

Rebellion in Labor Unions

A REVIEW—by MARTIN ABERN.

"Rebellion in Labor Unions" demonstrates most clearly how closely the official leaders of the American labor movement are tied in every way to the capitalist class. How and why the leadership in the labor unions is separated from the rank and file is graphically pictured as Miss Kopald in simply written but brilliant chapters outlines four major outlaw strikes in recent years.

The leaders have a vested interest in the unions and this cuts into the very heart of the organizations, presumably fighting bodies for the betterment of the conditions of the workers. This book proves one thing, if it proves nothing else: that the American "Labor Leaders," Farrington, Gompers, Lewis, Lee, Berry and others are intensely interested in the welfare of the employers and just as inversely in that of the rank and file of the labor unions.

The long tenure in office of the "labor leaders" has resulted in strong machines being formed and these machines have inevitably produced bureaucracies and other oligarchic features. Under the leadership of these agents of capitalism in the labor

movement, the unions have become governments and owe to any militant or oppressed and discouraged rank and file who dares to question the authority of the bureaucrat, labeled labor leader. The labor misleaders have become separated from the membership economically, in environment, in thought.

Unions exist primarily to conduct a struggle, a class struggle, against the employing class for better wages, conditions of labor, etc. But the labor unions in America today are not class institutions. There are two class institutions. There is the working class membership and then there is the leadership, capitalistically minded and capitalistically placed economically. A leadership which is heart and soul with the capitalist class, whom it must pretend to fight. But in this book, Kopald by citation of facts, by statements and actions of the alleged labor leaders themselves, Berry, Farrington, et al, shows how even the pretense of defense of workers in the unions has been eliminated and the bureaucratic and fake leadership has gone over completely and without any misgivings into the camp of the employing class. It is class collaboration with a vengeance.

The insurgent or "outlaw" movements of the Illinois miners in 1920, the railroad outlaw or "wild cat" strike in 1920, the Printers Vacation Movement in New York in 1919 and the New York Web Pressman's strike in 1923 are vividly outlined. In each instance Miss Kopald points out plainly how the "outlaw" or insurgent walkouts had their basis in bread and butter needs. The bread question in each case was acute. The needs of the workers were obvious—even to the "labor leaders." Only a spark was needed to touch off the seething discontent; and comparatively minor incidents, such as unjust fines (Tom Mooney penalty fine in Illinois), discharge of workers, (Carey Printing Company in New York) etc., did provoke the struggles which swiftly developed into struggles against the bureaucracy and tyrannical despotism of the labor officials and their, the labor leaders' aids, the government and the employing class.

As these insurgent strikes spread and brought thousands of workers into the ranks of the rebellious members (such as in Illinois) or brought out the entire organization such as the New York Web Pressmen, the insurgents learned that they not only

had to face the employing class. They discovered, to their dismay, but increasing knowledge, that they had to meet the enemy within the unions, their "leaders." These capitalist "labor" leaders invoked the aid of the employing class and the local, state and national governmental agencies. Thugs, gunmen, spies, expulsions met the insurgents on every hand. This was the democracy of the unions and rank and file rule.

These revolts of the miners, railroad workers and printers are significant, first in their similarity in origin, and, second, in their suppressions. These unofficial walkouts were unorganized. Patience and suffering had reached the point of revolt regardless of consequences to the men. The Union leadership suppressed these revolts with an iron hand. The insurgents were met at all times with cries of "Unconstitutionalism," "Bolsheviks" and the usual tirade of abuse, besides physical opposition.

Revolts in unions have taken place many times in the past. They are taking place in Europe and more will come in America. But revolts in the past and revolts now have a different meaning. Even as has taken place

(Continued on page 7.)

Rebellion in Labor Unions

(Continued from page 6)

in Europe, so also in America. "The long struggle over the leaders' acceptance of the automatic machine in industry, with its inroads upon the workers' skill and trade union practices; the gradual revulsion against an unquestioning pro-war attitude; the resentment against leaders' inactions on trade union amalgamation; and the conflicting attitude towards Bolshevik Russia, all helped to create a true rank and file movement."

"In America, moreover, the disappearance (statistically in 1890) of the frontiers, has slowly changed the character of our economic life until by 1920 we were a completely industrialized nation, whose industrial workers outnumbered the farm workers and whose urban population exceeded the rural. Our economic environment has at last set. In the face of such changed economic conditions, the old trade union machinery is bound to be recognized as antiquated. For bread and butter reasons, the most powerful in the minds of the unionists, arguments for change must attain new persuasiveness. Simultaneously the problem of democracy in the unions must attain a new sharpness. For the need and possibility of some change in the structure and functioning of the union at once brings to the fore the old question of union leadership which possesses a vested interest in things as they are, and the machinery of power with which to maintain it. How in the face of this condition will a change come to pass?"

Today opposition to the bureaucratic machinery of the American Federation of Labor and its respective units is consciously and militantly organized and is expressed mainly in the program and tactics of the Trade Union Educational League.

This boring from within, perfectly constitutional methods being employed, meets with the same opposition and reactions and suppression from the "labor leaders" as did what they called the "unconstitutional" revolts of the rank and file. As before, the rank and file must face the united front of the labor officials, the employing class and the government. Gradually they are realizing that reconciliation on the basis of pure wage settlements is impossible. Even ordinary and obviously just bread and butter demands meet with the utmost repression. The struggle within the

labor unions, as also among the rest of the workers, begins to be broadened and is directed not only for immediate bread and butter solutions, but against fake labor leaders, the employing class and the capitalist government. Gradually it becomes a struggle against the capitalist class for rank and file control, workers' ownership of the means of production and distribution, and for a workers' government.

The struggle is long, but militant workers have learned much in past years. The militants and revolutionists no longer flock by themselves, separated from the rank and file in their love-nest and purity unions. Because of the systematic campaign of the Red International of Labor Unions and in America the Trade Union Educational League, the militants and revolutionists stay in the unions in order to win the rank and file to their program, whether it be amalgamation, a Labor Party or the Soviet revolution. If expelled, they fight their way back into the unions. Regardless of consequences, regardless of methods employed against them, militants now have as their slogans, "Win the membership to the militant program. Conquer the unions for the revolution."

This book by Miss Kopald is of **Send in that Subscription Today.**

distinctly high value to every worker. It is a source book of fine historical need. Its facts are, however, also marshalled for excellent everyday use. It is a fighting document for all militant workers; it is damning against the labor officialdom. With their own words is the labor bureaucracy nailed to the wall.

Kopald deals with simple causes of the origin of the insurgent strikes, with bread and butter causes and brilliantly indicates their development into broader and, if you please, a revolutionary struggle. A truly valuable book which should be widely circulated and read. It is not necessary here to picture the struggle and detail the facts given. They will speak for themselves when you read the book.

The author, of course, writes from the typical "impartial" intellectualistic point of view, and while it should be clearly understood that the book is not written by a Communist or from the Communist viewpoint, it certainly is a welcome addition to the sparse literature on such a vitally important subject as left wing unionism in America.

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