

THE SOCIALIST LABOR MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

By W. Z. Foster.

The German labor movement presents widely varying types of unions. There are Socialist and syndicalist unions, Catholic and Protestant Unions, Hirsch-Dunkerschen and independent unions, etc., not to mention the "yellow" or bosses unions, of which latter type the railroaders' union, 400,000 strong is a prominent example.

The workers forming these organizations, although having economic interests apparently in common, have allowed themselves to be hypnotised by their religious and political priests, and divided into so many quarreling sects, with the usual mutual scabbing and lamentable sacrifice of their common interests. The catholic unionist is opposed to receiving instructions from the socialist popes, or to worship at the shrines of bygone saints of the same caliber; he takes his orders direct from Rome, and nominates St. Joseph, or some other Catholic saint, as patron of his union. The protestant unionist objects to the religious and political views of his catholic and socialist fellow workers, and fights the class struggle on lines laid down by his particular spiritual political leaders. The Hirsch-Dunkerschen unionist is patriotic, and wishes to defend "Der Vaterland" against the attacks of the socialists. The socialist unionist don't like the color of the ballots of the non-socialist unionists, etc., etc., to the production of the present comic-tragic situation.

Only one organization—the syndicalist with but 20,000 members—refuses the aid of spiritual and political popes alike, and stands on the solid ground of the all sufficiency of the organized economic power of the working class to solve all the workers' problems. The rest look for various sorts of intervention and help from either spiritual or political "abouger" or both.

Of the about 2,500,000 workers organized, excluding those in "yellow" unions, some 1,800,000 are organized into the socialist unions, or "Die Gewerkschaften Deutschlands." This organization is practically the German labor movement, it vastly outweighing in importance the other unions, with their combined membership of about 700,000. It is the organization that is so fondly dubbed "the progressive German labor movement" by our American socialist writers.

The following rapid sketch of this organization will enable American readers to judge whether or not it is worthy of such a title.

Forms of Organization

"Die Gewerkschaften Deutschlands" is the national alliance of 57 national trades and "industrial" unions. The central, or executive committee is the "Generalkommission" composed of 15 members, who are elected at the national convention every three years. Karl Legien is the president. Though the national unions officially retain their autonomy, the "Generalkommission" is possessed of large dictatorial powers, which are constantly on the increase. What the "Generalkommission" says usually "goes," whether it concerns national or international labor questions.

The national unions are composed of local and district unions, much the same as A. F. of L. unions.

In Germany, as in all European countries, the natural tendency of the workers is to organize themselves into larger industrial, or semi-industrial unions, in which craft lines are more or less obscured. This tendency is not hindered by the existence of such a vast difference between the rate of wages of skilled and unskilled workers which is so largely responsible for the sharply drawn craft lines of American labor unions. Where the mechanic is paid but little more than his helper, it is a very easy matter for both to see the advantage of combining their forces. Nevertheless, the socialist unions are largely of a craft form, and almost wholly imbued with craft union ideas. This is partly due to their guildish traditions, but mostly due to the baneful influence of their political leaders, who see in unionism at the best only a palliative until capitalism has been overthrown by political action, and who never permit their unions to take a step forward until there is no other alternative.

The syndicalist conception of organization strictly on industrial lines, for the double purpose of controlling and striking an industry under capitalism, and operating the same after capitalism has been overthrown, is practically unknown in Germany. At the last convention of the socialist unions—Hamburg 1908—the brewery workers proposed that all com-

paratively large numbers of them are a special profession engaged in distilleries, industries should be obliged to join the union of said industries. This was aimed particularly at the teamsters and coopers working in the breweries. Its adoption would have committed the movement to the industrial union principle. After a long debate the brewery workers, seeing themselves overwhelmed, withdrew their motion and the convention adopted a craft union resolution worthy of the A. F. of L. The gist of it runs: When members of various crafts are employed in an industry, they shall only be accepted in the unions of their respective crafts.

Since this convention, however, several of the craft unions have fused with either their industrial or closely related craft unions. Notable fusions were bricklayers with building laborers, and marine workers and longshoremen with transportation workers. These fusions were caused by stern necessity, and took place only when they could be no longer delayed by the "absorbed" union officials.

The transportation workers presents the highest type of organization form. It is composed of railroaders (a hand full), street car workers, teamsters, chauffeurs, cab drivers, sailors, longshoremen, warehouse employes, etc., etc. In spite of its scope, it is organized on craft union principles and insists that it be given jurisdiction over teamsters, shipping department workers, etc., no matter which industry they may be employed in. Other unions stretch in on its territory and steal workers, who should belong to it. The Metal Workers, a giant union of 455,000 members of practically every category of metal workers, in common with its smaller brothers, proceeds on the same principle. It stretches its tentacles into all industries in which metal workers are employed. There are several of these large so-called "industrial" unions. The building trades offer a fair example of the predominating form of union. There are fourteen national unions covering the same categories of building trades workers which in France are organized entirely into the National Federation of Building Trades Workers.

From this it will be seen that socialism and industrial unionism do not necessarily complement each other, as the "revolutionary" wing of the American socialist movement is maintaining.

(To be continued)

MIDDLE STATES AGITATION

On Sunday, Sept. 24 the delegates to the I. W. W. convention from the middle states met in special conference, and drew up plans for more activity and concerted action on the part of the locals in that section. An organization was formed subject to the approval of the locals, for agitation and organization purposes, whereby speakers will be routed, circuits laid out, and efforts made through co-operative effort, to organize locals and carry on propaganda in unorganized sections of the middle states. More about this organization will appear as soon as plans are completed. In order to facilitate the work, the delegates in this conference proposed at the present time the levying of a special per capita tax of 5 cents.

PRACTICING CRAFT SCABBERY

New York, Sept. 14.

The previous articles in *Solidarity* on the longshore situation were good, but I want to give a few more facts from New York harbor. About a year ago, 140 Poles were getting short changed in their pay envelopes, and decided to organize. They applied for a charter from the I. L. A., stuck together like men, and got the \$900 back which the company tried to rob them of.

About that time the local boat captains seeing the success of these unskilled workers, became discontented in turn, but did not have backbone enough to take a stand. They were pleading for better wages, but pleading will never get the workers anything. A few live ones among them tried to get the captains to take a stand, and succeeded to the extent that they went out on strike, stayed out a few hours, and then got cold feet.

The Poles went out in sympathy with the captains, and were double crossed. Result: I. L. A. coal trimmers on strike I. L. A. coal captains handling scab coal and bringing scabs over the coal dock on their boats; I. L. A. longshoremen putting scab coal in the ships.

Then they will tell you the industrial unionists are impractical!

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