
William Z. Foster

by William Hard

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Mr. Foster is an extreme case of the heretic turned churchman.

In days gone by he was a wanderer. He was brought up (as he told the Senate Steel-Strike Committee) "in the slums." He "knocked about in the industries." But he did more. He knocked about in ideas, from man to man and place to place.

In Chicago he happened once to see a labor paper published in Seattle. "The editor of that paper," he said to himself, "is a man I want to talk to." He had no money. But without money and by stray jobs and stray trains he proceeded West and Southwest to Los Angeles, and so to San Francisco, and so to Seattle, and saw his man.

Medieval students got their education wandering from university to university. Mr. Foster wandered for education from labor group to labor group.

The Senate Steel-Strike Committee asked him what position he now took toward the idea of government. He answered succinctly:

"I take the position that Lester F. Ward takes." Senator Sterling was puzzled. "That what?" said he.

"Lester F. Ward," said Mr. Foster.

"Who is Lester F. Ward?" said Senator Sterling.

Senator Sterling is a university man. For 10 years he was dean of a law school. He was dean of that school in 1903.

Lester F. Ward was a resident of Washington. He began being a resident of Washington shortly after the Civil War. By 1903 he had published his *Dynamic Sociology* and his *Psychic Factors of Civilization* and his *Pure Sociology* and was elected president of the European Institut International de Sociologie. The date of his death was 1913.

Senator Sterling was elected to the Senate in

1913. Mr. Ward was a government employee. Senator Sterling in 1913 became a legislative government employee. Six years have passed. Senator Sterling, a literate Senator, seems to have been able to live in our capital city for 6 years without encountering anywhere in his circle of acquaintances any recognized vestiges, written or spoken, of our capital city's most distinguished scientific philosopher.

Such is the organization of the society which we are called on to defend in the name of enlightenment against the dark forces of the working class upheaval.

Mr. Foster, out of the slums, and wandering on the front ends of baggage cars, was able to find Herbert Spencer and Lester F. Ward and Georges Sorel and Emile Pouget. He found also the Industrial Workers of the World. Mr. [Joseph] Manley of the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers, now an organizer in the steel strike, has told me of the circumstances of that finding.

Mr. Foster was in some western city — Spokane, I think — doing correspondence for a labor paper. In that city there were members of the IWW endeavoring to speak on street corners. There were other citizens endeavoring to prevent them from speaking. Mr. Foster took sides. He sided with the IWW and went to jail, and had a chain on his leg, and joined the IWW.

Whereafter he wandered to Europe. I have talked with him particularly about his wanderings there. They were decisive for him. There he saw *The Light*. It did not shine from Germany or from England. It shone from France. It was the *Confédération Général du Travail*.

In that assemblage of French labor forces and of French labor philosophies — moderate, radical, socialist, anarchist, syndicalist, anti-syndicalist, wild and

tame, Grand Right and Left, “revolutionaries” and “evolutionaries” all together — Mr. Foster saw a star of guiding for the labor movement everywhere. He has seen and followed it ever since. He has followed the star of the catholic unity of The Labor Movement.

He returned to the United States full of zeal. He went to a national convention of the IWW. He spoke to the brothers. He told them that he had discovered the right thing for them to do. The right thing for them to do was to quit. The right thing for them to do was to abandon their coterie, abandon their sect, and join The Church, join the body of Labor Movement, join the American Federation of Labor.

Mr. Foster used a quite different language. He does not use the language of religion. The outcome is the same. Shall a movement for saving the world be split into diverging and babbling rivulets, each calling itself simon pure, or shall it flow on in one mighty stream, a bit turbid perhaps, but whole, ordered, and irresistible? Mr. Foster urged the IWW to turn their rivulet back into the stream.

This sinking suggestion the IWW did not adopt. They remained stiff-necked in their heresy, and they continued to abide in their schismatic organization. Mr. Foster, having tried to save them, went away and joined the Brotherhood of Railroad Carmen — an organization in full communion with the American Federation of Labor and Mr. Gompers.

As a carman, Mr. Foster worked at his trade. He can call himself a skilled workman. His specialty as a carman is to be a car inspector; and car inspectors get the highest standard rate paid to mechanics on rail-ways.

So working at his trade, Mr. Foster was under observation by his union and by his union's officers. If Mr. Foster was boring at his union with an IWW drill from within, he was boring at those officers, and they would know it. They were, and are, the best judges of their own self-preservation. They observed Mr. Foster, and they accepted him and ordained him to be an Organizer of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen.

Working as an Organizer, Mr. Foster grew in a certain essential knowledge. He grew in a knowledge of the inward moving forces of The Labor Movement. He had already written his pamphlet on Syndicalism. He now wrote his pamphlet on Trade Unionism.

