

The A. F. of L. and the Wage-Cut Drive

By ARNE SWABECK

William Green has come forward with a statement that the A. F. of L. Executive Council will call upon the workers, organized and unorganized, to "resist wage cuts to the fullest extent". If that was meant to be taken seriously one would assume that steps for through-going preparation of all unions to adopt methods and measures for effective resistance should follow to correspond with such statements. But this is not the case.

What the Executive Council has in mind becomes clear from the editorials by Green in the June issue of the *American Federationist*. His appeal is not at all directed to the working class, not even to the unions, but in the usual boot licking lackey fashion addressed to the employers. He says in part, with regard to the present crisis: "We look to gatherings of captains of finance and leaders of industry to find a way forward". And then calling upon the unions he says: "Get ready the facts to show your community how many customers are wage earners and what their wages mean to the retail trade of the town, to those who rent houses to insurance agents, to automobile salesmen, etc. . . . Interest community groups in this wage preservation movement and get your statements into the local papers. Remember you must convince employers and the public. This is a time to utilize the facts and put your full strength behind them."

The actual extent of wage-cutting can perhaps best be gathered by referring to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' figures for the month of January 1931. A total of 335 companies reported reductions affecting 43,507 workers. The same bureau also lists the wage cuts in percentage for a number of industries under the heading of per capita weekly earnings of March, 1931, compared with March 1930. We quote in part:

2,937,525 workers in the manufacturing industry have had their weekly wage lowered by 9.4 percent; 110,669 anthracite miners by 9.2 percent. 213,028 Bituminous miners by 16.2 percent and so on for many other industries. These outright wage cuts listed by the bureau do not, however, at all include the many clever schemes which are being applied by way of indirect wage cutting of which many thousand workers have become the victims.

Undoubtedly these figures by themselves express a slashing capitalist offensive of a terrific magnitude against the working class standard. We might add that without a doubt the A. F. of L. leadership has become quite alarmed over the present situation. Not so much over the reduction of the working class standard as because of its ravaging effects upon the union membership. First, by the fact that large proportions of this membership find themselves unable to meet their dues payments. Secondly, and this is a well known fact that the unofficial wage cuts are far heavier than those registered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Notably is this so in the building trades unions, which form the very backbone of the A. F. of L. These unions are today unable to maintain the wage scale which the official agreements call for. Because of the failure of the organizations really to take any steps to repel the capitalist offensive the members find themselves face to face with the choice of prolonged unemployment or whatever wage the boss sees fit to pay. It is very natural that under such conditions the unions should experience heavy membership losses.

It should now be perfectly clear that what we have clearly and distinctly emphasized some time ago as an inevitable perspective, is actually coming to pass. Capitalism is beginning its desperate efforts to overcome its economic difficulties by saddling the burden more securely upon the workers' backs. They are aiming for a new sort of stabilization level, many degrees further down, based upon a drastically reduced working class standard. The all-important question now is: Will the workers resist and attempt to prevent it?

In answer to such a query we notice some very encouraging signs. Strikes are today on the increase. Workers are beginning to resist the capitalist onslaughts. The Department of Labor reports that there were only 903 strikes during the year 1930 which records the lowest number since 1918. During the most recent weeks, however many strikes, mostly against wage cuts, have broken out. There have been several strikes involving thousands of workers in the anthracite section of the Pennsylvania coal producing territory. Just now, about ten thousand workers are on strike in the Cannonsburg bituminous section in Pennsylvania under the leadership of the National Miners Union. About 2,000 steel workers struck in Mansfield, Ohio, against a 15 percent wage cut. The latter have so far ex-

perienced a total cut of 37 1/2 percent in eighteen months. Several thousand miners have been on strike for some time against wage cuts in Kentucky. Several thousand workers struck against the wage cuts in the Mishawaka rubber and woolen factory in Indiana. Hosiery workers in Pennsylvania are still on strike. Building trades workers in Indianapolis struck and prevented a 20 percent wage cut. Two thousand pocket book workers in New York are on strike against a 25 percent wage cut. Similarly leather goods workers in Massachusetts are out fighting wage cuts. The New England machinists have decided to resist any wage reductions. The street car workers of St. Louis Mo., have decided to strike against a 10 percent wage cut if negotiations fail them. These are only some of the present examples.

The American workers are still fighting on the defense. A change toward offensive battles is of course not determined only by the numbers involved the frequency of occurrence, the industries involved or even the specific nature of demands. It is rather determined by the general character and objectives of the struggles, not only toward the immediate issues but also toward the whole system of class society. Nevertheless there are without a question

of a doubt great possibilities for development in such direction. And it is particularly important to remember that upon the revolutionary movement rests the task of bringing forward the slogans and tactical guidance which will furnish the bridge from the defensive to the offensive.

