

A. F. of L. and Unemployment

By MARTIN ABERN

A review of reports given by organizers and leading union figures of various local unions in the May issue of the American Federationist, official organ of the American Federation of Labor, graphically indicates that the problem of unemployment is one which is affecting every stratum of the labor movement. These reports, however, further illustrate that the official labor bureaucracy has no concrete program to meet the menace of unemployment. They are given briefly by labor men from various cities and states throughout the country, and show that the problems which in one way or another are being discussed among the workers, organized and unorganized, are:

(1) Unemployment, (2) The Injunction Menace in the Labor Movement, (3) Unionization and the Counter-Menace, Company Unionism, (4) Lack of Labor Education in Trade Unions, (5) The Problem of the Replacement of Men by Women Workers, (6) A Slight Discussion on the Necessity of the 5-Day Week.

A Graphic Picture

To give a general picture of the views and reports of the labor situation throughout the country, as seen by these A. F. of L. men, the following will suffice. I have abbreviated the reports and placed them in quotas as substantially their reports:

"Lowell, Ariz.: Unemployment not serious problem. Safety first rules in shops enforced."

"Hot Springs, Ark.: Work rather slow in all trades at present."

"Venice, Calif.: Unemployment in all trades except printers. No public works undertaken to relieve situation because powers will not admit that it is serious. No changes in union scale of wages, but many cuts among the unorganized."

"Windsor, Canada: Nearly all trades have large numbers out of work. Toronto relieving unemployment through public work. Iron workers, carpenters, laborers, add to membership."

"Denver, Colo.: Considerable unemployment in Colorado among coal miners, building tradesmen, common laborers. Central bodies and local unions bombarding the senators and congressmen with resolutions favoring Shipstead-LaGuardia Anti-Injunction legislation. The Axton-Fisher Tobacco Company conducting splendid campaign in daily press for principles of American Federation of Labor. (!) Education Committee of Colorado Federation working out plans for a workers' summer school."

Factory Work Slack

"Elkhart, Ind.: Unemployment in general factory work. Union men talk against injunction and its misuse. New unions of teamsters and common laborers organized."

"Michigan City, Ind.: Unemployment in all trades."

"Muncie, Ind.: Union members in-

structed to include abuse of injunction in their addresses."

"Des Moines, Iowa: Unemployment in all trades. Non-union workers are hardest hit, especially those depending upon seasonal occupations. Asking city government to start public work for unemployment relief. Various companies developing company associations of various types or demanding workers sign yellow-dog contract."

"Waterloo, Iowa: Work dull among all building craftsmen, common laborers. John Deere Tractor Co. demands workers sign yellow-dog agreement. Hod carriers organized."

Railroad Company Unions

"Paducah, Ky.: Common laborers, carpenters, brick masons, cement workers, retail clerks out of work. West Kentucky Coal Co. and Illinois Central R.R. have company unions."

"Baton Rouge, La.: Only half of tradesmen working. Standard Oil men on half time. Injunction discussed."

"Portland, Me.: Unemployment all trades, especially building trades. Mass meetings discussing injunction issue throughout state. Textile and typographical unions have added to membership."

"Framingham, Mass.: Unemployment serious problem."

"Marlboro, Mass.: Unemployment in all trades. Petitions ask for injunction relief."

Building Trades Hit

"Ann Arbor, Mich.: Unemployment in all building trades."

"Lewistown, Mont.: Unemployment serious. All C. M. and St. P. Railroad shops closed. Arro Refinery closed indefinitely."

"Plattsburgh, N. Y.: Unemployment all building trades."

"Rochester, N. Y.: Unemployment among building trades, metal polishers, buffers. Taxi drivers local union disbanded."

"Durham, N. C.: Unemployment serious problem among seamless hosiery, cotton textile workers, carpenters. Greensboro and Durham C. L. U.s discussing injunctions."

"Minot, N. Dak.: Painters secured wage increase."

"Muskogee, Okla.: Slight increase in union membership."

"Tulsa, Okla.: Unemployment among carpenters and laborers."

"Elyria, Ohio: Much unemployment, women are replacing men at lower salaries."

The Injunction Menace

"Steubenville, Ohio: Unemployment all lines of work. Anti-injunction activity."

"Toledo, Ohio: Many unemployed in nearly all trades."

