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THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

AN OUTLINE

LEO WOLMAN

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WORKERS' EDUCATION
SYLLABUS SERIES No. 1

The American Labor Movement

A SYLLABUS FOR STUDY CLASSES

LEO WOLMAN

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

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FOREWORD

THIS *Outline of the American Labor Movement* has been prepared to serve a genuine need. For working men and women and for students of American labor there exists no brief and simple syllabus of the labor movement in the United States. Teachers of the different workers' study classes, as well as labor officials, organizers, and the members of the various unions, have repeatedly expressed their desire for such a simple statement. This outline or syllabus has been prepared, then, to meet this need and to serve as a guide for workers in and for students of the labor movement.

In addition, the Workers Education Bureau of America inaugurates with this pamphlet, a series of brief outlines and syllabi for the various workers' educational enterprises in this country. Such subjects as Industrial History, Economics, Sociology, Social Psychology, Municipal Government, Labor Law, Modern Literature, the Background of English Literature, will be included in outline form. Others will be prepared as the occasion demands. These outlines will all be prepared by competent authorities in the various subjects. A representative, if not a complete bibliography, will direct students to more exhaustive sources.

The Workers Education Bureau of America was organized in the Spring of 1921 to unify the separate experiments in American workers' education and to give them the strength that comes from a consciousness of cooperative effort. A good deal of sharing of views has been possible through this agency. These outlines and syllabi are but another way in which this Bureau is attempting to assist the various experiments in giving system to their efforts and a high standard to their instruction. The Bureau will gladly supply further information whenever asked.

S. M., Jr.

FOREWORD TO SECOND EDITION

SINCE the first large printing of this Outline in 1923, Banking and Insurance have been developed as important new functions of the American Labor Movement. At the request of the Bureau, Mr. Wolman has revised and enlarged this Outline and brought all the references up to date. It should be of added use in this revised form.

S. M., Jr.

New York
1927

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INTRODUCTION

This syllabus on the labor movement in the United States does not pretend to be complete. It is designed merely to serve as a guide to those men and women who conduct classes in the many aspects of so large and complex a movement as trade unionism in this country. Unfortunately for both the teacher and student the development of the American labor movement cannot be made to conform to any well-defined or convenient pattern. The history of working class movements in this country is full of surprises and shocks. Interpretation of what happened is, therefore, difficult and must be made with extreme caution.

On the history and character of American trade unions there is a wealth of printed material; widely diverse in content and in method of approach to the problem. In recent decades as the labor movement came to play a more and more prominent and influential part in the life of the country and as courses on the subject were introduced into our colleges and universities, students of the movement turned to the preparation of treatises and text-books which served to bring unity to a scattered and highly disconnected body of materials. Within less than twenty years a large number of such books have become available for those who seek brief discussions, within the compass of one or two volumes, of the history, problems, and policies of organized labor. Of books of this character, the most important are:

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1. The Background of the American Labor Movement.

The rise of organized labor was influenced in the United States by the progressive industrialization of the country, in much the same general way as changes in the organization of industry affected labor movements in Europe. The origins of organized labor in Europe and their relation to industrial and commercial history have for a long time been the subject of competent inquiry.

Until the same job has been done for the commercial and industrial history of the United States, the foreign economic histories must remain the sources from which American students will draw their ideas of the early beginnings of a labor movement.

The American labor movement, moreover, represents in many respects a transplantation to the United States of the labor movement in England and Continental Europe. A country whose working force was largely recruited from immigrants received many of its political and economic ideas from these men and women who from the beginning poured into the country. Even today many important American labor organizations retain policies and ways of acting which were imported into the United States by immigrant workers. Craft organizations which play so influential a part in the textile industry and whose workers were in the beginning largely recruited from England are even now typically English in character and behavior. Striking evidence of the same kind of influence is still represented in the policies of the United Mine Workers. Modifications in policy and outlook, when they did come, were the effect of the arrival of immigrants from other countries—Germans, Slavs, Italians, Jews and Greeks—and of the peculiar nature of the American scene. If American trade unions may be said at present to follow any foreign pattern which predominates, it is English in character. An adequate understanding of the American labor movement must, for this reason, begin with a study of the origins of the labor movement in other countries, particularly in England. The student of American labor should therefore acquaint himself with the important books on British economic history, and on the origin and development of British trade unionism.