It would be erroneous to draw the conclusion from the decrease of membership of the A. F. of L. unions that it is definitely facing an unbroken period of decline. Undoubtedly it is in a serious crisis. But it is to be expected that the very pressure of the capitalist onslaught will bring many in the workers' ranks to seek organizations and will still throw many of them into the folds of the A. F. of L. unions despite the treacherous career of its leadership. It is particularly pertinent, however, at the present moment to call the attention of the workers to the fact that the fundamental reason for the present plight of the A. F. of L. unions is to be sought precisely in the character of the leadership and its policies. It is only a short time ago, at the beginning of this present crisis, that William Green promised the Hoover Conference that there would be no strikes for "wage adjustments" during this period. And that at a time when any worker with an ounce of brains would know that precisely this period would be utilized for a general reduction of the working class standard.

Communism and Syndicalism in Spain

The programs of the different currents of the working class movement are being tested by the Spanish revolution—a revolution which is now in Socialist-Republican hands, but a revolution these forces are unable to solve, a revolution slipping from their grasp, either to be carried to the successful conclusion of a dictatorship of the proletariat by a Marxian leadership or to be spilled back in the hands of the capitalist-feudalist forces.

In the onward march of the revolution the syndicalists hold a key position not because of their theoretical position, but due to their lack of one and the fact that they are the most powerfully organized and militant proletarian force. The Communist program that does not give special attention to this part of the heterogeneous problem will be unable "to reduce all the contradictions and tasks to one co-efficient—the dictatorship of the proletariat". Before dealing with what kind of special attention we must take up the syndicalist movement of Spain.

The Russian Revolution and the German revolution had to contend with the socialists as the most powerful organized force with a non-Marxian position. The Chinese revolution has a different relationship of these forces. Although the present Spanish revolution brings out a relationship with the socialists resembling the German and Russian revolutions it nevertheless opens up a new problem when considering the relationship of the socialists syndicalists and Communists in Spain as well as what lessons revolutionists have already learned about the role of the socialists.

We are actively participating in a revolution that can be compared with the Russian revolution. If we are to list the striking differences between these two revolutions special attention must be given to the syndicalist problem, because the Left Opposition has already dealt with the other vital problems to a greater degree. The capitalist press of the continent is comparing the Spanish revolution with the French revolution and the American press has followed its lead. What blindness and lack of understanding of their own capitalist problems! The French revolution came in the period of the birth of capitalism and the Spanish revolution breaks out in the period of the decay of capitalism. The capitalist comparison holds no water.

The syndicalist movement took root in Spain at the beginning of the century, as it did in most capitalist countries, as a "healthy" reaction to the revision and opportunism of the Second International. The "denial" of politics and the attitude toward the State was the most favorable ground for the philosophy of Anarchism. The old problems of capitalism are incorporated in the new problems of capitalism and the old problems of the Marxian movement (Bakunin, Proudhon etc.) are incorporated in our new problems. They are not to be dismissed as settled problems, as an unnecessary retracing of steps over ground covered but to be treated as part of the contradictions of the present stage of imperialism. Stalinism as a revision of Marxism and the tactics of the Comintern have been feeding the stream of syndicalism. Driving

workers to reformism and syndicalism is part of Stalinism. To win the workers from the reformist and anarcho-syndicalist leadership, to the road of the proletarian revolution is a task that falls upon the shoulders of the Left Opposition. We must remember that the road does not lead around the party but through the party. But we must also add that "through the party" does not exclude independent action—it necessarily includes such.

The General Confederation of Labor, as a syndicalist organization, is far from homogeneous. At present the anarcho-syndicalists are in control but the very process of the revolution and the wrong policies of this leadership must accelerate the division in the organization. The 1919 Congress decided to join the Third International, but desiring to join and being Communist are two different things. By 1920 the confederation had over 800,000 members, according to their reports, but the eventful years and defeats since then have left them with a small underground organization which is rapidly growing in the present revolution.

The General Strike

The defeat of the general strike in 1923 in Spain and the general world effects of the defeat of the October German revolution enabled the dictatorship of Primo De Rivera to establish its rule on the backs of the workers and peasants of Spain. The syndicalist program is brought out in full light in the events since 1923 as an utter minus in relation to solving the problems of the proletariat and peasantry. To the syndicalist, the general strike means everything. To us the general strike is a most powerful weapon in the hands of Marxian leadership; yet it only RAISES the question of power but does not SETTLE it. Only the smashing of the capitalist state machinery and its replacement with a proletarian state machine, a dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry in Spain, will settle the question of power.

