't worth a plugged nickel if he showed up. The workers venerated him as a fearless and incorruptible leader. But human endurance could not withstand the crushing combination of forces, and on January 8, 1920, the strike was called off.

But it culminated in establishing the principle of the eight-hour day. The value of industrial unions, on a national, industry-wide scale had been proven. What the dead hand of Gompers and his associates could stifle in 1919, no man could smother in 1935, no, not after this historic experience. The organization of steel in 1935 was built on the struggle Foster led in 1919.

Unquestionably the workers could have been successful in 1919, this Foster knew. And he had planned, after steel, to achieve the organization of all industries in the land. No question too that the organization of the unorganized would have smashed the Gompers' machine, given rise, he wrote, to a new spirited, able leadership that would reflect the sturdy mass of America's industrial rank-and-file.

Toward Communism

THE EXPERIENCE IN steel and in packinghouse fortified certain conclusions Foster had long held. Successful work within the mass unions to win the majority for a healthy working class program required the existence within them of an organized militant minority, a factor lacking in both the great campaigns. He set about to remedy that lack by building the Trade Union Educational League. Regrettably, many honest left-wingers still wore the blinkers of dual unionism. This was not only true of old militants, it was also true of most advanced workers then founding the Communist movement in this land. The labor movements of many other lands suffered from the same malady.

At about this time a bolt flashed from the first workers' country of the world, the Soviet Republic. There the great proletarian leader named Lenin wrote his famous work that was translated throughout the world, and here, in the U.S.A., in the organ of a small left-wing party. It was called *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Lenin referred to dual unionism as "an unpardonable blunder." Refusal to work in the reactionary trade unions abandoned the vast bulk of inexperienced workers to the influence of labor's misleaders. Lenin's writings on the matter, needless to say, delighted Foster: the principle of his ten-year struggle against dual unionism was corroborated by the foremost workingman's leader of the world. The concept of dual unionism was dealt a fatal blow.

At this time Foster received an invitation to travel to Moscow to attend the deliberations of the left labor unions of the world, meeting at a conference of the Red International of Labor Unions. He instantly accepted. There he studied the life of the Soviet workers, their trade unions, the politics and theories of the land, studied with that ardent curiosity that is one of his chief characteristics. He walked the streets, visited the factories and talked with innumerable workers.

It was a time of enormous difficulty. Seven years of war, civil war, and armed intervention by fourteen foreign states in an attempt to overthrow the young Soviet Republic were just ending and had left industry in ruins. The nation suffered unimaginably from the economic blockade imperialism had thrown around it. Starvation walked the streets: typhus and cholera struck. Famine parched the farmlands. Yet wherever the American walked he discovered that the suffering workers were irrevocably attached to their new regime. It was *theirs*. The calamities they withstood were caused by enemies of the working class: that they knew. "It was plain as a

pikestaff to me that in Soviet Russia," Foster wrote on his return, "there had occurred a truly Socialist revolution." Its triumph would inevitably redound to the benefit of the working class in his native land and in all lands. He must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his brothers there, as he would had this revolution happened in Britain or in Germany or in France, anywhere on the globe. "The world's first free commonwealth," he said, "will live."

His intensive political study then, his first-hand observation, brought him to inevitable conclusions: first, that the working class had at hand an invincible science founded by Marx and brought forward into the twentieth century by Lenin. Its principles, its basic precepts, were valid everywhere though tactics and approach would depend upon the characteristics and conditions in each country.

He concluded, as he studied the first nation where the working class had become the dominant power, that the toilers in each land require vanguard proletarian parties based upon Marxism. The Communist Party that he saw in the erstwhile land of the tsars, he wrote after his studies, was "the highest type of organization ever produced by mankind."

He came to these conclusions after arduous study for he had arrived with many erroneous preconceptions not uncommon to the working class of the day. "Buried in the big packinghouse and steel campaigns, I had not found the opportunity to free myself from the current opportunist conceptions," he wrote, "that Socialism could only be brought about in a highly industrialized country." But what he saw there "shattered this wrong impression."