In *Syndicalism*, Mr. Foster had argued that the

“militant minority” of Labor should join The Labor Movement and make it militant. In *Trade Unionism* he argued that The Labor Movement is in itself, by its own nature, militant.

The Labor Movement cannot help conducting a continuous offensive. Trench by trench, mile by mile, inch by inch, it moves on. Conscious or unconscious, it proceeds to its grand objective, known or unknown. It may not declare. It acts. It goes as far at any given time it can. It goes and gains. Nothing else gains. The Labor Movement, *The Trade Union Movement*, is the one authentic and certain organ of working class destiny and of an emancipated world.

So argued Mr. Foster and so he concluded:

The Trade Union Movement is fighting the last battle between master and slave. Its inevitable triumph will mean the realization of the goal toward which humanity's noblest minds have turned for countless ages — the final overthrow of tyranny and the eternal ascendancy of liberty and justice. Be a man! Join the Trade Union Movement!

United States Senators may grieve and droop, thinking how Mr. Foster is undermining the Trade Union Movement. I shall worry when I see Mr. Gompers worrying. Mr. Gompers needs no worldly wisdom from anybody on the Hill, and he certainly needs no instruction in the salvation of trade unionism from people who do not know the beginning of the trade union creed.

The beginning of the trade union creed may have something to do with unswerving absolute loyalty to The Trade Union Movement as existing, as organized, as officered, as led. Mr. Foster gives that loyalty and is known to give that loyalty.

The Brotherhood of Railway Carmen continued to retain him as Organizer. The Chicago Federation of Labor entrusted him with the details of the successful effort to organize the wage-earners of the stockyards. Twenty-four unions of the American Federation of Labor entrusted him with the details of the ensuing successful effort to make an organization of wage-earners in the steel industry. And I subjoin certain facts which do not appear in the Senate Steel-Strike Committee's report regarding these matters.

Judge Alschuler, a Federal judge, was United States Administrator to arbitrate the quarrels between Labor and Capital in the stockyards. He saw Mr. Foster officially and frequently and revealingly. He saw

him in actual action. He wrote a letter saying:

In Mr. Foster's representation of the employees in the various controversies before me in which he participated he impressed me as being particularly intelligent, honorable, tactful, and fair. His manner of presentation and his occasional apt literary references led me to inquire of others as to his early advantages and I learned with wonder that they were absolutely nil and, on the contrary, all the reverse of advantages. If in his earlier wanderings he imbibed for a time fantastic, extreme, and destructive social ideas, I am sure that nothing developed in the many conferences and hearings in which he participated which would indicate that he still harbored them.

Judge Alschuler is the best possible outside witness regarding Mr. Foster's present beliefs in practice. Judge Alschuler is interred at page 393 of the Senate Steel-Strike Committee's Hearings. Not one line of him is quoted, or considered, in the Report.

Next:

The present strike in the steel industry is managed through Organizers and through Local Secretaries. The temperament of the strike is projected to the strikers through them — solely through them. If the strike is IWW in temperament, these men are IWW in temperament. Who may they be?

The organizers are chosen by the several and separate AF of L unions which participate in the strike. The Secretaries are chosen through the grouped AF of L unions which exist in the several and separate localities of the strike. And Mr. Foster himself is chosen, and continues to be chosen, by 24 AF of L unions acting through 24 AF of L hard-boiled Presidents.

These men — Organizers, Secretaries, Presidents — are professional defenders of the AF of L and professional haters of the IWW. They can tell an IWW sort of fellow from an AF of L sort of fellow by touch, sound, taste, sight, and smell. They are the inside experts on inside borers. They know the strike, and they know Mr. Foster. They exonerate Mr. Foster. They sanction and sustain Mr. Foster.

The Report of the Senate Steel-Strike Committee makes nothing of them.

It dwells instead on Mr. Margolis and on Mr. St. John — a self-stated anarchist and an unrepentant IWW.

Mr. Margolis is said to have "rallied the IWW and anarchistic elements in the Pittsburgh district to the support of the strike." Mr. St. John is said to have

written a letter to Mr. Margolis in which he suggested that "if you have a chance to talk matters over with Mr. Foster, I think it would be a good thing to do."

Such is the peak of the proof against the Mr. Foster of today.

I would like to ask the members of the Senate Steel-Strike Committee a few questions.

Will they tell Mr. Foster how he can prevent Mr. Margolis from exhorting anarchists to "support" the strike? Will they tell Mr. Foster how he can prevent Mr. St. John from hoping that Mr. Margolis will have a "chance" to talk to him? Will they tell Mr. Foster where to look, in the strike itself, for that "powerful influence" which they say is exercised in it by "IWWs, Bolsheviks, and Anarchists"? Will they name one Organizer or one Secretary contributed to the strike by Mr. Margolis or by Mr. St. John or by any other IWW or Bolshevik or Anarchist? Will they name one strike bulletin issued in furtherance of IWW-ism or Bolshevism or Anarchism? Will they name one strike-person of any sort or one strike utterance of any sort controllable by Mr. Foster and propagating any IWW-ism whatsoever or any Bolshevism whatsoever or any Anarchism whatsoever or any Syndicalism whatsoever or any Sovietism whatsoever in any way whatsoever? Will they? Can they? Do they?