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2. The Economic History of the United States.

It goes without saying that the character of an organized labor movement will be profoundly affected by the conditions which surround it. Only in the past five years, every one has seen how the economic forces arising out of the World War contributed to produce drastic and, perhaps, permanent changes in the character of American trade unions. So, throughout the history of this country, every industrial or economic development of any fundamental importance produced its reactions in the organizations of workingmen. Successive waves of business prosperity and depression; the exhaustion of free lands; the abolition of slavery; the industrialization of the country; the rise of industrial and business combinations; and the development of our enormous trans-

portation system; were all incidents in the economic history of the country which reflected themselves in the status of the labor movement at any particular time. Accompanying these economic changes were shifts in political and social outlooks which influenced, as they were themselves influenced by, the policies, goals and methods of organized labor. The economic history of the United States, however, is still a virgin field for investigation and interpretation. Much that has been written represents chronicles of events that apparently have little continuity or relation to one another.

This is no doubt due in great measure to the swiftness of American industrial development. Probably nowhere else have such divergent and various business, political and social phenomena taken place within so short a period as little more than a single century. In no instance, also, has the population of a large country changed in origin, constitution, and, hence, in outlook so rapidly and so extensively as in the United States. Conditions like these make interpretation exceedingly difficult and painfully slow. For this reason the story of just how and when economic and social factors and the labor movement reacted upon each other cannot yet be told. The student will, however, find some of the materials for tentative interpretation in the following books.

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3. The Early History of the American Labor Movement, 1800-1880.

If a labor movement be defined as a continuous organization of wage earners or of industrial workers, the American labor movement cannot be said to have begun much before 1880. It is true, of course, that there existed as early as 1800 organized wage earners who conducted their activities in much the same way as does organized labor today. These groups, however, showed but slight continuity. The labor movement before 1880, except for a few national unions like the Bricklayers, Molders, Iron and Steel workers was no more than the rise and fall of organizations, stimulated by favorable economic conditions and disintegrated by industrial de-

pressions or by internal dissension over conflicting social programs.

The class of industrial wage-earners, or factory workers, was not yet as clearly fixed as it is at the present time. Industrial wage-earners, although members of trade unions, would frequently throw in their lot with other elements in the community in revolt against the old political parties or in protest against particular evils. Labor and farmers would, thus, be found uniting for the purpose of effecting currency and similar reforms. At the same time the population of the United States was constantly changing through the influx of large numbers of immigrants who brought into the country their own conceptions of the purposes of trade unionism and of the nature of social ends. It was thus natural that variants of socialism, syndicalism, anarchism, and of other programs of social action should grow up and be seized upon by groups of workmen and by their leaders from among the intellectuals, as the material for political and industrial platforms. This did, indeed, come to be the case and groups formed new and rapidly changing alignments, related to one or another of the many programs of social reform. Together with these excursions into political action and social philosophy, trade unionism, as we know it today, appeared from time to time in the 30's, 50's and 60's in some instances to survive in the national organizations of today and in others to disintegrate under the influence of adverse economic conditions or of defects in the machinery of organization. The details of this period in American labor history have only recently become available in convenient form in the admirable studies by Professor John R. Commons and his associates, and in the popularization of Commons' books by Mrs. Beard which has been pub-

lished in The Workers' Bookshelf by the Workers Education Bureau.

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4. The Knights of Labor, 1880-1890.

Organized in 1869 by Uriah Stephens, the Knights of Labor became a factor in the American Labor movement in the late seventies. Then, as if spontaneously, in the course of less than five years, thousands of workmen crowded around the banners of the Knights and in 1880 the Grand Order of the Knights of Labor began that short and spectacular career which was destined to become the most dramatic single episode in the history of American labor. By the middle eighties it had acquired a membership estimated at more than a million. It penetrated into the ranks of the unskilled, who had hitherto been almost completely unorganized. In its system of organization, it disregarded trade distinctions. It embarked on political enterprises. It conducted country-wide strikes and boycotts on an unprecedented scale. It subscribed to political and economic programs which opened its doors to members of the intellectual as well as of the working classes. By the close of the decade, 1880-1890, it had become involved in a struggle for existence

with the re-organized American Federation of Labor and the national trade unions and by 1895 it had practically ceased to exist as a factor in American labor organization. Participation in ill-advised political enterprises, encroachment on the autonomy of groups of organized skilled workmen, and the failure to build a sound foundation for lasting organization were, in the main, the factors that led to the conflict and to the collapse of the Knights.

