
Current Phases of the Class Struggle in the United States

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The Convention of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, the title of which suggests its membership, was recently held at Washington, DC. The proceedings of this Conference were of more immediate interest to the working class of the United States than the Peace Conference held in the same city. The fighting slogan of the M&MA at the present time is the "Open Shop." With this tocsin they have called their forces together to wage war against organized labor. This battle is supposed to be waged against the old-time trade unions, which for years have vegetated in a sense of security by their unwarranted application and enforcement of the so-called "Closed Shop." It might be well here to say that the unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labour, are not so much interested in the "Closed Shop" as they are in the opportunity that it has given them to maintain a closed union.

It is not necessary to explain that the "Closed Shop" is not in itself a working-class weapon; most of those who advocate and fight for it are themselves unconscious of the class struggle, and are using the "Closed Shop" as a meagre effort to protect their own selfish interests.

The injuries imposed upon the working class generally by the "Closed Shop" of the old-time trade unions are many, but they will not be discussed in this article. Mention here is made of them only because the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association has so generally adopted the "Open Shop" slogan, which primarily means to the members of the M&MA not "Open Shop," but "Non-Union Shop," as is evidenced by the fact that the merchants and manufacturers fight the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) more bitterly than they do the old-time trade unions, though

the question of the "Open and Closed Shop" has never been a controversial matter with the IWW. This organization takes the position that the entire working class has a right to labor; they, too, appreciate that the only practical way of having what the AF of L claims to contend for the "Closed Shop" is by having a wide-open union without restriction to membership, either as to sex, creed, race, or color. Low initiation fees, low dues, no apprenticeship, but, on the other hand, every inducement for every man, woman, boy, or girl employed in the industry to join the union.

Though the capitalist class may be politically ignorant and economically dense, they realize that this form of organization would be a big step in the direction of their elimination, so, while fighting under the slogan of the "Open Shop," their real purpose is to entirely wipe out organized labor.

Unemployment.

The campaign of the M&MA, united as it is with the commercial clubs, and employers of all kinds in the United States, has much to do with the ever-increasing army of the unemployed. They are the masters of the situation, owning and controlling the resources of the country, the machinery and the tools of production, and with the elements of force, soldiers, the militia, police, detectives, and the press, always ready to respond to their masters' call. Between seven and eight million men and women have been forced out of the mills and factories, shops, and mines, and denied access to the means of life by the exploiters of labor, who will allow the workers access to these things only when they make a profit from their toil.

Threatened Railroad Strike.

The many brotherhoods of railroad workers, some 16 in number, threatened a strike against a reduction of wages. "Threatened" is used advisedly. I leave it to the reader to imagine if it is possible for leaders like Stone, Morressey, Lee, and Hanrahan to more than feebly threaten a strike against the railroad companies, which takes such special care for their comfort. When these leaders have occasion to travel, they, each of them, are provided with a sumptuously-furnished palace car at the cost of the company. Thousands of the rank and file were in deadly earnest when they registered their determination for a general strike against the reduction of wages. But the Government had provided the railroad companies with a club, in the shape of a law passed in 1920, which practically prevents strikes on interstate carriers. The men, nearly a million strong, had passed by a referendum a law of their own, and were determined to enforce it, even though a strike were necessary. But their soft-cushioned leaders regarded the edict of the politicians of Washington of greater importance, and the threatened strike was declared off.

Chicago Building Trades Strike.

Men employed in the building industry in Chicago and vicinity suffered a reduction in wages amounting to one dollar a day through a judicial decision rendered by the notorious judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis. It was he who fined the Standard Oil Company \$29 million, which fine was never paid. The same judge sentenced members of the IWW to terms ranging as high as 20 years in prison — not for any crime that they had committed, but because of honest opinions and convictions that they held. It seemed as though there would be a general strike of the building trades against this infernal decision, but the carpenters' union decided, amid cheers of its members, to withdraw their support to the call for a general strike, and submit without protest to the reduction of wages imposed upon them by this judge, who enjoys a life tenure of office, and who also holds the position of Baseball Commissioner, for which he receives a salary of \$45,000 a year, making a total of \$51,000 a year, while the white-headed old rascal cuts wages a dollar a day.

Coal-Miners' Strike In Kansas.

A statewide strike against the findings of the Industrial Court, which has been set up in the Sunflower State, is now on. This court of industrial relations was supposedly established for the prevention of strikes, but since it has been in existence hundreds of strikes have taken place in the State of Kansas; for most of them Alexander Howatt, President District 14, United Mine Workers of America, stands openly sponsor. The fight that he has made, backed up by the miners, is worthy of the cause. Howatt is now in prison, likewise the secretary of District 14, for violation of the decrees of this servile court. Howatt was compelled to fight this issue out in the Convention of the UMWA, from which convention he was finally expelled for having violated the order of President John L. Lewis. After this has occurred Howatt was re-elected President of District 14 by an overwhelming vote. He is in prison, while upon the shoulders of Lewis falls the responsibility of assisting the mine owners to break the strike in the State of Kansas. This is not the only weak-kneed action of the said John L. Lewis. It was he who crawled before the injunction issued by Judge Anderson at Indianapolis. If ability and a willingness to fight merits reward, Alex Howatt will step from the Pittsburgh jail to the President's chair in Indianapolis.

Strike of the Meat Packers.

