

Labor movement - U.S. (1950) ✓

THE Forward March OF American Labor

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LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

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The
FORWARD MARCH
of
AMERICAN LABOR :

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT
WRITTEN FOR UNION MEMBERS //

(L.I.D. Pamphlet Series)

LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

112 East 19th Street

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THE FORWARD MARCH OF AMERICAN LABOR

Every day we read in the papers about "labor".

We hear commentators talk on the radio about "labor".

In Washington, Senators and Congressmen always talk about "labor".

Some of the newspapers, radio commentators and Congressmen say that labor is ruining the country.

But others state that unions have been a great benefit to our land and that a strong labor movement is essential to our democracy. They are quick to remind you that the first organizations Hitler and Mussolini destroyed when they came into power were the labor unions.

Since there is so much public discussion and disagreement about us, we trade union members ought to know a little more about ourselves.

Who Is Labor? What Is Labor?

In 1952, about *40 million men* and women were working for wages or salaries and about *16 million* of these workers were members of some kind of trade union.

Some were in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), some were in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and others belonged to "independent" unions. An independent union is one that is not affiliated with the AFL or CIO, such as the International Association of Machinists or the Railroad Brotherhoods. However, there are many smaller unions which call themselves "independent" but are really company unions, completely controlled by the employers.

In 1952 the union membership claimed by AFL, CIO and independent unions was distributed approximately like this:

AFL	8,000,000	members
CIO	6,000,000	members
United Mine Workers of America	600,000+	members
Railroad Brotherhoods	400,000+	members
Other Independent Unions	400,000+	members
Total.....	15,400,000	

Both the CIO and the AFL are made up of many large and small national and international unions. An international union is one that has locals in Canada as well as in this country.

Here are some of the most important AFL and CIO unions. Maybe you belong to one of them.

United Automobile Workers of America, CIO
United Steelworkers of America, CIO
United Brotherhood of Carpenters, AFL
International Brotherhood of Teamsters, AFL
International Association of Machinists, AFL
Textile Workers Union of America, CIO
International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, AFL
Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, CIO
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL
Communications Workers of America, CIO
International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, CIO

These unions have memberships that range from several hundred thousand all the way up to a million. Each national union is made up of many different local unions. A local may have 50 or a hundred members or it may have 60,000 members like the giant Ford Local of the United Automobile Workers. Many unions combine locals in one area into joint boards or joint councils to give them greater strength and bargaining power.

Some unions are organized on an industrial basis, which means that all the workers in a shop or factory—both skilled and unskilled—belong to the same union.

Other unions are organized by "crafts". Thus, in the same plant, the electricians would belong to the electricians' union and the carpenters would be in the carpenters' union. There are some unions which cannot be called strictly industrial or craft unions because they combine important features of both types.

Industrial or craft unions, big or small, are organized to improve the working conditions and the wages of the many millions of men and women who work in the shops and shipyards, the mines and mills, and the offices and factories of our country.

What Do Unions Fight For?

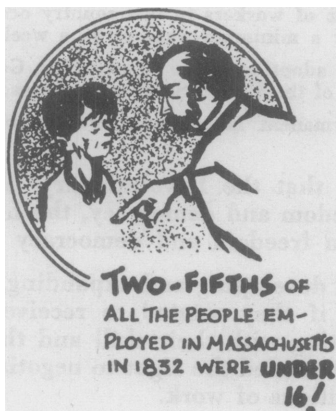
Not so long ago, one of the improvements that labor unions fought for was the 60-hour week. Today, we have the 40-hour week. Some unions have already established the 35-hour week and many others talk about the 30-hour week for the near future.

Today, we all have the right to vote, we all send our children to free public schools. Once labor unions fought for these things which we now take for granted.

It is hard to believe, also, that not too many years ago eight and ten-year-old children worked 50 and 60 hours or more a week in mills

and factories and sweatshops, many of them poorly lighted, badly ventilated, with miserable sanitary conditions.

Today child labor has been greatly reduced, safety and health conditions in industry have been greatly improved and workers receive compensation for injuries received on the job.



But these improvements were not easily won. Sometimes strikes of many months' duration were necessary to force concessions from employers. Many workers were beaten by company police and many were jailed as they fought for the right to have something to say about the conditions under which they worked. Active union men were blacklisted for life. On many occasions heads were broken and sometimes workers were shot dead. Fortunately with the rise of the trade union movement and the passage of protective labor legislation, these vicious practices have tended to disappear.

Questions We Want Answered

How did unions first develop in our country? How did the labor movement grow into its present national strength? How do unions work, what policies do they follow? What defects do our unions have and how can we correct them? How can we make our unions better and stronger so they can help workers live in freedom and peace, without the curse of poverty and the fear of want?

These are some of the things we will discuss. As a trade union member, these are some of the things you must know. For, after all, if not for you and millions of workers like you, this labor movement that we are talking about would not exist.

In the Beginning

Although many newspaper publishers are convinced that labor unions and strikes were imported to this country very recently by bearded, bomb-throwing foreigners, the facts of history tell us the following story:

In 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed.

In 1786 the first strike of workers in this country occurred when Philadelphia printers struck for a minimum wage of \$6 a week.

In 1789, following the adoption of the Constitution, George Washington became the first President of the United States of America.

In 1792 the first permanent labor union was established by shoemakers in Philadelphia.

At the same time that the Revolutionary War was being fought to obtain political freedom and democracy, the first labor unions were being organized to win freedom and democracy on the job.

As industry began developing and expanding, the workers realized they had to organize if they wanted to receive a fair share of the wealth they were creating with their skill and their sweat. And when they organized they demanded the right to negotiate with the employer about wages and conditions of work.

They soon learned that their strongest weapon was the strike. They also learned quickly that a small percentage of their fellow workers were willing to accept the benefits of the union but were not willing to support the union that made these gains possible. They found that employers tried to break their organizations by setting non-union against union members. And so in the early 1800's we find the workers demanding the "closed shop" where everybody must belong to the union and carry his share of responsibility.

