

The Revolutionary Age

A Chronicle and Interpretation of International events

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Reactionary A. F. of L. Officials

HERE are at this moment 30,000 men and women of the working class on strike in the textile mills of Lawrence, Mass. They have a hard struggle—race prejudice and the governing powers are against them. In the midst of this hard struggle, the Central Labor Union of Lawrence issues an attack upon the strike: it declares that the strike is not at all founded upon the "reasonable demands" of organized labor, but represents a bold attempt of a few leaders to stir up trouble, that the demands of the strikers are pro-German (!) and tacitly calls upon organized labor not to support the strikers. This is infamous; it reminds one of the attempts of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy to break the great Lawrence strike in 1912 by all sorts of desperate and contemptible means. There is a real struggle developing between the workers and reactionary unions and reactionary union officials: in England this is a great issue, it is beoming a great issue here. There must be a struggle against reactionary unionism, against corrupt union officials, against betrayals of the working class. On this issue the Socialist cannot compromise: it must become a central issue of our party policy—industrial unionism and mass action against reactionary unionism and its officials.

Strikes and Mass Action

THEY said that the American workers had nothing to complain about. They said that only in Europe could they have industrial revolts—that only in monarchial countries was there any revolutionary spirit. They have declared, the corrupt masters of bourgeois society, that the American workers were satisfied, and that only a few foreign agitators and un-American ideas were responsible for unrest. They tried to isolate the American working class, assisted by Samuel Gompers, against the international development of class action and class consciousness.

But, instinctively, irresistibly, great strikes are developing in our country. The war is over; the world is safe for "democracy," the peace conference, through Mr. Wilson, talks beautifully of a new order of civilization: 1,000,000,000 are appropriated by the American Congress to feed Europeans; the press teems with reports of prosperity;—but unemployment is on the increase; demobilized soldiers can't get jobs; and all over the country strikes are breaking out, a great struggle is developing between the proletariat and the capitalist class.

In its issue of December 11, 1918, *The Revolutionary Age* said:

"With the end of the war and the peculiar industrial conditions it created, will come readjustment; and with readjustment will come an era of great industrial struggles, greater than any this country has ever seen. That will be the opportunity of Socialism. The characteristic of revolutionary Socialism is that it study the alignment of social forces, the characteristics of each period in social development, and adapt itself and these characteristics to the task of developing the final struggle. The characteristic of the situation in the United States during the coming two or three years will be great industrial strikes. This will test the Socialist Party. If we are simply to use these strikes to make political capital, we shall miss a great opportunity; but if we absorb ourselves in these strikes, appreciate that in the industry lies the power of the proletariat, that it is the function of Socialism to use strikes to develop finer industrial organizations and general industrial action of the workers, out of which emerge class power for the final struggle, then the Socialist Party will measure to the oppor-

tunity, and a new and more vital Socialism come into being."

This analysis of ours is being confirmed by events. Great strikes are developing; revolutionary Socialism is measuring to the opportunity as determined by conditions.

This analysis of our's is being confirmed by events. The "prosperity" of the war is at an end—a prosperity which created thousands of new millionaires while millions of men were being slaughtered. During the war there were more jobs than workers; now there are more workers than jobs; accordingly, unemployment, reduction in wages, strikes, more misery and oppression for the working class.

And so they strike. The American workers are awakening. The war has taught them; that nothing is coming out of the war except splendid phrases is teaching them; and the Bolshevik Revolution, in which the workers themselves are masters of society, is having its profound influence among the workers of the world, silent, as yet inarticulate, but determining forms of action and about to burst forth in the international struggle for Socialism. And so they strike—for shorter hours, for more wages, for better conditions generally; but circumstances force these workers to use new forms of action, to develop larger purposes; and an immature revolutionary expression is imposed on the strikers by the brutality and aggression of the governing powers.

One thing the strikers seem to be learning, and that is—it is not enough to strike, and fold your arms: strikes must become more active, must have a larger purpose. They must, in the first place, become more general; not one trade, nor one industry, but a large number must strike;—a general strike;—they must be ready to meet the hostility of the state, the use of armed troops; and they must, in any large strike, assume control of keeping the life of a city going *themselves* while the strike is on and the employers are being beaten.

In the great Seattle general strike, of the shipyard workers, car men, and others, the new tactics of the industrial struggle were partly in action. It was a strike of many trades; it was managed by a unified council of the various industrial strikers; and it tried to assume municipal functions so that the strike might continue while the citizens of Seattle were not prevented from eating and carrying on their regular functions.

The Central Labor Council of Seattle issued the following proclamation:

"On Thursday at 10 A. M. there will be many cheering and there will be some who fear. Both these emotions are useful, but not too much of either. We are undertaking the most tremendous move ever made by labor men in this country—a move which leads no one knows where. We do not need hysteria. We need the iron march of labor. Labor will feed the people. Twelve great kitchens have been offered, and from them food will be distributed by the provision trades at low cost to all. Labor will care for the babies and the sick. The milk wagon drivers and the laundry drivers are arranging for supplying milk to babies, invalids and hospitals and taking care of the cleaning of linen for hospitals.