"Youngstown, Ohio: Much unemployment in steel industry. Subject of injunction before public at all times."

"Eastside, Ore.: Unemployment serious among building trades. Working conditions never so poor for 20 years."

"Canonsburg, Pa.: Miners striking. Injunction misuse discussed."

"Carbondale, Pa.: Unemployment in all trades. Men working at D. & H. shops must belong to company union."

"Pottsville, Pa.: Unions discussing 5-day week."

"San Juan, Porto Rico: Unemployment serious problem in all trades. Many sugar plants closed. Government employing convict laborers, aggravating unemployment crisis in island. Seven strikes since January to March."

"Friend" of Labor

"Memphis, Tenn.: Trades and Labor Council issuing synopsis regularly of labor situation. Stressing "friendship" between union labor and business. Big business man donates \$1,000 for labor temple."

"Galveston, Tex.: Seamen, longshoremen, common laborers out of work."

"Marshall, Tex.: Local unions and central body campaigning against injunction."

"Orange, Tex.: Unemployment among longshoremen, carpenters, ship carpenters, caulkers, hod carriers and common laborers."

"Port Arthur, Tex.: Unemployment in all trades especially among oil field workers. 2,500 laid off last 3 weeks. Discussing evils of injunction."

"Ogden, Utah: Men out of work in all branches of industry."

"Alexandria, Va.: Unemployment all trades. Central body open meeting discussing injunctions."

"Burlington, Wash.: Unemployment in building trades."

"Milwaukee, Wis.: Auto mechanics being organized into special local union affiliated with I. A. of M. Organizer reports generally good attendance at union meetings."

In "Liberal" Wisconsin

"Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.: C. L. U. discussing injunction evil. Plant conditions ideal." (!)

"Morgantown, W. Va.: Unemployment serious. Miners, glass workers, common laborers, carpenters, barbers out of work. Special committee taking up injunction issue."

"Cheyenne, Wyo.: Local union of city fire fighters organized."

The above reports undoubtedly indicate a situation in the organized labor movement which is not isolated, but general. The reports from these various active union members and local organizers show that the A. F. of L., neither nationally or local, has any concrete, developed program to meet the needs of the labor movement on the unemployment situation. There is no advocacy of a definite program for equalization of work, a shorter work-day, increase of wages, demands upon the government, local, state and national, for unemployment wages at the expense of the government and employers

Reactionaries Without Program

Here and there we find a feeble request for public work, and even

then no organized means are proposed to effect such action. There is no program indicated or even remotely suggested for the organization of the unorganized, though here and there it is hinted that unemployment and wage cuts are hitting the unorganized workers first, and finally the organized groups. Such organization as takes place is only among isolated unions, and then only in skilled or petty trades.

The reports show that the inroads of company unionism, yellow-dog contracts, etc., are heavy and sapping the vitality of the remaining trade unions. But no program for fighting the company unions inside the company unions and by a drive to organize bona fide trade unions is proposed. See concrete programs as, for example, those which are proposed by the Trade Union Educational League, and which are realizable through organized action and education are not thought of, of course.

Worried Over Injunctions

The injunction issue quite clearly is worrying every local union, and yet the only remedy suggested is to appeal to congressmen and senators to soften the injunction bill and to pass the mild Shipstead anti-injunction bill. Mass violation of the injunction through mass picketing, etc., when strikes occur, which even the fossilized Samuel Gompers stood for, if only in principal, are not offered.

Here and there it is indicated that women are replacing men at lower wages, but there is no program offered to organize the women into the trade unions along with the men and to fight for equal wages for equal work, etc.

Of labor education there is little or none, but collaboration with the employers at banquets, where the common interests of labor and capitalists are stressed, is gleefully reported.

In these reports it can be seen that the American Federation of Labor as the base for protecting the interests of the workers, for organizing vast masses of unorganized workers in the basic industries, have almost completely disappeared.

They show that while the menace of unemployment and injunctions are being keenly realized in the ranks of the labor movement, the A. F. of L. bureaucracy is either baffled, or entirely incompetent and unwilling to do anything concretely to meet these dangers.

The American Federation of Labor now represents only the interests of a very small section of the skilled workers. The basic tasks of organizing the unorganized, where the stress of activity, of militancy, must now be laid, falls on the left wing, the Trade Union Educational League, and the vanguard of the working masses, the Communists.