



# WHAT'S WRONG WITH LABOR?

## Federation Threatened With I. W. W. Control from the Inside

**I**T is generally believed that industrial revolution, if it ever should reach the point of real menace in this country, would come through the radical I. W. W. Against the spread of propaganda that must precede such a condition has been the bulwark of the conservative American Federation of Labor.

No doubt this is the viewpoint of the average citizen when attention is called to a threat of an overturn of the existing order. But recently there has been a change in position, and if revolution is attempted it will be through the American Federation of Labor. The I. W. W. has not reformed. It has adopted different tactics; first, to revolutionize the federation from within; then, through it, to set on foot the larger revolution.

What are the A. F. of L. leaders doing to head this off? To get an understanding of the factors entering into the answer, some discernible on the surface, some hidden within, it is necessary to take a look backward, and set forth the irreconcilable antagonism of the sets of ideas on which the organizations are founded. The antagonism was set forth by William Haywood, now under twenty years' prison sentence

for anti-war activities, when the I. W. W. was formed in Chicago in 1905:

"This is the Continental Congress of the working class. . . . There is no organization that has for its purpose the same object as that for which you are called together today. . . . The American Federation of Labor, which presumes to be the labor movement of this country, is not a working class movement. . . . You are going to be confronted with the so-called labor leader, the man who will tell you that the interests of the workingman and the capitalists are identical. . . . There is no man who has an ounce of honesty in his make-up but recognizes the fact that there is a continuous struggle between the two classes, and this organization will be formed, based, and founded on the class struggle, having in view no compromise and no surrender.

One organization's aim was to attain some method of co-operation between capital and labor and the consequent mutual benefit. The other aimed to eliminate capital.

With such diametric opposition in ideas, the two organizations stood at challenge from the start, as no rival labor organizations had stood before. Sixteen radical unions affiliated with

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### ACTIVE LEADERS OF STEEL STRIKE:

John Fitzpatrick (Above) and William Z. Foster (Right). Fitzpatrick, who says he is for "Law and Order," is not such a radical as Foster, but he is regarded as far from conservative.



CONSERVATIVE LEADERS IN THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR: Frank Morrison, Secretary, and Samuel Gompers, President.

the A. F. of L., mostly locals, joined the L. W. W. at the beginning, and later came the powerful Brewers' Union, which had been at loggerheads with the federation because its organization was in conflict with the craft union form of the A. F. of L. The brewery workers, irrespective of craft, all belonged to one big union, and this was the type adopted by the L. W. W. as the kind suited to strike and seize an industry. All the radical elements, with the turbulent Western Federation of Miners at the head, were, it seemed, to rally around the I. W. W., purging the American Federation of units antagonistic to its purposes, and establishing a chasm between the two. Chasm there was, and across it were hurled the bitterest epithets heard in the labor world.

Haywood, the dominant figure in the L. W. W., refused to listen to a policy then proposed by some of his lieutenants, to attack the A. F. of L. from without and at the same time to "bore from within," by placing propagandists inside the organization with the aim of capturing it. He said the only attitude toward the A. F. of L. should be to fight it to the death from the outside. However, though the policy of boring from within was frowned on by the leader, in a short time L. W. W. men got inside of the A. F. of L., bent on fomenting dissatisfaction and dissension. Their fight was to discredit the leaders, with the chief attack directed at Samuel Gompers, President of the organization. But as the L. W. W. men inside the federation were few in number at the start, they did not make much headway. Gompers fought them with all the vigor of which he was capable. In 1908 the United Brewery Workers returned to the federation, and in 1911 the Western Federation of Miners, out of the L. W. W. for several years and much calmed down from its radicalism, affiliated with the A. F. of L.

In 1912 William Z. Foster, Haywood's lieutenant, went to Europe to study radical labor organizations there. On his return he made this report:

"At Berlin a few months ago, Jouhaux, Secretary of the C. G. T., (Confederation Generale du Travail,) in a large public meeting advised them to give up their attempt to create a new movement and to get into the conservative unions where they could make their influence felt. At Budapest he extended the same advice to the I. W. W., via myself, and I am frank to say that it would be strictly good tactics for both movements to adopt it. I am satisfied from my observations that the only way for the I. W. W. to have the workers adopt and practice principles of revolutionary unionism \* \* \* is to give up its attempt to create a new labor movement, turn itself into a propaganda league, get into the organized labor movement and, by building up better fighting machines within the old unions than those possessed by our reactionary enemies, revolutionize those unions even as our French syndicalist fellow-workers have so successfully done with theirs."

Foster also said:

"Among the syndicalists the sentiment is strong and growing ceaselessly, that the tactics are bad and that endeavors should be made inside of the A. F. of L.; that it is in the existing unions that the syndicalists must struggle without ceasing."