Over and above its contemporary influence on the American labor movement, the Knights of Labor is important because of the lasting influence it exerted on the policies of the American Federation of Labor and its constituent unions. It is, indeed, largely out of the experience of the Knights that the labor policies of American labor later grew. Industrial unionism, as practiced by the Knights of Labor, had involved existing trade unions in frequent and costly strikes which seemed to bring them little direct advantage and which seemed to produce no permanent organization among the unskilled. Political action by organized labor, instead of leading to the substantial representation of labor in political office and to marked progress in the fields of economic legislation, diverted the attention of union officers and rank and file from the daily business of the organization and created that species of personal political power so characteristic of American politics. Adherence to programs of general economic reform dissipated the energies of leaders to the neglect of the immediate and visible interests of the worker in shop and industry. The logical outcome, at the time, of these conditions was the adoption by the unions that survived, of policies completely the reverse of those held by the Knights. Trade unions, after 1890, therefore, insisted on the unre-

stricted autonomy of their craft organizations; they rejected invitations to engage as labor organizations in partisan political activity; and they limited their economic programs to such matters as wages and hours, and shop conditions, which, they believed involved the direct interests of their members. It is these tendencies somewhat modified which still persist and dominate contemporary trade union policy in this country.

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5. Growth and Amalgamation, 1890-1914.

Roughly about 1890 begins the modern phase of the American labor movement. By that year the supremacy of the American Federation of Labor over the Knights of Labor was acknowledged; the beginnings had been made in the federation of many of the national trade unions which were then already in existence and in the organization of new trade unions. Committed to the policies of trade autonomy and non-partisan political action, the movement entered in the early nineties a period of slow, but substantial growth, which terminated only with the declaration of war in 1914. In these twenty-five years American trade unions have fallen into two groups—the one of unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and the other of independent unions like

the railroad brotherhoods—each of which has made marked progress in numbers and in power.

The development of labor organizations in this period has not been a peaceful one. It is in these years that great, and in some instances, decisive labor battles were fought at Homestead; against the Pullman Company; in the anthracite coal districts; in Colorado; in West Virginia; in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. In this period, too, organized labor has been made to feel the effects of adverse legislation and judicial decisions on its status and power. From the injunction in the Pullman strike, through the Danbury Hatters' case, to the passage of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, the legal status of trade unions received jolt after jolt, which were as harmful as they were unexpected.

In spite of many attempts at legislative enactment and a veritable mass of judicial decisions, both federal and state, the factors responsible for violence in labor disputes still exist. Throughout American industry there is substantial evidence of the extensive employment of industrial spies, private guards and other types of agents provocateurs who have invariably provoked armed warfare while they protected private property. Almost every great strike in this country has witnessed that private control of the courts and the police which inevitably leads to violence. At the same time there have existed in the basic industries, notably the non-union coal fields of West Virginia, and the steel and packing industries, groups of powerful employers, who have not believed in the principles of trade unionism and who have been so stubborn in their opposition to organized labor and so committed to the use of public agencies of law and order for private purposes as to invite vigorous retaliation.

where peaceful adjustment would have been entirely practicable.

But even in the face of these serious difficulties the movement has made considerable advance in cohesion and solidarity. Unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor grew in number and power. The railroad brotherhoods remained the most important group of trade unions not affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Within the Federation, successful efforts were made to acquire greater cohesion and, consequently, more effective action. Groups of national unions affiliated with the Federation became associated in federations, such as the Building Trades Department and the Metal Trades Department, which had their counterpart in local councils of the same character. While far from total amalgamation, the formation of these departments and local councils represent a long and significant step in the direction of that unity of purpose and action which the American labor movement is striving to achieve. At the same time, there had grown up within the Federation large and powerful organizations, like the United Mine Workers and the Brewery Workers' unions, which were entirely industrial in structure and function.