The Labor Movement Grows

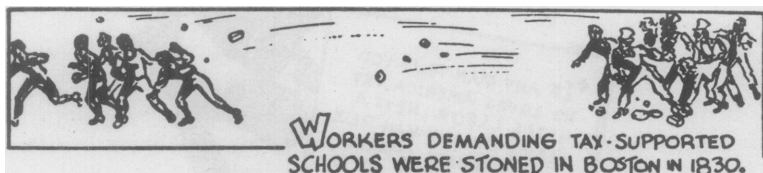
Scattered local unions existed throughout this period but it is not until 1827 that we can say a labor *movement* began in this country. In that year, for the first time, workers in different trades united to form one central labor organization. This occurred in Philadelphia when local unions of carpenters, bricklayers, printers, glaziers and others joined together in the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations.

Following this organization in Philadelphia there developed city-wide unions in New York, Boston and other cities. There were even the beginnings of national unions in the 1830's. This was a prosperous and booming period and unions grew and expanded rapidly.

During boom times labor is usually in a favorable position because workers are in demand. Workers have money to support and strengthen

their union. Strikes to increase wages and eliminate grievances have a chance to succeed. Labor soon learned this truth.

The grievances of the workers in these early days were many. Through their unions and political labor parties they demanded the vote—until the 1820's only property owners could vote. The workers wanted free education for their children—only charity schools were available for the poor. They wanted the 10-hour day. They fought against child labor and the sweatshop.



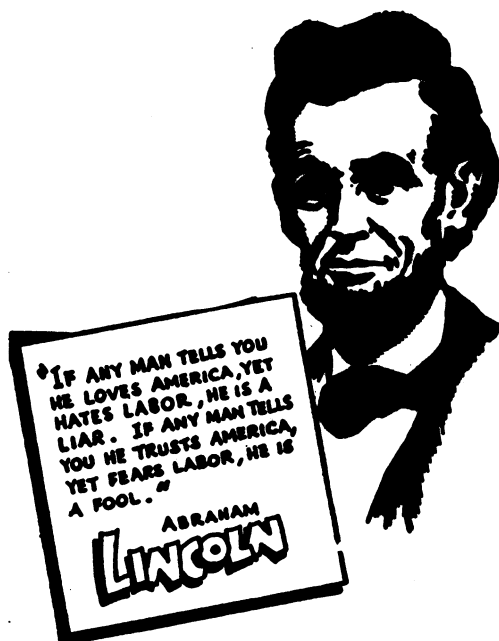
Some of these demands were won and the prospects for more improvements looked promising until the great panic and depression of 1837 suddenly gripped the country. Local unions, city-wide organizations, national unions, *all* were wiped out as the industrial life of the country completely collapsed. Factories and shops were shut down, men were thrown out of work and it was impossible for the unions to keep going.

It takes a strong union with a devoted membership and a large treasury to outlast a period of hard times. During a depression there are more men than jobs and the union is in a very poor bargaining position. It cannot strike for wage increases because too many hungry, unemployed men are ready to take the place of the strikers. Many union members are unemployed and cannot support the union, and, unless it has large financial reserves, the union is soon bankrupt and crushed.

During this period, many schemes to better the conditions of the workers were proposed by various reformers but none of them succeeded. It wasn't until the 1850's that workers turned again to labor unions to improve their standard of living. At this time the rapid building of railroads, the growth of industry and the discovery of gold in California increased employment and made the climate favorable for union success. During this period several national unions were formed but, again, a depression—this one in 1857—put an end to promising beginnings.

Expansion of Industry Brings National Unions

The Civil War, 1861-1865, had a remarkable effect on industry. New factories were built to supply the fighting armies. Large government



contracts were granted to manufacturers of munitions, shoes, clothing and meats.

The growth of transportation and communication and the expansion of markets permitted products made in different parts of the country to compete with each other. Thus we might find two suits of clothing for sale in a store in Ohio, one of them made in New York with union labor, and the other manufactured in a non-union sweatshop in Chicago or Baltimore, and selling at a lower price because of cheap labor.

It was obvious to many trade union leaders that scattered, individual local unions were no longer capable of giving workers the protection they needed. For a short time, a single, local organization of workers might be able to get high wages and good conditions. But the workers would soon have to take wage cuts or lose their jobs if they couldn't organize competing plants in other parts of the country. Only a union organized on a national scale could solve this problem and in the sixties we find the formation of more and more national unions. Among them were the printers, carpenters, molders, machinists, tailors, painters, and others.

There was plenty of work for these unions to do because the conditions of the workers were in great need of improvement. This is

how a recent book on the history of labor described the conditions of labor in the years after the Civil War:

"The passing of the small factory and the growing consolidation of industry inevitably reduced the wage earner to the position of a small cog in a great industrial machine . . . Despite the long agitation for the 10-hour day, the average work day in 1865 was 11 hours. Many worked much longer; the steel industry, for example, did not end the 12-hour day until 1923 . . . The increasing use of women and children in industry kept wages down, as did the large immigration throughout these years. Not only were hours long and wages low, but discipline was rigid . . . Working conditions were often unhealthy and unsafe, and the rules humiliating. In many communities, workers were forced to trade at company-owned stores and purchase at high prices. Laws favored the employer rather than the worker . . . Efforts at unionization were often prevented by forcing workers to sign a pledge that they would not join a union. (This was known later as the yellow dog contract.) Union members were discharged and then blacklisted to prevent their subsequent re-employment.

"These and many other grievances were behind the efforts at organization during the decades after the War between the States (Civil War) and they are fundamental in understanding the whole history of the labor movement."*

The National Labor Union

In order to fight effectively for workers' rights on a national basis, a strong, united federation of all the different labor unions in the country was necessary. After the Civil War several attempts were made to form such an organization.

The first was the National Labor Union formed in 1866. It was a loose federation of labor unions and many types of reform organizations. Although it campaigned for the 8-hour-day it never developed any trade union program as we know it today, and many of the unions soon left this organization. It concentrated on cooperatives and obtaining reforms through political pressure. It drifted completely into politics and died in 1872 largely because of internal disputes and lack of an efficient, well-planned organization.

The Knights of Labor

During the sixties, likewise, another national trade union was formed which was to play an important part in labor history. This was The Knights of Labor, organized in 1869 by a group of Philadelphia tailors.

