

The Declining American Federation of Labor

By SAM DARCY.

WORKERS have been leaving the social fascist and fascist unions in the United States by hundreds of thousands. This is admitted by even an official United States government report based on figures supplied by the American Federation of Labor and closely allied organizations.

This report published in the Monthly Labor Review, organ of the Department of Labor, exhibits chiefly a comparison of the situation obtaining in 1923 and in 1929. The figures are of course gross exaggerations. The report refuses to acknowledge the practical destruction of the A. F. of L. needle workers union during the past few years, the loss of hundreds of thousands of members by the United Mine Workers of America, the wiping out of the textile workers union with an insignificant exception in a very minor part of the industry (full-fashioned hosiery), etc. Yet the facts offered indicate clearly enough the answer of the workers to the activities of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy.

Net Loss.

During the three years covered, the report admits a net loss of 112,272 members for all unions involved out of the somewhat over two million members which are claimed. This loss was sustained chiefly in the basic and war industries of the country. The railroad union alone show a loss of over two hundred thousand members. Those railroad unions directly affiliated with the A. F. of L. do not show any loss because of the return in 1929 of a previously expelled railroad craft union from the A. F. of L., the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks with a membership of 135,000. The net loss to all the various craft unions including the A. F. of L. totalled 81,894 members. All of the unions concerned in these losses one of the most significant is that of the "Jim Crow" Association of Colored Railway Trainmen which lost 1800 members out of its pitiful total of 4800.

In the group of mining and mineral extraction workers, the official figures report a loss of 50,000 members. That the actual loss is several times larger than this can be seen from the fact that the United Mine Workers of America are listed as having 450,000 members in 1929, whereas it is well known that not more than one quarter of this number, chiefly anthracite miners have remained in this union.

Basic Industries.

In the basic branches of the metal industry similar losses are admitted. The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, and Helpers of America acknowledges a loss of over 3,000 members out of its total of 23,000. This, despite the sweet overtures of Green to Hoover begging the union label on American shipping and navy boats in return for energetic support by the A. F. of L. of the new and greater war program before and after the London Naval Conference. The union which includes the aircraft workers was cut in half. And so on all the way through.

In the clothing, shoe and similar unions, a loss of 26,000 members is acknowledged. That the loss is far greater can be seen by the fact that the International Ladies Garment Workers Union is listed as having 87,000 members. This union actually has less than 5,000, and even these are mostly non-dues paying. The United Garment Workers is alleged to have 85,000 members. It has barely 20 per cent of this amount and these are concentrated in a comparatively unimportant part of the industry, the over-all line.

Textile.

In the textile industry, while the official A. F. of L. figures admit a loss of 5,000 members in the American Federation of Textile Operatives, the membership being reduced

from 11,000 to 6,000, they still claim 30,000 members in the United Textile Workers of America. This is a most fancifully exaggerated figure. Even the Department of Labor comment on it is that this does not represent actual membership but merely "voting strength" in the A. F. of L.

The tremendous losses suffered by the A. F. of L. which they do not yet acknowledge is evidenced also by the fact that the American Federation of Musicians still claims in 1929, 125,000 members, the same figure as for 1926. It has become common knowledge that the crisis amongst the musicians in the United States brought on by the tremendous extension of talking pictures and other mechanical devices has declassed tens of thousands of musicians and practically wiped out this once flourishing organization leaving nothing but a treasury. This treasury is now being used in a pathetic attempt to win the public against "canned music"—talking pictures, radio, victrola, etc.—and for attending concerts.

Progress?

The report claims serious progress for only one group of unions. These are the unions which include the government employees. Even in this list, however, it is not the laborers or other actual manual workers which increased organization but the most vilely corrupted groups of government employees. Thus, for example, the International Association of Police Women doubled its membership from 300 to 600. The two unions which include the postmasters, the worst slave drivers possible, increased their membership by over 4,500. The American Federation of Teachers claims an increase of 1,500. This last is, however, very doubtful.

The building trades according to the official reports have been holding their own during the three years under consideration. However, because of the tremendous crisis which this industry is suffering from at the present time, where in many sections between 45 and 60 per cent of the workers are unemployed, these unions have also lost considerably. For some time the official figures as shown in the voting strength in the A. F. of L. will not reflect the tremendous losses of membership which they are suffering from. Especially the larger of the various crafts have accumulated hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars in their treasuries and will continue to pay their per capita in the A. F. of L. out of these funds irrespective of actual dues payments within the unions.

Senility.

This is done by the bureaucrats so as to better enable them to jockey for power against one another. The perspectives especially for this group of unions auger their further weakening. The builders have already reduced wages by at least 35 per cent in by far the greatest part of this industry. Thus though a carpenter's wages in New York is still officially \$13.20 per day, there are almost no carpenters getting these wages at this moment which is supposed to be the height of the season. Because of economic conditions the carpenters leave the reactionary unions which are doing nothing to help them out of the misery of unemployment and go to work for as little as three dollars per day. The National City Bank, one of the biggest investors in heavy industry declared in commenting on this situation that "wages must come down" if industry is to survive.

The A. F. of L. is in the period of its senility. Next year marks its fiftieth anniversary. It cannot and will not lead the workers in defense of their interests against the wage cuts and worsening conditions which are being carried through.

The Lovestone and Trotskyite oppositions

"Our Father who art in Wall Street, Hoo Thy Will is flouted, in China darn near as bombs. And forgive us our debts, as we have the other war lords, but the British have recessions, the graft and the main swag fore"

Steel Workers M Comm

By VERN SMITH.

STEEL has long been considered the barometer of business. When steel production sags, even the capitalists admit there is a crisis. The reason, of course, is that this is really the iron age. Steel is the fabric of a machine civilization.

Just now steel production is at a low ebb, nearly down to the lowest points of previous crises, in spite of various precarious and artificial boosting of production for months. Even before the crisis, more experienced observers pointed out that the auto industry was taking the place of railroads and building, at that time as a consumer of steel, and that the steel industry was running on thin ice, for at any moment the auto orders might fall to nothing.

52 Per Cent Capacity.

Now, in spite of the preparation of war material, autos have stopped buying much steel,

find common ground against our Communist Party on the trade union question. They wail about the danger of deserting the American Federation of Labor. They cry against the isolation from the masses which will inevitably result from "exaggerating" the possibilities of the new revolutionary unions. They shout that we must reach the masses through the A. F. of L. This opportunist sentiment has even found echo within our Party in the articles of Comrade Stahl, during the pre-convention discussion.

This point of view has roots in the history of our Party. Even at the time of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in October, 1928, there was considerable speculation on the question of a possible new era of growth after the A. F. of L. This point of view never considered that the will of the masses might settle this question. Nor did they conceive of the Communist Party and revolutionary trade unions as a factor in determining the will of the masses. The workers are in fact writing the answer to the renegades in bold letters by leaving the A. F. of L. in hundreds of thousands. The right wing however, has developed a scheme of possible historic development fatalistically based on the will of the bourgeoisie to force the working class into the A. F. of L. so as to have the situation more in hand. Our Party has since left these profound thinkers to their speculative tasks and proceeded with its own.

T. U. U. L.

While the A. F. of L. continues to decline, a glorious opportunity for revolutionary trade unionism was opened with the successful Cleveland conference which formed the Trade Union Unity League. It is now about one year since that conference. A thorough examination of that year's work must be made, the sharpest and most constructive critical faculties must be brought to bear and then all possible forces must be thrown in to help the Trade Union Unity League become the great class defender of the workers that the historic moment calls upon it to be.

The Fifth Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions, now meeting, will undoubtedly provide the lead necessary to accomplish this task.