It is in this period, too, that revolutionary unionism took root and challenged the position of the existing labor organizations. Small in number, but vigorous in method, such organizations as the Industrial Workers of the World and others of a syndicalist mold appeared about 1905, engaged in spectacular strikes, particularly in the textile and lumber industries, fought the older and more conservative organizations, and survived to see their influence wane and their membership drop to only a few thousand. Like many organizations of this char-

acter, their influence was indirect and was considerably greater than it seemed on the surface.

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6. The World War and Its Aftermath, 1914 to Date.

It was not long after the outbreak of war in Europe, that the economic effects of war made themselves felt in this country. The Allies became heavy purchasers of American products. The depression of 1914 was turned into a business boom. Immigration into the United States stopped. There resulted a scarcity of labor and an active demand of employers for workingmen. These conditions, which existed as early as 1916, grew more intense after our entry into the war in 1917. Abnormal business activity was soon followed by the adoption of a policy of government control over industry. As a part of this system of industrial control, various labor administrations were set up in basic industries by the federal government and to them was entrusted the definition and administration of a federal labor policy. Without almost a single exception this public policy assumed attitudes highly favorable to organized labor. By its terms public recognition and support were given to the place in industry of collective bargaining between bona-fide labor unions of workingmen and organizations of employers. With favorable economic conditions, therefore, and the encouragement of the government, trade unionism spread rapidly and penetrated in industries and occupations, where it had before been unable to get even a foothold. The close of the war was followed soon after by the post-armistice boom, when industrial conditions became even more favorable to the spread of organization among workingmen than before. Within less than five years, trade unions more than doubled their membership and made headway even in such industries as packing, hitherto practically unorganized. Only one stronghold, the steel industry was not captured.

This extension of organization and rise in influence were accompanied by the infiltration into the American labor movement of new ideas concerning the nature of a labor movement. Demands were made for a greater measure of workers' control; old trade-union demands were translated into terms of industrial democracy. Workers wanted a voice in the management. On the railroads a concrete proposal for such participation in management actually appeared in the form of the Plumb Plan and received serious consideration. In the government arsenal at Rock Island a plan of workers' representation and participation in management was put into operation.

By the middle of 1920, however, the business boom turned into a severe depression. Thousands of firms failed. In less than a year an army of industrial wage-earners, estimated at from 4 to 6 millions, became unemployed. Instead of an acute labor shortage the labor market was overstocked. This condition brought its customary consequences. In places where trade unions were of recent origin and comparatively weak, they succumbed against the attacks of hostile employers. The young union in the packing industry was almost completely wiped out. It is probable that trade unions lost in this period substantially more than 1,500,000 members. In the more strongly organized industries, also, the fight against the unions was carried on and culminated in the spring of 1922 in the great strikes of the anthracite and bituminous coal miners, of the textile workers and of the railway shopmen. Both organized and unorganized workers in all industries lost heavily of their war gains through wage reductions, increased hours, and modifications in their working rules. With the settlement of the coal and railroad strikes, however, the tide seems to have

turned. The coal strike was ended with the continued recognition of the United Mine Workers and with the preservation by the union of prevailing wage rates and working rules. Gains were even made in districts hitherto completely non-union. While the railway shopmen were able to win only a partial settlement, the close of the strike left them with the integrity of their unions safeguarded. This strike of the shopmen is notable, too, for the unity with which it was conducted. Although the strikers were members of several independent unions, the management of the strike was entrusted to the railway workers' department of the A. F. of L. Thereby was achieved practically the unity of industrial unionism. In the textile industry as in the coal mines and railroads, the resistance of organized workers stopped abruptly the tendency toward the further liquidation of labor. By the fall of 1922, the period of labor liquidation seemed, temporarily at least, to have stopped. Opportunities for employment were numerous. Prices were rising. The number of wage advances far exceeded the number of reductions; and the membership of unions was again growing.