Because they feared the newly formed national employers' associations and were afraid of being blacklisted and discriminated against,

* Faulkner, Harold U. and Starr, Mark, *Labor in America*, p. 84-5.

the members of the Knights of Labor met secretly in club rooms and workers' homes. Each local union was called an assembly and could include farmers, shopkeepers, professionals and others, besides workers of mixed trades.

The Knights were slow to develop in strength and membership because of the depression of 1873 and on account of the lack of a strong and able leadership. However, with the return of some degree of prosperity in the late seventies, the Knights of Labor reorganized itself, ceased to be a secret organization and became more aggressive.

In 1880 and the years following, the tremendous industrial expansion of steel, coal and the railroads brought boom times to the country and also brought thousands of workers into the Knights of Labor. Although the leaders of the Knights did not regard the strike as labor's strongest weapon, and preferred to get benefits for the workers through nationwide political reform, they soon found themselves leading some of the biggest strikes the country had yet seen. The membership and prestige of the Knights increased enormously when it won several sensational strikes fighting against the Union Pacific Railroad and the Gould railroad system.



AS LATE AS 1885 THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK DECLARED THAT A STRIKE OF WORKERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF RAISING WAGES CONSTITUTED AN UNLAWFUL CONSPIRACY

This was a period of bitter warfare between organized employers and workers. Industries were developing rapidly, heavy and automatic machinery was being introduced, profits were climbing, giant corporations were being formed. In many of the battles between the unions and the employers, the government took the side of the employers. The excuse was that the government had to protect private property and preserve law and order. Many times this "protection" meant using armed soldiers and National Guardsmen as strike-breakers.

In 1886, in the midst of this exciting period, the Knights of Labor reached the height of its power and influence with a membership of 700,000. But in that same year it began to decline swiftly and by 1893

it had only 70,000 members left. What were the reasons for the sudden collapse of the first labor organization in American history that had been able to unite large sections of the working population; the first organization to bring to the attention of the government and the general public, on a nation-wide scale, the problems and conditions of the workingmen and women of this country?

There were several reasons. Two disastrous defeats in strikes against the southwestern railroads and the Chicago meatpacking industry weakened its influence and caused it to lose many members. The mixed membership of the Knights of Labor which included many other groups besides workers tended to weaken it, causing much confusion, disagreement in policies and lack of efficiency. Poor leadership also helped to quicken the Knights' downfall.

The Haymarket Riot

Another weakening influence was the famous Haymarket Riot of 1886 which caused such bitter feeling against labor that it injured the entire labor movement for many years thereafter.

The riot took place in 1886 in Chicago at the McCormick Reaper Works. The McCormick workers had been locked out when they struck for the 8-hour-day in support of the nationwide 8-hour-day drive started by the labor movement. During the strike a fight developed between the police and the workers in which 4 strikers were killed and many others were wounded. The following day a protest meeting was held in Haymarket Square. The police ordered the meeting to break up and as the crowd scattered a bomb was thrown and a policeman was killed. The police fired into the crowd and several workers fell dead.

The hysteria which followed was felt around the world. Leaders of the Chicago labor movement were arrested and convicted of the murder of the policeman.

Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, a great fighter for human rights, declared that no real proof was given at the trial as to who threw the bomb; and to this day many people are convinced he was right. But the explosion was used by the reactionaries of those days to smash the rights of labor and to put a temporary end to the movement for the 8-hour-day.

Birth of the American Federation of Labor

All of these reasons listed above—defeat in important strikes, mixed membership, poor leadership, the Haymarket Riot—helped to destroy the Knights of Labor.

But we have not yet mentioned what some consider the most important reason—the rise of a rival labor organization which seemed to fit the needs of the times better than did the Knights.

You must remember that labor organizations which rose and fell during these years—years of expanding capitalism—were much confused in their philosophy and in their ideas of how to improve their working and living conditions.

Some believed in workers' cooperatives. Some wanted the abolition of the wage system. Others believed in forming political parties. Some wanted land reforms. Others were in favor of strictly trade union activity.

This new organization of workers, the American Federation of Labor—first organized in 1881 and reorganized in 1886—was the first labor organization to survive permanently the heavy attacks of the open shop employers and the anti-labor government. It was even able to hold together through the toughest depressions—something no other labor organization before it had been able to do. The Knights of Labor soon disappeared and the AFL became the most important labor organization in America.

Under the leadership of its president, Samuel Gompers, the AFL concentrated its chief efforts on the organization of the skilled workers into national unions and in securing for them, through collective bargaining and strikes, the economic improvements that the workers needed. Although it emphasized what became known as “pure and simple trade unionism”, it was also active in Washington and in the state capitals, fighting for laws that would help workers.

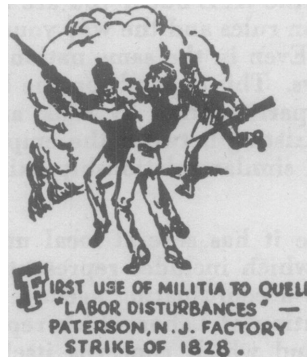
The AFL profited from the very beginning from the experience of the Knights of Labor. Its leadership recognized that only a union with dues high enough to build a strong “war chest” could successfully survive depressions, attacks by well-financed employers' associations, and the national and state governments which seemed to be under the control of powerful big business and anti-labor groups. “War chests” was the only way to describe the large treasuries that the unions tried to build because labor had to battle desperately for any and all job improvements it tried to get.

Two Defects — The Homestead and Pullman Strikes

In the steel industry, for example, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, AFL, called a strike at Homestead, Pa., in June 1892, to fight a wage cut. The company declared that it would not recognize the union. In the clashes that followed between the workers and the imported, armed, company guards acting as strike-breakers, both strikers and guards were killed and many were wounded.

As had happened so often in the past, the State Militia was called in to "establish peace" and the workers were defeated.

Another great strike was fought two years later by the American Railway Union, an independent organization, led by Eugene Victor Debs. A strike was called in an effort to get back a wage cut which the Pullman Company had forced upon the workers. No sooner was the strike called than the Federal Government ordered out troops to protect the property of the Pullman Company. Perhaps that was the real reason for bringing in troops but the result was that the strike was broken and the union soon fell apart.



