

# SYNDICALISM IN GERMANY

(By W. Z. Foster).

Revolutionary Industrial Unionism or "Syndicalism" in Germany finds its expression in "Die Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften" (F. D. G.), or "The Free Union of German Unions." This organization is inspired by the same ideals that uses the same tactics that distinguish Syndicalist organizations the world over. With its program of "direct action" tactics, it is in sharp contrast with the balance of the German labor movement, to whom these modern tactics are practically unknown. It is a comparatively small organization, numbering some 20,000 members, whilst the conservative unions—Socialist, Christian, etc.—number about 2,500,000. Yet it possesses an influence entirely out of proportion to its size. It is an object of almost horror to the political leaders of the great Socialist sick and death benefit societies, misnamed unions, who see in its violent agitation of the general strike and direct action tactics generally a threatening menace to their policy of working class non resistance to its oppressors, which is so indispensable to the success of their insurance, labor and political organizations. They leave no stone unturned to discredit the organization and its officers and use it as a general bugaboo to scare any of their own disobedient unions back into the straight and narrow path. In Germany any union that dares to exhibit the slightest degree of independence is promptly insulted by being called "localist," the reigning central committee rattles the "Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften" skeleton, and the frightened and repentant union promptly submits.

The F. V. D. G. is also called "The Localist" owing to its federative form of organization, which is the antipodes of the prevailing "Centralist" type of the balance of the German labor movement. In the centralist trades or industrial unions, the central or national committees are almost absolute masters, the local unions are dependent on their wills and are practically deprived of all independence of action. In the F. V. D. G. or "Localists" unions, it is just the opposite, the local unions retain almost complete liberty of action, being bound together nationally into industrial unions just as loosely as is compatible with effective co-operation. The alliance of these national unions forms the F. V. D. G. Each union is perfectly independent of the others and makes its own constitution, etc. The local unions of all industries also organize themselves into Gewerkschaftskartelle or District Councils, which likewise are strictly autonomous. The central or business committee of the F. V. D. G. consists of five members which are elected at the regular bi-annual congress. Their functions are largely of a "post office" order, the unions retaining to themselves, all important prerogatives. The F. V. D. G. has but one official organ, "Die Einigkeit," which is edited by the business committee. This paper is exposed to none such financial storms as beat on the devoted heads of the I. W. W. papers. All locals in industrial unions which have no paper of their own, must subscribe for as many copies of "Die Einigkeit" as they have members. These papers are distributed gratis to the members. This is a plan that the I. W. W. would do well to follow as it is a disgrace that the lives of our papers should be endangered for lack of financial support.

In Germany the workers receive very low wages, as a class they are only a week or two from hunger, therefore in anticipation of strikes or lockouts, funds must be collected in order to tide the striking or lockout workers over until they go back to work again. The big Socialist centralist unions, collect these funds by charging high dues, putting this money into the central treasury, and investing the central committee with almost absolute power, which they liberally use to prevent strikes. The local unions are even forbidden to appeal to other unions for aid without first getting permission of their national central committee and the general commission of all the centralist unions. This is called the "self help plan" and effectually puts a damper on the "solidarity" feeling amongst workers during strikes. In the F. V. D. G. a different plan is used; the industrial unions have no central strike fund treasuries and the local unions are duty bound to assess their members a half week's wages yearly for strike purposes. They retain these funds themselves and when they deem a strike necessary they enter upon it without asking anyone's leave. When their funds are gone, they make an appeal to the business commission of the F. V. D. G. and the latter issues appeals to all the local unions of the whole organization. There in turn assess themselves so much per member weekly as long as the strike lasts. This plan has proved to be a success, as so far, the unions have loyally lived up to their agreed on plan of "free solidarity." This plan far from suppressing the fighting qualities of the unions, as does that in vogue in the centralist unions, stimulates them. The socialist union leaders say "The F. V. D. G. unions are utterly unreasonable, when they enter into a "loan movement" they never know when to quit.

