

The One Big Union in Canada

By Ben Legere

THE capitalist press of Canada for months past has been crying out frantically against the growth of Bolshevism in the Dominion. The Winnipeg strike and the strikes that grew out of it were labeled a Revolution. Every move made by Labor has been denounced as an effort to set up a government of Soviets. From the line of attack pursued by the editors and spokesmen of the Canadian plutocracy one would expect to find Canadian labor in a white heat of emotional turmoil preparing to march against the machine guns of the capitalist government. Yet one may search the literature and propaganda of Canadian labor in vain for emotional revolutionary appeals. There is no mention of Bolshevism or Soviets except to repudiate the raving of the capitalist press.

I have recently returned from Western Canada after having been hastened across the border to the freedom of my native land by the agents of the Canadian government. They have the traditional British freedom of speech in Canada and I took advantage of it to encourage the Calgary workers in the construction of their One Big Union organization, but the Northwest Mounted Police made it quite clear that freedom of speech could not be accorded to aliens. They tried hard to impress that upon me by giving me a taste of their provincial prison accommodations, but the One Big Union convinced the Canadian government that would be decidedly unwise, so they deported me instead.

During the past year I have been in every part of the United States and Canada and nowhere have I found anything so inspiring as the manifestation of Labor's awakening that is making itself felt particularly from Winnipeg to the Coast. I came away convinced that Canadian Labor is leading the workers of the Western World toward industrial freedom and the new society that is already functioning from Russia across a considerable area of Europe almost to the Adriatic, and is even now setting up its preliminary structure in Italian cities. Yet the thing that impressed me most was the calmness with which the Canadian workers are setting about their task.

In Canada they are proceeding with a full consciousness that their movement is a part of the same historical revolution that had placed the Russian working class in power and dethroned Capitalism in those countries. They recognize their mission very simply by stating in the constitution of their One Big Union that they are preparing themselves for the day when production for profit shall be replaced by production for use. They have expended little energy in verbal attacks upon the capitalist government, but they quietly organized every branch of governmental employees from postal clerks to policemen; and for several days in Winnipeg utterly prevented the capitalist government of that city from functioning by simply suspending the service of its man-power.

It is perfectly true that during the first few days of the Winnipeg strike the General Strike Committee functioned practically as a worker's Soviet and supplanted the power of the municipal authorities. But the condition was not a part of the immediate program of the strikers and only existed incidental to the calling of a general strike of Winnipeg Labor for the purpose of securing for one section of the workers, in the building and metal trades, two definite demands for which they

had been striking for two weeks previous.

The subsequent extension of the general strike to practically every industrial community in Western Canada and to many of the important eastern cities as well was carried out as a normal tactic of a new kind of labor movement, and I did not find that the workers anywhere regarded the general strike as a prelude to revolution nor as a serious crisis in the constant conflict which they recognize as existing between them and the employing class.

In calling off the strike and returning to

From a Soldier

Dear Friend:-

I noticed in the daily press that you are held over for trial

I heard you speak in Calgary and I cannot understand why it should be so, since we are living in a free and democratic country.

I am the ex-soldier that spoke to you outside the Allen Theatre in Calgary, after the meeting.

As a soldier and ex-sergeant I fought for three years that Battle of Freedom and democracy on the battle fields of Flanders and France. I fought the monster of militarism, faced the screaming shells, the rattle of machine guns and inhaled the poison gas.

The remainder of my life I will devote to fight the spirit of Prussianism in our own country.

Great was my zeal when I marched into battle to the sound of drums.

Greater today is my zeal and spirit fighting the battle of the working class.

Take heart, friend, your friends are today numbered by the millions; thirty-five thousand are today protesting in Winnipeg against the forces that oppress us.

Ten times that number is this day ready to aid them.

The clarion call is sounded; eager thousands are anxiously waiting to down tools if it be necessary. At last the workers are beginning to realize that an injury to one is an injury to all.

So we see the dawn of better days.

Liberty will not for ever remain but a fair vision on the distant sky. It will come and take up its abode among the children of men.

On with the fight, upwards and onwards for ever humanity is striving.

All our petty prosecutors will some day be forgotten, buried in the cemetery of oblivion. And the names of the champions of freedom, of a better day, will be inscribed in the loving memory in the great red heart of humanity.

work without fully achieving the definite immediate demands they were fighting for, they were also following a simple rule of procedure of the new unionism which they have embraced. Anyone who conceives the idea that the Canadian general strike was a failure will have to learn that Labor organized as is the One Big Union in Canada is little concerned with the nominal success or failure of its strikes. It is simply part of the business of the day and will be repeated as a matter of fact part of the program whenever the occasion seems to require it. And from the point of view of these workers the only success or failure possible is measured by the growth of the union organization and the extent to which the working class of Canada advances in ability to conduct and administer the industries of the country when an under-

mined and crippled Capitalism may be finally swept aside and supplanted by a worker's democracy.

The Canadian general strike was unquestionably the most important demonstration of the spreading proletarian revolution that has yet been made on this continent. It was possible because a single simple idea has been sown and firmly taken root in the mind of organized labor in Canada. The idea of One Big Union. The Canadian Minister of Labor denounced the One Big Union as being the I. W. W. under another name. It is something much more than that. The I. W. W. has never been anything more than an insurgent section of Labor in America, breaking away from the main body and with revolutionary ideals and program striving to reorganize the working class upon the one big union plan.

To find a proper parallel for the One Big Union movement in the United States one would have to imagine 88 per cent of the three and a half million members of the American Federation of Labor, voting in their local unions and central labor bodies to abandon the entire theory of the A. F. of L., adopt the fundamental theory of industrial unionism as held by the I. W. W. and electing delegates to meet in convention and reorganize themselves in One Big Union. That is just what happened in Canada. Its significance can be readily understood by anyone who studies the evolution of labor organization and realizes that it is the skilled workers of Canada who have made this move, who have repudiated the theory of labor organization, which Capitalism counts upon the skilled workers clinging to, and are going out with the developed and unimpaired machinery of their organization to line up with their unskilled brothers in a solid phalanx of class organization against the employing class.

Thus the capitalists of Canada, who have seen European Capitalism go tumbling to ruin as a result of the war and stand facing the threat of their own Capitalism being carried down with the wreck, do not wait for the workers to rise for revolution by force of arms before they raise the cry of Bolshevism to frighten benighted citizens who do not know what is going on in the world. They see the handwriting on the wall and they realize that in the One Big Union, in spite of its calm demeanor, its restrained emotion and its concentration upon the work of organizing the working class, the power has been organized in Canada that will inevitably supplant their system.

So they have launched a campaign of violent suppression which they had hitherto hesitated to do for fear of arousing an unawakened section of the workers. Their arrest upon conspiracy charges of 48 of the leaders of the One Big Union, with more to come, is the beginning of a desperate attempt to smash Canada's contribution to the spreading movement of proletarian revolution before its full effectiveness may be applied.

In this situation a duty devolves upon every propagandist of revolutionary working class ideals in America that is just as plain as that which determines our attitude toward the struggling Communist government in Russia and Hungary. The Canadian One Big Union must be supported in every possible way and every possible kind of assistance that can be given it in resisting the attack upon its leaders must be rendered.