The world of labor was startled by the so-called riots precipitated in Chicago through police interference, when the workers of the great packing plants of that city walked out. They were almost immediately attacked by mounted police. Nine of their number were shot down in cold blood. The only offence of the workers was an effort to maintain the wages they had been receiving. The strike has grown in proportion until it has almost completely tied up the plants of the beef Trusts. Minneapolis, Sioux City, Omaha, Kansas City, Fort Worth, and eastern plants have become involved in the controversy. Out of this strike may grow an industrial union with which the workers who prepare food for some of the world may be able to do something to improve their own living conditions, which are, at best, miserable in the extreme. Arbitration courts cannot prevent strikes.

Marine Transport Workers' Strike.

A strike of sailors and other marine transport workers of American ports developed into international importance. Andrew Fururseth, Secretary of the Seamen's Union, was all fuss and feathers because of the actions of the members of the Seamen's Union in their refusal to accept his advice against the strike. Poor old Andy, who fought for 45 years to get a law placed on the statute books of the United States, which he finally accomplished, but the poor fragile thing is not worth quoting; it could not stand the stress of the first little storm. Andy's bark was nearly swamped. The membership declined from 65,000 to 20,000. This would be a serious blow to organized labor were it not for the fact that the members who gave up the sinking ship found berths in the marine transport workers of the IWW, through which organization they have been able to make a remarkably good fight for better conditions, for men of seafaring lives.

Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Lockout.

For months the clothing workers of the manufacturers of New York and vicinity were locked out. A vicious conspiracy of the capitalists, large and small, of this important industry, determined to weaken the strength, to clean out entirely, if possible, the members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. A lockout was declared; shops and factories were closed throughout the city and State.

The Amalgamated Clothing Workers, organized on industrial lines, independent of old-time trade union affiliations, took up the conflict, collected a strike fund among their own members of more than a million dollars. They maintained that serious point, mass picket lines. They established distributing agencies for food and relief. They opened cooperative clothing factories, providing work for victimized members; they conducted educational courses, lectures and propaganda meetings.

The officials of the ACW were hailed into court. The preamble drafted after the draft of the IWW, of which it is almost a counterpart, was presented by the prosecution as a seditious document. The ACW fought valiantly for the principles set forth in their preamble.

They were exonerated. They won against the lockout, coming out of the struggle stronger morally and financially, stronger as an organization. During their hours of stress they were planning for the relief of Russia, and since their victory have done much for the famine-stricken, as well as assisting in the reconstruction of the clothing industry of Russia.

Ladies' Garment Workers' Strike.

New York and vicinity was the centre of another struggle of clothing workers. The organization they belong to is known as the Ladies' Garment Workers which declared a strike against the manufacturers of ladies gowns, cloaks, etc., when an attempt was made to reduce their wages. During the progress of the strike they adopted the unique method of suing out an injunction against the bosses. This injunction, which was granted, prohibited the employers from discriminating against members of the organization, the Ladies' Garment Workers. Some damages were granted and the manufacturers, in this instance, were taught a wholesome lesson. Courts are seldom appealed to in the United States. The writer recalls one other instance where an injunction was granted, during the strikes of Cripple Creek, Leadville, and other mining sections of Colorado, when the late Judge Owers granted an injunction on behalf of the Western Federation of Miners, prohibiting the mine owners of Leadville from discriminating against members of the WFM. It is good to have friends at court. But working men seldom find them there.

Coal Miners' Strike in West Virginia.

Black is the record of the authorities of the state of West Virginia, where the coal miners have had one strike after another during the last 20 years. This state has seventy million tons of measured coal recognized as the property mainly held by the Steel Trust. This coal means an immense amount of wealth to the stockholders, who have little regard for the men who delve into the depths to produce it.

Since May 1921, the miners of West Virginia have been on strike, chiefly against the imposition imposed upon them by the private army of the Baldwin-Felts detectives. The system of espionage that pre-

vails became unbearable. When the miners went on strike they were evicted from the homes in which they had been living, company-owned houses, and were compelled to take up their abode in tents pitched on the sides of the hills and mountains opposite the mines. The thugs of the company armed with rapid-firing guns, fired volley after volley into the miners' homes, who, when attacked, armed themselves, and for many months maintained a 50 mile front. A march of miners was organized, in which 6,000 men took part. The Governor fearing the strength and publicity which the miners were attaining, appealed to the President of the United States for troops. Martial law was declared; aeroplanes flew over the assembled miners, dropping chlorine bombs. A friendly sheriff, Sid Heightfelt, who had killed 5 Baldwin-Felts detectives, was, with a friend, assassinated on the steps of the courthouse. A form of civil war has prevailed in Mingo and adjacent counties of West Virginia, though less than 150 miles from the nation's capital.

Though the miners complied with President Harding's orders at the time of their march, since then 300 of them have been indicted, 19 charged with treason, and the war is still on.

Eugene V. Debs and Amnesty.

Debs, since being released from prison, has come out with the signed statement pledging himself to the support of the members of the IWW, hundreds of whom are yet in prison. Debs says, "No one of them is any more guilty of crime than I was." He is lending his energies to the movement for general amnesty for all political and industrial prisoners, including IWWs, most of whom were convicted of intent to conspire against the government during the war, and Communists who were convicted for the opinions they held. Jim Larkin, [Benjamin] Gitlow, [C.E.] Ruthenberg, [Isaac] Ferguson, and others are among the many still in prison. Workers everywhere can assist in securing the release of our imprisoned comrades and fellow workers in the United States. Help those who are the last held by any country for activities during the war, by sending your protest and demands for their release to the President and Congress of the United States.

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