Victories in Coal, Clothing, Building Trades

During this period there were many successful strikes which helped to establish permanent unions in many industries. One of the most spectacular of these was the 1902 strike organized by the United Mine Workers under the skillful leadership of John Mitchell. This strike for union recognition, the 9-hour-day and other job improvements, lasted five and a half months and involved more than 100,000 miners. This victory was important because it ended in a union contract with the entire anthracite coal industry.

The building trade unions, including carpenters, bricklayers, painters, electrical workers and others, also developed strong organizations in the large cities. In this industry the main bargaining unit for the workers became the Building Trades Council made up of representatives of all the building unions in a city.

During this period of the 1900's and the years following, we even find strong unions being built in the men and women's clothing industries, which were at the time the worst sweatshops in the United States. A series of dramatic strikes in 1909 and 1910 established strong unions which improved the conditions of the workers tremendously. The

International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (men's clothing) developed into two of the most outstanding trade unions in the country.

Structure of the AFL

When the AFL was founded in 1886, the national and international unions which made it up were quite independent. Each union made its own rules, elected its own officers and carried on its policies generally with little or no interference from the national AFL officers or executive council. This same situation exists today. Thus you and your cousin may both be in the AFL but if you are in two different national unions, your dues, union rules and the way your union is run will probably be different too. Even in the same national union two locals may be run in different ways. This depends on the kind of local leadership, the amount of active participation by rank and file union members, the kind of relations existing between the employer and the local and many other reasons. A similar relationship exists among the unions in the CIO.

In each city where it has several local unions, the AFL forms a Central Labor Union which includes representatives of all the unions in the city and acts as a coordinating agency. In each state the AFL also has a State Federation of Labor which represents the AFL unions in the state capitals and which concerns itself primarily with labor legislation.

AFL Policies

The AFL was always wary of going into politics. The AFL policy was best expressed by Sam Gompers' statement, "reward your friends and punish your enemies". Though the AFL would support certain Congressmen it regarded as "friends of labor", it did not believe that trade unions should spread their limited energies too thin by giving a lot of time to political as well as industrial battles.

The unions in the AFL concentrated on getting benefits for the workers by winning signed contracts or agreements from employers. The contract stated the wage rates and job conditions for each type of job. It recognized the union as the "bargaining agent" for the workers.

No longer could the boss fire you just because he didn't like you. The contract said no one could be fired without a good reason. You had *job security*.

If business was slow the boss or foreman could not lay off anybody he wanted and keep his friends and relatives working. The contract called for *seniority*—no favoritism. Under the seniority rule, men with

the longest service were the last to be laid off and the first to be rehired. In many contracts seniority also applied to promotions and shift-preference.

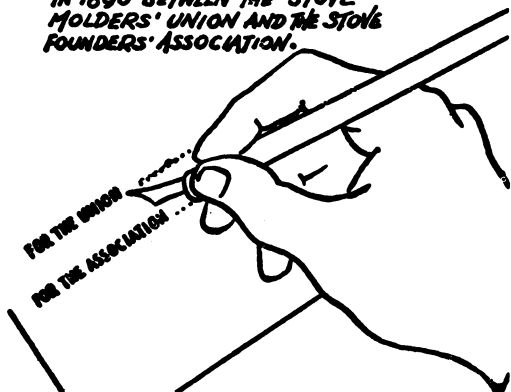
If you had a complaint about sanitary conditions, promotion, discrimination, work-load or any of the hundreds of problems that come up in a shop or factory—you didn't have to quit your job. The contract provided *grievance procedure*. This meant your union representative—the shop steward, shop chairman or grievance committee—took up the problem with your foreman or supervisor. If they couldn't settle it, the union business agent and top management tried to reach an agreement. If there was still no settlement, the dispute could be taken to arbitration where a neutral outsider made the final decision.

Industrial Democracy

A union contract meant higher wages and better working conditions. But perhaps more important was the new feeling of dignity and freedom that unionism brought with it. College professors called this new freedom "industrial democracy". Maybe workers didn't know what these fancy words meant, but they knew they could not be pushed around anymore like so many bales of hay. Now they could say and do something about the conditions under which they worked. They could hold their heads high like human beings. They were free men *inside the shop* as well as in their own homes.

In the building trades and the printing, mining and clothing industries, the unions developed control of the job to a very high degree. As one labor expert remarked, "The boss owned the business, but the union—the workers—owned the job." These unions were successful in

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obtaining contracts covering an industry in an entire city or in a large section of the country. This kind of industry-wide contract made it possible to improve wages and conditions without forcing union employers out of business because of low-wage, sweatshop competition.

The AFL was also able to improve job conditions a great deal by getting the states to pass labor laws helpful to workers. During the years before the first World War the AFL state federations of labor joined with other groups in persuading many state legislatures to pass laws on workmen's compensation, child labor, health and safety protection for factory workers, the shorter work week and special protection for women workers.

In the states where workers were well organized, fairly good labor laws were obtained. In other states the laws were not so good. However, in all states, the organized labor movement continued to fight for the improvement of all labor legislation.

The Industrial Workers of the World

Although there were unions in the AFL in the early part of the century that organized the unskilled and semi-skilled workers—among them the United Mine Workers, organized on an industrial basis—most of the unions brought within their ranks only skilled craftsmen. Some of the union leaders believed it was impossible to organize the unskilled and the semi-skilled, many of whom were recent immigrants who knew little about American ways and nothing about unions.

In 1905 there was formed the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical labor organization which aimed to organize these unskilled and semi-skilled workers into industrial unions. Many of these unskilled workers, ignored by the AFL, welcomed the opportunity the IWW gave them to improve their miserable conditions. When the rebellious leaders in the labor movement devoted their energies to the IWW, progressive forces in the AFL suffered a loss.

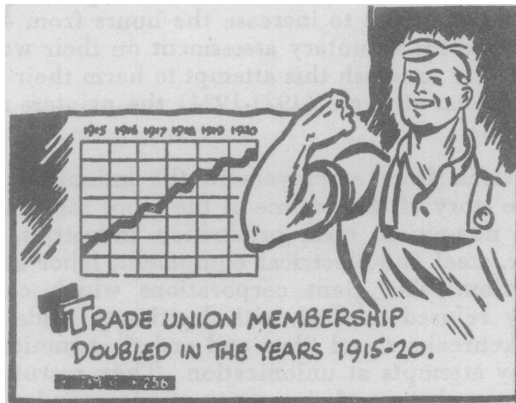
The IWW was very active among western miners, lumbermen, textile workers, seamen and traveling agricultural laborers (migratory workers). It organized many sensational and dramatic strikes. Most famous was the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike of 1912, when 20,000 workers walked out against a wage-cut. Before the wage-cut the workers were averaging less than \$9 a week for a 56 hour work-week.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the IWW was its vigorous fight for free speech and the right to express its opinions. The IWW died soon after the first World War, due, in part, to its inability to build unions on a permanent basis and in part to the strong opposition of the government to its radical policies. The unskilled workers were not to be organized successfully, on a permanent basis, until the CIO came along in 1935.

