

Whither the Trade Union Bureaucracy?

By JOSEPH ZACK.

We have had six years of prosperity. Yet there has been no organization drive of importance undertaken in any industry whatever by the A. F. of L. leadership. On the contrary, instead of the trade unions registering big gains in membership, as is usual during periods of prosperity, there was a tremendous decrease totalling over one half million members.

Right now we have a virtual lock-out of soft coal miners to enforce a wage reduction. The employers realizing the weak position of the trade unions are taking the offensive. There are several indications of a new open shop drive even in the strongly organized building industry. We have the lock-out of the New York plumbers organized and led by the Building Trades Employers Association. In Chicago we have a lock-out of inside carpenters to enforce a wage reduction.

Judicial Aid.

Throught the country there is a tendency on the part of the governmental authorities to outlaw strikes, by judicial decisions, by police interference. Even organization campaigns are being outlawed by injunctions, as in the case of the traction interests of New York against the subway workers' local union affiliated with the Amalgamated Association of Street-car and Railway Workers; the Watson-Parker Law practically outlawing strikes on the railroads; the latest anti-strike decision of the supreme court in the stone cutters' case, all this tends in the same direction.

The approval of the U. S. Supreme Court of the war legislation embodied in the numerous anti-syndicalist laws, as manifested in the Anita Whitney case stabilizes political repressive anti-labor legislation on a big scale and is a part of the new drive of the employing class against labor.

What has the trade union bureaucracy done during this prosperity and what is it doing now?

As already pointed out there was no organization drive on a big scale undertaken by the A. F. of L. leadership. Instead the trade union bureaucracy sought to profit, in the main personally, through this prosperity by investing the union treasuries and the workers' savings. Thru so-called labor banking and other financial schemes into those industrial and commercial schemes that yielded the most profit and these for the most part are industries where the workers are most exploited.

This was the main preoccupation of the big trade union officialdom in all these years of prosperity. It is there that they sunk the union treasuries. The spare time they had they spent hunting down the Reds, who led the opposition against this treacherous policy. Now the prosperity seems to be waning and the employers are once more taking the offensive, but the trade union bureaucracy, is not mobilizing the entire strength of the labor movement in support of the miners, who are in the front trenches of the trade union struggle and to organize the southern coal miners without which the miners' union is in danger of a disastrous defeat.

The bureaucracy instead mobilizes all the strength they can muster and at the head of the Civic Federation, led by Matthew Woll, carries on a civil war inside the union to defeat, with the support of the employers, the opposition to them led by the left wing, by attempting to crush the left controlled local unions inside the needle trades.

Thus the center of the struggle is not the defense of the workers

against the employers, which at present means mobilization of all forces and resources in support of the miners, but a war inside the unions against those that favor and fight for a policy of organizing the unorganized, amalgamation, aggressive use of the strike weapon in defense of the workers interests; 40-hour-5 day week, political action on the part of labor in opposition to the old parties, etc.

The Whys and Wherefores of the Present Situation in the American Labor Movement.

The history of American labor shows that labor federations and bureaucracies came and went in the U. S. in accordance with the change that took place in the development of the country. We had the National Labor Union, the Knights of Labor, big organizations in their time. Who knows what may become of the A. F. of L. under its present leadership? The A. F. of L. has lost nearly half of its membership since the close of the war. With the war against the miners' union, the war in the needle trades and a probable struggle in the building unions, the Watson-Parker Law in the railroad unions, who can tell what will remain inside of a few years of these unions, if the policy of the present leadership remains in force?

We have a situation where the trade union bureaucracy is growing more and more reactionary and constantly moving to the right, nearer to the views, practices and needs of the employing class; while the workers seeing their rights abridged, suppressed and interfered with and their trade unions crumbling in morale, fighting strength and numbers, move further to the left following those that have a program and slogans reflecting their interests.

The Role of Our Trade Union Bureaucracy Under American Imperialism.

The American trade unions in pre-war days, when industry was in a highly competitive stage and when trusts and capitalist combines of present day type were spoken of only in Jules Verne's fantastic novels, were of course of a different type, different in policy, practice, organization, experience, etc. The Spanish-American war and Monroe Doctrine imperialism marked another stage, a stage where trustification of industry and centralization of capital had made already considerable headway. Free land which hitherto was serving as an outlet for dissatisfied skilled workers and immigrants, was getting scarcer, the unions began to stick, consolidate locally and nationally and on trade lines. They were several steps ahead of the employers in this respect. The capitalist political parties were still in a state of flux. Into this period came the formation and development of the American Federation of Labor. If we trace back to these days, study the statements and declarations which embodied the policies of the A. F. of L. we find that in those days we can call the A. F. L. progressive in the sense that it corresponded closely to the situation then existing in the country and hence could get something for the workers on the economic and even on the political field.

Since those days, however, everything except perhaps the A. F. L. bureaucracy who remained relatively speaking at a standstill, has considerably changed. Not only have the employers organized, locally and nationally thru associations and Chambers of Commerce, but enormous industries have trustified and interlocking trusts are developing where a few capitalists control several related industries. We have also seen the beginning of international trusts. The money power of the big capitalists, centralized thru the banking system and the Federal Reserve Board unites all the capitalist interests in a manner never known in American history and reflects itself daily in the policy and reaction prevalent in the local and national governments.

