

# The New Open Shop Drive

By JOSEPH ZACK

THE miners' strike, organized wage cuts, drive against the Left Wing, lock-out of the plumbers in New York, the U. S. Supreme Court decision in the stone cutters' case which tends to prohibit strikes, the latest decision by the same court upholding the anti-syndicalist laws as made in the Whitney case, which tends to outlaw the party, lock-out of the carpenters in Chicago, the imperialist drive to maintain control of foreign markets and gain new ones, (China, Nicaragua, etc.)—what does it all mean? Have these two (reaction at home, imperialism abroad) any connection with each other? Are they indissoluble parts of the post-war imperialistic era of American Capitalism? Industrialization of the South and West, the large numbers of child, youth, and woman labor being inducted into industry, the replacement of skilled labor by semi-skilled and unskilled, thru efficiency schemes sectionalizing, new machinery, the terrific drive to increase the output at reduced costs. What has all this to do with the post-war imperialism of the U. S. A.?

The tremendous swing to the right of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, the tremendous loss of membership of the A. F. of L., the agricultural crisis, the crisis in several big industries. What has this to do with American imperialism?

The recuperation of European industry as a competitor for the world markets, the industrial development of semi-colonial and colonial nations and its effects upon the American capitalist system and imperialist rivalries?

Here are a few questions to be solved by us. What are the effects of American world imperialism upon the various sections of population, workers, farmers, petty bourgeoisie, middle class, independent manufacturers, industrial capital, degree of trustification, international monopoly, finance capital? Without a correct answer to these questions we can have no program, politically or industrially, we cannot see clearly enough the present divisions amongst the bourgeoisie, we cannot formulate an agricultural program. We are just groping in the dark, on the defensive, merely defending ourselves against blows that come our way. Surely, we can not play a leading role in pointing the way and leading struggles against American capitalism. Thus far no such analysis with specific American application has yet been made by our party. To speak of imperialism as a Chinese or Nicaraguan proposition as is the popular way, is like seeing merely the surface manifestations of a profound transformation of the entire system. It would be merely like seeing the advance strokes of the oncoming open shop drive without understanding the why and wherefore of the forces and conditions that produce it. It would be like blaming it on the capricious greed and mischief of individual capitalists in control of important industries.

It would be beyond the scope of these two articles\* to go beyond a few indications of what the problem is and where it leads to. Surely the best minds of our movement and all our resources must be used to go into this in a really thoroughgoing manner.

Bourgeois propagandists and theoreticians have been psychologizing the labor movement with the contention that the American worker is enjoying unexampled prosperity. The social democrats have picked it up and the miracle of high wages, short hours, etc., under capitalism, "American Democracy Brand," is being dangled before the eyes of the "humble and meek" all over the world. Commissions, official and unofficial are coming to investigate the miracle of our proletarian prosperity under capitalism. Even many Left Wingers, yes even Communists, have been caught by this contagious propaganda. It reminds one of Woodrow Wilson's war propaganda that carried our Social-Democrats off their feet. At the theories of the labor movement moving to the right, the abandonment of militant slogans, the excuse for abandoning class struggle policies, working with the bureaucracy within the orbit of class collaboration, all the class collaboration tendencies and theories can be excused on that basis.

The commissions that come to investigate our proletarian prosperity in the U. S. A. never went to the Massachusetts and Connecticut textile towns, to the coal towns in the bituminous fields, down the South and West with their new industries and cheap labor, into the needle and shoe industries in the East. They never examined how many skilled mechanics have been replaced by cheaper semi-skilled and unskilled labor and machinery. They never looked into the earnings of our unorganized semi-skilled and unskilled in the great industries. They never looked into the fact that the surface prosperity of many proletarian families is there only because the children, women and youngsters are now in the factory, mill, store or mine, thus increasing the total income of the family.

The number of skilled mechanics bribed by this prosperity are most probably a minority even amongst the surviving skilled mechanics, not to speak of the semi-skilled and the unskilled who make up the huge army of the American proletariat and who have been either the losers or profited



—Drawn by Hay Bales.

A deluded worker, patting himself on the back on reading a letter from the boss thanking him for contributing to the prosperity of the country. The boss got the prosperity.

very little by this prosperity. Yes, there is a section of the skilled mechanics that have been petty-bourgeoisified. Even the semi-skilled and unskilled in such relatively well organized industries like the building trades and printing have had a corrupting share of prosperity for these industries. The bosses have been willing to yield a part of their huge surplus profits to the workers in the form of wage increases and there only was class collaboration successful to the extent of wage increases without a sharp struggle. But to conclude from that that the labor movement is moving to the right, means to leave out of sight at least 90% of the proletariat and to deliberately ignore the million of workers skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled in industries that are going thru a crisis and where the income has been reduced as the result of this very imperialism.