Upon his return to the United States in the summer of 1921, he joined the Communist Party here. His subsequent years of experience brilliantly confirmed his deci-

sions, he felt, and in 1949, when he wrote *The Twilight of World Capitalism*, he dedicated the book to his great grandson "who will live in a Communist United States."

The Amalgamation Fight

WHAT HAPPENED IN the years since Foster joined the Communist Party is a record, virtually, of his life during this time. He became chairman of the party, a post he has held for thirty years continuously, because of his great gifts as union organizer, political leader and Marxist theoretician. Foster always felt the power and wisdom of his party's collective efforts, received inspiration from its devoted members, learned from them even as they learned from him.

The movement he had joined continued his determined crusade for the trade union principles he had worked out. The Trade Union Educational League, which he had founded, fought under his guidance for the amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial unions. Everywhere it taught the imperative need to organize the unorganized, to crusade for unemployment insurance and to achieve the independent political action of labor. It insisted that the times required a Labor Party; and to achieve peace in the world his TUEL urged the American people to build the firmest fraternal relations with the peoples of the Soviet Union.

The crusade for these principles began in a time of unprecedented struggle between the capitalist class and Labor. The employers were determined to crush America's unions and establish the Open Shop. A wave of strikes engulfed the nation in opposition to Big Business' objectives. Capitalism and its spokesmen in the government dragged out the red bogeyman to befuddle the issues and to confuse the nation's mind. Today's repression has abundant precedent. Thousands of workingmen had al-

ready been arrested and imprisoned under President Wilson's regime.

The TUEL, with Communists spark-plugging its campaigns, shook the entire labor movement by its tri-pronged program for amalgamation of trade unions, a Labor Party and the recognition of Soviet Russia. At least half of the American labor movement openly supported one or another, or all three of these demands. The first success was in the great coal strike of 1922; then in the Chicago building trades strike in the spring of that year. But the climax came in the national strike of 400,000 railroadmen also in that year, during which Foster was kidnapped by Colorado state troopers when he came to Denver to speak. They turned him over to the Wyoming authorities who in turn carried him across the border and dumped him ten miles inside of Nebraska. Undeterred, he continued his organizing work, and the TUEL movement in this strike culminated in a big national amalgamation conference of 400 delegates in Chicago, December of 1922.

Old Gompers watched the TUEL's success with nervous alarm. The tirades out of his office were ceaseless and increasingly hysterical. "Tools of Moscow," was the favorite epithet then as it is today. Gompers was shaken after the Ohio Federation of Labor virtually unanimously endorsed the TUEL's resolution for amalgamation. The old fox decided to come, in person, flanked by his beefy general staff, to the Chicago Federation of Labor's conference where a similar vote was to be taken. Despite his frowning presence he was soundly trounced by a vote of 103 to 14. Foster, on hand to defend the TUEL's resolution, was challenged by Gompers to debate the issue publicly, and Foster instantly picked up the gauntlet. But the old man, full of second thoughts, quickly forgot the challenge and though Bill frequently reminded him of it publicly, the old bureaucrat never replied.

The stock of the newly-formed TUEL and the Communist movement rose in the labor movement. It was then that the federal authorities decided to intervene decisively. Foster was the first Communist tried after the authorities had raided and arrested its leaders during a convention in Bridgeman, Michigan. Despite the hysteria in the newspapers, the fierce efforts of both state and national authorities during the trial in 1924, a hung jury freed him. The jurymen had refused to be stampeded into acquiescence. Later Charles Ruthenberg, formerly a leader of the Socialist left wing, a founder of the Communist Party and its national secretary, was tried. And this time the authorities succeeded. Ruthenberg was found guilty of criminal syndicalism and his tragic death at 45 came before he entered the penitentiary gates.

