

REVOLUTIONARY TACTICS

I.

The gathering of Socialist labor leaders and politicians, who founded the I. W. W. and outlined its policies and structure, unconsciously pursued a curious though not unnatural method of reasoning by analogy in their undertaking.

Previously, when establishing their political party, following the universal custom of Socialists, they had scathingly criticised and condemned all existing political parties as being by nature non-revolutionary, and organized their party entirely independent of and opposed to all others. When they felt the necessity for an economic "wing" to their movement they instinctively pursued the same course of reasoning and tactics. They violently criticised and utterly condemned the existing conservative labor unions and established the I. W. W. as an independent labor movement.

They reasoned, in effect, though perhaps without realizing it, as follows:

"The corrupt old parties don't represent the interests of the Working Class on the political field. We organized a new party and it is succeeding. The rotten craft unions don't represent the interests of the Working Class on the economic field. Therefore, let's organize a new revolutionary union to replace them. It also will succeed."

The result of this sub-conscious analogic lumping together of labor union and political party organization problems was that the special problems ever present in the organization of dual labor unions were entirely neglected and the I. W. W. organized "willy nilly" on the gratuitous assumption that if a dual political party can be made a success so can a dual labor union.*

But as time has gone on the political party has had a continued growth while the I. W. W., in spite of a large and growing revolutionary sentiment, has vegetated, struggling with problems and difficulties entirely absent in the political party's experience. It is, therefore, high time that the problems facing the I. W. W. be given a long needed and more thorough examination than the haphazard one accorded them at the outset, when they were all "settled" without even being considered.

To contribute to this long delayed investigation will be the purpose of this series of articles.

A Dual Program

In its attempt to organize the American proletariat on a revolutionary basis, the I. W. W. is performing two distinct and separate functions with the one organization. It has a double program: First, it is serving as a propaganda league to propagate the ideas of industrial unionism; second, it is functioning as a labor union wherever possible and trying to build up an entirely new labor movement.

We have been so accustomed to see these two programs associated together, that we have not heretofore even remarked them as being two different entities. Proof of their individuality is seen,

AROUSE YE WORKERS

Workingmen arise! the night departeth

Arise! the day draws near

Of old, foretold, by prophet, poet;

Vision of sage and seer.

Arise! the first rays rend the blackness

In which ye long have lain;

Rouse ye, my brothers, and cast from you

The many-centuried chain.

Rouse ye! for woes of weakly women;

For crippled children crying;

For all the many and mute millions

In gross darkness dying.

For the harlot, for the drunkard,

For the outcast, the thief;

For those "poor heirs of all ages"

Who are heirs to nought but grief.

For the starving—yea, for the satiate;

For the uncouth, the uncouth;

For all fair fields of earth befouled,

Rouse ye! stand for the truth,

'Gainst forms and forces which are blighting:

And working ruin and ruth;

Because of wrongs which wait for righting,

Rise and strike for the truth.

—JOSEPH LEE.

however, in that in many countries syndicalist propaganda leagues exist which do not function as labor unions. The syndicalist propaganda league of England is an example. On the other hand, innumerable labor organizations exist, which are not functioning as propaganda leagues.

In France, where the labor movement is controlled by direct action revolutionists, this quality of functions is also clearly seen. The direct actionists have established magazines and papers (one of them a daily) to propagate their ideas, especially anti-parliamentarism, it being recognized that neither the labor unions nor their official papers can be used for this purpose, if disastrous internal dissensions are to be avoided. Violations of this principle always provoke violent quarrels between the direct actionists and politicians in the unions.

In the I. W. W. these two functions of labor organization and propaganda league are combined—thanks to the farseeing (sic) judgment of the politician founders of the I. W. W. They thought that if a political party could be built around a principle, so could a labor union and they constructed the I. W. W. accordingly.

Since then the I. W. W. has presented its two programs of industrial unionism and dual labor unionism to the working class. The responses to these programs have been, or rather should be, instructive. They have certainly been very different. In fact, one program has been welcomed and the other repudiated. The one is a success and the other a failure.

The Successful Program.

