

---

# A Year of the League

by Charles Krumbein

Published in *The Labor Herald* [Chicago], v. 1, no. 12 (Feb. 1923), pp. 3-4.

Although the Trade Union Educational League was organized in November 1920, it is really only a year old, because previous to the launching of *The Labor Herald* in March 1922, it consisted of little more than a few scattered groups throughout the country. But in the past year it has taken on a truly wonderful growth. Not for many years past, if ever, in this country has there been an organization operating upon the industrial field which has created such a stir in the labor movement and made so much genuine progress.

When the League began its operations a 12-month ago, the situation was anything but promising. On the one hand there was a reactionary bureaucracy heading the trade unions, unprogressive and tyrannical, and having behind it a demoralized, discouraged, and defeated labor movement. And on the other hand there were the militants, confused and befogged by dual unionism, inexperienced in the trade union movement, and overwhelmed with contempt for the old mass unions.

## Attacking the Problem.

But despite this double difficulty of an unprecedentedly reactionary leadership to contend

against, and a very inexperienced body of militants to draw upon for support, the Trade Union Educational League has nevertheless made most substantial progress in the 12 months of its activity. It has become a real force in the labor movement, and one which even the most powerfully situated reactionaries have to reckon with.

In its operations directly upon the mass organizations the League has real results to show. It has popularized various planks of its program among groups of workers hitherto untouched by radical propaganda. Its agitation for the formation of a Labor Party has struck home in many organizations and is bound to bear fruit in the near future. Likewise its advocacy of the Red International of Labor Unions. But the one glowing success of the League's work was in connection with its work for industrial unionism. It has gone to the masses of organized workers with its message of solidarity and got an overwhelming response, a response which has not only shocked and frightened the reactionaries but heartened the rebels more than anything else that has happened in the United States for decades. How the innumerable local unions, central labor councils, state federations, and international organizations have been won to declare for industrial unionism



through amalgamation, in spite of the bitter opposition of the reactionaries in their ranks, is an old story now to all who follow the course of the labor movement. It is not too much to say that in the short period it has been in the field the League has already got the majority of the organized masses to accept in principle, at least, the highly important proposition of industrial unionism. With this accomplished, the definite reorganization of the craft unions onto an industrial basis will inevitably and unfailingly follow.

But far more important than the effective work done among the broad masses was the educational results secured among the militants themselves. The one thing that is needed to put the American labor movement on its feet and to make a real fighting body of it is a clear-seeing, self-confident, and well-organized body of militants. Substantial headway has been made by the League in creating such an organization. By their experience of the past 12 months the militants are learning that the workers making up the trade unions are eager and willing to accept a militant program, once it is put up to them in a way they can understand. And the way they are recovering from the infantile sickness of dual unionism constitutes one of the most remarkable phenomena in the whole history of the labor movement. The change that has taken place in this respect, due to the League, is nothing short of an intellectual revolution.

### **The Opposition Defeated.**

As few organizations in the labor movement have achieved so much success in so short a time as the Trade Union Educational League, likewise few have had such heavy opposition to contend with. Hardly was the announcement of the organization of the League made than a general rallying of the reactionary forces took place to withstand the onslaught of the threatening newcomer. Fulminations flared forth on all sides in an attempt to discredit the League in the eyes of the

rank and file by painting it red and denouncing it as a Russian conspiracy against the labor movement. No less a person than Mr. Gompers himself took the lead in this virulent campaign of attack, and when he broke a few lances fruitlessly, he called upon his faithful lackeys, Matthew Woll, Chester Wright, etc.

But the opposition, reckless though it was, did not break up the advance of the League. This is primarily because of the soundness of the latter's policies. When its militants went to the masses with propaganda of industrial unionism through amalgamation, for example, they received such widespread support that the old guard were unable to fight back successfully. A case in point was the National Railroad Amalgamation Conference. Despite the fact that that historic gathering was condemned in bitterest terms by Stone, Johnston, and many other high officials of the railroad trade unions, it was a glowing success. For once the rank and file, acting in intelligent opposition, took the bit between their teeth and made a determined move for progress. Grable, in the Detroit convention of his organization, tried to step in front of the amalgamation movement and to bring it to a halt, but what happened to him is now a classic in labor history. The League has demonstrated beyond all doubt that it is possible to organize progressive movements among the mass unions in spite of the most determined opposition of a reactionary bureaucracy. This in itself is an achievement of the first magnitude.

### **The Tasks Before Us.**

Although the League has already made its influence felt in the labor movement it is only an infant in size and experience. There is still a world to do to give it the necessary volume and power to achieve the great task before it. This work is of a manifold nature. First we must see to it that all militant workers throughout the length and breadth of the country become members of the

trade unions and plunge deeply into the activities of these organizations. We must organize local general groups in every city and town in the United States and Canada. These in turn must be subdivided into industrial sections, which shall work ceaselessly to educate the members of their respective organizations locally. Then there must be National Committees set up to coordinate the work of the local industrial groups throughout the entire labor movement. Especially is this latter task very essential, because without national organization the work of the local groups is without result.

Besides building the structure of the League, we must also see to it that it has a powerful weapon wherewith to reach the minds of the masses. *The Labor Herald* must be developed. Its present circulation must be quadrupled in the coming year. This can readily be accomplished if all the individuals and groups in the League will do just a little towards developing its circle of readers. When *The Labor Herald* reaches a circulation of 50,000, and this should be in a year's time if the militants realize their opportunity, it will have power and influence that will astound both reactionaries and revolutionists.

But in addition to a powerful *Labor Herald* the League must have several organizers in the field to cover the various trade union conventions. This requires considerable money, and the only way it can be raised successfully is through the Sustaining Fund. More than that, he will see to it that his local group makes the development of the Sustaining Fund one of the first orders of its business.

### **The Year to Come.**

The Trade Union Educational League looks forward with confidence to the oncoming year. The experience of the past 12 months shows it that its methods and policies are fundamentally correct and that the workers of America are ready for its message of solidarity and liberty. The old Gompers bureaucracy is bankrupt. It has absolutely nothing constructive to offer the workers. Industrial evolution proceeds with ever increasing speed, but the Gompers crowd, learning and forgetting nothing, cling desperately to their outworn and futile policies. The Trade Union Educational League, despite its youth, has a practical monopoly upon the advocacy of progressive policies in the mass organizations of the workers. It is the only organization, radical or otherwise, in the field today which has any message of real instruction and inspiration for the masses. Its policies of industrial unionism through amalgamation, organization of a Labor Party, affiliation of the trade unions to the Red International of Labor Unions, the Workers' Republic, etc., correspond to the needs and aspirations of the American working class. The Trade Union Educational League is the key to the industrial situation in this country and Canada. Every militant who understands the true course of events will become a member of this organization and do his utmost to push it on to victory.

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

***Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.***