The control by Wall Street of the two capitalist parties, courts, press, etc., has become more positive and direct. In other words the American labor movement has not only not moved ahead of the employers in organization methods, policies, etc., but is behind, so far behind indeed, that its method of organization struggle is completely out of date with the development of American industry. The situation is such that whereas the capitalist is organized on the basis of throwing in his whole power and resources, the bonafide policies of the A. F. L. bureaucracy are to mobilize the strength of a mere corporal's guard and expel anyone who insists on doing more than that.

The Sharp Swing to the Right.

The development of industry and finance in the U. S. outlived the policies prescribed by Gompers more than 30 years ago. Steadily the A. F. L. leadership has been moving to the right and opposition movements demanding a change antecede many times the life of the present left wing opposition movement. The scope and intensity of the present left wing opposition movement however, is due to the fact that antiquated policy was steadfastly adhered to by the bureaucracy despite the fact that it got out of date more and more each year. During the last open-shop drive and at the close of the world war, the employers, taking advantage of re-stabilization of industry from a war to a peace basis, opened up the gigantic open shop drive in 1920-23 in

order to take away from labor the advantage it gained during the war and drive conditions low enough to enable American industries to compete on the world market and create sufficient surplus profits to financially establish its world dominion.

The bureaucracy did not yield to the amalgamation movement and began expelling its advocates. It is then that the first great collision between modern progressive policies and the old A. F. L. methods settled down to a chronic civil war and crisis inside the trade unions. Amalgamation meant that as against trustified industry labor is to unite its forces on industrial lines by amalgamation of its craft organization as against the greater centralized strength of the employers. There was to be greater centralization of organization and methods of struggle on the part of the trade unions.

Finally, when in 1925 the A. F. L. leadership sought to prevent the development of a third party movement and finally helped to strangle it, it was clear that the bureaucracy made a sharp turn to the right and was in the way to gradually surrender before the might of trustified industry and finance, enormously strengthened by profits and expansions made during the war. Indeed the employers had as a result of the open shop drive scored a great victory. With one swoop they took away almost all the gains labor made during the war and with it went also all increase in membership the A. F. L. made during the war.

The Drive for Cheap Production.

With the war gains of labor taken away, and with a high cost of living, American capitalism entered its imperialistic career having the advantage over European capitalist competitors, seriously weakened by the world war. This was the stage setting for the present prosperity which we have had with us for the last five years or so. We know that American industry and finance during the war developed at a rate that would normally take 10-15 years to cover. Efficiency, "speed up," etc., etc., were the mottoes during the war. They meant hundreds of millions to the employers. Such patriotism was turned by the profiteers into huge profit. But, boy oh boy, this was nothing in comparison to the "speed up" and efficiency drive we had in our latest prosperity. It was just one terrific drive for cheap production, "double up," "speed up," new machinery, sectionalization, efficiency schemes, introduction of women, child and youth labor on an enormous scale, moving of industry to the South and West for cheap unorganized labor.

Thus the output was increased nearly 50 per cent with the same payroll and what did the trade union bureaucracy do? They cooperated in this drive to increase production and eliminate waste. They assumed the role of "speed up" and efficiency foremen to the employers. What is the waste in industry that is being eliminated? Skilled mechanics are being replaced by semi-skilled and unskilled. Working men and women are being replaced by new machinery and this is being done with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy so that the employers may make greater profits at the expense of the workers. This is the policy that was officially adopted at the Atlantic City convention of the A. F. L. in the resolution on so-called new wage theory to the accompaniment of the usual anti-Red speeches.

Now American capitalism faces a new problem. We are confronted with the European industry reestablished to more than the pre-war strength with the very aid of American capital and as a result we are face to face with much sharper struggles and imperialist rivalries, for the control of the world's markets, with the U. S. driving for supremacy.

American capitalism saved European capitalism from collapse and helped to force wages of European labor far below pre-war standards. Europe now again can produce cheaper than America.

There must be a new drive against American labor in order to again re-stabilize production on a still cheaper basis, wages must go down and production must go up in order to underbid European capitalist empires. American imperialism must strengthen its position in South America and the Far East.

A new open shop drive is coming; in such a drive the left wing is in great danger. It may inflame the workers to resistance and struggle. The trade union bureaucracy takes another sharp turn to the right. This time it goes to the very front of the drive of the exploiters to fight the left wing and thus to assist in the continuation of capitalist prosperity at the expense of the workers. It does its bit to save the labor banks and investments from a most probable crash in the event of a depression. Thus the trade union bureaucracy has definitely landed in the camp of big imperialist capital and become the followers of the ruling group in government and the old parties. It is the task of the left wing to defeat this treachery and to revive the labor movement.

WASHINGTON, June 9.—Clarence D. Chamberlin may be made a brigadier general in the Iowa National Guard.

Governor Hammill of Iowa, after a conference at the White House to day said the question was being considered.

Let's Fight On! Join The Workers Party!

In the loss of Comrade Ruthenberg the Workers (Communist) Party has lost its foremost leader and the American working class its staunchest fighter. This loss can only be overcome by many militant workers joining the Party that he built.

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Mail this application to the Workers Party, 108 East 14th Street, New York City; or if in other city to Workers Party, 1113 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Distribute the Ruthenberg pamphlet, "The Workers' (Communist) Party, What It Stands For and Why Workers Should Join." This Ruthenberg pamphlet will be the basic pamphlet throughout the Ruthenberg Drive.

Every Party Nucleus must collect 50 cents from every member and will receive 20 pamphlets for every member to sell or distribute.

Nuclei in the New York District will get their pamphlets from the District office—108 East 14th St.

Nuclei outside of the New York District write to The DAILY WORKER publishing Co., 33 East First Street, New York City, or to the National Office, Workers Party, 1113 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, Ill.