

The Communist

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INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCES.

CAPITALISM possesses an infinite capacity for adaptation. Its policy, while rigid in the general purpose of maintaining supremacy, varies in particular application to particular conditions. Having power and control of the resources of power, Capitalism can use a large variety of means to maintain its oppressive control of society.

In the United States, at the moment that Capitalism was using all its resources of brutality and coercion against the working class, Capitalism was simultaneously preaching fraternity and financing the Civic Federation, the particular purpose of which was cajolery of labor.

In spite of coercion and brutality, the American working class developed more and more consciousness and militancy. This development has been accelerated by the inspiration of the proletarian revolutions in Europe and by the industrial crisis in our own country. The workers are becoming restless, more militant, impatient of small means and purposes. There is the threat of potential revolutionary action. Capitalism resorts to new forms of coercion—legislative measures are adopted which make almost any advocacy of militant proletarian action a crime; all the resources of the state power are mobilized against the revolutionary movements of the working class, and armed force is used against workers on strike.

But still proletarian unrest grows, revolutionary agitation becomes more general and aggressive. Capitalism, while intensifying its coercion, resorts again to cajolery and deception. The Industrial Conference, now in session, is of this character.

This Industrial Conference, the creature of President Wilson, is composed of representatives of capital, labor and the public. (Among the representatives of the public, incidentally, are two traitor Socialists.) The labor representation is an A. F. of L. representation; consequently, in fundamental issues of class policy, necessarily representing Capitalism. The public—in a society rent by class divisions and class struggles, there is no public neutral in fundamental class disputes—the public must necessarily align itself either with capital or labor; and, the Conference being determined by President Wilson, the representatives of the public are necessarily capitalistic. The Industrial Conference, therefore, represents Capitalism in fundamental issues, whatever disagreements there may be on minor issues of controversy.

The purpose of the Conference is to ascertain means for assuring industrial peace. Capitalism realizes that brute force alone is insufficient to suppress the developing revolt of the working class. Therefore, if certain strata of the workers, the "aristocracy of labor," can be given slight concessions, and the great prestige of the A. F. of L. secured in favor of a program for industrial peace, Capitalism is strengthened in its usurpation of power.

That is the meaning of the Industrial Conference—to strengthen the authority of the capitalist class over the working class.

Industrial peace is impossible under Capitalism—the development of economic and political forces smashes every dream of industrial peace. The antagonisms of class against class are a necessary phase of Capitalism. These antagonisms must become more and more acute, until they flare up in the final antagonism of revolutionary crisis.

TWO STRIKES.

THE Socialist Party and the Communist Labor Party agree on one thing—an "American" movement, not a "foreign" movement, is necessary. It is appropriate that the Communist Labor Party, which has not yet severed the umbilical cord binding it to the Socialist Party, should express this treacherous ideology of "Americanism."

Marxists are not idealogues; they consider objective facts, variations in class relations, every peculiarity of social development that may determine tactics. But the fact that there are peculiar problems of each proletarian movement does not alter the general character of the problems of the revolutionary proletariat. The Right Wing and the Centre use a perfectly good principle not for purposes of revolutionary action, but either to discourage revolutionary action or to promote a malicious controversy.

That the general problems of the proletariat are international is attested repeatedly by an abundance of testimony, theoretical and practical. Consider the steel strike in the United States and the Railway strike in England.

The British Railway strike was initiated by a mass impulse of the workers. It was an expression of the developing revolt of the workers, forced upon the union officials, who were as much terrified by the strike as the British Government. Prior to the strike the Railway union officials acted against the strike, tried every resource of compromise; but caught between the militancy of the workers and the hostility of the government, the union officials were forced to yield and declare a strike. But the day the strike was declared, J. H. Thomas, secretary of the Railway unions, said: "This is the saddest day of my life."

Starting on this compromise basis, the Railway strike persisted as a strike unwelcome to the officials. These tried every opportunity to compromise the strike. They used every means to prevent the strike assuming a revolutionary character; other unions were discouraged from participating in a general strike. The union officials argued that a general strike might mean revolution!

The compromise was effected. It was

not the government that broke the strike but the trades union officials. The New York "Times" says that the trades union "Conciliatory Committee" deserves more credit than any others, including Premier Lloyd George, in settling the strike. The depth of this betrayal of the strike and the workers is more than apparent in this clause of the agreement: "The Union of Railwaymen agrees that members of the union should work in harmony with the workers who returned to work or who continued working during the strike."

The Steel strike also started as a mass movement of the workers. The trades union officials of the A. F. of L., in control of the organization work, tried compromise from the start. They wanted a conference with the Steel magnates before the strike; now they are willing to accept arbitration—anything but the aggressive struggle. In this strike, as in the British Railway strike, the union officials are preventing any expression of solidarity from the other workers. The Steel strike might have eventuated in a general strike; but the leaders of the Steel strike not only do not carry on an agitation for a general strike, they set their faces as flint against it. The A. F. of L., moreover, is not at all sympathetic to the strike; the "philosophy" of trades unionism sees in this strike a menace, and they are not supporting the strike. The Steel strike is now languishing, in spite of the determination and courage of the men; the situation now is either defeat or a miserable compromise—unless the strike workers can take control of the strike and oust the reactionary leaders.

The parallel between these two strikes—one British, the other American—is a drastic illustration of the international character of the proletarian struggle, of the similarity of problems and the fundamental tactics that these problems impose.

Trades unionism is the arch enemy of the militant proletariat. It is archaic in organization structure and counter revolutionary in spirit. It accepts capitalism, and thereby places itself at the mercy of Capitalism. In all nations the trades union organizations are against the militant struggle of the workers; they develop into bulwarks of Capitalism in the revolutionary crisis, in Russia, in Germany, in England, in the United States.

But in the United States, as in England, there is developing a revolt of the workers in the unions. They are discontented by conditions; they are being awakened by the betrayals perpetrated by their organizations. This provides excellent opportunity to agitate revolutionary industrial unionism and the Communist program.

This is one of the tasks of the Communist Party—the destruction of the existing trades union organizations. The particular means by which this may be accomplished depend upon circumstances; the task is clear and imperative.

The Communist Party possesses a sense of revolutionary realism; it recognizes any peculiarity in our American problems, but it does not use that as the pretext for an hysterical "Americanism." Only the adherence to fundamentals, among which is a recognition of the international character of the proletarian struggle, will build a Communist movement.