In the four years since 1922 labor organizations have done little better than hold their own. They have not penetrated in striking manner the outstanding non-union industries. The United Mine Workers, the largest union in the American Federation of Labor, has engaged in several nation-wide strikes, which left its power apparently unimpaired in the anthracite industry, but which have resulted in substantial and continuous loss in the soft coal fields. Organized labor in the building trades, due in large measure to the continued prosperity of this industry, finds itself in 1926 at the peak of strength and achievement. On the railroads the shop craft unions are

just beginning to retrieve their losses; whereas the metal trades and textile unions are still in a state of depression and stationary or even declining membership. Although, with some few exceptions, American industry has enjoyed great prosperity in the past few years, the high level of business activity has been only slightly reflected in the growth of labor organization. The spread and establishment of so-called company unions, labor organizations created by the initiative of the employer, have been no small factor in accounting for the present state of American trade unionism.

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7. Types of Unions.

Whatever cohesion the American labor movement may have it derives from the affiliation of national unions with the American Federation of Labor and from the common industrial problems which all trade unions must face and meet. While, therefore, many American trade unions have policies in common with others and have much the same outlook, in actual practice frequent and important differences in policy and in practice appear, due in part to the leadership and character of rank and file and in part to the nature of the industry in which the union works. A fuller understanding of the American labor movement can come only through the perception of such industrial differences and the inter-

pretation of trade union policy in the light of such differences. Few comprehensive studies of the trade union on its industrial background are available, but enough material of this nature can be found to indicate to the student the general type of problem which such studies, on a wider scale, would reveal.

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8. Policies of American Trade Unions.

Trade unions are organized for the purpose of protecting workers against the grosser evils of modern industrialism, for the purpose of improving working conditions, and to effect such changes in the relations between employers and employees as to extend the field of activity of the worker in the shop and industry. In the performance of these functions, trade unions almost at the outset develop attitudes and ways of acting with regard to specific issues. The sum total of these attitudes and ways of acting, as they are originally and as they become through addition and modification, constitutes the policies of trade unions. Trade union policy, just like the policy of all organized groups of people, experiences growth. A policy may be changed to meet new and unforeseen conditions. The rise in power of a certain trade union, a change in leadership, or the spread of a new idea may produce a change in policy with reference to an old condition.

A most important class of trade union policies is concerned with the fixing of remuneration for work done. In some industries, where the character of the work is of a certain kind, the union approves a condition of piece work. In others, where experience with piece work is unsatisfactory because it has led to excessive speeding and the cutting of rates, the union policy is one of week work. In still others another set of circumstances has led the union to adopt a modified policy which combines the characteristics of both piece and week work. More generally, also, the union desires to raise the standards of living of its members or it wishes to protect them against reductions in their standards. In their effort to protect standards that have been achieved or to win new standards the union develops attitudes, which necessarily differ from time to time and which at first blush seem to be no more than occasional arguments, but which ultimately tend to become permanent policies.

In much the same way the members of unions and their leaders approach the problem of the length of the workday. Organized labor wishes to attain for itself more leisure, which people may use as they please. So trade unions strike for the eight hour day or the 44 hour week. Frequently, also, those who have been responsible for the formulation of trade union policy have felt that the shorter workday contributes to lessen the evils of unemployment by spreading available work over a longer period. And so the policy of a shorter workday is developed to meet one or more of the problems with which all industrial workers today are confronted.

Because trade union leaders and many of the rank and file consider the shorter work day to be a solution of the problem of unemployment, they tend, for this and other reasons, to be indifferent or hostile to other meas-

ures suggested as cures for industrial unemployment. Just as the members of an American political party may find in the protective tariff the root of business prosperity and therefore remain ignorant of all other sources of prosperity, so the leaders and members of trade unions may cling to unemployment policies, that seem to them effective, and neglect new and unfamiliar measures that may be much more likely to reach the ends which they really desire. In this as in other trade union policies, progress is frequently halted by inertia and habit,

An outstanding feature of modern factory production is the rapidity of change in method of manufacture and in the organization of industry. All such changes, such as the introduction of machinery or even some minor change in the method of work, immediately affect the worker either by throwing him out of a job, by reducing his earnings, by making him perform work which is distasteful to him, or by a combination of these circumstances. To protect their members against accidents of this nature, over which they have no control, unions have come to adopt protective devices of one sort or another, some restrictive in nature, others permitting a large amount of freedom for mechanical development. Unions by no means follow the same practice in this matter. Conditions vary widely from industry to industry; in some the change is gradual, in others revolutionary. To meet this variety of conditions a policy of control and restriction, in all of its complexity is soon adopted throughout the entire labor movement. An interesting case in point is the adoption in the United States of systems of scientific management. These systems carried with them changes in shop procedure, methods of payment, discipline and so on. Just as in the case of the introduction of machinery, the trade

union soon met the movement toward scientific management with a definite, if changing, attitude and policy.