It is not true that the labor bureaucracy has gone to the right because of the corruptive effects of imperialist prosperity upon the skilled mechanics, organized within the A. F. of L. altho this did bolster up its position. The needle trades and mining unions, etc. which are in a crisis, and where the tendency is to the Left, have as many skilled mechanics as the building trades and printers. The bureaucracy has gone to the right because it has itself surrendered to the might of corporate and imperialist capital in control of government and the principal industries and has gone in business thru banks, insurance companies, etc. to profit financially by this very prosperity and for this very reason will keep on moving to the right even when the skilled mechanics in these preferred trades, as is particularly likely in the building industry, will move to the Left. No serious action on behalf of the workers is to be expected as far as the A. F. of L. leadership is concerned. Their activity will, in the main, be to prevent us from leading the workers into effective counter-action against the employers.

The Party and the Left Wing is at the cross-roads. If we keep as our chief orientation to operate within the A. F. of L., as it is today, we must move to the right and work within the orbit of class collaboration, with democratization of the unions, elimination of corruption, amalgamation as the chief slogans. It means the gradual abandonment of real



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militancy, particularly in the industries passing thru a crisis—like mining and the needle trades—in order to avoid head-on collisions with the A. F. of L. bureaucracy. It means the progressive abandonment of the unorganized, semi-skilled and unskilled masses that make up over 90% of the American proletariat as any attempt to organize them will bring us into violent conflict. It means a considerable surrender to the A. F. of L. bureaucracy all along the line and a probable degeneration of the Left Wing movement, if not of our Party itself. Such an orientation is out of the question.

A revaluation of the role of the A. F. of L. leadership under imperialism is absolutely essential. So is a revaluation of class relations and stratification amongst the working class under imperialism necessary and if we make the correct analysis we will come to the conclusion that our chief orientation must be on the basis of the unorganized, semi-skilled and unskilled, who in the main are outside of the A. F. of L. The organization of the unorganized must be our central task. We must undertake to lead and organize these workers thru international unions affiliated to the A. F. of L. wherever it can be done effectively and outside the A. F. of L. wherever necessary.

Our concentration would be on the basis of industries most favorably situated for organization and most unfavorably affected by American imperialism such as the automobile, marine transport, textile food, amongst the unorganized in the miners, needle trades and amongst the relatively organized inside the A. F. of L. Which does not mean an abandonment of our extensive activities particularly among the railroad workers, nor building trades or printers who are relatively favorably affected by imperialist capitalism. With a policy of this kind, the A. F. of L. bureaucracy would be under what might properly be called an enflaming fire by opening of the vast field among the unorganized and concentration of our main energies in that direction; and by the continuation of our activities inside, particularly in industries going thru a crisis, we can still maintain our slogan of affiliation to the A. F. of L., but application on the basis of fighting unionism. If the new unions are accepted on that basis, and those we control stay on the inside very well. If not, it will be up to the bureaucracy to expel us. But we maintain a policy of organizing the unorganized and struggle for better conditions and use and defense of the strike weapon. Whether as a result of that a progressive new labor movement will gradually develop outside the A. F. of L., will largely depend abandonment of the expulsion policy by the A. F. of L. bureaucracy.

There are vast forces in the U. S. whose interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of imperialist capital at this time. Among them are the farmers, large sections of the petty-bourgeoisie and even part of the middle classes and independent manufacturers. In proportion to the pressure exerted upon them, they will separate politically and otherwise from the dominant imperialist group and in opposition inside and outside the old political parties and social and fraternal organizations. The uncompromising attitude of the employers toward labor, which will come sharp to the front in a new open shop drive, will defeat the class-collaboration policy of the A. F. of L. leadership and will break loose the lower layers of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy thus reconstituting to some extent the alliance between the progressives and the Left Wing. The division even among the upper layers of the bureaucracy will be more pronounced and while we cannot orientate ourselves on this possibility, we can take advantage of this most probable development as it occurs.

The workers in vast industries unfavorably affected by imperialism, these are the elements that can be brought into united fronts politically and otherwise on various issues arising out of the conflict against imperialist capital; and large sections of which will in large degree co-operate against the imperialist group in control of the U. S. government and the A. F. of L. leadership allied with it as it was even demonstrated in Passaic.

These dissident groups among the bourgeoisie, particularly the agricultural group need allies in the industrial states in the East. They must extend their influence politically, principally in the ranks of Labor in these states, and since they cannot do it thru the leadership of the A. F. of L., they will go a great way to do it thru the opposition in the ranks of Labor inside and outside the A. F. of L. The Left Wing, especially in its work among the unorganized, needs all the political protection and support it can get. It needs a political mass movement mainly directed against imperialist capital and the old parties. Now, before the 1928 presidential elections, is the time to formulate a clear program, and lay the base for this mass movement. Now, that the politicians must be careful more than usual, is the time to concentrate upon a certain industry and start a movement much greater than Passaic and altho no Labor Party can be expected for 1928, a big movement amongst the unorganized and a united labor picket for the 1928 presidential election will go a great way in mobilizing the masses against the new open shop offensive and the building up of a mass movement politically and industrially in the U. S. A.

\* This is the second and last article by this writer on the subject. The first appeared in the New Magazine on May 14.—Ed.