The propagation during the past seven years of the industrial union idea—in the sense at least of the necessity for much broader forms and more militant types of labor organizations than those now existing, if not in the exact sense of the I. W. W. charted anti-political One Big Union with an all powerful G. E. B. at the top and an obedient rank and file at the bottom—may be fairly said to have been a success. Workers everywhere are imbued with it. Only the most reactionary or ignorant workers are opposed to it. Insistent demands are being made on all sides in all kinds of unions for the remodeling of the labor movement, more in accord with industrial union principles.

The I. W. W., for some time after its founding, had a monopoly in this propagation of industrial unionism. Indeed, to say "Industrial Unionism" was to say "I. W. W." But in the course of time the I. W. W. has lost this monopoly. (This has been caused principally by its universal dual organization and anti-political attitude.) Today it is perhaps only a minor factor in the propagation of industrial unionism. At first sight this statement may seem exaggerated, but when one considers that the whole radical wing of the Socialist party (represented by the International Socialist Review, Revolt, etc.) have taken the propaganda as their own and are carrying it on independent of the I. W. W.; that dozens of other Socialist and trades union papers are doing the same; that at its last convention, the U. M. W. of A. endorsed industrial unionism

and instructed its officers to attend as many trade union conventions as possible in order to spread the industrial union propaganda; that numerous papers, such as The Coal Digger, The 3-Hour Day, Toledo Union Leader, controlled by direct actionists, are carrying on an active industrial unionism campaign outside of the I. W. W. and the other multiple signs of widespread non-I. W. W. propagation of industrial unionism, the statement takes on at least an appearance of strong probability.

The important fact is, however, that the propaganda program of the I. W. W. IN ITS BROAD outlines at least has been a success, so much so, in fact, that it has very largely run away from the I. W. W.

The Unsuccessful Program

But let us turn to the other program of the I. W. W. viz.: the building of a new labor movement, and see how it has fared. The answer is readily apparent. It is a failure. In spite of the great and rapidly growing sentiment in favor of industrial unionism, the I. W. W. has less members now than at its inception seven years ago.

Very many superficial reasons are urged in explanation of this condition and many rosy prophecies of the future made. But they don't do away with the all important fact that the workers have failed to respond to the I. W. W.'s dual organization program.

And this is true in spite of the I. W. W.'s recent large increase of membership in the textile industry. These new members were gained as a result of the great Lawrence strike, but this by no means signifies that the new membership is a permanent one. We have time and again in the past had large groups of workers organized, only to have them desert the organization as the W. F. of M., or disintegrate, as the McKee's Rocks organization, in response to influences still at work in the I. W. W.

The failure of the dual labor organization program of the I. W. W. means the failure of the I. W. W. itself, as above all it aims to be the labor movement, its propaganda program being only incidental to this end.

In the next article of this series, some of the causes of this failure will be pointed out.

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* At the first convention of the I. W. W. (see minutes) the debates on the attitude of the I. W. W. towards the already existing craft unions consisted simply of so many "roasts" of these unions. The problems presented by them was not even discussed, the men forming the convention having determined beforehand—and by the mode of reasoning above indicated—to form a new labor movement.

MAY 1st AND A SHORTER WORK DAY.

That eventful day, the first of May, is approaching.

Eventful because the radical workers of all countries have stood united on that day, in great demonstrations, demanding the eight-hour day. It is true that those workers were (and are as yet to a great extent) led by politicians, or would-be saviors, who delivered eloquent orations, and fed the slaves upon munificent promises, but that does not alter the fact that the workers demonstrated for shorter hours and better living conditions. But the workers of the world over are more and more losing faith in leaders and saviors of all kinds, and are slowly but surely awakening to a realization of their own power as a class.

In all capitalist countries syndicalism, or class unionism—the one big union idea—is rapidly pushing itself to the front. Strikes are becoming larger and larger, and the antagonism between the masters and the slaves is growing more and more intense. The slaves are losing their respect for parasitical life and property, and are resorting to direct action and sabotage.

In view of the tremendous struggles raging to-day between the slaves of the workshops and the masters of the bread, it is to be expected that the coming May Day will go down in history, with more real working class significance than any May Day preceding it.

It is true that very few American workers have so far taken part in those International May Day demonstrations. While the workers of the world were marching to the tune of revolutionary music on the 1st of May, demanding a shorter work day, the American workers were sleeping. They