Conditions prevailing in American industry since the war have brought labor unions to the realization of the necessity for fundamental revision of their industrial policy. Some of them have come by experience to learn that power in the unionized sections of an industry carries with it responsibility for the stability and prosperity of the industry. As a result constructive policies have begun slowly to replace the old obstructive tactics. The more alert organizations are now assuming responsibility for production and for the management of the shops and factory, where before they were content to limit their activities to measures designed to produce temporary, if doubtful, advantages. The most striking progress in this direction has been made in the men's clothing and railroad industries. In railroad shops, as in men's clothing factories, the organizations of labor have in a few years gone a long way toward assuming important managerial functions which have added to their power and permanence.

In addition to their relations with employers, trade unions with memberships varying from only a few hundred to over five hundred thousand, are confronted with a vast range of problems of internal government. They must decide the question of conditions of admission; of the number of apprentices; of the desirable units of local government; of the manner in which the mandates of the officers must be carried out; of their relations with unions in similar occupations. In these respects, as with their contact with their employers, trade union policy shows a wide range of interesting and important variation. At the same time trade unions are essentially fighting organizations. For better or for worse, they all, sooner or

later, engage in tests of strength with employers. In preparing for these emergencies and as a result of the experience gained in participating in them organized labor has developed its various conceptions of industrial strategy. The railroad unions use one type of strategy, the unions in the building trades another.

Organized labor, then, in its contact with employers, in its life in the shop, in its internal organization has built up a mass of practises and attitudes which together represent their policies.

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9. Women in Trade Unions.

With some few notable exceptions, women have not yet come to occupy prominent positions in the American labor movement. In spite of the gains in membership made by women during the war, it is not probable that the total female membership of trade unions exceeds in 1922 a few per cent of the number of women working in industry. The reasons for this are two-fold. In many trades and industries, in which trade union policy is controlled by men, changes in technical processes have come so rapidly as to make possible the wholesale replacement of men by women workers. Where this has been the case, the unions have erected barriers to the entry of women into the industry and, therefore, into the trade unions. Occasionally, of course, these restrictive measures have been fruitless and women have in a large measure replaced men. This has been strikingly the situation in the needle trades. Here trade unions have adopted liberal policies toward the admission of women with the result that women in this group of industries show a relatively high degree of organization. Women, secondly, have entered in large numbers into occupations, such as clerical and stenographic work and as saleswomen, in which the spread of labor organi-

zation has always been exceedingly slow and difficult even among the men. But in these places, too, progress in organization has been more rapid in the past few years. Making allowance for the inherent difficulties in organizing women in industry, the probabilities are that the changing attitude of American trade unions toward women members and the development of groups of skilled women organizers will, within the next ten years, effect substantial increases in the number of women members of trade unions.

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10. Trade Unions and the Law.

American trade unions, unlike the English, have not attained a clear and definite status under the law of the country. Since 1880, certainly, American labor has urged the unequivocal definition of its rights, privileges and immunities as organized workmen. It has pressed for protection against the uncertainties and hostility that so frequently have characterized American legislatures and courts in their attitudes towards labor unions. Trade unions here have consistently wanted the right to strike, to persuade the unorganized to organize and to join with the organized in strikes, and to employ those methods, like picketing, without which the right to strike becomes a mere shadow. Twice in the course of their agitation for a definite legal status, the trade unions hoped that their fight had been won—once with the passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1890 and again with the enactment of the Clayton Act in 1914. In the latter of these measures American labor believed its status to be clearly and favorably defined. They were prepared to find in these measures emphatic statement of the essential differences between trade unions and other types of industrial combinations. Later events proved these anticipated gains to have been largely illusory. American courts, as before, continued to issue injunctions restraining members of the union from engaging in practices that can be interpreted as interfering with the free conduct of their business by employers. The boycott, in all of its practically effective forms, continues to be illegal. And trade unions, on many occasions and in many of the courts and legislatures of the land, are regarded no more favorably by the law than forms of business combinations, whose practices have been stamped as illegal and anti-social by legislatures, courts, and public opinion.