The "Syndicat" as a federated system of autonomy is the syndicalist structure to take over production. Workers' federalism vs. centralism is their keynote. Under capitalism the organization of production has already surpassed this syndicalist federated or local commune stage. Capitalism has combined industry, etc., nationally and internationally interlocking numbers of industries under finance-capitalism. The syndicalist proposal is a step backward to the organization of productive forces on a lower level, while the socialist solution of the proletarian problem lies in surpassing the capitalist mode of production. We must build a higher stage of economic production as well as distribution. The Centrist with his theory of socialism in one country is only different in degree from the syndicalist conception of the solution of the toiling masses' problems under the socialist mode of production. Stalinism can build socialism in an isolated economic backward unit and the syndicalist can build socialism through local communes. The Left Opposition say the solution of our problems and of the Socialist mode of production lies in the world arena through the world revolution. The seizure of power in Spain

It is to be expected that the present period of such slashing attacks upon the unions will bring forward new elements with pretensions "progressive" declarations. Such are merely the weathercocks of the general trend of the working class movement and serve as a mask cloaking the treason being prepared by the reactionary leadership whose color does not change. In that respect, such elements become particularly dangerous, as their fundamental outlook has not changed either, but only their appearance. They furnish the feeding channels of social reformism, into which they endeavor to direct the trade union movement to prevent its development truly and genuinely in a Left direction.

The American working class has during the past "prosperity" period been lulled into a false sense of security which to a large extent accounts for the slow developments of resistance to the attacks upon it. These workers have not suffered serious defeats. All the more can it be expected that with the increase of these attacks the developments toward large struggles scale and even offensive struggles will become quite rapid. There are great prospects and great encouragements in such a perspective. But there are also immense responsibilities resting upon the Communist movement. The coming period will most likely hold rich possibilities for the organization of the unorganized industries for the building of new unions. But it also holds similar possibilities for development of militancy for building of a Left wing movement within the old unions. Only a correct combination of these two tasks can assure success.

now by the proletariat would be another step, a link in the chain of world revolution and would bring greater clarity to our ranks and more unity between the proletariat and peasantry—a unity with an accelerated solution of the peasant problem.

Lenin wrote, "The basic question of any revolution is that of state power. Unless this is understood there can be no intelligent participation in the revolution, let alone directing it." The leaders of the syndicalists have not learned this BASIC question but fortunately the rank and file followers of the syndicalist and some capable proletarian leaders of their camp are learning this basic problem not only in Spain but throughout the world. The quicker we teach this basic point to the Spanish syndicalist followers the faster will be the development of a party, a Marxian party of Communists.

The capitalists may be "dumb" but they at least can distinguish friend from foe. They recognize the Soviet Union not as a friend but as a foe, in spite of the blunders of Stalin. But the syndicalist cannot understand this distinction. No matter how far Stalin has gone up to now with his theory of socialism in one country the international capitalists will not confuse this with capitalist rule even though they realize his policies are strengthening the element that want the return of capitalist rule. The syndicalists often say they would rather have a capitalist dictatorship (U. S. "democracy") than the Russian dictatorship (Soviet power under Communist leadership). Their actions in Spain prove it.

"Freedom" and Dictatorship

Postana, leader of the syndicalist says, "A dictatorship of the proletariat is continually mentioned. We want no dictatorship. The workers must be educated for freedom, not tyranny. The syndicate is the freedom." There is nothing in between the dictatorship of the capitalist today in Spain and the dictatorship of the proletariat tomorrow. The only choice lies between rule of the workers and peasants and the rule of the capitalist; and feudalism. We say to the syndicalists: If you establish your "federation of syndicates" and the capitalists endeavor to take them back, you must either use force against them, or give up—to use force against them, to keep them from a return to private property is the dictation of one class the working class over the capitalist class, and such, in plain English, is the dictatorship of the proletariat through the Soviets. You want freedom and we tell you freedom for the capitalist and feudalism is tyranny for the workers and peasants and freedom for the workers and peasants is "tyranny" for the capitalist and feudalism. Only, our rule is the rule of the majority over the minority.

The objective conditions favor us, the masses learn fast in a revolution and through united fronts with revolutionary syndicalists fighting the Socialist-Republican government we can help them to discard their anarchist prejudices.

Worker, peasant and soldier Juntas with the Communist program presented by the Left Opposition, is the road to power in Spain for the workers and peasants.—H.

—HUGO OEHLER