

The Unification of Labor

An Interview with William Z. Foster (Federated Press)

Chicago, December 10, 1921.

Is it possible to call into existence simultaneously from 500 to 1,000 groups of trade union radicals and progressives in that many localities, to put spirit and fire into the labor movement? Can a network of such minority committees be set up throughout the entire trade unions of the United States by a series of national moves, taking one industry after another and completing the proposition in from six to eight months?

William Z. Foster, organizer of the steel workers, says that it can be done, and that it is the program now being worked out by the Trade Union Educational League. "Our plan," said he, "is one of the most important projects ever undertaken by union men in this country. In my judgment, it has far more significance for labor than even the campaign to organize the steel industry."

"We aim to unite all the radicals and progressives for a concerted drive to invigorate the old unions and to remodel them into modern union structures. All the details of our program will be explained, and the campaign itself actually started in the first issue of The Labor Herald, which will appear on February 1st, of the coming year."

"The campaign of organization will be carried out somewhat along the principles of a military drive. It is a large scale proposition in organization, such as I tried in vain to get the trade union leaders to make out of the steel campaign. Our first move will be to set up Educational Leagues of live wires in all the important trade union centers of the country at the same time. These bodies will consist of trade unionists of all trades, and will at once get busy to put some life into the local labor councils."

"We calculate that by our system of organization it will take only a month or so to put in anywhere from 200 to 800 of these local general groups. Once they are established, they will immediately set to work to carry out the second phase of our campaign, which is to organize similar Educational Leagues within the various single industries. That is, at a given signal, all the local groups in the country will, practically simultaneously, call meetings in their towns of all the live wire elements of all the local unions in a given industry, and then proceed to organize them into a group. Then these single industry groups will be put into touch with each other all over the country, thus creating a national educational group throughout their whole industry. Such a national group, for example, the one in the railroad industry, will consist of the militant elements of all the 16 unions. Having a common program, these militants will function industrially, and strive to infuse the many organizations with their own spirit. Eventually they aim to amalgamate them together into one organization."

this problem—so they bluff. Although they are a result of farm exploitation they must run true to type. Which is another way of saying that they will avoid all fundamental issues. But they do mark another advance of farmers towards economic freedom. They may set the fashion for "occupational representation." Whatever else they do they will fail to give the farmer relief. This failure will bring rural psychology a little closer to the truth—that after all there are only two occupations—those who produce wealth and those who steal it.

"Immediately a minority organization of this character is set up in one industry, the local general educational groups, which are the basis of the organizing mechanism, will turn their attention simultaneously to the organization of the next industry group all over the country. Thus, at the rate of about one industry per month, such groups will be established in the various great industrial divisions, printing trades, building trades, metal trades, etc., etc. The final result will be the thorough organization of radical and progressive sentiment throughout the entire labor movement."

"This is a big plan of organization, but I am willing to stake my standing as an organizer on its feasibility. American radicals have been talking for a long time on what they know about organization. Now we will give them a chance to see if they can translate some of this talk into practice in a large scale project."

"The beneficial effects on the trade union movement of such an organization cannot be doubted. As it is now the militants, those to whom the trade union movement carries a real message of emancipation, are disunited and demoralized. They have hardly a shred of organization anywhere. Their will does not count in the labor movement. But once they are organized and can turn their boundless energy and enthusiasm towards the upbuilding of the trade unions, we may look for the dawn of a new day for labor in this country. The organization of the Trade Union Educational League throughout the trade union movement will be an effective counter-stroke on the onslaughts now being made upon our organizations by the employing class."

Mr. Foster emphatically declared that the new movement has nothing whatever in common with dual unionism. For many years he has stood consistently against the dual union policy, claiming that the militants have greatly injured the labor movement by quitting it and forming idealistic organizations. The new movement, which has already developed powerful backing in many localities, is designed to put the trade union movement on its feet, not to break it up. It is the very reverse of dual unionism.

"Just now," said Mr. Foster, "we are establishing our preliminary communications with militant union men in the hundreds of centers where we will launch our work shortly. This is one of the more difficult phases, and all union men anxious to see labor do something real, are invited to write at once to our headquarters, 118 No. LaSalle St., Chicago."

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