Until the legal status of trade unions in the United States is fixed favorably and unmistakably, they will constantly confront the uncertainties that have been the sources of so much confusion and cost in the past.

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11. Organized Labor in Politics.

Organized labor in the United States has frequently responded to the call of political action in the last century. Its political adventures have been short and, in the main, unsuccessful. The receipt of the ballot in the early nineteenth century, the panics and depressions of the 30's and 70's served to turn trade unions to political action, independently or in company with the farmers. The political platforms of these occasional "labor parties" were interesting mixtures of measures, such as currency reform, suggested by prevailing industrial condi-

tions, and of larger programs of social reform introduced by intellectuals affiliated with the more "radical" political parties. Apparently it was impossible for a labor movement which possessed little cohesion and continuity in the industrial field to win great power in the political field. These attempts at political action accordingly proved abortive and in the long run produced the effect of making distasteful to American trade unionists any attempt to lend the labor movement to experiments in independent partisan political action.

Latterly, however, the attitude of organized labor toward political action seems to be undergoing a transformation. The traditional non-partisan political policy, observed by the American Federation of Labor, has become the subject of criticism and of dissent. The political success of the farmers, in the form of the Non-Partisan League, and the realization of the political influence of organized labor, of which there were many evidences during the war, again turned certain groups within the labor movement toward political action. The new attitude first took practical form in the organization of the Farmer-Labor Party in 1920. Under the leadership of the railroad unions, the machinists, and the clothing workers a beginning was then made in the organization of a political party to represent the interests of labor and of farmers. Its first results were far from encouraging. Its future can be no more than a matter of speculation. At present it has a little strength in several of the industrial centers in the middle West and on the Pacific Coast. The apparent success, in fact, of the A. F. of L. and of the railroad unions in the Congressional elections of 1922 has probably again strengthened the faith of the leaders of the American labor movement in the advantages of non-partisan political action.

This lack of faith in an independent labor party was shaken but not destroyed by the La Follette presidential campaign of 1924. Under the leadership of the Committee for Progressive Political Action the time seemed then ripe for the creation of a genuine labor party. Associated in the Committee were the leading railroad and needle trade unions, several important organizations in the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party. Senators La Follette and Wheeler were prevailed upon to accept the nominations for president and vice-president. The ticket was endorsed by the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor and a fairly vigorous campaign was conducted throughout the country. The upshot was a vote around 5,000,000. The results were apparently regarded as disappointing. Organizations, like the railroad unions, seemed to fear the entangling alliances of a labor party, and returned to their practice of independent, separate political activity. The American Federation of Labor did likewise. The approach of the next Federal elections in the United States is not marked by any signs of the creation of a labor party.

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12. Banking and Insurance.

Every labor movement has a general interest which transcends its immediate activities and preoccupations. It is ordinarily prevented from exploiting this interest by the inertia of habit and by the lack of a skilled personnel. Great social upheavals, of one sort or another, set loose neglected interests and initiate periods of experimentation. Such was the contribution of the World War to the American and other labor movements. The impulse to engage in cooperative enterprise took in this country the novel form of labor banking. Beginning in 1920 with the organization of banks by the Machinists' and Locomotive Engineers' unions, the movement spread rapidly to other labor organizations and to all parts of the country. In 1926, 36 labor banks, having combined resources of nearly \$130,000,000, are operating and transacting every type of banking business. The majority of these institutions are limited-dividend enterprises; their purpose is to share profits with their customers and to contribute, by the development of new features, to the range of financial services useful to the great masses of people, as individuals and as members of an organized movement. How far these ends will be realized will depend partly on the preservation of labor control but more particularly on the character of the administrative staffs that are drawn into the service of labor banks.

The interest of the labor movement in cooperative enterprise did not stop with the growth of labor banking. There appeared new fields to conquer. Within the past year under the initiative of the American Federation of Labor a company was organized to furnish various forms of personal insurance to the members of trade unions. Ownership of stock on this company, known as the

Union Labor Life Insurance Company, is limited to members of unions, local and national. The company is still in the stage of promotion. But skillfully administered co-operative insurance, like labor banking, holds the promise of valuable service, both by remedying the abuses that have grown up in the private business of insurance and by discovering those methods of conducting an insurance business that will most economically furnish protection to persons of moderate income.

