

# WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

## IN SOVIET RUSSIA

(Editor's note:—This is the tenth of a series of articles on Russia which Mr. Foster is writing for The Federated Press. It deals with labor laws and working conditions in the workers' republic.)

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Moscow.—In no other place on the face of the globe do the workers enjoy so many rights in industry as they do in Russia. This is perfectly natural because all other countries are ruled by a few capitalists who own the industries and crush down the workers in order to grind out profits for themselves, who utilize the industries for the use and benefit of the whole people.

The universal eight-hour work day (seven-hour night shift) for adults and the six-hour work day for persons under 20 years of age; the freeing of women from industry, with full pay, for eight weeks before and eight weeks after childbirth; the compulsory weekly rest time for 42 continuous hours for all workers; the legal limitation of overtime; the granting of two week's vacation, with full pay, for each six months of continuous labor; and dozens of other important measures in force in Russia making for the improvement of the workers conditions, would be considered great achievements in capitalistic countries, where the powerful trade unions, in spite of long and bitter struggles, have not been able to win their equal. But in this country they are only minor details of a great social program. Something much more fundamental, for instance, than all of them is the right to share in the fruits of industry (which amounts to the right to live) guaranteed to all its citizens by the Russian government.

This means that in Russia every able-bodied person has a legal right to work in the industries at the prevailing trade union scales. If for any reason no work is to be had then the applicant is entitled to full wages during his term of unemployment. If an individual is incapacitated for work because of youth, old age, sickness, injury or some other legitimate reason he is given a decent standard of living, not as a matter of charity but because of his right as a citizen of the workers' state. In short, Russia recognizes the right of human beings to live and places the industries at their disposal so that they may freely earn this living.

How different it is in capitalist countries. There the industries are in the hands of a few exploiters. If they find it convenient or profitable to operate their mills and factories, then they do so, and the workers may be able to beg opportunity to work. But if the capitalists do not see fit to run their industries then the workers are left to starve in unemployment, as millions of them are doing this very minute all over the western world. Under capitalism, work horses (because they are valuable property) are well taken care of in good times or bad, but workmen (because they are not property) are thrown upon the streets in periods of industrial depression and left to suffer poverty and despair. And yet we find hypocritical labor leaders, for fanciful reasons, misrepresenting and condemning Russia, the only country in the world which guarantees its people the right to work and to live, and where there is no curse of unemployment.

Without duties there can be no rights. Hence, with the right of the Russians to work goes also the legal obligation that they do so. The workers' government takes the stand that no one has the right to live in Russia without working for his daily bread. Its constitution declares: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat." The law specifically requires that every able bodied adult do his share in producing the necessities of life. Exploiters of labor are classed as a species of criminal.

Thus we come to one of the "horrors" of Sovietism. People here are actually compelled to earn their own living, instead of being allowed to

whip it out of the hides of others. No wonder the various brands of reactionaries (most of whom never did a useful thing in their lives) consider the Russian compulsory labor laws a horrible tyranny and are making the welkin ring with their howlings.

But their complaints are lost on the Russian labor militants. The latter are striving for the establishment of a Communist society in which every sort of compulsion will be unnecessary; where the multitudes of people, of their own volition, will freely perform their full social and political duties toward themselves and each other. But they know that that time has not arrived yet. The present state of society represents the transition stage from capitalism to communism. The vast bulk of the workers are just emerging from a dog-eat-dog capitalism and are still afflicted heavily with its ignorance, selfishness and short sightedness. Many of them thought the revolution meant that they no longer had to work, while others supposed that an hour or two's labor a day, when they felt like it, would meet the situation. For workers in such a primitive state of mind discipline is still necessary. Only a minority are intellectually prepared for the new society. And it falls as naturally to this intelligent minority to set up the essential discipline in Russian industry as it does to the corresponding minority to create the discipline in the American trade unions absolutely indispensable for making the backward masses fight effectively on the industrial field in their own behalf.

Compulsory labor is only a temporary measure in Russia. It is a reaction from capitalism and will gradually disappear as the effects of the capitalistic training are eliminated from the workers' minds by proletarian education.

Far more important, however, than even their legal right to work is the Russian workers' recognized right to the full product of their labor. This principle is established by the Soviet government and forms the foundation of all its institutions. It is the heart of the revolution and it means that the Russian workers no longer have to pay tribute to an exploiting class. To the toilers accrue all the advantages of invention and every device that goes to increase production. They get all they produce, after deducting, of course, what is necessary for state expenses. In passing it may be noted that these state expenses will eventually be reduced to nil, because the Russians, looking upon their government purely as a temporary war measure against domestic and foreign capitalism, intend to eventually abolish it through gradually replacing it by a purely business administration of things.

