

By Dwight Macdonald

SPARKS IN THE NEWS

How George Dobbin Lost His Job

I am turning over this column to a guest conductor: George Dobbin, one of the Southern workers who tell their life stories in *These Are Our Lives*, an extremely interesting compilation made by the Federal Writers Project and published by the University of North Carolina Press. The story begins in the boom years of the War:

"Mills was beginnin' to pay good," George continued. "It wa'n't long till I was makin' \$20 a week."

"We done some good livin' then," Sally remarked. "It seemed like we never had to study and contrive so hard. I could buy all the milk my children needed."

"Groceries kept agoin' up," George began again, "and they took up most of the wages, but then we did have enough to eat."

"In 1919 we moved to Durham and first thing I knowed I was makin' from 25 to 35 dollars a week. Times stayed good with us up to '21. When I say times was good, I don't mean we done no fancy livin' at all but we sat down to the table three times a day and always found somethin' on it."

"Then one day I went in the mill and seen a notice tellin' of a twenty-five percent cut and a shortenin' of time to three days a week. Hard times really set in like always but groceries never come down accordin' to the cut."

"Them was miserable days for us," Sally declared, "and many a time my little ones cried for milk."

"And when it began to look like the livin' wa'n't worth the worry of gettin' along I lost my job complete—left without any little piece of a job."

"It was human kindness that caused me to lose it too. A body is hard put to it to understand how kindness can work against him sometimes but it sure happens. Word got out amongst the neighbors that we was havin' a struggle gettin' along with me one workin' and seven children lookin' to me for a livin'."

First thing we knowed a woman come out and set to talk awhile with my wife. She asked her how we managed to live on what I made and the old lady answered we done the best we could. At different times three women come out and done just about such talk as the first one, and Sally, she answered 'em all alike, but not any times did she ever ask help of 'em. But it wa'n't long till baskets of groceries started comin' to us and it seemed just like manna from heaven. That's been goin' on a few weeks when my boss told me Mr. Wilder, the superintendent, wanted to see me.

"Soon as I could I went to Mr. Wilder's office and told him Mr. Henry said he wanted to see me. He answered right quick, 'Yes, Dobbin, I did. The comp'ny's decided all who can't live sumptuous on what they make at this mill is to be given ten-day notice. I'm givin' you yours now.'"

"'But Mr. Wilder,' I says, 'I don't understand what's causin' this. I have never raised one word of complaint against this mill.'"

"'Mr. Dobbin, it's awful knockin' on the mill,' he says, 'to have folks workin' for this company that calls on the welfare and the Salvation Army for help. We don't like to have the Salvation Army callin' up this office and tellin' us they'd like a contribution from us to help them take care of our hands.'"

"I looked at Mr. Wilder settin' there behind his desk and I knowed he couldn't help feelin' I was tellin' the truth when I spoke. 'Before God, Mr. Wilder,' I said, 'to my recollection I've never spoke to a Salvation Army man or woman in my life and I've never been to no organization to ask for help.'"

"'But you've been agettin' help, ain't you?' he asked.

"'I've got help and I highly appreciate it,' I said. 'It's kept my children from goin' hungry.'"

"'You've got your notice,' he answered me.

Martin Strike Call Is Desperate Move

Effort to Win Back Auto Following Fails as Workers Refuse to Respond to Call

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imposed under the pall of Stalinist domination. Militants who turned to the Communist Party, because they hoped to find there a bold and radical leadership, are becoming rapidly disillusioned. It is time for them to break with this reactionary machine.

Martin Men Balk

At the Fisher No. 2 plant, formerly Martin's outstanding stronghold, and where the C.I.O. has not even chartered a local, the membership bitterly denounced Martin's dictatorial methods, and refused to support an action about which they had not been consulted in advance. At a meeting of the Martin union in Fisher No. 2, attended by several hundred men, attempts to speak by Elmer Dowell, Martin Executive Board member, were thwarted by boos and catcalls. A motion to go out on strike in support of Martin's move was unanimously defeated. A motion was then passed to poll the members of the local by means of a referendum, on the question of returning to the U.A.W.-C.I.O.

Attempts to close the Chevrolet and Buick plants met with dismal failure.

