

Will

Industrial

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Reprint of Editorial published in
One Big Union Bulletin

MAY 11th, 1922

Will Industrial Unions Suffice

Throughout the coal mining districts of Canada and America, a grim struggle is taking place between the coal companies and the miners. This is the time of the year when the need for domestic coal is at its lowest level, so that the average citizen is quite unaffected by the continuance of the strike. The daily press has not appeared over anxious to give much space to the matter, so that it is no exaggeration to say that a large number of people, probably a majority, are unaware that the coal miners of Canada and the United States are not at work, owing to a dispute with the coal owners.

It is not our intention to go into the causes of this dispute at this time. We have already carried many news items giving the facts leading up to the strike and also its progress in the various districts, but what we intend to do at this juncture is to enquire a little more deeply into the means of defense and offense possessed by the miners.

For weeks this strike has been in progress, and the inconvenience suffered by the owners has been very small indeed, while as we have already stated, the majority of people are totally unaware that the battle of endurance is taking place.

A ONE-SIDED STRUGGLE

But to the miners and their wives and children the struggle is a very real one indeed. In ordinary times the miner is not far removed from the poverty line, but when for months at a stretch there has been no pay envelope at all, his lot cannot even be imagined by those who have never felt the actual pinch of hunger and who have never had the pleasant experience of being unable to satisfy the insistent appeals for food from their own children.

And, yet, this is the twentieth century, the century of progress and enlightenment. And, yet, in spite of the progress made in every field of activity we find that a situation such as the one now existing between the coal owners and the coal miners can be calmly accepted as inevitable and a relationship allowed to exist in other industries which will produce exactly similar results.

Our friends of the Bourgeoisie and of the reactionary labor movement will hasten to agree with us, no doubt, in our above lament, and will advance the so-called remedy of Joint Councils of Industry and compulsory arbitration boards in place of the "vulgar" and "wasteful" weapon of the strike, but here, of course, we part company with them. We are not finding fault with the strike as such, but we ARE dissatisfied with the fact that the form of organization used by these workers predetermines that they shall lose, loads the dice against them and leaves them at the mercy of their masters.

DEMANDS—AND THEIR NECESSARY BACKING

Any progressive thinking worker knows that the disputes of capital and labor cannot be settled to the satisfaction of labor by the ruling of a board appointed by the master class. Even those workers who claim to believe that getting their feet under the same table with the boss and talking over the difficulty, will solve the problem, must admit that the result of that conference will depend almost entirely upon the strength that can be displayed by the workers' organizations. If this is true and we do not expect contradiction upon a point that is so obvious any form of organization which would permit a vast army of workers, in a given industry, organized practically one hundred per cent, to quietly starve to death while the

rest of the organized workers stand idly by and watch the process, is not the form of organization to gain the best of conditions for the working class or to inspire the bourgeoisie members of our arbitration boards with the necessary "respect" for our demands.

CRAFT AND INDUSTRIAL SEPARATION IS FATAL

Most thinking workers have come to the conclusion that the craft form of organization is obsolete. They have realized that the many divisions created by the craft unions are hindering the solidarity of the working class. It is plainly demonstrated that with the development of industry and its specialization processes, the craft skill is becoming superfluous and the workers are rapidly being reduced to something closely approaching homogeneity.

The obvious nature of this change has rendered its repetition almost superfluous in working class circles, but sad to say, there are still vast numbers of our class who are not well enough informed to differentiate between a real remedy and a quack substitute. Many of them, seeing the futility of craft division, cannot, however, see the equally dangerous character of industrial divisions. In this connection the past and the present struggles of the miners should be a very valuable lesson to all those who are honestly anxious to further the interests of the working class and to impart that class concept which is the necessary prelude to real class solidarity.

U. M. W. of A. HAS GREAT STRENGTH, YET CANNOT WIN.

As an industrial organization the United Mine Workers of America has no equal on

this continent and there are very few that will compare with it elsewhere. But can the United Mine Workers, in spite of its numerical strength, in spite of the indomitable spirit of its members, win the struggle against the master class? The answer is, no. And for the same reason that the craft unions cannot win, because the purely industrial form of organization cuts the workers into distinct sections, gives them sectional concepts and attempts to fight the struggle alone. Such attempts must end in failure.

There are those who will state that this utterance at this time is a preaching of defeatism. On the contrary, we hold that our duty is plain, to point the object lesson to these workers and to show them their weakness. Pure industrial unionism, one union for one industry, is NOT an efficient weapon for the working class and the advocates of such a policy will defeat themselves.

UNIONS TAKEN ONE AT A TIME AND DEFEATED

The workers in every industry on this continent have suffered wage reductions and adverse revision of working conditions and hours of labor during the last two years. Ruthlessly have the members of the master class taken advantage of economic conditions to use the whip and bring us "back to normalcy." In every industry there exist conditions which would in normal times have caused a strike a thousand times over. And in spite of this, the coal miners are on strike for more than a month, courageously, grimly playing a game of endurance, matching themselves against hunger and privation, whilst the master class sit back and laugh and the members of the unions of other industries still apply themselves to the machines of production and assist their masters to starve the miners back into the mines.

