
Report on the Labor Union Situation in the United States and Canada, Dec. 16, 1922.

by William Z. Foster

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 99, l. 1-2. Recipient of the report is unspecified, from context and archival placement one might infer that it was directed to Grigorii Zinoviev, head of the Communist International, rather than A. Lozovsky, head of the Red International of Labor Unions.

Dec. 16, 1922

Dear Comrade —

We desire to submit to you a confidential report on the labor union situation in the United States and Canada, and to make some recommendations regarding the same. This is confidential and is not to be published.

The present situation offers a wonderful opportunity for the growth of sentiment in favor of the policies of the Red International of Labor Unions, which in the United States and Canada is represented by our organization, the Trade Union Educational League. To begin with the masses are demoralized by the great capitalist offensive. Their unions are melting away like snow in the July sun — it is doubtful if, at the present time, there are 3,000,000 organized workers in the trade unions. In this supreme crisis the old trade union bureaucracy, headed by Gompers, is absolutely bankrupt in every way and has nothing whatever to offer the workers in the way of progress. The same is true of the Socialist Party, which does not propose even the mildest of mild reforms in the unions. And as for the Syndicalists, they no longer exist as any appreciable element in the labor movement, having practically disappeared as a distinct tendency. Actually the only group in the labor movement proposing any kind of progressive policies, however moderate, for the trade unions are the Communist elements organized in the Trade Union Educational League. We can truthfully say that probably in no other country is the such a splendid opportunity for Communist propaganda

among the organized masses as in the United States and Canada.

The proof of this is the remarkable growth and expansion of the Trade Union Educational League. Although only one year old, our organization has become a powerful and recognized factor in the whole trade union movement. Its policies, based entirely upon the program of the RILU, are attracting the widest attention and support in the labor movement. This was launched by the Trade Union Educational League immediately upon its formation. The amalgamation movement is now running like wildfire through all the organizations. Eleven State Federations of Labor — those are Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, Washington, Oregon, and South Dakota, and they alone comprise at least 25% of the whole labor movement — have declared for industrial unionism through amalgamation. In addition, scores of central labor councils and thousands of local unions have done the same. Never in the history of the labor movement has there been such a demand for industrial unionism.

On the basis of this issue alone, the communists have sprung into great prominence in the trade union movement. So badly needed is this measure of amalgamation that even the reformistic elements have had to recognize the leadership of the communists. Committees, of which communists occupy the strategic positions, have been organized in all the principal industries and are carry on the propaganda not only for amalgamation but for the other policies of the RILU. The Gompers bureaucracy is alarmed and nonplussed at this new network of nuclei machinery. In the rail-

road industry, particularly, wonderful headway is being made. A recent referendum on amalgamation of the sixteen railroad unions into one organization sent out by the rank and file national amalgamation committee, was formally endorsed by at least 4,000 local unions out of a total of 12,000. Besides this two great National Unions, the Railway Clerks and the Trackmen, numbering 400,000 members, were won for the proposition. On December 9th and 10th of this year, the national amalgamation held a conference in Chicago, in spite of the bitter condemnation of the heads of the railroad unions. There were 425 delegates present, from all railroad unions all over the United States and Canada. Reports to the conference showed that already a large majority of the rank and file of the railroad workers had been won over to amalgamation. The problem now consists of compelling the reactionary officialdom to yield to the will of the rank and file and actually to amalgamate the unions. For this purpose the national committee worked out a widespread campaign of agitation and education in all the unions all over America.

This great amalgamation movement, which is now the sensation of the American trade unions, was started through the efforts of the Trade Union Educational League. And this in spite of the fact that it has been entirely without financial resources. So far the League has had only two paid employees upon its payroll, and these have had to devote fully 90% of their time in editing and publishing our monthly journal, *The Labor Herald*. Because of the terroristic nature of the Gompers bureaucracy, the Trade Union Educational League cannot collect dues or per capita tax, or even donations, from the unions sympathetic to its program. It has to rely for funds almost entirely upon the money it takes in from the sale of pamphlets and *The Labor Herald*. This of course greatly limits its possibility of accomplishment. If such wonderful headway has been made with such meagre resources it is

only a striking evidence of the extreme readiness of the American workingmen for many policies of the Red International of Labor Unions. If the Trade Union Educational League can be better equipped financially, if it can secure sufficient funds to put a crew of organizers and propagandists in the field, we can confidently expect a tremendous overturning in the American labor movement within the near future. The workers are ready for our leadership. All we need is the means to reach them.

In order to be able to exert a considerable influence upon the rank and file revolt now developing against the reactionary leadership in the unions of the United States and Canada, we should be able to put into the field at least four organizers to visit the unions and organize nuclei within them. In addition, our journal, *The Labor Herald*, should be widely developed. The total cost for a campaign that would get great results in the trade unions is approximately \$25,000 per year. Were this sum available we would have no hesitancy whatever in promising a powerful left movement within the trade unions of America within a short time. Although the number of Communists in America is small, the fact, as stated above, that we have practically a monopoly on all progressive policies, gives us a tremendous strategic advantage. If we can but secure the necessary resources to take advantage of the splendid opportunity now presenting itself, we can easily assume the leadership in the great revolt of the rank and file, now taking shape, that will deal the final blow to Gompersism in America. The winning of such a commanding position in the American labor movement is a goal well worth accomplishing. We hope that we can look for your active support in the matter.

Fraternally yours,

Wm. Z. Foster

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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