In the Chevrolet plants where Martin had comparatively sizeable blocs, he was met with rebuff by his own members. Here Martin's red-baiting reactionary program slapped him in the face. In these plants Martin had gathered around him all the worst reactionary and anti-union elements. These men are against militant action of any kind, and refused to support Martin's strike under any circumstances, having joined with him only to indulge in red-baiting and class-collaboration. These men are no longer Martin men, but have dropped back into their original roles of company stooges and finks.

In the Chevrolet No. 2 plant, where it happened that Martin had a half dozen men in key positions, the plant was forced to shut down for about an hour, but quickly resumed production.

In Buick there wasn't a tinker's dozen to support the bureaucratic and adventurist "strike." Instead of rallying men to his side, Martin's clumsy and stupid tactics alienated even his own meager forces.

But "Strike" Is Warning

In spite of its dismal failure, its dictatorial methods, and its thoroughly anti-union character, the strike nevertheless sharply calls to attention the necessity for the U.A.W.-C.I.O. to begin to do something about the wretched state of organization in General Motors.

Martin knew very well that C.I.O. members were dissatisfied with the timid and do-nothing policies of their leaders, and hoped to re-establish himself by playing upon this feeling. This should serve as a strong warning, and faces the C.I.O. leaders squarely with the task of showing their members, and the great number of men outside the union, some real action or suffer the consequences.

Contrast with Briggs

The inspiring strike and victory at Briggs body plant, in Detroit, is a glowing call to arms. The union must return to the bold and militant tradition of the past, when it was an unconquerable force. The Briggs strike was successful because it was fought along the old, militant lines that have always won victories, and which the workers, particularly in Flint, know they must use. The Briggs strike has done much to reawaken desire for militant action; if followed up with a militant campaign of organization, it can point the way toward a complete rejuvenation of the U.A.W.-C.I.O.

While Briggs, under an anti-Stalinist leadership, has made healthy strides ahead, the Flint U.A.W.-C.I.O. locals lie

inert under the pall of

Stalinist domination. Militants who turned to the Communist Party, because they hoped to find there a bold and radical leadership, are becoming rapidly disillusioned. It is time for them to break with this reactionary machine.

Smashing the Martin action

alone will not satisfy the thousands of men in the plants who have been disillusioned both by the dragged out factional war, and by the floundering, union-wrecking policies of the present leadership. These men want their bargaining rights restored, they want the 30-hour week at 40 hours pay, they want a closed shop agreement with General Motors. And when they see the U.A.W.-C.I.O. getting into action they will readily take their places in the ranks of union fighters.

Whether Martin makes headway in the auto field, and whether the company succeeds in smashing the union altogether, depends entirely upon whether or not a militant organizational campaign is begun by the U.A.W.-C.I.O.

Yellow "Leaders"

In Flint the C.I.O. leadership, and their army of Stalinist

funks, have distinguished themselves by their timidity and fear, lest they do something to irritate the police. A plan to hold colorful and militant rallies at plant gates, after having been voted upon by the Chevrolet Executive Board, and passed, was quashed by Art Case, regional director, because the action might possibly have led to a little trouble with the cops.

Militants know the United Automobile Workers was not built with this kind of a craven belly-crawling attitude, but by bold action.

S.U.P. BUCKS GOVERNMENT

Showdown Fight Going Full Blast on West Coast

(Continued from Page 1)

West Coast Sailors, S.U.P. weekly, June 8, reports:

Hiring Halls Issue

"Maritime Commission representatives called on the Sailors Union and asked the Secretary why the sailors had a picket line around the ship when there was no crew on the vessel. . . They believed the S.U.P. ought to let them load and said that 'meanwhile we could negotiate further in regard to getting ship crews from union halls' (Oh, yeah!)"

"The representatives were told that the S.U.P. will keep a picket line around the ship until such time as the Maritime Commission sees fit to get a crew from the S.U.P.—Marine Firemen halls through the regular channels."

The Showdown Came

When the Maritime Commission, Roosevelt-appointed body, ignored the declaration of the sailors that no ship will move on the West Coast that is not manned by crews dispatched from the union hiring halls which the sailors have shed their blood to establish as the sole method of obtaining crews.

The Commission's attempt to hire through non-union channels is believed to be instigated by the shipowners who, although pushed into line during the strikes of the last few years, are still hoping to break the union. Admiral Land, chairman of the Commission, has openly defined the merchant marine as an auxiliary of the Navy, and appears to be determined to try to reduce the merchant sailors to the robot-like military discipline of the Navy.