The industrial union advocates will no doubt claim that this can be overcome by affiliating the various industrial unions. This, however, is only true on paper. It has been proven conclusively that this loose affiliation is of no use in a crisis. The tragic failure of the Triple Alliance in Britain is a glaring example of the futility of this burlesque solidarity. When put to the test it failed miserably as must all such efforts fail that have not the necessary basis for class action. Certain mushroom revolutionists claim that this failure was due to the perfidy and the timidity of leaders. Not being subscribers to the great man theory we do not agree with this view. That the actions of leaders will have a strong reflex upon the rank and file there is no doubt, but the outstanding fact remains that the loose affiliation of industrial unions was not capable of producing class solidarity and the industrial concepts and divisions will stand in the way of class solidarity just as the craft divisions have done.

ONE ENEMY, ONE FRONT, ONE UNION

At the time the One Big Union came into being this point was very clearly understood by those who played a prominent part in its formation. It was stated in the conventions that industrial unions such as the United Mine Workers of America were unable to meet the needs of the workers. The need was for ONE UNION FOR ALL WORKERS, which would allow the class concept to be in evidence at all times. The ONE BIG UNION is just such an organization. For convenience in routine work the unit of the organization is composed of the workers in a given industry. This industrial unit will manage the ordinary business of that industry, but unlike the pure industrial unions, these units in the O.B.U. are an integral

part of a body that is organized geographically. Thus the delegates of the O.B.U. industrial units, meet in the Central Labor Council in each locality, delegates of all industries coming together as a class, discussing class problems as members of one organization.

With such an organization class solidarity changes from a dream to a reality. Loose affiliation without contact cannot eliminate the psychology of sectionalism. Phrasemongery and slogans do not produce a "united front," it must be done by convincing the workers of their identity of interests, a thing which cannot be done while a distinct sectionalism is fostered.

THE O.B.U. INDUSTRIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The One Big Union form of organization differs far more from the pure industrial form, than the latter does from the craft form. The industrial unionist has seen the decay of the craft but has not grasped the fundamentals of solidarity, namely, a working class viewpoint, unhampered by occupational divisions.

Under the One Big Union form of organization the isolation of an industrial section such as is taking place with the miners today would be impossible. Instead of allowing a portion of its membership to be defeated the members engaged in other industries would have a word to say on the matter. It would no longer be a laughing matter for our masters if in spite of their large stocks of coal they could not get workers to take them to their destination. Take for instance such industries as Street Railways. The industrial unionist says, build up an industrial union of Street Railway Men from coast to coast. Under this form of organization the

Street Railway Men of any city in case of a dispute are left isolated. It is of no benefit to the Street Railway Men of Winnipeg that the men employed in the same industry in Vancouver are solidly organized. What good would that do them in the event of a strike. But it does matter to the workers in that industry that the rest of the workers, in the same city are lined up in the same organization and will not scab on them in the event of a strike and will also assist them if necessity demands it. This is an important and vital necessity, a valuable weapon in the struggle which the pure industrial unionist fails to recognize or is too obstinate to accept.

BACK TO THE GREAT MAN THEORY

These distinctive structural features of the One Big Union and the great advantage the working class would derive from them; their necessity in order to equip the slave class for a militant struggle and with a united front against their enemy, was clearly understood by most of the thinkers in the movement at least in this western country. It is not without surprise, therefore, that one finds that a new political party has now been formed, allegedly revolutionary and calling itself the "Workers' Party of Canada," whose members seem to imagine that the acme of perfection in the economic field is the organization of the workers into industrial unions on the basis of one union for one industry. The fiat has gone forth from Moscow, that this must be the tactic and like true slaves receiving their ideas in the same manner as they get most of their furniture, second hand, they prepare to forget all the lessons of the past and like sheep through the hole in the fence blindly follow the bell wether.

TACT AND DISCRIMINATION NECESSARY, NOT BLIND EMULATION

No sane member of the working class would attempt to minimize or belittle the great work accomplished by our comrades in Russia. The Russian revolution has been a great beacon light which has shone to the uttermost parts of the earth and has carried hope and encouragement to the workers of every land. But much as we admire their courage and their ability to overcome colossal difficulties and obstacles, in Russia, we can scarcely be expected to admit their superior ability, to prescribe the best tactic for countries many thousands of miles away. It may be said that the conference at which this "tactic" was formulated was not Russian, but was composed of delegates from every country, but it is only necessary to point to the representation from America and also its personnel to prove conclusively that such a statement is without foundation.

We are aware that to differ with a Moscow pronunciamento, even to the extent of discussing its advisability is rank sacrilege and that our adolescent revolutionists and potential commisars will brand us as yellow and counter-revolutionary, but such is our revolutionary depravity, that we make bold to again assert that their advocacy of one union for one industry is a reactionary step and will not bring solidarity of the working class.

This solidarity can come through the building up of the One Big Union, and in spite of our enemies of both classes and our alleged friends of our own class we shall continue to show to our fellow-workers the class viewpoint and do our part in building up a movement that will function in their interest.

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