The Age of Myths

THE WHEEL OF time moved on, and the 'twenties, which began with a postwar depression, turned by mid-decade into a time of relative "prosperity." Capitalism filled the air with hosannahs to itself: "Ford, Not Marx," became the shibboleth of the day as the bourgeois economists bowed to the Golden Calf and predicted an unending vista of boom-time. The misleaders of labor, against whom Foster crusaded ceaselessly, in pamphlets, books and speeches, fell into line with the employers. Class collaboration was their avowed policy, the cessation of strikes; they had arrived at "the higher strategy of labor." They opened banks, speculated in stocks, accepted the Baltimore and Ohio plan as if, he wrote, it were "manna miraculously fallen from heaven." Its essence was to win the workers, agreement to speed themselves up, turn out more work, and thereby, the B. and O. railroad efficiency experts promised, they would automatically reap real advantages in higher wages and more continuous employment.

The 1925 convention of the AFL regarded the plan as a turning point for the American labor movement. German Social-Democratic leaders abroad, like Rudolph Hilferding and Karl Kautsky, tumbled over each other in praise of the intensified class collaboration. Inevitably it depressed the hard-won working conditions of labor, depressed its morale, while the aristocrats wallowed in the fat salaries of careerism.

The Communists took up the cudgels against these myths. Its members tirelessly explained the economic facts of life to their fellow workmen in the factories; thousands of meetings were held in working class communities to clarify the issues. Poverty-stricken as they were, they dug deep into their pockets to bring out leaflets, pamphlets, books, to teach the truth. And Foster's pen turned out articles, leaflets, pamphlets, and his book *Misleaders of Labor*, in 1927. It was written after his grueling days organizing, speaking, meeting. Many of those meetings were held within the ranks of his own party where Foster and his like-minded associates combatted Wall Street economic shibboleths advocated by Jay Lovestone, then a party leader.

As a member of the executive of the Communist International and of the Red International of Labor Unions, Foster helped to shape the Marxist policies refuting these dangerous myths that were promulgated on a world scale. Here in America his views won the day in his party, and shattered the preachments of Lovestone. The latter, treacherously vindictive in his reaction, was expelled and promptly enlisted in the ranks of Marxism's enemies. Today Lovestone is the arch-exponent of war against the Soviet Union, collaborates with the shadowy spy network of the C.I.A., and plots to disrupt the work of all bona-fide trade unions abroad that do not truckle to the world spokesmen of Wall Street.

The Bubble Breaks

NO ASPECT OF American life and labor was alien to Foster. Long a protagonist of labor's independent political action, he studied the political scene and waged battle in this area as well. He became the Communist Party's first candidate for the presidency in 1924, and again in the campaign of 1928 and 1932. He stumped the country, speaking in his plain fashion that is devoid of dramatics, warning his listeners against the myth of endless prosperity, against the blatherings of Coolidge, and against the Great Engineer Hoover who promised a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage. Organize your own power, Foster exhorted, against that day, coming soon, when the bubble will burst; build your unions, oust your misleaders, organize the unorganized, fight for social and unemployment insurance so that you will not bear the heavy burdens of the crisis on your own shoulders.

The bubble broke in 1929, as the Communists had sought to alert the nation, standing alone in the prediction—a cardinal proof, Foster insisted, that the science of Marxism surpassed that of all others. In March of 1930, he led the historic demonstration of more than 100,000 unemployed New Yorkers in Union Square.

The peaceable assembly was attacked by thousands of police armed to the teeth. The ragged men and women, desperate fathers and mothers, were dispersed by an unprecedented orgy of official force and violence. Foster and his delegation chosen by the jobless at the Square—Robert Minor, Israel Amter, Harry Raymond among them—turned up a few minutes later at City Hall to present their program to Mayor Walker for immediate relief from starvation. The police swooped down and prison followed—a term up to three years in the pest-ridden city prisons of the East River, a veritable Devil's Island of misery, dope-smuggling, graft and raw inhumanity.

Released after seven months, as the jobless marched upon City Halls and state capitals bearing placards with the slogans for relief and unemployment insurance, he became the party's banner bearer in the presidential election of 1932, with James W. Ford, the Negro Communist leader, as his running mate. Despite physical strain after prison and the long years of incessant activity before, he spoke at hundreds of meetings to at least five hundred thousand Americans nationally. He spoke on the radio, organized demonstrations, gave newspaper interviews, traveled scores of thousands of miles by train, auto bus, airplane, steamboat, wagon and even on foot. And the inevitable happened: he was stricken with a heart attack in Moline, Illinois, and for five months was near death. Full convalescence required three years during which time he dared not make even a ten-minute speech.