What may to many seem to be an exaggerated form of "autonomy" prevails in regard to the congress, each union sends as many delegates as it wishes to. This plan is really only a symptom of the universal syndicalistic contempt for majorities in congresses and committees. It is proof that these bodies in syndicalist organizations are only advisory and legislative, that the power ever rests where it belongs—in the local unions. In these basic organizations—the local unions—where the assemblies are genuinely legislative, the prin-

ciple of majorities is rigidly upheld, not because it is particularly just, but because it is the only known practical method of doing business. The whole superstructure—congress and committees—of the French labor unions is built on this same principle. The smallest federation of 350 members gets the same representation in the C. G. T. as the largest 90,000.

The F. V. D. G. has been developed as a result of thirty years of warfare with the centralist unions. Though the national organization of the F. V. D. G. is but fourteen years old some of its component organizations date back into the days of the "Ante Socialist" laws from 1878-1890. These Ante Socialist laws forbade labor unions which were professedly political—as were all the revolutionary unions—to enter into alliances with each other; they had to remain isolated. After their enactment the labor movement became split over the question of whether it should remain political and only locally organized, or whether it should discard politics and form national centralized unions, as it was entitled to do under the law. After years of strife—even after the repeal of the Ante Socialist laws in 1890—the centralized form of union became the dominant one, and the localist organizations, the still strongly Socialist, gradually became outcasts. These ne'er-do-wells went from bad to worse, and finally wound up in the lowest depths of depravity by becoming Syndicalist. Today, these organizations alone of all the unions of Germany are entitled to be called revolutionary. Whilst all the others have vague plans of bettering the living conditions of the workers, the F. V. D. G. unions are aiming consciously to overthrow capitalism by direct action methods and when this feat is accomplished to use their own structures as the basis for the constitution of the new society.

In all the capitalist countries of the globe the syndicalist organizations are desperately fighting to get a little breathing space in the Black Hole of the modern labor movement and everywhere their most inveterate enemies are the Socialists. Here in Germany, the so-called classic land of Socialism and revolution, the Syndicalists, because of the power of the Socialists, believe that they have a more difficult task than that of any other Syndicalist organization. They even consider the German worker hypnotized by "political dope," to be more immune from the attacks of revolutionary unionism than even the American scissor bill. However, they are not dismayed by their task but are carrying on a vigorous agitation which is bound to eventually win.

## LABOR DAY IN NEW YORK

60,000 PARADE ON LABOR DAY IN NEW YORK—SOCIALIST AND LABOR FAKIRS TRY TO DESTROY I. W. W. BANNERS—I. W. W. IS VICTORIOUS.

(Special to "Industrial Worker.")

New York, Sept. 4, 1911

Labor day in New York is once more a thing of history. Approximately 60,000 workers participated in the parade. In the immense parade there was one division reserved for those organizations wishing to put themselves on record as specially protesting against the McNamara outrage. Invitations were sent to all organizations to form part of this division, which invitations were accepted by many among which was the I. W. W. Though all these organizations naturally carried their union banner, an attempt was made by a combination of socialist party and A. F. of L. fakirs (among whom were Julius Gerber and Isadore Philips of the S. P. and A. Abrams of the A. F. of L.) to prevent the I. W. W. to carry its banner and to force them to withdraw from the parade. They threatened to pull it down but got their bluff called and as the I. W. W. regulars seconded their motion with enthusiasm, seeing that their attempt to slug the I. W. W. was a failure they contented themselves with putting us at the tail end of the McNamara division which was the last division of the parade. Here we were joined by several hundred rebels of every stamp, many of whom were disgusted members of the S. P., who swore all kinds of vengeance even going so far as to threaten a split in the party. The result of the battle around the I. W. W. banner was that the I. W. W. made the best showing in the McNamara division, besides showing a few of the faithful tactics of their fake leaders, also gave them a sample of the fighting spirit of the I. W. W. Yours for solidarity,

W. Z. FOSTER.  
AUGUST WALQUIST.  
Press Committee.

### ARE YOU BOOSTING?

Are you boosting for the eight hour day to take effect all over America on May 1st, 1912? Remember the time is getting shorter every day and we have not a minute to lose in this matter. Everyone get busy. Get stickers and literature and don't forget to get subs for our papers. There is work for every rebel in America and then some.

### CORRECT, BY GUM!

Even the slogan of a "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" really means equitable conditions of employment, and to the worker the fruits of his labor. Anything less is unfair.