

May Day, 1928, Sees Rise of New Spirit of Militancy in American Labor Movement

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

May Day, 1928, shows many manifestations of a new spirit of revolt in the ranks of the working class. The workers in ever greater masses are throwing off the lethargy which has characterized them for several years past and are beginning to enter more and more into conflict with the employers. May Day of this year marks the transition of the working class from the period of deepest quietude in its history into one of growing discontent and struggle.

From 1917 to 1927, with the exception of short intervals, the United States experienced an industrial activity and expansion altogether without parallel in any coun-

try. This translated itself into an exceptional prosperity for the workers: that is, relatively steady employment and comparatively high wages levels, especially for the more skilled sections of the workers. Results, a weakening of their determination to build strong organizations and to struggle; a slackening in the development of class consciousness; and a spreading of illusions, carefully cultivated by the trade union leaders and other agents of American imperialism, that capitalism offers to the workers the means to systematically better their conditions without limit. Reformists of all shades held that the era of class struggle was over in the United States and that this country was on the road to the development, on

the basis of class collaboration, of a progressively developing prosperity for the workers.

The Fading Picture.

But now this idyllic picture has received a shattering blow. It has been destroyed by the present weakening of American industry. Over 4,000,000 workers walk the streets unemployed; many other millions work short time. Attacks are being delivered on all sides by the employers against the wages, hours, working conditions and organizations of the workers. American imperialism is forced to expose its Achilles heel. Despite its great strength it cannot keep employed the masses of workers; in the face of realities its glowing promises of prosperity fade away.

Instead it gives them a diet of unemployment, wage cuts, and generally worsening conditions on every front.

The great masses of the workers, whom American imperialism hoped to lull and terrorize into submission, begin to stir, to organize, and to resist under the heavy economic pressure to which they are subjected. This is the outstanding characteristic of the present situation. It is an era of growing class consciousness, of expanding class struggles. And as American capitalism gets into greater difficulties, because of its insoluble contradictions, these tendencies of the workers towards radicalization and more intensive and extensive struggle will be deepened and broadened.

Many signs are at hand of this new spirit of struggle among the workers. The bitterly fought strikes of the miners and the determined movement to oust the Lewis gang; the big New Bedford strike of textile workers; the Haverhill shoe strike; and the tenacious fight of the rank and file in the needle trades, are symptoms of the growing resistance in the working class. These fights, as yet confined to organized or partly organized industries, will soon be followed by vast movements among the unorganized workers. As yet the struggles are confused and disconnected, but their inevitable tendency, under the pressure of the employers and the state, will be, despite temporary revivals of industry, to develop into a broad-

er and broader base and to take on higher political forms.

To conduct their fight in this era of growing struggle, the workers possess only the most fragmentary mass organization, and this is led by the most reactionary and treacherous officialdom in the world. No labor party and pitifully weak trade unions. Often the unions, obsolete in form, encompassing only a small fraction of the workers, in the hands of hopelessly corrupt leaders, and collapsing in the face of the employers' attacks, are more of a hindrance than a help to the workers in their efforts to develop real struggle against the bosses. Significant of the new spirit of struggle among the workers is their determined efforts in the mining indus-

try, Haverhill, New Bedford, etc., to force the existing unions to function in their behalf in spite of reactionary leaders. This symptom of the deep-going revolt now developing in the unions which must culminate in supplanting the present weak unions and corrupt leadership with powerful unions and militant leadership.

The present situation, with a growing spirit of revolt among the workers, with the weakness of the mass organizations and corrupt leadership, throws tremendous tasks upon our Party. We have the main tasks in building up the mass political and economic organizations of the workers and of leading them in the everyday struggle. The organizations of the great unorganized

masses, the breaking of the power of the A. F. of L. leadership, the building of the Labor Party, the political education of the masses to their true class interest, are vast immediate tasks. But our Party and the left wing must plunge into them with greater energy than ever.

Our forces are small and our tasks are great. But our Party can live and grow in the struggle. The present situation, with its perspective of growing struggle, is highly favorable for us. May Day this year presents to us unequalled opportunities for leadership in the battles for the workers, for laying the basis of an eventual big mass Communist Party. We must mobilize our forces and plunge into the struggle as never before.