But his indomitable will triumphed, and his health improved, stimulated, no doubt, by the successes the counter-attacking working class was winning. Unemployment insurance, espoused by the TUUL in the early twenties, became the law of the land in the middle 'thirties. As it was for the jobless, so it was with the workers on the job.

It is exhilarating to recall, in retrospect, how the slogans for industrial unionism came to life as the great mass of workingmen swept into the giant strikes, sit-downs and massive demonstrations. The Congress of Industrial Organizations was formed. The impetus of its existence brought millions, almost overnight, not only into the CIO but also into the older AFL. Communists were in the van everywhere as organizers, strike leaders, pickets captains, and in many an industry, like maritime, steel, auto, men like Gus Hall, Pat Cush and Bill McKie had laid the original groundwork for organization of the unions. No wonder Bill's heart could heal!

Dreiser and Foster

DURING THE TIME of his illness he learned to husband his powers more cannily than ever. Every minute of his day was organized to prevent the "leakage" of time. So many hours for sleep, up early in the morning (6:00 A.M.) to scan the morning newspapers, then to write a thousand words on whatever project engaged his mind—an article, a report, a chapter in a pamphlet or a book. Early in his years he had revealed a deep, orderly mind, a strong inner discipline which made him organize his days with care and thought: the old railroadman accustomed to the requirements of a time schedule.

Despite his immersion in the hot day-to-day struggles, he had continued his readings, his studies, marked off so much time for this endeavor, so much for that, always leaving time (time, so precious and so scarce), to the books he loved: history, the Marxist classics, the current economic, political and literary writings of the time. He had become the proletarian leader and intellectual leader incarnate—the man whose deed was wedded to his thought. Perfect for him was the Marxist dictum that practice without theory is blind, theory without practice, barren. In his own way he had been practicing that all his life.

Health partly restored, he proceeded to leave his mark on every political, economic and theoretical question of his time. Yet he never lost touch with the daily life of the American workingman, his advances, his retreats, his hesitations and confusions. Presidents in the White House and children of the slums came equally under his scrutiny. And, if, on his way to his office to discuss a course of strategy at some critical moment of our nation, he saw the city's children sweltering in the torrid summer streets, he checked that fact in his mind to write, the next morning, in his thousand-word quota, an article demanding sum-

mer vacations for the offspring of the poor in the countryside, at municipal expense.

No, not only workingmen loved him. If this writer may interpolate a personal experience, he recalls the day he encountered Theodore Dreiser in the Pennsylvania coal fields near Avella during the 1931 strike which Foster and his TUUL led. The eminent novelist told me, speaking of Foster, that he regarded this Communist leader as the foremost son of the American working class.

He spoke to me of Foster's "Christ-like devotion to the poor and dispossessed," which he, the novelist, had observed since the great steel strike of 1919. He planned, some day, he said, to write a novel in which Foster would be the hero. There is no question that Foster's example, his precepts, influenced the man many regard as the nation's outstanding novelist to become a member of the Communist Party.

War and Its Aftermath

When our nation entered the time of its greatest trial, the war against fascism, the Communists stood in the forefront of all who advocated a total, unyielding effort for victory. Its spokesmen, like Foster, argued the imperative need for all-out production to win. It summoned all whom it could reach in its appeal for an unparalleled national effort. Fifteen thousand of its members fought in the armed forces, many of them to return honored veterans, like Robert Thompson, bearer of the Distinguished Service Cross, and all others on the battlefields. It urged our nation to mount the Second Front that would cut the war short and spare the lives of thousands of our boys, as well as those of our allies. It argued for close relations and aid to that ally—the Soviet Union—whose sons were dying by the millions for the cause of humanity.