Toward the Party Convention

New Directions Require New Methods of Party Work

By JAMES P. CANNON

A revolutionary party begins with an idea, and the idea—that is, the program—becomes an all-conquering power capable of transforming society when it permeates the masses. The work of attracting the masses to the revolutionary program does not proceed along a straight line by the simple repetition of propaganda. If that were so, working class politicians would not be necessary; a good phonograph—or a sectarian, which is the same thing—would suffice. The struggle for the support of the majority of the working class, the prerequisite for the socialist victory, is an extremely complicated struggle, and one which, moreover, is constantly changing and constantly imposing shifts in emphasis and different methods of work. It is necessary to keep a clear view of the goal but that alone is not enough. The art of revolutionary politics consists in recognizing the most favorable immediate objective and of concentrating, according to the military motto, all forces on the point of attack. Only thus is it possible to move forward.

Lenin spoke of the necessity of seizing the right link in the chain. And Trotsky crammed all practical political wisdom into a single sentence when he said the most important of all questions is, what to do next. The tactical orientation of the moment depends on what is necessary and what is possible at the moment.

The Way Is Cleared

Our goal is and has been always the same—the winning over of the masses for the revolutionary struggle for power. It was the same in our formative days when we disregarded the "mass work" windbags, as later when we turned to broader fields of political activity and broke with the sectarians. If we say today, with at least the formal agreement of the whole party, that our work must now be concentrated directly on mass work it is because the road has been cleared for such a turn. The rather sad fact that our practices in this respect have by no means caught up with our resolutions does not signify any intention on our part to deceive ourselves by our unanimous declarations. We mean what we say and will learn how to act accordingly.

Nobody at the convention will argue against the necessity of a full concentration on mass work. Nobody will propose that we go back and chew the fat once again with the sectarian cliques who have theorized themselves into a secluded corner and remain there to everybody's satisfaction—their own, and ours and that of the world at large. It is unimaginable that anyone should suggest that we go back and fight over again the factional struggle within a common organization with the Thomasite "socialists." That chapter is finished. What was once alive and revolutionary there belongs now to the American section of the Fourth International.

As for the spurious "unity" campaign of the Lovestonites—is it possible that any member of our party can be caught on this hook? Hardly. This petty stratagem of the Lovestonite leadership—is transparently crooked as its authors—is designed only as artificial stimulation for a doomed and dwindling sect without program or prospects or good repute, and a cover-up for the real object of the maneuver—unity with the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation. No, there is nothing there for us. Let the Lovestonites unite if they wish with the Thomasites and the flag-waving Social-democrats. That is their affair, and we have no objection; they all need a bit of "unity," God knows. But let us attend to our own work—the penetration of the workers' mass movement.

I repeat, if we have not been about this business it is not from lack of conviction as to its necessity. It is simply that we hesitate—or don't know how—to begin in earnest. We have more faith than works and faith without works is dead.

What We Still Lack

The situation within the radical labor movement has been long since ripe for a decisive turn to mass work, and the objective circumstances are becoming increasingly favorable. What is lacking, primarily, is the necessary psychological readjustment and change in methods of work imposed by the new tasks. The expert programmatic critics, propagandists and internal faction fighters of yesterday—that's what we were and that's what we needed to be in the conditions of the time—

have not yet mastered the art of mass agitation and of simple day to day work in the trade unions and other mass organizations. Too many of our comrades, who can debate any question of the program at the drop of the hat, find difficulty in speaking the language of the unskilled worker who is ready for action and willing to learn.

This is not said to disparage those who have mastered the program and the ability to defend it against all opponents, nor to contrast educational work to mass agitation. Far from it. It is a question rather of supplementing the one with the other. The problem which presses hard today and will press harder tomorrow is to interpret and expound the program in such a way as to enable wider circles of workers, hitherto unacquainted with Marxist doctrine, to understand it and act upon it. That is an art which we must learn. We must put ourselves to school in the living movement of the workers. To do that we must get into it. In spite of everything the water remains the only place where one can learn to swim.