American Labor and World War I

It is a common saying that wars quicken the march of history. The relations between the government and labor during the first World War seemed to prove this saying. For it was in this war, as a result of the demand for increased war production, that the government first recognized the right of a worker to join a trade union. This occurred when President Wilson—in setting up the War Labor Board of World War I—declared that “the right of workers to organize in trade unions and bargain collectively” was not to be interfered with.

This new government policy, together with the heavy demand for workers caused by the war, resulted in a great improvement of labor's bargaining position. A tremendous increase in trade union membership followed. Starting with 2 million members in 1914, the AFL doubled its membership to 4 million by 1920. Including the million or more members in the Railroad Brotherhoods and other independent unions, the organized workers reached the record total of 5 million union members in 1920.



This increase in membership was accompanied in some of the major industries by the establishment of labor-management committees. Many were optimistic enough to believe that the day of industrial democracy was steadily approaching.

But the employers' associations had different ideas. They decided that now was the time to cut wages and smash unionism and collective bargaining.

Then soon began one of the worst “open-shop” campaigns American labor ever had to face. This open-shop drive had a very nice, patriotic name. It was called the “American Plan” and it was supposed to wipe out the “un-American” closed shop. However, the history books tell us that what the employers really had in mind was the

complete destruction of unionism. And they spared neither money nor effort to do this job.

Unions lost many of the strikes which they called in a desperate effort to hold on to what they had gained during the war. Many unions went down under the avalanche of blows delivered by hundreds of open-shop employer associations. The Seamen's Union, the Meat-packers' Union, various building trades unions, were completely crushed when they refused to take wage-cuts. Unsuccessful strikes, involving more than a million railway workers, textile workers and miners greatly weakened these unions for many years to come.

The Labor Movement Fights for Its Life

However, unions that were solidly organized and had large financial reserves were able to weather this open-shop storm. These unions included the Amalgamated Clothing Workers which defeated a wage-cut when they survived a six-month strike of 65,000 workers. A \$1,000,000 defense fund helped save the union. In the printing industry the employer associations tried to increase the hours from 44 to 48. With the aid of a 10 percent voluntary assessment on their wages, the printing unions were able to smash this attempt to harm their job conditions. During the three year struggle (1921-1924) the printers raised \$17,000,000 for strike relief.

But this attack from employers in the unionized industries was only part of the story of the decline of the labor movement during the 1920's. In the non-union, mass production industries, such as automobiles, rubber, steel and electrical equipment, labor also met a solid wall of opposition. The giant corporations which controlled these industries flatly refused to deal with legitimate trade unions. They used spies, strikebreakers and "law and order" committees of citizens to break up any attempts at unionization. They recruited labor from farms and villages where cash incomes were low, and where unionism was almost unknown, with the idea of using this type of labor to keep unions out of their plants.

Many of these big corporations developed schemes such as profit-sharing, bonuses, pensions, baseball teams, company unions and health programs to help lure the workers away from the trade union movement. Some companies even gave wage increases "to keep the workers happy".

During this period labor was also weakened by the introduction of a great number of labor-saving machines which turned many skilled craftsmen into unskilled machine-watchers. Many of the AFL craft union leaders were either too cautious, or too narrow-minded to take the only step that could organize the giant auto, rubber and steel plants which were full of this automatic machinery. That step was the crea-

tion of industrial unions—everybody in the plant organized into one union, instead of being split up into twenty craft unions.

Labor also laid itself open to attack when it failed to get rid of graft and racketeering in several local building trades, service trades and other unions. It was likewise weakened internally by the boring-from-within tactics of the Communists in the more progressive trade unions, tactics which resulted in a series of disastrous strikes.

The result of all these forces, between 1920 and 1930, was the reduction of trade union membership by more than a million. By 1930 the AFL had only 3,000,000 members and it had lost much of its influence in American life. Then came the depression.

The Depression and the New Deal

The collapse of the stock market in October 1929, followed by the general financial crisis, stopped the wheels of industry. Millions of workers were thrown out of their jobs. They lost their homes and their



life savings. They lost their dignity and their self-respect as they walked the streets looking for jobs which did not exist. Some sold apples on street corners. Many who had jobs shared them with the unemployed. Still the number of unemployed increased and by 1932 it was estimated that 16 million men and women were jobless.

During this greatest depression in the history of our country, the Hoover government acted as if it were paralyzed—doing little to eliminate or ease the suffering of millions. Discontent and despair among the masses mounted and on election day in 1932 a majority of the

workers voted for a new administration which became known as the New Deal.

Many New Deal leaders were convinced that the depression was caused mainly because workers did not receive enough wages to buy back the goods that they produced. When the unsold goods piled up, factories cut production and men were thrown out of work. These unemployed men could not buy food, clothes or house furnishings; therefore more factories cut production or closed down, and more men were thrown out of work. Result—depression.



The New Deal government, led by President Roosevelt, believed it could pull the country out of the depression by increasing the purchasing power of the masses. For this, it needed a strong labor movement which would act as a force to raise wages. It therefore passed laws encouraging to trade unions.

Most important of these laws was the *National Labor Relations Act*, passed in 1935. This law, known as the Wagner Act, marked a fundamental change in peace-time government policy toward trade unionism. It recognized the right of the worker to collective bargaining. It made

company unions illegal. It stated that discrimination against union members or interference with unionism was against the law. It called for a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to hold elections in order to decide what union, if any, represented the majority of the workers in a plant.

The New Deal: New Laws: Industrial Unionism

The New Deal government also set up agencies to give workers a chance to earn some money, among them the Works Project Administration (WPA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and others. Laws were passed providing old age pensions, unemployment insurance, minimum wages and maximum hours. A new philosophy was born—the government must assume a responsibility for the welfare of its people; it must help them to help themselves.