Yet this patriot had no illusions about the high-and-

mighty who sat at the controls of that war. He understood, why the profiteers of Wall Street refused to make a "No Profits" pledge whereas organized labor made and kept its "No Strike" pledge.

The imperialists of this nation who helped Hitler in his rise to power and had been his partner to the day of Pearl Harbor would not, he knew, change their stripes once war was won. He foresaw that men whose concern for profit is paramount in their lives would plunge wildly for world domination, try to cut down every obstacle that stood in their way.

He collided head-on with the views of Earl Browder, then secretary of the party, whose ideas, he insisted, would lead the Communists into the swamp of opportunism that had wrecked the old Socialist Party. Foster held that Browder's ideas were a rejection of Marxist-Leninist principles. No, American capital would *not* voluntarily improve the standards of life of the American working class after the war, nor, on the international scene, would it voluntarily abide by the "generation of peace" agreements at Teheran. Big Business, strengthened by the war, would, on the contrary strive to gobble up world markets, subordinate all other nations if at all possible. That was the nature of the beast, as he had learned from his Marxism, his Leninism. He acquainted his fellow members of the National Committee with his views through a letter which stated them explicitly. Foster bitterly opposed Browder's dissolution of the party and its transformation into a mere educational society.

A party-wide discussion ensued on these ideas. Foster felt that once they were aired the overwhelming majority who had studied and lived the ideas of Marxism-Leninism would see the truth. His stand was almost unanimously vindicated. The party which was dissolved by Browder was reconstituted: Browder, fighting his party, was ulti-

mately expelled, and became an enemy of Marxism.

What Foster foresaw, as he had spoken and had written in innumerable articles and pamphlets, came to pass: the world trembled on the brink of another universal war; this time, the menace of total annihilation hung over all mankind. Preparation for absolute war has always, under capitalism, led to the absolute repression of those who stand for peace. And so, when the cold war settled down in earnest, Big Business bared its fangs to devour the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The Wagner Act was rescinded and the Taft-Hartley "slave law" took its place, for first and always, labor must be the victim when the capitalist war hawks go on the rampage. To crush labor one must begin with the suppression of the Communist Party, a basic law of today's politics, as Mussolini, Hitler, Tojo, Franco proved.

And so Foster, ill, his stout heart strained by years of illimitable struggle, a victim of the heart disease which struck in 1932, was arrested and manacled by the thought-control police of the Smith Act. He was one of the twelve Communist national committeemen arrested in July of 1948. The trial opened January 17, 1949, but the authorities desisted from bringing the sick man into court, knowing, as their doctors had warned them, that he was critically ill and the siege of trial could well prove fatal to him. Periodically the doctors of the court examined him, and still do, for they had hoped to clamp him behind the same bars that held his fellow-leaders like Eugene Dennis, Benjamin J. Davis, Gus Hall, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the many others.

A Monumental Task

AND SO, IN this time of uncertainty, never knowing when the federal marshals would walk in on him in his little study, in this time of slow and painful recuperation, he

continued to work. This time, he resolved, he would get down on paper the basic outline of all working class ideas and experiences of our age. It is his objective to write a series of books that would embody the mainstreams of history, the experiences and principles of the Marxist movement, here and abroad, the course of trade-unionism, the history and problems of the Negro people. He planned to summarize the experiences of the working class so that any thoughtful workingman would have, within arm's reach, a basic proletarian education, "to condense," as he says, "but not oversimplify fundamental matters that have great bearing on the worker's life."

He set about the monumental task with a zeal and an application that would do credit to a Marxist sage half his age and at the summit of his physical power. There is something titanic in his determination, reminiscent of Beethoven creating his greatest symphonies after he was struck deaf, or Milton dictating his epic poetry after he had gone blind. And, added to Foster's illness, the police stood at the door. One thinks, too, of Marat, the Incorruptible, pursued by the Emperor's armed deputies, writing his treatises on freedom in the dark alleys of Paris as a companion held a lantern aloft.

