
The General Strike is Dead! Long Live the General Strike!

by J. Louis Engdahl

Published in *The Worker* [New York], vol. 5, whole no. 241 (Sept. 23, 1922), pg. 2.

Workers of the United States! You have heard the first call for a General Strike. Its rumblings across the land have awakened in you a sense of new power, it has aroused new fears in the minds of your enemies, those who would keep you in subjection.

You have hurled your demand for the General Strike into the sessions of the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor. There your demand lies buried. But it will rise again, stronger, more insistent.

Your first call, Workers of the United States, for a General Strike in defense of your class is dead. But there will be newer and greater efforts under the slogan of "Long Live the General Strike!" until the present ruling class shall have crumpled into dust.

Your present officials, Workers of the United States, are opposed to the General Strike. They will always be opposed to it.

Favor in Order to Betray.

They gave it lip service for a few short moments because they felt the power of your demands. Thus did Kerensky when the workers and peasant swept the Russian tsar off his throne, try to ride the storm of revolution. Thus did Scheidemann, Ebert, and Noske for a few brief days side with the upheaval that lost the Kaiser his empire. They favored it to betray it.

So have your leaders betrayed you. The demand for the General Strike came from the most militant, the thinking, far-seeing elements among you.

Gompers and his reactionary associates used your demand, for a few days, to frighten your enemies. Then they threw your demand

into the waste basket and continued their alliance with your enemy, the present ruling class.

They made their gesture and they think they have fooled you, just as Scheidemann and Ebert believe they will keep the workers of Germany in subjection. But you will not be fooled, the workers of Germany will not be fooled, no more than the workers and peasants of Russia who have dethroned their bosses were fooled. It will only take a little longer to win the fight, to reach the goal.

Be Proud! Plan Anew!

Workers! Be proud of your achievements this year! You might have done better, had you the right kind of leadership and the proper form of organization. But you will do better, because you will get a real leadership and develop a fighting organization.

First came the great strike of the textile workers in New England — a revelation in working class solidarity.

Then the giant walkout of the 600,000 coal miners, unprecedented in this country in the display of industrial unity.

Then followed the nationwide down tools movement among the railroad shopmen that nearly swept with it the railroad brotherhoods.

Three times you have assailed the citadels of capitalism in three great industries and you were ready for the great assault, a General Strike, but your leadership held you back because it is yellow and reactionary.

They are trying to interest you in fake “impeachment proceedings” against Daugherty, in per capita taxes for the relief of the striking shopmen that will never be collected, specious plans for curtailing the power of the US Supreme Court, and “new legislation” for Congress to pass and the sacred cows of the Supreme Court to chew to bits.

In Europe the yellow leaders of labor cry, “Anything but revolution!” while here in the United States we have reached the stage where the same cringing officialdom yells, “Anything but the General Strike!”

No Action Yet Taken.

Gompers announced ten days before this writing that the AF of L Executive Council was being called into session for the purpose of

discussing the demand for the General Strike. But, as we go to press, no action has been taken.

James Duncan, First Vice-President, declared the "General Strike" would only be called as a last resort, "in defense of democracy," while every worker knows, if Duncan doesn't, that democracy is dead in the United States of America.

When completely cornered these side-stepping labor spokesmen announce they have "no authority," which is a confession that labor is so crippled, through the form of its organization, that it is unable to fight its own battles.

It is because the militants of the Trade Union Educational League would develop the kind of an organization that could carry on a General Strike, that they are being fought by the Gompers regime.

We had been told that an industry-wide strike of the coal miners was impossible. But it has taken place, even with a backward officialdom forged to win a partial victory.

The strike of the railroad shopmen, involving 7 out of the 16 craft unions of railroad workers, gives promise of the day when all labor in the transportation industry will stand together and fight together.

Unity of the capitalists, nationally and internationally, will force the workers to parallel the organizations of their bosses whether they like it or not.

The peewee mind of a Matthew Woll fights amalgamation in the printing industry. He is head of the photoengravers, and he fears to associate in one organization with the printers, the pressmen, the stereotypers, the electrotypers, the bookbinders, mailers, and even the newsboys, who have shown themselves an important factor in every big newspaper strike.

Similarly this Woll, hater of "Reds," carries his isolation tactics into the AF of L Executive Council. He is typical of the rest.

The Last Alibi.

"Anyway the general strike is a European institution," is the final display of ignorance with which some of these misnamed "labor leaders" dismiss the subject.

It is true that the workers of Europe, and we might add labor on every other continent with the exception of North America, have de-

veloped the General Strike into a more effective weapon than in the United States.

In spite of their officials, in league with Germany's industrial kaisers, the German workers have repeatedly invoked the General Strike to crush the restoration attempts of the Monarchists.

The Italian workers bring the General Strike to bear in the struggle against their American Legion, the labor-crushing Fascisti.

The General Strike has proved an effective weapon in Europe, and elsewhere, not because the European profiteers and exploiters are different, but because the workers are different. They are more class-conscious and are learning more and more to fight as a class, as a united working class.

The workers of the United States are neither class-conscious nor united as a class. As workers, with the exception perhaps of the mining industry, and partially on the railroads, the workers are merely craft conscious.

But this year, 1922, has shown that you are waking up, Workers of the United States. You will, in the very [near] future, show that the General Strike is also an American labor institution, because capitalism is just the same in this country as it is everywhere else, and it must be fought with the same weapon — CLASS SOLIDARITY.

It Isn't "Respectable."

The last word from Atlantic city is that "the general strike talk has had a very bad effect on the industrial situation.

That was not said by Schwab, or Morgan, or Rockefeller, but it is credited to the president of an international labor union, who adds, "I believe it was a mistake to allow this report to go out."

This "labor leader," no doubt, does not consider it respectable for labor to get up off its knees and enjoy the sensation of standing erect.

Against the claim of the "leaders" that "the majority of the workers are not in sympathy" with the proposal for a general strike, the militant workers will raise the cry, "Organization! Education! Solidarity!" until the workers show by their deeds just where they stand.

Replying to the claim of the "leaders" that "the public should be officially assured at the earliest possible moment that they are not faced with a general strike," we say, let the great masses of the people realize they are but a part of the working class and that they should take their stand with it in all its struggles.

The threat of a General Strike will bring the bosses to their knees. The ability of labor to carry out that threat will keep them there.

Labor has responded to the question of the Trade Union Educational League, "Is it to be amalgamation or annihilation?"

It is going to be AMALGAMATION! With amalgamation the general strike weapon gradually evolves into a reality.

Workers of the United States! You will need that General Strike weapon for the bigger struggles ahead. You cannot perfect your organizations for its successful use too soon.

GET BUSY!

FORWARD TO COMPLETE AMALGAMATION OF ALL LABOR!

FORWARD TO THE GENERAL STRIKE!

FORWARD TO THE REVOLUTION AND THE ABOLITION OF CAPITALISM!

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · October 2011 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.