With this kind of government encouragement, workers joined unions in great numbers. But the newer mass production industries—rubber, steel, auto, electrical and radio equipment—remained unorganized.

The AFL conventions of 1934 and 1935 voted to unionize these industries. However, many leaders in the AFL insisted that the new union members in a plant be divided up among many craft unions. They did not seem to understand that these giant industries, with their mile-long factories, could not be organized effectively along craft lines.

Progressive unions in the AFL recalled the attempt of twenty-four separate craft unions to organize the mighty steel industry in 1919. It ended in miserable failure.

They declared that twenty-four separate craft unions could not organize the workers in one plant successfully, nor could twenty-four unions bargain successfully with one powerful employer. They wanted one local union for one plant, one national union for one industry.

The Labor Movement is Split

When it became obvious that the craft union leaders who controlled the AFL executive council would do nothing about industrial organization, these progressive unions formed the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935 under the leadership of John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. Although this committee of unions declared that it wanted to organize the unorganized into industrial unions *inside the AFL*, the 1936 convention of the American Federation of Labor expelled these unions, charging them with starting a rival labor organization. After it was thrown out of the AFL, the committee changed

its name to the Congress of Industrial Organizations and organized itself as a permanent federation of national industrial unions. All attempts to heal this tragic split in the labor movement ended in failure and, as time went on, unity seemed further away than ever before.

Rise of the CIO

When the CIO was first formed in November, 1935, it had a tremendous job on its hands. But it was equal to the task. Organizations like the United Mine Workers, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies' Garment Workers, provided expert leadership, hundreds of trained organizers and millions of dollars. The slogan of the day was "Organize the unorganized!"

The drive took on the spirit and enthusiasm of a nationwide revival meeting as thousands of workers poured into the CIO every day. Every modern organizing technique was used to bring the message of industrial unionism to the unorganized, including loud speaker trucks, mass meetings, radio broadcasts, leaflet distributions, house to house visits, movies.

One by one, the anti-labor giants of American Industry were flattened by the CIO steamroller. General Motors, Chrysler, U. S. Steel, Goodyear Rubber and others signed CIO contracts. Toughest nut to crack was General Motors where a spectacular sitdown strike involving 140,000 workers finally forced the company to sign on the dotted line. When these sit-down strikes occurred, some newspapers seemed to think that the revolution had come to America. But the workers were not interested in revolution or in taking over the auto plants. They were "sitting down on their jobs" and they would not leave until the company recognized their rights to the job.

Another miracle performed by the CIO was the successful organization of a union of textile workers. Conditions and wages of textile workers have always been among the worst in American industry, partly because there never was a strong national union. Today, the Textile Workers Union of America, CIO, is one of the largest in the country. It has succeeded in greatly improving the conditions of the nation's textile workers.

Memorial Day Massacre

The CIO met temporary defeat in 1937 when it tried to organize the group of steel companies known as "Little Steel". To prevent their employees from having a union, the Little Steel companies used every trick in the anti-union bag—including strike breakers, labor spies, machine guns and tear gas. The climax of this battle was reached at the Republic Steel plant on Memorial Day in Chicago when 150 police

fired into a crowd of peaceful pickets. Eight strikers were killed and many were wounded during this police attack which became known as the "Memorial Day Massacre."

Despite such temporary defeats, the CIO went on to organize workers in electrical and radio plants, in shipyards and offices, in packing houses and retail stores. It organized city and state industrial union councils similar to the AFL central labor unions and state federations. When John L. Lewis resigned as president of the CIO in 1940 and two years later led his United Mine Workers completely out of the CIO, the CIO continued its organizing campaign under its new president, Philip Murray. By 1950 the CIO included forty national unions and organizing committees with a total claimed membership of about 6 million.

Freedom From Fear

For millions of workers all over the country—unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled—CIO organization meant the beginnings of industrial democracy, the end of industrial slavery.

 THE GENERAL MOTORS CORPORATION
AND ITS DIVISIONS SPENT \$94,455.00
FOR DETECTIVE AGENCY SERVICES
FROM JANUARY, 1934 TO JULY, 1936.



On the assembly lines of Detroit—where men grew old before their time—fear no longer haunted the minds and hearts of the workers. Before the union came, when a worker could no longer keep up the killing pace of the assembly line, he was thrown on the scrap heap, just like any other piece of worn-out machinery. Modern technological improvement in the hands of the powerful corporations—without the balancing force of unionism—had made mechanical robots of hundreds of thousands of men. Now, the union—the United Automobile Workers of America (UAW-CIO)—one of the largest unions in the world—was always there to remind the corporation managers that workers were human beings.

In the isolated company steel towns of Pennsylvania and in the textile mill villages of New England in the South, the workers found

a new freedom, a new sense of belonging to the community. Perhaps the company still owned the stores, the church, the bank and the houses—but it no longer owned the people. In the few short years of its existence the CIO had established itself as a progressive and influential force, fighting effectively for a better life for the working men and women of America.

The Labor Movement Gains

During this period, beginning in 1935, the AFL was not sleeping. It began a nationwide organizing drive, when the CIO was first formed, and gained thousands of new members. Craft unions like the machinists and the electrical workers organized many plants on an industrial basis in order, among other things, to compete effectively with CIO unions in NLRB elections. By 1950 the AFL claimed 8 million workers in its ranks.

There was much bitterness and jealousy between AFL and CIO leaders during these days and many jurisdictional disputes arose between the two organizations. But, despite this bitterness and this rivalry for new members, workers were organized, unions were built, and peaceful collective bargaining was established in many cities and industries by both CIO and AFL. Although a united movement would have greatly strengthened labor, there was plenty of work for both organizations. In 1950—when labor unions had more members than ever before—there were still 25 million unorganized workers in the United States.

For the great numbers of newly organized workers, progressive unions carried on educational programs to acquaint them with the labor movement. Classes were conducted in labor problems, in duties of a shop steward, economics, public speaking and many other subjects. Unions organized cultural and recreational activities. Many unions built up insurance and other benefit funds. Many locals, for the first time, became active and progressive forces in the community.