It is a miracle for a man who has recognized no miracles to have been able, these years of illness and unremitting strain, to complete the trail-blazing volumes he has written, in the past few years, each a major full-length work: *Outline Political History of the Americas*, *History of the Communist Party of the U. S.*, *The Negro People in American History*, *History of the Three Internationals*, and his latest book, *Outline History of the World Trade Union Movement*, to be published on his seventy-fifth birthday.

One cannot here attempt more than a rough, sketchy summary of his thought-provoking concepts with which these books deal, ideas which, even in this time of syste-

matic repression, of thought-control laws, break through the iron curtain of silence. His opponents, perforce, take notice of his ideas for they know, or at least they suspect, that thousands of workingmen and working women in a hundred factory cities are studying the books of this man, who, like the Renaissance giants, scrutinizes everything that can speed the ultimate liberation of man.

It is significant that the book *Six Upon the World*, written in 1954, by the bourgeois scholar and former college president, Paul F. Douglas, published by Little Brown and Company, included Foster as one of the six principal figures in the land representing the main currents of thought in America at mid-century. The others Douglas described are Paul G. Hoffman, former head of the Studebaker Corp., Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., chairman of General Motors; Walter P. Reuther, chairman of the CIO; Francis Cardinal Spellman, chief figure in the Roman Catholic Church, and James B. Conant, scientist and former head of Harvard University, and currently ambassador to West Germany.

Douglas, dealing with Foster, begins with an apt allusion, a comparison of the Communist leader to Thoreau, the author of *Walden*, who had gone to jail because he refused to pay his poll tax at the time of the Mexican-American war, a crassly imperialist enterprise. Thoreau did not want a single dollar of his to "buy a man or a musket to shoot one with." His friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the foremost man of letters of his time, went to see him in jail and asked, outside Thoreau's cell, "Henry, why are you there?" And Thoreau replied, "Ralph, why are you not here?" And at the moment that Foster related this story to Douglas, the Communist leader was himself under a Smith Act indictment, which as Foster put it, "is a trumped-up charge fabricated by warmongering Wall Street capitalists."

The remainder of Douglas' essay is a summary of Fos-

ter's life and views as the bourgeois economist understood them. And concluding, Douglas quotes Foster: "In the United States the Communist Party works for a people's government representing a broad coalition made up of the political and economic organization of the workers, the Negro, small farmers, intellectuals and other democratic strata who constitute the great bulk of the American people." Furthermore, he continues, "We are living in a great historical period, that of the replacement of capitalism by socialism. The motive power behind the vast international socialist movement is the imperative demand of the workers for greater freedom and well-being. . . . World socialism will liberate man from his age-old slavery and open up before him a perspective of freedom, development, and happiness that he now hardly dreams of." It is a heart-warming, optimistic yet scientific perspective that Foster presents, one which he has argued in many pamphlets and books before: you found it far back in his autobiographic work, *From Bryan to Stalin*, it appears more recently in his book, *Twilight of World Capitalism*, in fact it runs through everything that deals with his world outlook.

Theory of Trade Unionism

FOSTER, THE THINKER, who has always been a simultaneous doer, a leader of men in the dust of daily battle, has gotten down on paper the enormous wealth of his experience as trade union organizer who never regarded a single aspiration of the working class as secondary or pica-yune. If it helped the workingman raise his standard of life by a slice of bread or raised the level of his vision a fraction of an inch, it was his business. And so no man in all the history of American labor approaches the breadth and depth of his writings on the tactics, the strategy and the basic theories of trade unionism. He has not only

been a general on the field of battle, he has, like a Clausewitz in the arts of warfare, generalized his experiences and those of others.

As I have said, space herein permits of scarcely more than a brief description or mention of his more than 100 pamphlets and thirteen books. Among the writings on labor questions, his pioneering book, *Misleaders of Labor*, written in 1927, was already mentioned. The bookshelves of thousands of workers still hold his pamphlets on company unionism and on strike strategy, like *The Great Steel Strike*, his book *American Trade Unionism*, his writings on Social Democracy, like *The Crisis in the Socialist Party*. He has crowned these previous works on trade unionism with his forthcoming major work, *Outline History of the World Trade Union Movement*.