Learning by Doing

The workers' mass movement is the source of power, and also of compensating inspiration and enthusiasm for those revolutionary militants who intelligently participate in it. It will see it demonstrated once again at the convention—that those comrades who are learning by doing in the mass movement are the least tainted with pessimism and discouragement, that sickness of isolated, helpless and hopeless people who contemplate life without living it and see the world mirrored by their own weakness.

The convention will do well to listen attentively to those comrades who come fresh from active participation in the recent class battles—the Briggs strike at Detroit, militant actions of the unemployed at Flint, the epic struggle of the seamen on the Pacific coast, the magnificent campaign for the independent labor ticket in Minneapolis. The invincible power of the laboring mass in action communicates its enthusiasm and its confidence to its participants and they, in turn, will help to communicate it to the convention of the party and determine its spirit and orientation.

We have every right to confidence in our future, for we alone, out of a 15-year period of unprecedented defeat and disintegration, have fought a way forward. Beginning with nothing but a revolutionary program and a handful of people, we have become a movement, if as yet but a small one, and have swept all rivals from the field. Our party is the sole organization of the revolutionary vanguard. Our programmatic disputes with the futile sectarians of the right as well as the pseudo-left—unavoidable in the struggle to clarify the doctrine of the movement and sift out the basic cadres, although they cost us precious years of time and effort—are finished and done. They are things of yesterday and we shall not return to them. Nothing is more foolish than to chase a street car after it has been caught.

The Road Is Pointed

Our road now points directly to the mass movement and to the recruiting of hundreds and thousands where once we counted our new adherents in ones and twos. If we have been suffering a certain stagnation, which we do not conceal from ourselves or others, it is primarily because we have not yet made the necessary readjustment of our work to new times and new conditions. From all indications there is every reason to be confident that the convention will survey the situation realistically and give the signal for a speedier readjustment.

I have not mentioned the struggle against the Stalinist Party as one of the tasks that are behind us nor one that can be separated from effective work in the broad workers' mass movement. Indeed, it is precisely in the trade unions that our militants encounter the Stalinist machine as the greatest obstacle and the greatest enemy. Profoundly wrong are those comrades who, in their commendable zeal to concentrate all activity on trade union work, try to jump over the Stalinist obstacle and "constructive work" to the unremitting frontal attack against the party directed by degenerate turncoats. The party must be clear on this. Otherwise it will not succeed in the mass movement. I will take up this question in my next article.

MEN AND WOMEN OF LABOR

OUT OF THE PAST

By EMANUEL GARRETT

VINCENT ST. JOHN
(1873—June 21, 1929)

(The following account of a great fighter's life is from an article written at the time of St. John's death by James P. Cannon, National Secretary of the Socialist Workers Party (The Militant, July 1, 1929). Comrade Cannon worked with St. John in the glorious days of Wobbly militancy and activity.)

The death of Vincent St. John at San Francisco marks the passing of another of the great figures of the American revolutionary movement whose deeds helped to make its tradition and whose names will not be forgotten. "The Saint," as he was known to those who knew and loved him, died at the age of 56 after a long illness complicated by high blood pressure. He will be sincerely mourned by thousands whose lives were influenced by him, particularly by those who belonged to the old guard of the I.W.W. in its bravest days when he was its moving spirit and guiding intelligence.

Vincent St. John, like Haywood and Frank Little, was trained in the hard school of the Western Federation of Miners, that model labor union whose mighty struggles threw their shadow across the world in the latter years of the Nineteenth Century and the first years of the Twentieth. A metal miner by trade, he joined the Western Federation in 1894, and became one of the most militant fighters in its ranks and an influential voice in its councils. Despite his modesty of disposition, his freedom from personal ambition and his lack of the arts of self-aggrandizement, his work spoke loudly and brought him widespread fame. His stirring deeds as a pioneer organizer became legends of the movement and remain such today. Until 1907 he was a member of the executive board of the W.F.M. and in that strategic position became the leader of the left wing in the looming struggle between conservative and revolutionary unionism which centered around the question of affiliation to the I.W.W. which the Western Federation had played a role in founding in 1905.

