

The Drift of the Labor Bureaucracy to the Right

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

THE outstanding characteristic of the American labor movement is the drift of the trade union bureaucracy to the right. This has been an almost unbroken process since the close of the war. Three great landmarks stand out in this rightward tendency of the trade union officialdom. These are the movements of the steel workers in 1918-19, of the railroad workers in 1920-22, and the coal miners in 1925-27. These are three key struggles and have exerted profound effects on the general course of the labor movement.

The Great Steel Strike.

THE organization of the steel workers represented the highest point ever reached by organized labor in this country in establishing unionism amongst the masses. The campaign of organization received little or no support from the upper bureaucrats. And when the steel workers were attacked by the steel companies those bureaucrats betrayed the movement outright. They abandoned the steel workers completely. The latter demanded co-operation from the miners and the railroad workers to tie up the steel mills, but their proposals went unanswered by the reactionary leadership of these organizations.

THE strike was lost. Had it been won, as it might easily have been with support from the related basic industries, it would have enormously strengthened the entire labor movement and fortified it for the bitter struggles ahead. But due to the treachery of the class collaborationist leadership it was lost. In consequence the union line-up of the workers was weakened and the employers were encouraged to redouble their attacks against the trade unions. The loss of the steel strike was followed by a decided drift to the right of the bureaucracy.

The Railroad Shopmen's Strike.

AT the close of the war the bloc of 16 railroad unions were the strongest and most progressive section of the labor movement. In 1921 the railroad companies opened their campaign aggressively to shatter these organizations. First they split the four brotherhoods from the rest of the unions by promises of concessions. Then they cut the wages of the shopmen and worsened their conditions so that they had to strike, in spite of the prevailing unemployment. Their great national strike in 1922, like the steel strike of but two years before, was shattered by the attacks of the employers and the treachery of the union leaders. The latter abandoned the railroad workers on strike even as they had the steel workers. The strike presented the sad picture of nine unions staying at work while seven were on strike. Real solidarity by the 16 unions would have resulted in a magnificent victory.

THE loss of the shopmen's strike, coming at the end of unsuccessful struggles by the unions in the textile, building, meat packing, and other industries, drove the timid leadership still further to the right. They concluded that the railroad corporations, fattened like the rest of American capitalism by the super profits of imperialism, were too strong for the unions to resist. Hence, instead of adopting the T. U. E. L. program of amalgamation, a labor party, the organization of the unorganized, and the development of a militant fight against the employers, they surrendered to the employers. This surrender takes the shape of the whole series of class collaboration movements, such as labor banking, the B. & O. plan, etc.

THE entire A. F. of L. bureaucracy also plunged into a retreat to the right in the years following this struggle. With their "new wage policy," and worker-employer co-operation schemes they have fallen in step with the program of the employers to company unionize the trade unions and to reduce them to mere auxiliaries of the exploiters to speed up production and to check class consciousness. An inevitable phase of this retreat to the right is the bitter war being carried on against the left wing, that has culminated in the unheard of persecution and autocracy being practiced now in the needle trades.

The Struggle of the Coal Miners.

WE come next to the vital strike of the bituminous miners, now taking place. This strike was preceded, as well as accompanied, by the rankest treachery on the part of the Lewis machine. For the past two years the employers have been literally cutting the Miners Union to pieces, smashing them in district after district. Yet Lewis has done nothing to prevent the destruction of

the organization. During the anthracite strike of 1925 there was a splendid opportunity to rehabilitate the organization by pulling out the bituminous miners. But Lewis refused to do this. He permitted the employers, under the fiction of the Jacksonville agreement, to undermine the organization, to the extent that where three years ago union bituminous miners were producing 70% of the bituminous coal and non-union miners 30%, the percentages, on the eve of the present strike, were almost exactly reversed. Lewis' policy brought the union in actual danger of destruction. The "Save the Union" slogan of the progressive bloc in the recent elections, was based upon the realist of realities.

THE loss of the vital steel workers' and shopmen's strikes resulted in the bureaucracy of the labor movement going far to the right, with consequent neglect of the workers' interests and to the demoralization and weakening of the unions. Already the weakening of the Miners Union has had a reactionary effect upon the labor movement. And the loss of the present bituminous strike, which would shatter the U. M. W. A., backbone of the American labor movement, would also drive the bureaucracy still further to the right and inflict fresh disasters upon the trade unions as a whole. Hence the rallying of all possible support behind the striking miners looms as the major task confronting the labor movement at the present time. The miners' strike must be won in spite of Lewis' policy of betrayal.

The Road Ahead of Us.

THE present fight of the workers for a powerful and militant labor movement is a difficult one. The reactionary bureaucracy, who are set upon their policies of no fight against the employers, cling to the control of the unions by autocratic measures which outrage every tradition and practice of democracy in the unions. But the situation is much better than it appears upon the surface. There is widespread discontent among the masses of workers. This was evidenced in the recent miners' elections, when the opposition undoubtedly polled the majority of the votes cast. It is also manifest in the vast upheaval now taking place in the needle trades. In the Machinists' Union, which the recent election demonstrated, the workers are discontented with the reactionary leadership. Even in such organizations as the carpenters, the rank and file (witness the elections in Chicago and other cities) are finding themselves in conflict with the reactionary officialdom.

IN the unions there are great numbers of workers at odds with their leaders. The task is to unite these under progressive and left wing leadership. They lack organization and a definite program. It is not that the bureaucracy is so strong but that the opposition is so disunited. The T. U. E. L., with its slogans of organize the unorganized within and without the existing unions, the amalgamation of the craft unions, the formation of a labor party, and the democratization of the unions, points the way to victory. What is needed is the development of a widespread united front of progressive and left wing elements to put these vital slogans into reality. This is the specific to stop the drift of the present leadership to the right. It is the way to a militant and successful trade union movement.

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS—1927

Sacco and Vanzetti
No murderers are you.
But worse than mere assassins,
That judiciary crew,
Grim, black robed and stony
Just like their Plymouth rock
Killing guiltless workers
By electric shock.
These judges hang together
They ought to hang—by God!
These foul birds of a feather
Smell worse than putrid cod,
That is to say, the "justice"
That in this case they've shown
There is no worse injustice
In legal records known.
Oh land of boasted freedom
Whence liberty has fled
[t seems that even your justice
Is cock-eyed drunk or dead.

—ADOLF WOLFF.