Illustrative of his thinking is the excerpt from this book printed under the title "The General Law of Trade Union Progress" in the July 1955 issue of *Political Affairs*, the monthly organ of the Communist Party, to which he contributes virtually in every issue. In it he reveals a profundity of approach to the study of trade unions which is unequalled in American labor literature. One cannot compare, one can only contrast, the thoughts in this work with the ideas of men like Samuel Gompers, or Philip Murray or John L. Lewis or any other renowned leader of labor.

Scientifically, he demonstrates that the trade union movement has specific laws of its own. "With some 140,000,000 members throughout the world and over two centuries behind it, the movement has not grown and does not function haphazardly. Unions are born, advance and decline according to ascertainable principles or laws." He analyzes the reasons for their stormy, swift advance at certain historic periods and why, at other times, "they have expanded at a snail's pace, or even retrogressed." He charts the basic currents of the modern labor move-

ment, probing their origins and outlines their influences. Roughly, he groups these trends as Right Social Democracy, Anarchism, Syndicalism and Communism. He describes why the Right-wing Social Democrats have always based themselves "upon a minimum of class struggle," explores the underlying forces that compel them to lead movements of struggle "which they head only to behead." The Anarchist trend ignores the current urgent tasks of day-to-day demands, struggles and organizations, relying fundamentally upon "the spontaneous action of the masses"; the Anarcho-Syndicalists have the same weakness, "an over-reliance upon the spontaneity of the working class," regarding the general strike as the "cure-all" to be achieved by "arbitrary manifestos." The Communists alone have shown themselves to be the best day-to-day builders and fighters in both phases of the trade union process, the periods of relative calm, as well as during periods of "the periodic expressions of high working class spontaneity of fighting spirit." And he exhorts all militant unionists to acquire a working knowledge of the general law of trade union progress so that they will more effectively work "during those calmer times when the working class makes only a slow evolutionary advance and during the militant upheavals when it makes revolutionary leaps ahead."

In his article, "Marxism and the Labor Movement," in *Political Affairs* (November 1953), he proves that the Marxists in America played a central part in helping America's trade unions advance in the following areas: the organization of the unorganized, the Negro-white-labor alliance, governmental social insurance, trade union democracy and an honest labor leadership, and labor's independent political action. True, he shows that the road is long and these advances are but beginnings, but they are signal advances compared with the past. The spiral is distinctly upward.

And in this day when the historic merger of the AFL and the CIO will create a single labor organization of more than fifteen million it is necessary to recall Foster's tireless and unceasing crusading for labor unity which, years ago, focused national attention on the need. In his book *American Trade Unionism* he proves—and it would be well for all in labor to realize it—that the key to trade union success in this country has always been the cooperation between the left and the middle-of-the-road forces, and that the prime object of red-baiting is to break that united front.

His writings on labor and his histories of American Communism and of the world Socialist and Communist movements crown the thinking of this American theoretician who began to grapple with the troublesome questions facing the American workers from his early years as an organizer.

He never lost that deep sense of working class reality, which he expressed so admirably in his autobiographical *Pages From a Worker's Life*, published in 1938, a book unique in American labor. By every canon it belongs to the category of permanent literature. He recounted his experiences, in the form of sketches and stories, from childhood on, through his years on the seas, his "hobo" days, his organizing. Dominating this book is love for his class, for his nation. Characters emerge in a few swift strokes that enable you to understand, through his eyes, why it is rational to retain through thick and thin a supreme faith in the working class. Yet the workers of his pages are not glorified, unreal with attributes beyond their time. They stand there in their strength and in the weaknesses of their day. The book is a masterpiece of observation, for the man has the eye for detail that is the portend of the creative writer. Even H. L. Mencken, certainly no friend of labor, praised Foster's craftsmanship.