They do not. The facts are undoubtedly against them.

The fact is that Mr. Foster saw Mr. Margolis, and, having seen him, refused to employ him in the strike. This fact appears on page 400 of the Hearings. It certainly does not appear in the Report.

The further fact is that Mr. St. John had likewise nothing to do with the strike and that when Mr. Margolis received Mr. St. John's letter he did not even mention it to Mr. Foster. This fact appears on pages 866-867 of the Hearings. It does not appear in the Report.

The final fact is that not one bit of propagating of "radical" doctrine has been done by Mr. Foster's strike organization and that the agents of the Department of Justice have been unable to convict Mr. Foster of any such propagating and that the only important instances of any such propagating have been by enemies of the strike and by United States Senators.

Mr. Margolis was practicing law and theorizing anarchism in the privacy of Pittsburgh. The general

American national public was without the slightest suspicion that he would not defend his wife from assault. The Senate Steel-Strike Committee summoned him to Washington. It put him on the stand. And it filled the next morning's newspapers with more agate lines of anarchism than had ever before reached the general public in our accumulated national history.

Mr. Foster had ceased to circulate his pamphlet on Syndicalism. He had long ceased to circulate it. The strikers had never seen one word of it. They had never seen one word of his discarded defense of the "lawless course" of the Syndicalistic "militant minority."

In action Mr. Foster was undoubtedly conducting a strike so lawful, so peaceful, so nonresistant, that not even Governor Sproule's venomously hostile state government could breathe the slightest taint of violence on him. The pamphlet on Syndicalism — the "lawless" teaching contained in the pamphlet on Syndicalism — was buried. The enemies of the strike dug it up. They reprinted it, minus the union label. They recirculated it. They got it before the United States Senate. They pumped this dead trickle of "radicalism" to the top of the Capitol and made it run back to the eyes of all the strikers in all the newspapers of all the strike districts.

It is not Mr. Foster that is mad. It is the world of rulers.

The Senate Steel-Strike Committee, by reddening and blackening Mr. Foster, has reddened and blackened the whole of a great strike for elementary industrial representative rights. The Chairman of the Committee — Senator Kenyon, of Iowa — could have intended no conscious injustice. He long ago proved his independence of the wishes of wealth and his truth to the straight line of the verdict of his own vision. I believe he will someday admit that the madness of the ruling world of 1919, enveloping him, made him look at the strike through a red mist and that the "powerful influence" which he saw gesticulating Bolshevism on the Pittsburgh skyline was wholly in the mist and utterly not in the strike. In the meantime Mr. Foster is

not mad at all. He has gone sane.

The 24 Unions give him a job. He does it. The American Federation of Labor speaks. He listens. The Trade Union Movement decides. He acts. He wishes to go East-Southeast. He is outvoted. The order is to go West-Northwest. He goes. He is not wiser than the Trade Union Movement. He is not wiser than the body of the faithful. He is of that body. He moves with that movement. It takes its way, West-Northwest, East-Southeast, wiggling, wavering strengthening, straightening out, to "*the final overthrow of tyranny and the eternal ascendancy of liberty and justice.*" He believes.

I have watched men, reporting them, for 20 years. This man is of the converts who are more Catholic than the Catholics. He is more trade unionist than the trade unionists. I have watched him. He moves slower than his 24 Unions. He moves actually behind his 24 Unions, not in front of them. He waits for authority. He follows it inch by inch, day by day.

Someday the Trade Union Movement may abolish the Wages System. Someday it may abolish The Compulsive State. Someday. Today the Trade Union Movement is trying to abolish primitive personal autocracy in wages and hours in the steel industry. Today is sufficient. One step enough for Mr. Foster. He does not demand the details of the distant scene.

Mr. Foster is a Radical Regular. He will stay regular when many native-born Conservative Regulars might rebel. Why? It is as plain as light. In their regularity there is often only habit. In his there is a philosophy won after long wandering.

Well may Mr. Gary regret that ever that wandering ceased. Mr. Foster, a theoretical violent heretic of Labor, gave Mr. Gary no trouble. Mr. Foster, a pious churchman of Labor, ordered and orderly, gives Mr. Gary a lot of trouble. We hear Mr. Gary's tears falling. They fall on Mr. Foster's sad estate of syndicalistic sin. There is a slight error in their public direction. They ought to fall — and perhaps in private they do fall — on Mr. Foster's conversion.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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