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13. Workers' Education.

American labor came out of the war with greater self-consciousness and the realization that within its own ranks there were problems of education and growth to which it must attend. The very growth in the size and power of organized labor focused attention on the question of the education of the adult workers as one of the fundamental problems of the labor movement. Workers' education has come to be regarded as the basis of a permanent and responsible workers' organization and must therefore be an integral part of the trade union itself.

Historically the interest of American labor in education is a long and continuous one reaching back to their championship of our free public school system during the early twenties and thirties of the 19th century. From time to time during the latter part of the last century we find sporadic efforts in the development of study circles for workers. In 1897 the People's Institute which was the pioneer experiment in adult education in the United States was started at New York City to bring "the world of culture and the world of labor together." So too, about 1900, the Workers' Educational League, the Workers' School and other attempts were made to serve the education of the worker. In 1906 the Rand School of Social Science was established in New York drawing inspiration from Ruskin College, England, which had been founded by three Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Vrooman and Charles A. Beard, at Oxford, in 1899.

While these and other attempts on the part of settlements to provide education for the workers were made during the opening years of this century, the workers' educational movement controlled and directed by the labor movement is of recent date in this country. Under the influence of earlier English experience and with modifications due to conditions peculiar to the United States, the American unions started no more than ten years ago a modest movement aimed to spread education, under union control and with union finances, among the working people of this country. The first specific step in the movement for workers' education within the labor movement was taken by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union which appropriated in 1916 at its convention in Cleveland union funds for educational work. In a few years this union developed

classes that soon became the model for the experiments of other unions. One by one in different parts of the country trade union colleges, workers' universities, and labor schools appeared under trade union auspices. Nine years ago there were but four workers' educational groups in two cities. In five years these groups increased from four to twenty-six in number in twenty-two cities.

In response to the need for closer cooperation between the various workers' educational enterprises, a group of teachers and trade unionists held a conference on workers' education in April, 1921, in New York City. The result of this conference was the establishment of the Workers Education Bureau of America as a clearing house of information and guidance for the movement. During the five and a half years of its existence the Bureau has developed certain well defined services. It issues a monthly News Service to all its affiliated centers and publishes a Workers' Education Quarterly for teachers, students and other interested persons. It also publishes a series of text books known as the Workers' Bookshelf and a series of pamphlets, organization, and research studies which are listed fully at the end of this pamphlet. During the year 1926 it has incorporated the Workers Education Bureau Press and has established a research department at headquarters. And in addition, the Bureau employs field representatives to assist local groups in starting study classes and maintains a teachers' registry, loan library, correspondence and cooperative book service.

In 1924 the American Federation of Labor at its annual convention recommended to the national and international unions the support of this Bureau on a per capita basis. In 1926 this per capita which was adopted two years before was raised to one cent per member per

year. Today the Bureau represents a federation of over five hundred thirty national and international unions, central bodies, local unions and workers' education enterprises. There has been as well an increase in the number of study classes, institutes and summer schools throughout the country. A resident college has been established at Katonah, New York in 1921. Approximately 40,000 wage earners have been enrolled in various enterprises which now exist in forty states of the union.

The movement is still young. It has spread rapidly over this country and has secured a genuine measure of support from representatives of labor. Fortunately the leaders in this movement are not committed to particular systems or aims. The spirit of experimentation is consistently encouraged.

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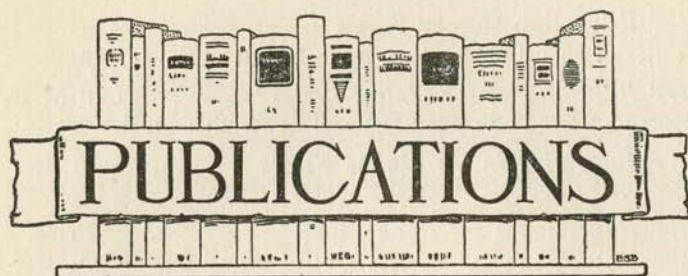
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