Compare the Russian's right to the full product of their labor with the deplorable arrangements prevailing in capitalist countries. In the latter the workers are legally entitled to nothing, not even the barest minimum wage upon which to feed and clothe their families. All they get is what they are able to wring from their employers through the power of labor organizations. The cream of industry's products flows into the maw of the exploiters; the benefits of invention and intensified production are absorbed by countless industrial parasites; the drones idle in luxury, while the workers toil in poverty. In such wise are the fruits of industry divided under capitalism.

It is true that as yet the Russian workers have not reaped any great prosperity from their newly won right to the full product of their toil. They are still poor and in want. The reason for this is that the industry of the country has been practically ruined by seven years of imperialist and civil war. Production is far below

# SYNDICALISM

By AMEDEE DUNOIS.—Tra

Bulletin Communiste, Paris, June 16.

When this article appears, the first interview between the delegates of the Central Committee of the C. S. R. (revolutionary syndicalists) and those of the Communist Party will have taken place. The subject is the old and difficult question of the relations between the political and economic organizations of the working class. This explains the importance of the conference which is to be held between the communists and the revolutionary syndicalists.

In their own sphere these latter are carrying on the same struggle that we carried on in the heart of the Party against the opportunist and reformist elements which have held the upper hand for so long. There is, however a very decided point of difference between them and ourselves: which we were trying to break off, and finally did break off, not only with war-time socialism but with pre-war socialism as well. The revolutionary syndicalists seemed as a rule to have their minds on a reversion pure and simple to the ideas and action which, before 1914, constituted the real originality of the C. G. T. (General Confederation of Labor) and the tendencies of which are clearly defined by a well-known formula: syndicalism is enough in itself.

And so, while communism is trying to adapt the political movement of the working-class to the needs of the new historic period which began—after the night of blood and war—with the Russian Revolution, revolutionary syndicalism is tending on the contrary, or rather believes it is tending, toward a reversion to the past. I may frankly say that this is an illusion. History alone can restore the past. Life goes on without ever starting over again. Movement is its eternal law, and Heraclites was right when he said, "the same river is never travelled twice, a boat is never tied twice to the same bank." There is no doubt that syndicalism will become revolutionary again, it will become revolutionary under pressure of events and by human will; but it is an illusion to believe that the revolutionary syndicalism of to-morrow could possibly be closely patterned after what it was in the past.

### Political Or Syndicalist Control.

There is not a single communist who is not an ardent supporter of revolutionary syndicalism. Direct action, the general strike, the future of the industrial union as the fundamental organ for the production of wealth and the administration of affairs in the new society—all these ideas are ours also. Where the difference comes in is that when it is a question of determining whether, under the existing system of capitalist society, the direction of the revolutionary movement should belong to the political, or to the syndicalist organization. In their desire for power, the revolutionary syndicalists decided the question by the formula repeated above: syndicalism is enough in itself,—meaning that syndicalism would do everything. That is to say, they rejected all political parties, however revolutionary or proletarian. While, even in the heart of the party, certain doctrinaires were trying to preach the subordination of the party to the unions, and of reformist socialism to revolutionary syndicalism, the syndicalists were declaring that the General Confederation of Labor was enough in itself and had no need of subjecting the party to its authority.

In the party, opinion was more divided. Outside of the small group of doctrinaires which Lagardelle represented at the Congresses, two tendencies were evident. The "Guesdists" attributing to the unions only an exclusively reformist role, felt that a more or less strict bond should hold them to the political party, which alone they felt had a revolutionary character. On the other hand, the "Jaurissists", and Vaillant, while they

the needs of the nation. When the unions come to work out their wage scales they find but little social product to be divided. Virtually the whole people are now upon a ration system of the necessities of life. But this hard period of trial and deprivation will soon be over. Industrial conditions are on the mend and it will not be long before the Russian workers, blessed with a rich country and a bounteous productivity, and freed from the 57 varieties of lecherous social parasites, will develop a standard of life absolutely unknown and impossible in capitalist countries.

Such are some of the labor principles and institutions for which tens of thousands of Russian trade unionists have died in their long struggle against an armed and hostile capitalist world. What do American unionists think of them?

In my next article I shall outline briefly the system of administration worked out by the Russian toilers for the management of industry.

## 15 Million Russians Starve

### WORKERS MASS MEETING FOR RELIEF

SUNDAY, SEPT. 4—8 P. M.

Remney's Hall, now Manhattan Dance Hall

East 55th St. and Woodland Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Caleb Harrison of New York, Speaker.

Russia appeals to the world's workers for help. Show your solidarity with the Russian Revolutionary workers by attending this meeting.

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