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# Wherefore Stand Ye Divided?

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Published in *The New Day* [Chicago], v. 2, no. 22, whole no. 51 (May 28, 1921), pp. 3, 6.

Whence comes the notorious weakness of radicalism in all its phases in the United States? How comes it in particular that, while in all other important capitalistic countries radicals stand at the head of the labor movement and dominate its policies, here in this country the conservatives and reactionaries are in almost complete control?

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For a generation virtually the whole radical movement has been wasting itself on utopian union projects. It has divorced itself from the masses and has failed to win their leadership. That is why it is such a small factor, politically and industrially. Dual industrial unionism — that is the principal ailment of American radicalism.

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The worst feature of the dual industrial union program is the disastrous effect it produces in the old unions. In them it poisons progress at the very source. A word as to how this occurs: It is a well know fact that ordinarily the life of trade unions is [based around] a very small number of militants, who probably constitute not over 1 percent of the whole membership. These active spirits do the practical work of the unions, and are the very lifeblood of the labor movement. They are the elements that first become radical, and where a rational economic program is in effect, the result of their becoming radical is vastly to increase their efficiency and value in the old unions. Imbued with renewed courage and intelligence, they make the whole trade union flourish and prosper, and incidentally also the radical movement at large.

But in this country it all works out differently. Here when this class of militants in our unions become radical, they at the same time get infected with the virus of dual unionism. Then, instead of having their efficiency increased in the old unions, it is practically destroyed altogether. They promptly lose all interest in their trade unions, and waste their great potential strength on the sterile utopian industrial current in their respective industries. Thus, in the course of many years, tens of thousands of these precious militants have been sucked out of the old unions. The loss to the latter must have been tremendous. The wonder is not that the trade unions are making such slow progress, but rather that they have been able to live at all. If the trade union movement in this country is weak and conservative, the radicals are chiefly to blame.

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A number of reasons might be advanced to show why a dual industrial program flagrantly violates the first principle of unionism, namely the solidarity of labor. Let us explain how: The foundation of labor unionism rests upon the grouping of workers, regardless of the intellectual differences that otherwise divide them. The necessity for 100 percent organization imperatively establishes this condition. The place for all propaganda groups is within the bounds of the basic union. Hence, where the movement is normal, as in England for instance, we find Anarchists, Socialists, Communists, Catholics, Protestants, atheists, craft unionists, industrial unionists, etc., all in the same organization. This results from a true working of the root principle of the solidarity of labor.

Should any of the intellectually homogeneous

groups depart from this principle, and undertake to organize unions around its particular beliefs, it is leaving the grounds of true unionism and sowing the seeds of disunion. Yet our dual industrial unionists, who are such great exponents of the solidarity of labor, leave the mass and attempt to organize a new movement upon the basis of their elaborate revolutionary conceptions. No matter that their new unions profess to have as their *raison d'être* the common interests of the workers; the inescapable fact is that the organizations are essentially built around certain ideas not held by the great masses. In this country they have literally cut the heart out of the labor movement.

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Looking at the situation from a different angle: The dual industrial unions are essentially utopian. They ignore the natural evolution taken by labor unions in proving their conceptions, tactics, and structure. For example: normally labor unions pass through three general stages of development, which I shall call (1) Isolation; (2) Federation; (3) Amalgamation. In the first, or isolation stage, the several craft groups, recognizing few or no interests in common, act independently of each other. Later, when they begin to get a better understanding of their mutual interests, they seek cooperation through a system of more or less loose alliances among the closest related trades, thus coming into the federation stage. And finally, with a ripening understanding, they inevitably make for still greater solidarity by entering the amalgamation stage and fusing together along the lines of their industry. Later the same course of development goes on as between the industrial unions thus built up. They, too, gradually come together.

Dozens of industrial unions in Europe and elsewhere have grown in this evolutionary manner. It is the natural way to solidarity, and it is the course that American trade unions are going, however slowly. Our whole movement is now virtually in the federation stage of development. The railroad unions are a notable example. Their multitudinous system of divisional and national alliances constitute the most elaborate maze of federations ever constructed by any group of unions on the face of the globe. They are ripe for amalgamation. The clothing trades are typical. At the

start the several crafts in the clothing industry operated separately. Now they are yielding to the need for industrial solidarity, and we see that they have just set up the needle trades alliances. This is a typical federation, and is only a preliminary to the inevitable amalgamation of the unions of the industry into one compact organization.

So, from stage to stage, goes the normal course of labor union development. But our dual unionists ignore it all. They have their spick and span, blueprinted, perfected organizations. And they ask an ignorant working class, habituated to craft unionism, to throw aside their old unions, built through 40 years of strife and struggle, and to join themselves forthwith to the highly advanced type they propose. They would abolish the law of labor union development. That's all. Is it any wonder that the American radical movement stagnates, resting as it does upon such a bizarre and unworkable economic program? \* \* \*

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The radicals should get into tune with labor union development; the dual union program should be finally and definitely discarded; the ideal of industrial unionism should be set up in the old unions, and then every practical measure applied looking towards its realization.

Nor can there be any doubt of the outcome. The "it-can't-be-done" stuff is rubbish. Leadership is bound to come to the radicals, and radical measures are bound to be followed. The radical has every advantage over the conservative in the unions. In the vital matters of energy, honesty, courage, idealism, and knowledge of the movement, he has, or should have, all the best of it. And the best proof of this is that all over the world he is gradually taking the leadership of the unions. If that has not happened here, it is simply because the radicals have made no serious efforts. They have practically abandoned the unions to conservative leadership and programs.

The popular notion that the American workman is immune to radicalism will not bear investigation. What has been accomplished in Seattle and other places, where the radical have been able to free themselves somewhat from the thralldom of dual unionism, disproves it effectively. But the classic proof

is to be found in the condition prevailing some 35 years ago. At that time the American labor movement was the most militant and radical in existence. Here was first tried out the general strike idea, and here the 8-hour movement got its first real impetus. The great foment in 1834-1886 attracted the attention of the whole world; international May Day grew out of it. The Knights of Labor and the American proletariat stood in the vanguard of the world's labor movement. This was as things should be in the greatest capitalist country.

In those days conditions were not so ripe for radicalism as they are now. The workers were not so receptive, nor were radicals 1/10th so numerous. What then is the explanation of the great wave of radicalism, compared with the present stagnation? There is only one answer, and that is that in those days the dual union idea had not yet infected American radicals. Those old-time militants in their economic activities were not slaves to utopianism. They functioned naturally and consequently effectively. They took the unions as they found them and worked in harmony with their laws of evolution. They stayed with the masses, and inevitably became powerful leaders among them.

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This period of radical leadership in the labor movement came to an end in the early '90s. At that time began the siphoning of the militants out of the old unions and into the sterile dual organizations. And from then on radical influence among the unions waned and waned until now it is next to zero. For a time, recently, the "Right" Socialists made an effort to establish their militants in the trade unions; and they were very successful although they attacked the problem at the hardest spot, the American Federation of Labor convention. They came to control over 1/3rd of the votes in that body. But the waves of dualism submerged the movement and it has practically dissolved.

Things are bad for radicalism in the United States now. Nor are they likely to get better until the movement rids itself of its old-man-of-the-sea, dual industrial unionism. When that is done, and done it inevitably must be, then we can look for a real renaissance of the movement. While the radicals have been wasting their effort on experimental dual unionism, the old unions have been weak and neglected. Capitalism, taking advantage of the situation, has raced on practically unchecked and deeply entrenched itself. For the weak position of American labor the radicals are chiefly to blame.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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