

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: A New Union

News comes from Chicago that the recent strike has given birth to the thought of organizing a new union of the working class upon a national and international basis. All previous labor organizations are to be dissolved, so runs the plan, and a fresh start taken.

That this thought should suggest itself is natural. Sad, indeed, were it if failure effected no enlightenment whatever. The first thing necessary towards discovering the right path is to find out that the one one is treading is wrong.

The private ownership of the implements of production has developed into full-fledged capitalism. While formerly, little else than the laborer's skill and strength were needed, to-day all his strength and skill are useless to him unless they are applied to the privately held tremendous steam and electric motor powers and the gigantic tools of production at present in vogue. Great as has been the development of both of these, they have not yet reached perfection. At every step, during the past 30 years especially, their progress has been marked with widespread and increasing suffering among the workers: these were thrown out of work, displaced by machinery, or their wages were lowered and their work was intensified. Under such circumstances, the union became less and less able to protect its members; the unemployed grew over the head of the employed; and strikes resulted increasingly in failures. Nor was this all, where the strike did have a chance; i.e., when through the size of the organization the work of supplying non-union hands was difficult, the government stepped in every

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time, took the side of the capitalist, and either clubbed, shot or indicted the strike to pieces.

In view of these facts, the union of the workers that expects to be successful must recognize:

1. The impossibility of obtaining a decent living while capitalism exists; the certainty of worse and worse conditions; the necessity of the abolition of the wage and capitalist systems, and their substitution by the Socialist or Co-operative Commonwealth, whereby the instruments of production shall be made the property of the whole people;

2. The necessity of conquering the public powers at the ballot box by the vote of the working class, cast independently of the old parties and in favor only of that party that demands the abolition of the wage system.

In other words, the union that aims at the preservation of the life and limbs and freedom of its members must recognize the hitherto ignored fact that politics and wages are as closely connected as the skin is with the human body; that he who would have good earnings, must aim at full earnings, and that these cannot be obtained without joining the political to the economic struggle, and fighting the capitalist class every day in the year, at the ballot box as well as in the shop. This is the programme of New Trade Unionism, outside of that there is only disastrous failure.

The present American Railway Union itself was the offspring of the reverses suffered by the old and fossilized Brotherhoods of railroaders. The Ann Arbor strike was the straw that broke the long-suffering camel's back of patience and illusion on which Superlative Arthur and his pack had been riding their men to perdition. Failure in that instance enlightened the clearer heads, and a new, in many matters of form superior, organization was launched. The experience just made by this organization, the defeat itself, has suffered, together with the impotence revealed by the national industrial organizations of the land in general, all of which, tho' sympathizing with the new A.R.U., felt unable to lend a helping hand that was

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effective, were well calculated to arouse dissatisfaction and to prompt the thought of still another reorganization.

We hail the thought. Nearly 18 months ago when the first prospectuses of the new railway union began to be foreshadowed we hailed the new organization, we repeatedly called its attention to the real defects in the old, and we urged it on to that higher ground from which alone stability and success could be expected. Unfortunately, our endeavors at the time proved vain. The real cause of the failure of the old brotherhoods did not yet seem to have been understood; the new organization preserved substantially the same fatal defects of the older ones: it ignored the wisdom of building right from the start and drilling its membership in the principles of New Trade Unionism. The disastrous result of this error was not long in being felt.

Generations ago it has been stated that the strength of an organization depends upon its aims and methods; if these be high and sound, it succeeded; if these be low and wrong, failure was inevitable.

We again call these facts to the attention of the workers as we called them to the attention of the organizers of the new A.R.U. months ago. Let the motto be "New Trade Unionism!"; let the disastrous failures of the past serve as guiding posts for the future. If ignored only suffering is in store for the toilers; if taken to heart redemption is at hand, and the century will not end without the Social Revolution has been accomplished in our land peacefully yet radically.

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