
W.Z. Foster, Back from Europe, Pins Faith on Economic Action: Labor Man Slips Quietly Into US After Months in Russia, Italy, Germany, France, England — Confident of Soviets' Success and Leadership of ACW Here.

Unsigned article in the *New York Call*, v. 14, no. 258 (Sept. 15, 1921), pp. 1-2.

William Z. Foster, one of the leaders of the steel strike in 1919, arrived in town the other day in much the same silent way he made his start for a European tour last winter. Nobody seemed to recognize him on the *Kroonland*, nobody questioned him, and the lynx-eyed ship news reporters apparently did not see his name on the passenger list.

Foster has been in Russia, Italy, Germany, France, England, and the Scandinavian countries observing European labor in the crucible of revolution and in the throes of the post-war period. He comes back more than ever convinced that in the development of the economic movement lies the greatest strength of the working class and that any political expression of the American workers must come out of the labor unions.

He still wore the same kind of a stiff, black felt hat he used as a disguise during the steel strike, but which eventually became known to steel trust agents in Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Duquesne, Braddock, and other points of interest as an infallible sign that Foster was in town. He had on a light tan raincoat that he bought in Sweden, a pair of trousers ripped across the left knee, and a pair of much-soled and mended black shoes.

In case the steel trust is still on his trail this description should help. What is more, he confided that he hoped to get back to Chicago as soon as possible and get to work writing up his experiences abroad. Detectuffs, get busy!

Over a good "kosher" meal Foster sketched the high points of his adventures. In one respect they were similar to his early days as a "lumberjack" and "blanket stiff" in the Northwest; square meals were scarce.

Before he left Moscow, where he spent much of his time, Foster gave away everything he had. "They were so terribly in need of things there," he said, he even gave away his gold watch. As he had to hurry to get away in time, he rushed out of the Continental Hotel, apparently a universal resort for labor leaders to the Foreign Office, where one of his best friends was working, to give him his watch. In his hurry he fell and tore his pants and they are not mended yet.

There are two things of which Foster remains sincerely convinced: that the Russian revolution is a success and that the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America will continue to be the leader among American labor organizations.

He remains an optimist, confident of the ultimate victory of the working class in the very near future, admitting at the same time that the world is in the trough of reaction, that the revolution has been compromised in all countries except Russia, and that even there the famine has stopped the Soviet government from at last "going over the top."

In Germany and Italy the same events that portended the revolution took place as occurred in Russia, he said, basing his observations on what workingmen had told him.

In the months of October, November, and December, 1919, in Germany, and similarly in Italy last September [1920], when the Italian workers seized the entire metallurgical industry of that country, capitalism lapse in its control of the state of industry, the bourgeoisie disappeared, crept into its hole, and only workingmen were in evidence in the streets, he said.

That was what happened in Russia and the reso-

lute Bolsheviks seized control. But in Germany and Italy, although the bourgeois elements were powerless, the workers who were ready for action were not led to revolution but were compromised, in Germany for the *Stimmrecht*, the universal secret ballot which they now enjoy under a republican form of government, and in Italy for a voice in the control of industry.

No Gain From Compromise.

In neither of these countries have the workers profited by these reformist concessions, obtained by the bargaining — Foster calls it “peddling” — policies of the veteran labor leaders, Socialist and trade unionist. In Germany, where the workers, through the Majority and the Independent Socialists, controlled the cabinet completely at one time they now control but little. In Italy their right to look into the books and records of the steel mills, advertised and hailed throughout the world after Premier Giolitti’s strategy as the great step toward “democratic control of industry,” has gained them nothing.

In Germany, despite the fact that it has the greatest potential labor movement of all with 9 million members in the unions alone and the workers thoroughly conscious of their political power, the average workman laughs when asked about the revolution, Foster said.

But the change is going on within the organizations and in each of these countries. In England as a result of the failure of the miners’ strike, in France due to the chauvinism of the labor leaders, and in Germany and Italy as a result of “peddling” policies, the workers are shuffling out the men who would not go through with it and are replacing them with men who are expected not to halt when the next favorable opportunity presents itself to topple over the capitalist system.

Foster explained at length how the Russian Soviet government, through the Communist Party, exercised a dictatorship over the trade unions as it did over every other activity of the new state, the condition in the famine area, and new tendencies among the workers in the 4 other chief European countries.

Young Workers Lack Restraint.

He spoke of some of the defects of the new leadership of European labor, one of the most serious, he said, being the lack of restraint of the younger men. He described how in Germany and Italy the workers were continually called on strike, how often at intervals of only 2 or 3 days, for Mooney, for Russia, because some leader had been assaulted, and for hundreds of trifling incidents in the course of events. The workers have struck time and again and nothing has happened. They have become tired of striking.

And yet, Foster said, in all these European countries the power of the workers is there and the rank and file is ready, if only the leadership is, to strike and assume control of industry, and Foster believes that this possibility is not remote, for, with mending times, with better harvests, with more resources at their command, the organized workers can strike more telling blows than now, when the reaction is at its height.

He had some words of advice for internal wranglers and factionalists who have destroyed the power of so many labor unions, or folly committed in the name of revolution and so forth, that will come better from the lips or the very industrious pen of the man himself.

While he met the “big guns” — Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek, Trotsky, and the like — it was with the common herd of the workers that Foster mingled while abroad, and they, he said, are “all right.”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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