"Labor will preserve order. The strike committee is arranging for guards, and it is expected that the stopping of the cars will keep people at home. . . .

"As a mere shutdown will not affect these Eastern gentlemen [the shipowners] much, they could let the whole Northwest go to pieces, as far as money alone is concerned, but the closing down of the capitalistically controlled industries of Seattle, while the workers organize to feed the people, to care for the babies and the sick and to preserve order, this will move them, for this looks too much like the taking over of power by the workers. Labor will not only shut down the industries, but labor will reopen under the management of the appropriate trades such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues labor may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities under its own management, and that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads no one knows where."

The *Seattle International Weekly*, organ of the Socialist Party of the State of Washington, asked "Can 60,000 workers operate industry without bosses?" and said:

"The policy of the folded arm is a passive one, a negative gesture of defiance to Capitalism. The workers are not satisfied with merely defying Capitalism; they are demanding the overthrow of the whole rotting, decaying system. They are not going to stand by and see the industries of Seattle non productive because it is the whim of the American capitalist class to crush out unionism. The class conscious workers of Seattle insist on a positive policy; the management

of industry by the workers with the complete elimination of the boss. The decision lies with the employers of Seattle. Do they want to compromise and give in to the shipyard workers' demands or would they rather face expropriation? . . .

"It would be nothing short of a crime for the shipyard workers to allow the shipyards to remain idle for more than two weeks when the world needs ships and the returning soldier must be provided employment alongside of the worker. If the shipyard owner does not want to "build ships" the workers must not let him prevent them from so doing at wages satisfactory to themselves.

"Unemployment stalks through the land; hunger and cold threaten the people; millions of soldiers are returning and expecting jobs which don't exist. What is the solution? Surely not the closing down of the shipyards for a protracted period. The shipyards must be reopened; the strikers are the only ones to do it. Then let's do it."

This was a proposal for revolutionary mass action; and American Capitalism recognized the revolutionary threat latent in the Seattle strike. The whole American press organized a campaign of slander against the strike; Mayor Ole Hanson used all the power of the municipal government; Secretary of War Baker sent troops to break the strike; all the forces of American Capitalism were directed against the strike, the workers elsewhere did not respond; and the strike ended—but only temporarily. Its educational value has been tremendous. The American working class will accept revolutionary mass action.

Then came another industrial explosion, in Butte, Mont. Thousands of miners are on strike, including hundreds of demobilized soldiers. The strike is being directed by the local Soldiers' and Workers' Council, 1,000 demobilized soldiers alone being on the picket line. The Mayor has proclaimed martial law; but the workers are organizing their own military guards, prepared to meet force with force, if necessary. Troops of the regular army are being used against the strikers, many of whom have been bayoneted while picketing. The Council has demanded of Secretary of War Baker whether these troops are being used as strike-breakers with the consent of the Department of War. Major A. M. Jones, of the United States Army, informed the soldiers and sailors that he had cleaned up the scum of Panama and that there would be no dallying with the "disturbing" elements in Butte. The troops are armed to the teeth with machine gun equipment.

The strike in Butte is still in process of development; it may develop into a general strike; it is tinged with revolutionary sentiments, the most important thing being the unity of soldiers and workers. In this sign the working class will conquer!

Then there is the Lawrence strike; there was the silk-workers strike in Paterson and a number of strikes in New York—all proof of the great movement among the working class.

This strike movement is developing new features. The Butte, Seattle and Lawrence strikes are largely mass movements; the old union officials are being repudiated; the workers are taking power into their own hands, depending upon their own initiative and mass action—as in England and in Russia. The old union officials are largely conservative; they are united with the government and with capital; they are trying to tie ropes upon the workers—the workers must repudiate them. Unionism and the working class must be revolutionized before they can revolutionize Capitalism.

Strikes are not "made to order" by agitators—they come because they must, out of the terrible pressure upon the workers. That more and larger strikes are coming, that they are more radical than in the old days is because of more pressure, more experience, more understanding.

Bad days are ahead for the American workers. The war has strengthened the power of the capitalists, but not to the same extent the power of the workers. The capitalists will use, *are using* that power to starve the workers, to subjugate the workers. The workers must answer by means of strikes and industrial mass action.

These strikes are here; more will come. The measure of their success will depend upon how much the workers have learned the new tactics, the new revolutionary spirit. They must use the general strike; they must repudiate the old union officials and the old unionism; industrial unionism is necessary, they must use mass action, the unity of organized and unorganized workers in action; they must take control of their affairs by means of organizations based directly on the workers in the shops.

These strikes, moreover, must always strive to cease being strikes and become *revolutionary mass action against Capitalism and the state*. While Capi-