About the time Foster returned, this country was visited by Tom Mann, the English revolutionary agitator. He supported Foster, saying: "If the fine energy exhibited by the I. W. W. were put into the A. F. of L. \* \* \* the results would be fifty-fold greater than they are." Later he added to this: "As the situation appears to me, after many deep conversations and discussions with workmen of all conditions, I say emphatically that the I. W. W. should work in harmony with the American Federation of Labor. There is not the least necessity for two organizations. The field of action is wide enough for all to be able to co-operate in the economic struggle."

Thus, with the weight of European

revolutionary opinion behind him, Foster sought to put into effect his plan of centring attack on the A. F. of L. from within. But Haywood, as dominant as ever and with no hampering prison sentence hanging over him, stood by his policy of a frontal attack.

Unable to budge the L. W. W. leader, Foster withdrew from the Industrial Workers of the World, gave notice that he had renounced revolutionary doctrines, and was received into the American Federation. Leaving out of question the sincerity of his recantation, the course he pursued was the one necessary



D Harris & Ewing.  
Matthew Woll, Conservative, Vice  
President of the American  
Federation of Labor.

to carry out the plan he had advocated of "boring from within." In order to obtain the requisite position of leadership in the A. F. of L. he had either to reform his opinions or disguise them, for Gompers and the other chosen leaders of the federation were, practically to a man, as opposed to the revolutionary program of the I. W. W. as any class of citizens. But the utterances of Foster quoted above, which were available in official records of the I. W. W. and its literature and which cast suspicion on his renunciation, seem to have been overlooked or did not receive due consideration from the conservative leaders of the federation. Foster captured a position of leadership in the one great field that remained outside of trade unionism—the field of the steel industry.

In organizing the steel workers, he followed, as closely as the federation's system would permit, the I. W. W. model of one big union. The twenty-four steel unions were "amalgamated," so that as nearly as possible they might act as one. This is an important point in any effort of the I. W. W. to get control of the federation, for as the ideas on which the two organizations are founded are antagonistic, so is their plan of organization, one being with the aim of co-operating with employers, the other, by having all the workers in an industry organized in one body, designed to take it over.

The federation's system is not framed for revolution; its processes in reaching decisions are too deliberate, too slow. The crafts are organized separately; they are sovereign in a more complete sense than our States are. It is literally a federation. Any member may withdraw. So, in taking a strike vote, each branch makes its own decision. A universal strike in which every member of the A. F. of L. would join in dealing one blow at the country is, therefore, a very difficult undertaking, owing to the checks in the federation against precipitate action, and the absence of any central authority that can swing the whole body as one. But, in appraising I. W. W. schemes to get hold of the federation's machinery, the A. F. of L. is now without units that conform to the Industrial Workers' ideal of organization. One is the Brewery Workers, which, as noted, early had trouble with federation officials on account of its defiance of craft

type; another is the United Mine Workers, which some time ago set Nov. 1 for a general strike of its members. The United Mine Workers is the largest "one big union" in this country, and probably in the world. As a type of labor organization it has long been pointed to as a model by I. W. W. organizers.

Not only has Foster, once inside of the A. F. of L., reached a position of importance, but the events of the war co-operated to turn many of the I. W. W. members who had hitherto held to the Haywood platform of attacking the federation from without to the conviction that Foster's strategy of "boring from within" was the right one. Haywood and 122 of his followers were convicted for acts of disloyalty. With the hand of the law descending on them, the I. W. W.s saw their activity under that name limited. Looming beyond was the possibility that a law would be passed by Congress singling the I. W. W. out as an unlawful association, as Australia had done. Under such conditions the revolutionaries naturally began to turn to cover in large numbers.

The cover selected was the law-abiding American Federation of Labor. They found the door open. All who could qualify from the craft standpoint were received. They scattered themselves in federation unions throughout the country. According to a high A. F. of L. official at Washington, most of the unions of the country have I. W. W.s among them, some only one or two, some enough to affect voting strength. Whenever they are they are "boring in." None of the federation leaders knows how extensive the radical effort is.

The I. W. W.s are employing a new strategy. This is to concentrate work on the rank and file; leave the leaders alone, undermine them first. Their aim usually is first to create dissatisfaction before sowing the doctrine of revolution. They try to bring about strikes, to disrupt production, for this means intense dissatisfaction. Thus they urge the men to make greater and greater demands; if one advance is obtained, agitation is at once begun for another. All the guile of German propaganda methods is used. In pressing for the supreme rights of "the rank and file," one of the latest slogans of the I. W. W., the agitators endeavor to precipitate strikes against the authority of the American Federation of Labor.

According to an A. F. of L. official in a position to know, there has been I. W. W. agitation in some form behind every strike where men have gone out in defiance of federation regulations and authority, as in violation of contracts entered into between employers and employees. I. W. W. unions are forbidden to make contracts with employers. Every unauthorized strike is considered a step toward revolt from the conservative leadership of the A. F. of L.