American Labor and World War II

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor, and we were soon in the middle of the greatest war in our history. The CIO, AFL and the Railroad Brotherhoods gave up labor's strongest weapon—the strike—so that production for the war against fascism could go on without interruption.

Production was tremendous. Undreamed of quantities of planes, tanks, ships, guns, ammunition and other war materials rolled off the production lines into the hands of our eleven million fighting men. Labor migrated to crowded war centers. Hours were increased to forty-



eight, fifty-four and sixty per week. Women and older men entered industry.

The War Production Board and other government agencies planned for war production on a national scale. The Office of Price Administration (OPA) set ceilings on prices and rationed food, gasoline and other items. The War Manpower Commission established controls over manpower. Some labor-haters and others were anxious to draft labor to work for the profit of private employers. But labor leaders pointed out that manpower difficulties could be solved by raising substandard wages, by eliminating discrimination in employment because of race, creed or color and by preventing the hoarding of labor.

Equality of Sacrifice

Early in the war, President Roosevelt issued his seven-point program to prevent inflation and, at the same time, assure "equality of sacrifice." Besides calling for bond purchases and rationing, the program asked for:

1. heavy taxes to keep profits low
2. ceiling prices to keep cost of living down
3. freezing of wages and salaries.

However, as the war progressed, union leaders and workers became bitter as an anti-labor Congress crippled the President's program. This is what one union publication* declared about the "equality of sacrifice" program:

"What has happened to the President's program? How *equal* has the sacrifice been?

"Let's look at taxes. The 1944 tax bill passed by Congress was so bad that President Roosevelt said, 'It is not a tax bill, but a tax-relief bill providing relief

* Publication of Textile Workers Union of America (CIO).

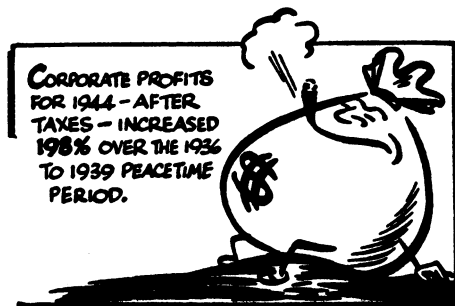
not for the needy but for the greedy.' In 1943 corporations made almost 9 billion dollars in net profits—more profits than ever before.

"What about *price control*? A CIO-AFL report showed a 43.5 percent rise in the cost of living between January 1941 and December 1943. Congress simply refused to pass adequate price control legislation. Sky-high living costs have meant wage cuts for the workers.

"Meanwhile, what about the *freezing of wages and salaries*? The President asked for a \$25,000 limit on salaries after payment of taxes. Congress threw it out, said it was 'un-American' to limit a man's salary to \$500 a week during wartime. *But it was not considered un-American to freeze the wages of workmen in the face of rising living costs and swollen war profits!*

"The President talked of equality of sacrifice. Where is it?"

There is no doubt that the entire labor movement felt the same way about the seven-point program.



Although the take-home pay of workers increased, most of the increase was due to overtime pay and incentive wage schemes that were to disappear after the war. Labor pointed out that at the height of the war boom, while corporations were piling up profits "hand over fist," more than eleven million workers were making less than 65 cents an hour.

War Labor Board

The most important war agency labor dealt with was the War Labor Board. This board settled labor-management disputes to prevent wartime strikes. The decision of the board was final.

Endless months and sometimes years of waiting for War Labor Board decisions caused a great deal of unrest among union members. Sometimes wildcat strikes occurred when workers felt they had been stalled at every attempt to better conditions. Despite this, labor's no strike record, according to government statistics, was 99.9 percent perfect. However, the few wildcat strikes that did occur were reported with big headlines in many newspapers and created the general impression that the workers were always to blame. Actually, a big percentage of these strikes was directly due to management's taking advantage of labor's no-strike pledge, refusing to bargain in good faith, and attempting to weaken or destroy the union.

After World War II

After World War I, as we have pointed out, a vicious attack was made upon the labor movement. Unions were smashed, wages were cut, hours increased. Many feared that the same pattern would be repeated in 1945 on the conclusion of World War II.

But there were important differences between the two periods. After World War I, most of the major industries were still unorganized; the government took the side of the employers during labor disputes, and most employers were bitterly and aggressively anti-union. After World War II, many employers were convinced that collective bargaining and unions were permanent institutions in this country, although many still resisted union demands with their old-time vigor.

After World War II, rising prices and loss of overtime pay ate into workers' living standards. Profits, however, remained fabulously high and many strikes were called as workers tried to get a more equitable share of the nation's increased production. The year after the war, a record was established in this country—4700 strikes involving 5 million workers. Most unions came through this critical period in good shape, winning substantial wage increases and other benefits for their members.

Labor's Fight For Social Insurance

An important development on the post-world War II collective bargaining front following World War II was labor's fight for various kinds of social insurance paid for by industry. Many unions won hospitalization, sickness and life insurance for their members, in most cases paid for by the employer. Union health centers were established supplying various kinds of medical diagnosis and treatment. Union health and welfare funds were created with many types of benefits for members.

Because of the pitifully low pensions provided under the Social Security Law (in 1949 the average worker received \$26 per month), unions demanded that industry provide pensions to supplement the social security benefits. Up until 1949, the miners' union and parts of the CIO clothing and AFL garment workers were the only major groups able to win company-paid pensions. But in 1949 great drives by the CIO Steelworkers and Auto workers decisively established the principle of this type of pension system. Many other industries followed suit. Old-timers were saying, "Now the company will have to take care of its men just like it takes care of its machines."

Labor Throws Out the Communists

The post-war period saw the decline and practically complete elimination of the influence of Communists in the labor movement.

Communists had many times proved by their actions that their first loyalty was to the Soviet dictatorship and not to the American labor movement. Because of this, workers in numerous Communist-dominated unions revolted against their leadership and threw leaders who followed the Communist line out of office.

The final blow to the Communists came in 1949 and 1950 when the CIO expelled the remaining group of Communist-controlled unions and set up new unions to take their place. Workers deserted the Communist-run union in droves to stay in the CIO. The Communists were left with a handful of small independent unions under their control and the future for Communists in the American labor movement looked black indeed.