Led "Direct Actionists"

At the second convention of the I.W.W. in 1906 St. John headed the revolutionary syndicalist group which combined with the S.L.P. elements to oust Sherman, a conservative, as President and to establish a new administration in the organization with a revolutionary policy. He became the general organizer under the new administration, breaking with the W.F.M. on the withdrawal of the latter body, and giving his whole allegiance to the I.W.W. He presided at the 1908 convention which saw the split with the S.L.P. and the elimination of the "political clause" from the preamble. St. John was the leader of the proletarian "Direct Action" forces which defeated the "political" wing of De Leon. Thereafter he served as General Secretary of the I.W.W. until 1914, and undoubtedly did more than anyone to shape its course and prepare the ground for its later development under the active leadership of Haywood.

He withdrew from activity on leaving the office of General Secretary and engaged in a mining enterprise, doubtless with the illusory hope of acquiring a fortune to help finance the organization of the workers. Despite his retirement at the period, fear of his abilities, and the prospect of his return to the office vacated by the imprisonment of Haywood, dictated his own arrest and subsequent conviction with the Chicago group of I.W.W. war-time prisoners. He served two and a half

years at Leavenworth before commutation brought his release.

From his earlier concepts of revolutionary socialism St. John, in revolt against the parliamentary reformism of the Socialist Party and the sectarian, ultra-legal concepts of the Socialist Labor Party, developed along the line of revolutionary syndicalism, the path taken by many of the best proletarian fighters of the period. In many respects this represented a step forward from parliamentary socialism, but the prejudices and theoretical falsity of the syndicalist or industrialist position were storing up disasters for the future. The philosophy of the I.W.W., which St. John did so much to shape, was too simple for the complex situation brought about by the entry of the United States into the World War. The great sacrifices and heroic deeds of its members were unavailing against this handicap and were greatly discounted by it. The spirit of the I.W.W. died in the war, and not the least of the signs of this tragedy was the loss of faith of practically the entire body of the old guard which had made its history and its glory. St. John was among them. Spiritual death is the real death of revolutionaries.

To the great loss of the workers' cause, St. John, and with him the great majority of the leading militants of the I.W.W., failed to make the theoretical and tactical adjustments necessitated by the experience of the World War and the Russian Revolution. Their limited industrialist concepts remained unchanged. Communism, especially its American representatives, impressed them unfavorably and they could not swim with the current of the new movement. The enormous errors, presumption and tactlessness of the Communist party leadership are partly responsible for this calamitous state of affairs. American communism should have been a natural growth out of the soil of the pre-war movement represented in part by the I.W.W. The early years of the Party were weakened and hampered by this failure and the I.W.W. movement, alienated from Communism, lost its old time vigor and passed into an inevitable degeneration and decline.

A Tradition to Be Valued

But despite the tragedy of the after-war years, the earlier work of the I.W.W. militants—and St. John in the front rank—retains all its validity. They wrote much of the tradition of the American revolutionary movement in letters of fire that will never be extinguished. The modern movement of Communism, which is the heir to their achievements, should value this tradition highly and honor the memory of the men who made it. The memory of Vincent St. John will always be a treasure to the revolutionary workers of America in their aspiring struggle for the workers' world.

For those who knew the "Saint" as a man and friend, his untimely death brings a deep and poignant grief. He was a most admirable personality—brave and resolute, loyal and honest. He was a gifted and inspiring leader and organizer who gave himself, throughout the years of youth and manhood prime, untiringly and unsparingly to the workers' cause. And with the highest executive qualities he combined the rare gift of friendship, of warmly human consideration and concern for others, of loyalty in personal relations, which bound men to him in life-long affection. Those who were so bound to him, who knew the warmth of his handclasp, enshrine his memory in their hearts along with the best memories of the great cause for which we live and strive.

Hail and farewell, Soldier, Man and Friend!

MASS MEETING

Greet The Anti-War Convention of the Socialist Workers Party! Hear The Internationalist Position on War!

Chairman: JAMES P. CANNON

Reporter for the Political Committee: MAX SHACHTMAN

Speakers: V. R. DUNNE of Minneapolis, GENORA JOHNSON of Flint, GLEN TRIMBLE of San Francisco, GEORGE CLARKE of Detroit, REUBEN PLASKETT of Newark, NATHAN GOULD, National Secretary Y.P.S.L.

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Arrangements have been made to leave by boat from the Battery for a forty-minute ride to Seagate for 15 cents. The grounds can also be reached by subway.

MAKE THIS DATE A MUST!