Matthew Woll, Vice President of the federation and a leader of the conservative type, was asked in Washington the other day if the federation had any way to keep I. W. W.s and other revolutionaries out or to keep new ones from getting in.

"No, we have no standards of that kind as to membership, and consequently no machinery for expelling a member on account of political beliefs," answered Mr. Woll. "Our regulations for discipline concern the member as a craftsman only."

"Not even if the member is preaching extreme radical doctrines?"

"No, not if he confines himself to speech. If he tried sabotage we would not put up with that. Advocating revolution is a matter for the Government to deal with, not the federation. We have always stood for free speech, whether it was for or against us. I remember a case in a newspaper office. A printer rebelled at setting up an editorial that was a violent attack on trade unionism. The union ordered him to go back to work, on the ground that the editor had the right to say whatever he pleased against the unions. I myself do not be-

lieve anything but harm comes in the long run from preventing a man from expressing his opinion, no matter how extreme it may be. It is not possible to pen up ideas, and the way to beat a bad idea is to let it be spoken and meet it with argument. That is the method we are pursuing. Our men who are opposed to the L. W. W. doctrines are meeting the revolutionary agitators with argument for argument."

"If a union goes I. W. W., have you no way for dealing with that?"

"Yes, the charter of the union can be withdrawn. That is what we threatened to do in Seattle, and that action had more to do with restoring order in Seattle than did Mayor Ole Hanson, though it received no notice in the newspapers. In Winnipeg, during the trouble there, we did withdraw the charters of some of the unions. The 'one big union' movement is about broken up there. In the printing strike in New York, the men who broke the rules of the federation are now outside the pale of the organization. All this was for disobedience to our regulations—adopted by us to make our organization effective in the purposes for which it was formed—and not on account of political beliefs."

"While the I. W. W. agitators are now scattered through many of our unions and are stirring up some of the men, I have no fear that they will make much permanent headway, for our members generally are of the character to see the weakness in such arguments as the I. W. W.s put forth. The best way to check radicalism is to grant the legitimate demands of labor."

This probably represents the viewpoint of the average conservative federation leader—to let the I. W. W.s run their course. There are those, however, who believe that from the first the attitude of the federation officials has been too lenient toward agitators who represent ideas inimical to the leaders themselves, to the organization it is their duty to protect, and to the country under whose institutions the American Federation of Labor has had a long and successful career.

Midway between radicalism and conservatism in the federation is a body with socialistic tendencies; how large it is the leaders can only surmise, but it is estimated to be not less than 500,000. This number includes the members of the United Mine Workers, who have come out for the nationalization of the coal mines, and the members of the railroad workers' unions, who are for the Plumb plan to take over the railroads. The railroad brotherhoods, with their half million members, have made application to join the federation, so that the federation, with 4,000,000 membership, also faces the situation of having 1,000,000 members with socialistic tendencies. On neither the Plumb plan nor the nationalization of the coal mines has the Executive Council of the federation announced any decision as to what the attitude of the organization is to be. Here, too, it is asserted, the leaders, most of them from long habit conservative, are letting a ticklist subject drift. From its birth socialistic proposals have been brought before the annual conventions of the A. F. of L. Some of the Socialist members fought to commit the federation to a Socialist program, and to turn it into a political machine for the advancement of the Socialist Party. But usually such efforts met with defeat by a large margin. The nearest to success was at New Orleans in 1902, when a resolution in favor of an industrial commonwealth was beaten by just a few votes.

Another wing has fought against the Gompers policy of opposing labor's entering the field of politics as a party. This issue has been brought to more active life in the present year, and, in spite of the turn-down by the Atlantic City convention, moves have been made in two important centres by federation men to form labor parties and organizations have been announced. John Fitzpatrick, the steel strike leader and President of the Chicago Central Labor

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Assembly is the most prominent federation man in the movement.

These two currents, socialistic tendency and the move to form a labor party, add to the tension in the federation caused by the inherent antagonism between the conservative leader and such a radical as Foster. So far, it is pointed out, situations have been permitted to drift. Issues have not been brought to challenge in the rank and file, and no one knows where the lines of demarkation run.

The longer the drift continues, the better chance the extremists have for making inroads on the steady-going element of the federation, it is asserted, and the less safe will be the ground for the opinion of conservative leaders like Woll, that the long-tested stability of the American Federation of Labor will stand proof against assaults of radicalism of whatever kind. To the criticism of temporizing with radicalism within the federation, however, the conservative leaders answer that they have not been neglectful. They say that in addressing their attention to obtaining from employers the recognition of what they hold to be labor's rights, at the head of which they place collective bargaining by trade union representatives, they are striving for the only real preventive of the spread of radicalism.