

AMERICAN LABOR UNIONS

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American Labor Unions by Helen Marot

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BY A MEMBER

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PREFACE

FOR several years economists, social workers, and magazine writers have done their part to bring the labor problem, in many of its aspects, before the public for impartial consideration.

I find that the cumulative force of recent labor events has influenced some of these people to discourage the presentation of a point of view which is characterized as distinctly labor. It is not that they fail to recognize that there is a labor point of view, but that militant tendencies within the labor movement have alarmed them.

A one time friend of the labor unions, whose good services had been frequently invoked when an intermediary was needed for the settlement of a dispute between capital and labor, told me it was his opinion that the time had gone by for setting forth the labor point of view. As a friend of labor he intended, he said, to exert his energies in putting a stop to the warfare which had developed. It was not, he said, an understanding of the warfare that was needed, but a suppression.

About the same time I learned from an economist, who had given much time to the study of labor conditions, and had formerly welcomed a full presenta-

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tion of both sides, that it was a mistake to lay before the people the labor controversy as interpreted or viewed by organized labor. He took the position that there is no labor side apart from the public side, and, therefore, that there is no basis for a labor controversy. He had decided that the time had come when social reform would and should take the place of the labor movement.

This man, I realized, had become partizan,—partizan to a program,—and in his partizanship he saw no room for the presentation of other programs than those of a nature similar to his own. It happened that I, too, was partizan, but, unlike my friend, I had been partizan for many years, and I have found that clearly formulated programs presented by any large section of the community, throw light on other programs and clarify issues.

But from another point of view the partizan position my friend had taken was important. It typified the intensity of feeling which has centered around the labor movement, and was another evidence of the need of presenting the movement, in its several aspects, from the point of view of those most directly concerned.

Any one who has followed the course of the labor movement during the past five years, must realize that it is the cumulative force of recent labor events which is responsible for the intensity of outside interest. The labor problem remained academic for

those outside until the movement itself took on a more determined and militant aspect. But advocacy of pacific reform measures will not minimize interest in what the organized workers are proposing as long as the daily press reports the dramatic labor struggles which follow each other in rapid succession.

Newspaper accounts, while stimulating public curiosity, do not give an idea of the movement as a whole; the relation of its parts; the controlling thoughts back of the general movement, and the variations in principles and methods. Neither do the valuable studies of single phases of the movement, the studies which make up the literature of our labor movement in America, give a picture of the movement as a whole and the contrasting philosophies, methods, and forms of organization.

This book undertakes to give the labor union point of view of labor union policies and methods which characterize the labor organizations of national reputation. These policies and methods, even the forms of organization adopted and advocated by each, are based on certain "rights." To the workers these rights are as real and as inevitable as any of the political or religious rights claimed and secured in earlier times.

I have not tried to give the "impartial" view of these rights, as presented at times by individual workers, employers, or representatives of a general public. I have tried, rather, to express the views of each or-

ganization and their own reasons for their line of action.

In this book the labor use of terms has been followed, as well as the labor point of view. I have not, for instance, recognized the classroom distinction between the terms *capitalist* and *employer*. To labor, these terms are interchangeable. They are not so used in error or illiteracy, as it is often supposed. Like most labor terms, they are true expressions of the movements which they represent. The use of the terms "capitalist" and "employer" follows the classification in labor union policy of excluding employers from membership in the unions. With a few exceptions this distinction is made by all labor unions whether radical or conservative. From the labor union point of view it is not important that employers, through direction and management, increase production. The important point is that all employers are representatives of capital and work in its interest; their allegiance is, of necessity, to capital and not to labor. This very difference in the phraseology of labor and of the student of labor indicates an important departure in point of view.

I have used the term *labor union* not to indicate, as it often does, a mixed union, but to cover at once the industrial and trade union.

Although every subject treated in this book has been approached from the standpoint of organized labor, I have not spoken for any one of the several

groups of labor which hold opposing views as to rights and methods. I hold no special brief for the left or the right wing of the American Federation of Labor, nor for the American Federation itself as opposed to the Industrial Workers of the World, nor for the Railroad Brotherhoods, independent of the one or opposed to the other.

My object has been to interpret each one of these organizations as it interprets itself, with this difference: I have noted the criticisms made by the different groups within the labor movement of each of the others, when these criticisms deal with fundamental things. I have disregarded the differences based on personal rivalry. The criticisms made by one group of another are as much a part of the labor movement to-day as are the established principles of any one section. It is the disposition of all leaders of all organized movements to regard divisions within a movement as a sign of weakness. This is particularly true of the labor movement, whose universal aim is unity. But there are members of organized labor throughout the country who look on the criticisms and even the divisions as signs of new life and strength. They regard each group as an experiment or trial in theories and methods for the overcoming of labor's deadliest foe,—the apathy of labor itself. Viewed in this light, the factions may be a promise of approach toward an eventual unity of like interests if not a solidarity of all labor.

The total number of men, women, and children employed in gainful occupations, according to the United States census of 1909, was 29,073,233. The number of workers in each occupational group was as follows:

Agriculture	10,381,765
Professional Service	1,258,538
Domestic or Personal Service	5,580,657
Trade and Transportation	4,766,964
Manufacturing and Mechanical Pursuits	7,085,309

The President of the American Federation of Labor, before a recent hearing of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate, pointed out that the field in which the labor organizations operate is confined to the last two groups, that is, *Trade and Transportation*, and *Manufacturing and Mechanical Pursuits*, which together numbered 11,852,273 workers.

Taking no note of the members and adherents of the Industrial Workers of the World and other independent groups, he stated that the membership of the American Federation of Labor and the Railway Brotherhoods together was about 2,500,000, or 18 per cent. of the workers eligible to membership in labor organizations. If some 50,000 were added, to include the members or adherents of all other labor unions, there would still be left a large field for experimentation in the theories and methods of working class action.