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# Labor Liquidates Revolution.

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My young friend, an important officeholder in a large local labor union, came in the other day with a remark:

“You know, I have found that mysterious ‘perpetuum mobile’ which scientists used to seek. It’s my organization which is moving perpetually — though without arriving anywhere.”

My friend hardly realized that he had admirably stated the essence of the movement in our hemisphere, the movement that moves without advancing, that drifts aimlessly when it doesn’t retreat consciously. He stated our “formula of progress.”

What’s really “coming up” in the American labor world? To be sure, something is doing here, there, and everywhere. There is motion and commotion, but is there movement?

William Z. Foster, perhaps the one live man in the American labor movement that is American, sums up the situation in the following words:

“The old trade union bureaucracy is intellectually dead and spiritually bankrupt. Absolutely no progress may be looked for from that source. The dead hand of Mr. Gompers holds the old officialdom in an icy grasp. He will not tolerate even the mildest progressivism on their part.”

There was plenty of dynamite in the air of American labor reality this year to supply the basis for a test. But what are the net results? If the miners’ fight for their independence and the tragic struggle of the railway shopmen did not offer the movement the much desired opportunity to assert itself, what, where and who will supply that chance?

The showing made at the recent meeting of the central conclave of the American Labor Movement at Atlantic City did not belie Foster’s appraisal of the situ-

ation. To be sure, Mr. Gompers said something about a general strike to counteract Daugherty’s injunction against the striking shopmen of the nation’s railways. He said it in rather annoyed tones, enough to inflame the self-heated imagination of some kindergarten Socialists. But then came the bathing beauties’ contest, and the great heart of the Grand Old Man of Labor warmed up to the new situation. Will you blame him?

Said an editor-manager of a mid-western American Labor paper to prominent editors in his office, the other day: “We are for labor, and I say to my city editors — if the readers want SEX, give it to them.”

Of course, Mr. Gompers is also for booze. His blood evidently needs strong stimulants. But is there enough stimulation in the body of the Labor Movement to awaken its official head from old-age slumbers?

“The otherwise dismal situation of black reaction,” to use once more Foster’s characterization, could not have been made more strikingly clear than by the meeting of Mr. Gompers’ Executive Council at Atlantic City referred to above. The Council had been facing a situation that not only called for action, but made action mandatory upon anyone who has not sold his conscience for a pot of flesh, or cold-stored it.

The miners, even though led by Lewis, Green and others, who are “Americans first and would not fight our government,” checked decidedly the onslaught of big capital on union labor, in fact stopped the energetically pushed process of the post-war liquidation of labor. The miners won a signal victory.

The railway shopmen, on the other hand, were pretty near a successful conclusion of their battle marked by genuine fighting vitality, if only — if only labor would agree to move an inch. Without aid, sub-

stantial, generous, quick, effective — not necessarily a general strike — the largest and most effective struggle of railway labor in the history of this country was brinking the abyss of unrecoverable defeat.

Could the AF of L call a general strike? Of course not. It would have been the part of wisdom not even to invoke in vain the sound of the word. But surely the alternative that confronted the Supreme Council of Labor was not: general strike or inspection of bathing beauties.

Was it a search for union labels on bathing suits that engaged the attention of the captains of labor, as suggested by a good communist?

## II.

“Liquidation of labor” has been the slogan of the captains of industry coming into their own after the wartime “inflation” of Labor.

Liquidation of Revolution — is the object of the Captains and Lieutenants of Labor since the noticeable return to normalcy on the exchange of social forces battling for supremacy.

The “revolution” came in Europe, and there it is being liquidated. Europe has had its experience, and its “best minds” are willing to learn from the past. At times, of course, they are not altogether free to forget. While the liquidation after the great social upheavals of 1848 and 1871 was carried out with “fire and sword,” it is the policy of “peaceful penetration” that marks the present day process.

True enough, misery and suffering fall to the lot of the rebellious proletarians of today as then, but no longer are their leaders exiled to a better world or even to lands “not so distant.” At least that is true with regard to some of the leaders. Blind vengeance is no policy for the enlightened twentieth century; and the rule of reason, or compromise, has substituted it.

The Paris Commune of 1871 was drowned in its own blood, and those who challenged the social fabric of merchants and moneylenders in the red days of 1848 did not live to tell the tale. But 1871 was the direct heir of 1848, and the *immortelles* placed by history at the grave of the communards reared the seeds of the red roses of 1905 and 1917.

The bourgeois leaders of today, unlike the Bourbons, forget if need be, and learn if they must. They

reject the historically proven-to-be-fallacious idea of drowning the revolutionary workers in their own red blood; rather will they tame them with the aid of a submissive leadership; they dilute the revolutionary stock in the rosewater of social-democracy. Thus with the benevolent assistance of the enlightened bourgeoisie, order revives the Second International to grandeur and orderly betrayal.

The great German Independent Socialist Party capitulated its at times conscience-stricken head to the peaceful standards of the Majority Party of Scheidemann, Ebert, Noske, and the rest. The British Labor Party under Webb, Thomas, Henderson, and Tom Shaw cuts away from whatever red blood transfused into its body politic. George Lansbury, who is not willing to revise his sympathy for the Russian Workers’ Soviets is recalled from the editorship of the paper he created in the twilight of the decadent social day. The Vienna International passes away, offering the blessing of its dying lips and the fading shading of its bygone promising youth to the grave-diggers and ill-wishers of the German and Russian Revolutions.

The family-reunion of the gentlemen of betrayal on the Second, and the Knights of Hesitancy and indecision on the 2 1/2, amounts to a carte blanche to the powers that be to exterminate to the root the non-conformists of the Third International. Thus Europe is liquidating the revolution by peaceful penetration into the ranks of the proletariat, diluting the red blood of the rebels with the pink hopes of the reformists.