Labor and Political Action

The most important development in the labor movement after World War II was the increased emphasis on political action and legislative activity. In 1944 the CIO formed the Political Action Committee (PAC) which planned and participated in election campaigns and got union members to register and vote. In 1947 the AFL set up a similar organization which it called Labor's League for Political Education (LLPE).

It was obvious to unions that they had to become more active politically if they were to give their members proper protection and representation. Union leaders told their members: "Politics determines how much taxes you pay, how much social security you get in your old age, what kind of education your children will get, how much unemployment insurance you receive when you are laid off; politics and politicians will decide whether there will be prosperity or depression, peace or war."

In 1947 an anti-labor Congress passed the Taft-Hartley law which crippled the Wagner Act, put many restrictions on unions, made it more difficult to organize and bargain collectively, and generally strengthened the hands of employers. Unions claimed that during a period of large unemployment the Taft-Hartley Act could be used to crush the labor movement and many independent experts agreed.

The Taft-Hartley law forced all unions to become active on the political front so that they could, among other things, get legislators who would repeal this union-weakening law. However, unions did not limit their political activity to labor legislation. They fought for civil rights, health insurance, low rent housing, more regional developments like TVA, and many other laws which helped not only labor, but the entire country.

CONCLUSION

This, then, is the story in brief of the American labor movement. As you can see, it is a story of struggle, sometimes bloody and bitter struggle. This struggle to build an American labor movement was fought by workers like you who organized unions like your own, to help get a decent life for themselves and their children.

Yesterday the labor movement fought for the very right to exist; for the right to bargain collectively with the boss. It fought against child labor, for free schools, for the right to vote, for workmen's compensation, for safety and health rules in factories. Today the labor movement is recognized as an important force in our country.

The fight for better jobs and better living continues on many fronts. It includes the battle for paid vacations and holidays, free health insurance, dismissal pay in case your job is taken by a machine, a guaranteed annual wage, adequate unemployment insurance and old age benefits, and, most important—*jobs for all*. And always there is the fight to organize the unorganized, increase wages, shorten hours. There is the fight against totalitarian dictatorship and for world peace; a fight that includes cooperation with the labor movements of other lands, and the building up of a world federation and international organizations aiming at the uprooting of the causes of war.

There has been criticism that labor unions sometimes prevent technological improvements and thus prevent progress. Economists and industrialists state that even though some workers may be tempor-



arily thrown out of work by an automatic machine, in the long run all workers will benefit because of greater production at lower prices. The unions have pointed out that everything may come out fine in the long run—but, in the short run, the workers are unemployed and their families are hungry. Unions declare that unless workers have the assurance they can get a decent job or sufficient unemployment insurance if a machine takes their job—it is hard to blame them if they worry about automatic machines which throw them out on the streets.



Of course, labor leaders and labor unions are not and have not been perfect. There have been some dishonest men and there have been racketeers. Some leaders have become dictators. There have been unnecessary and harmful jurisdictional disputes between unions.

We must remember that unions—just like corporations or banks or fraternal societies—are run by human beings, not supermen. Mistakes have been made and more will be made in the future. Dishonest men have been elected, inefficient men have been elected. Some anti-labor people have implied that all labor unions should be destroyed because of a few wrong-doers. Yet they do not suggest we abolish all government because there are crooked politicians or that we close all the banks because there are some dishonest bankers.

A recent book on the history of labor in America concludes that "on the whole, labor has a long and honorable record of community service . . . The unions represent a genuine effort in self-help made by people of the United States. They have protected their members from the ravages of insecurity and have made tremendous contributions to community welfare . . . They represent an attempt to gain security with a minimum sacrifice of individual freedom. The future of the United States is intimately bound up with the wisdom and intelligence of the members of its unions because of their great power and importance in our community . . . The unions are the only way in which the workers can meet directors of corporations . . . on terms of equality. They are particularly concerned with realizing for the community the third great freedom of the Atlantic Charter—freedom from want. They make more complete our democratic way of life by applying its principles to modern industry where men and women make a living collectively."*

You Are the Life of the Union

Where there have been cases of bad union leadership and bad unions it has frequently been due to neglect of the union by the rank and file members. As one union pamphlet explained it, "*You weaken the union when you stay away from meetings and when you let a handful of your fellow workers carry the entire burden of the union on their shoulders. Without your active support, the union is only a hollow shell, a mere shadow of its potential strength and power. With your active support, with your presence at your union meetings, you make the union breathe, you make it live, you make it a powerful instrument to help get a better life for you and your fellow workers.*"

The history of the labor movement teaches us that the workers—through their organized strength—have played and will continue to play an important part in the never-ending struggle to build —

- a better job
 - a better life
 - and a finer America.
-

This pamphlet was written by Dr. Theresa Wolfson, Associate Professor of Economics of Brooklyn College and by Joseph Glazer, Educ. Dir., United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum and Plastic Workers of America. The illustrations are by Bernard Seaman from the series "March of Labor" appearing in the HAT WORKER, publication of the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union, AFL. The manuscript was prepared under the general supervision of Harry W. Laidler, Executive Director, League for Industrial Democracy.

* Faulkner, Harold U. and Starr, Mark, *Labor in America*, p. 278.

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John Dewey at Ninety25
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Education and the Social Order—John Dewey15
Our Changing Industrial Incentives—Harry W. Laidler25
Canadians Find Security With Freedom—Prime Minister T. C. Douglas of Saskatchewan. Foreword by M. J. Coldwell, M.P.20
Labor Politics in U. S. A.—Mark Starr75
Labor Governments at Work—Harry W. Laidler20
Sweden's Labor Program—Tage Lindbom35
A Housing Program for America—Charles Abrams25
The Atomic Age—Suicide, Slavery or Social Planning—Aaron Levinstein15
Labor Looks at Education (Ingllis Harvard Lecture)—Mark Starr50
A Program for Labor and Progressives—Stuart Chase, M. J. Coldwell and others25
Canadian Progressives on the March—M. J. Coldwell, M.P.15
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Liberalism and Sovietism—Alfred Baker Lewis25
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What Price Telephones?—Norman Perelman15
Economics of Defense and Reconstruction: A Symposium by a score of speakers15
Immigration and National Welfare—Felix S. Cohen15
New Zealand's Labor Government at Work—W. B. Sutch16
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