Fountainhead of Ideas

BECAUSE HIS EYE is focused always on the needs of the workingman, Foster has probed into every subject related to his welfare and the destiny of his class. Hence he avidly studies the latest developments in bourgeois economics. Years ago he sounded the alarm against the theories and practices of Keynesism which he described as "capitalist economics in the period of the decline of world capitalism." Forever a dogged champion of the truth as he sees it he exhorts Marxist economists the world over to expose the erroneous and dangerous fallacies of the Keynesian "Ponzi-like" schemes whereby all capitalist countries hope to "combat" economic depressions in the future. But Keynesism, Foster contends in abundant argument and documentation, cannot overcome the inner contradictions of capitalism that gnaw at the vitals of the system, and he returns again and again to the subject to show, using the example of various government and corporation economic programs in this country, that Keynesism is indeed the doctrine of state monopoly capitalism in the period of its decline.

It is doubtless not at all accidental that the man who first organized Negroes in a mass production industry has written a classic work on the Negro question which has been studied by prominent Negro commentators and scholars. J. A. Rogers, in the leading Negro newspaper, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, regarded it as "one of the most scholarly, factual and comprehensive works on that subject." Others agree with Rayford W. Logan of Howard University, who writes in the *Journal of Southern History* that the book "cannot be summarily dismissed because it is written by the former candidate for President on the Communist ticket." But the reviewers in that land where racism has been abolished, in the U.S.S.R., gave the book unequivocal praise. *International Affairs*, a journal pub-

lished in the English language, says: "For the first time, a scientific treatise, presenting the history of the Negro people since their first forcible importation into the U.S.A. up to the present from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, has become available . . . it is a noteworthy contribution to Marxist literature on the national question."

Foster's *Outline Political History of the Americas*, like his other books, has been translated and published abroad—in Hungary (1951), Czechoslovakia (1952), Japan and the Soviet Union (1953), Romania (1954), Bulgaria (1955), and is being translated currently in Italy and the German Democratic Republic. A lengthy review in the *Communist*, the organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union said Foster's book "is an outstanding study of the history of the peoples in the Western hemisphere." It called attention to his main thesis that "the several American revolutions in North and Latin America for independence were but so many segments of one general movement. The heart of this great movement was a revolutionary attack against the feudal system. It was the broad, all-American bourgeois, i.e., capitalist revolution."

And as these books come rolling off the presses of International Publishers, Foster continues to write articles that throw light on current matters, the Geneva conference, for example, or the latest developments on the labor front, or answering the question no few ask, "Is the U.S. in the Early Stages of Fascism?" or on such momentous topics as "Sectarianism in the Fight Against White Chauvinism." The man is inexhaustible despite the precarious condition of his health, a veritable fountainhead of ideas!

The Happy Warrior

SO BRIEFLY, THESE ARE a few of the highlights in the life of this man who had devoted sixty of his seventy-five years to the American working class. Unique in the annals of

American history, it is clear why so many regard him as one of the great figures of our time.

He celebrates three-quarters of a century's stormy yet abundantly fruitful life as his latest book, *Outline History of the World Trade Union Movement*, comes from the press.

What a pageant of mankind's genius he has seen, and to which he has added! What an epic his own life is! Well over a third of humanity has marched from the Kingdom of Necessity into the Realm of Freedom, as Engels foresaw, writing these words when Foster was a child in "Skittereen," the slums of Philadelphia. His is the time of the turning point, the era when man is passing from pre-history, as Engels called all times before man's full liberation, into Socialism. And the son of a poor Irish carriage-washer not only saw these marvels, he is helping to create them.

Imbued with a love for life that has survived an infinity of hazards, he pursues the sole ambition that motivates his stormy Odyssey: the day when all men will live as brothers, enjoying the fruits of their labor in a world forever at peace.

Truly, here is the happy warrior. As he himself has written in *The Twilight of World Capitalism*, "My life in the labor, left-wing and Communist movement has been a very happy one. It has given me the opportunity to do the thing closest to my heart and mind—to fight for progressive socialism. From my earliest youth I have always felt a great pride in being a worker, and it has ever been a matter of the deepest satisfaction to me to be able to identify myself so closely with the struggles of the working class. If I were starting my life all over again, I would take the same course as I have done. . . ."

OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE WORLD TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

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