## III.

But capital in America does not need the finesse of dealing with adversaries that the European bourgeoisie sees fit to employ. There is no social democracy in the United States worthy of buying or blinding. Whatever handful of it there is left is the debris of post-bellum spiritual readjustment, is either reactionary as a matter of faith or too insignificant to be honored with benevolence. And the giant on legs of clay, Organized Labor, is atrociously counterrevolutionary, counter-progressive, counter-anything that “was not good for grandpa.” It is phenomenally stupid. So much so as to worry even the intelligent ones of the commanding classes. True to the fashion of the day, it pro-

ceeds to liquidate the “revolution” on its own hook. Thus the action of the AF of L in revoking the charter of the New York Bookkeepers’ and Stenographers’ Union because it contained “Reds,” and endangered the strategic basic industry of typewriting minutes, communications and letters in a dozen New York radical union offices. It was the only “action” of the captains and lieutenants of labor, except of course then uttering of an acrimonious diatribe against radicalism, leftism, Fosterism.

And what “national” labor is doing, local labor feels obliged to follow. Thus a regular witch-hunting of radicalism in labor unions styled as “socialistic,” the raid on the conference of the Trade Union Educational League, the determined effort to get Foster, all this by federal authorities, unquestionably provoked and stimulated by the “feelings in the matter” of regular labor leadership. The old classic report of the Russian County Sheriff to his superiors — “there was going to be a rainstorm and a lot of damage caused by it, but due to the energetic precaution taken by the police in my charge, nothing happened” — will be paraphrased some day by Gompers reporting to history itself or to the Civic Federation, “the East Side, the American Workers and Foster were about to offset law and order, but I said — no!”

#### IV.

“There were times much worse but never as mean.” It’s true the badly damaged ship of labor and hope is sailing under the flag of defeat and there’s nothing cheerful in sight. But a poor captain is he who is not ready to weather a storm. Downs are inevitable where ups are attempted, and those who, on this side of the ocean, banked on imported victories, will have to pay their own checks, which will not be honored because written against exaggerated hopes. The promise of labor is international in its outlook and scope, but fulfillment is national, local. You may hope regardless of distance and time, but struggle is territorial. And an alarming tendency is noticeable to disintegrate belief and to weaken action because of what has happened across the waters.

The militants in American labor, and rebels and

nonconformists on labor’s periphery, will have to learn from defeat as well. It’s just at times like the present that thinking is most necessary; that aping and following stereotyped formulae or notions is a mortal danger. More than ever there is a necessity today for a thoroughgoing ransacking of the house of labor from ill-advised attitudes, from overestimated shibboleths, wherever they come from. An organization of militants so knit together that it is capable of action on the slightest provocation, yet not straight-jacketed, is the command of the hour, now that the “revolution” is being liquidated even before it has arrived. But this does not mean that privately-conducted tea and garden parties, even if enjoying official labels, are the means to the end, are to substitute for mass-movement, open and aboveboard. Hunting in the woods and fishing around the lakes is a pursuit worthy of the gods. But the men who will forge the sledgehammer of the American revolution will come into the open from the open, not an exotic growth, and not children of a childish conspiracy.

The romantic chase in Michigan was worth all that they may get for it to the sleuth of the federal and state authorities, and the immediate group for whom they were acting, the fossilized leadership of the misled. But to the real labor movement this even betrays the fact that in the heads of many revolutionaries there is still fog rather than gray matter.

#### V.

The Workers Party, hardly nine months after its inception, succeeded in earning the condemnation of all it set out to combat, which is proof positive that it was a hit rather than a miss. The ire it honestly deserved was due to its determination, as expressed repeatedly by its original organizers, to live in the open, to remain open. It was the open communist fighting movement that the alliance of yellow and black hates and fears. Groups of ten are of no danger to anything except the aims they profess to be pursuing.†

And what is true with regard to the political end of labor organization, such as the Workers Party was conceived and born to be, is equally true with regard to the Trade Union Educational League, in its own

†- The underground Communist Party of America was based upon a structure of local groups consisting of ten members or less.

way, to be sure. The TUEL must be an open consolidation of all actively progressive forces in the Trade Unions. Any annexation of the league by party units not committed to a policy of broad progressive trade union action would be detrimental to the objectives of the movement, including the Party.

However, it looks as if these self-evident truths have been sacrificed to a narrow-minded, historically stupid mode of thinking, deriving its strength from parrot-like copying of situations and conditions totally different.

If there is any truth in the detailed account of the Michigan Communist Conference as published in the Boston *Transcript*, striking departures have been made from the policies understood to be guiding the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League, respectively.

It looks very much as if the costly experience of the last four years has been consciously cast aside, and the frail shell of the open and aboveboard movement is to be made a tail to the kite of romanticism at its worst. A perfectly irresponsible, because uncontrollable, leadership from around the corner is to keep in mechanical control of the political movement, as well

as the efforts of genuine progressives in the unions. A citizenry of first and second raters, of desirables, near and pretty-near desirables, is to be built around or under the organizations that thrive in the open, and are the only ones capable of attracting the confidence of the masses of thinking American workers. All this substructure is devised in order to assure the “mechanical control” which is incapable of controlling by virtue of ability.

The liquidation of revolution by a deadening labor bureaucracy could wish no better assistance than this policy of hari-kari on the part of the radicals within the ranks of labor. It is the sort of cooperation for which they would give any price; the radicals burying themselves in underground dugouts and they — letting down the lid over the chances of the radicals in the functioning of labor conglomerations.

I know that the undergroundist psychology, trying to elevate itself to the height of policy, has a powerful backing in a source from which we are prone to draw our inspiration. But in that great and enticing “over there” there is little patience for child’s play, and we owe it to them to cease being children here.

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