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## BOOK REVIEWS

### WILLIAM GREEN RECONSTRUCTS LABOR HISTORY

*LABOR AND DEMOCRACY*, by William Green. Princeton University Press, 194 pages.

**I**N HIS new book, *Labor and Democracy*, William Green appears to have in mind two main objectives. The first is an appeal to employers to support the A. F. of L. as a solid bulwark against Communism and militant unionism. The second is to prove to labor that, within the range of its anti-radicalism and with a weather eye upon the C.I.O., the A. F. of L., or rather its leadership, is a progressive force in advancing the interests of the workers. Mr. Green's argument literally butchers American trade union history.

To support his first proposition, Mr. Green rehashes the typical A. F. of L. bureaucrats' pro-capitalistic arguments. It does not occur to him to examine the basic foundations of the capitalist system, the private ownership of industry and land and the exploitation of the toilers for profit. Green simply takes capitalism for granted, as something that is here as naturally and irrevocably as the land, sea, sky and other natural phenomena. The world may be prostrated with industrial chaos; wars may rage in Europe and the Far East; reaction may threaten the

existence of civilization; but Green, like other pro-capitalist writers, sees nothing in all this indicating the decay of the capitalist system. He glibly passes over the crisis of capitalism in decay as due to superficial causes which can readily be remedied under the present system by "forward-looking" people.

The nearest Green comes toward indicating that perhaps something may be wrong with capitalism itself is in the statement "when private enterprise cannot adjust itself to new conditions, it fails to serve the public need, places public welfare in jeopardy and becomes a deterrent force. It is then that the government must respond, assuming such measure of regulation in industry and in private enterprise as will bring the economic processes to the point where society is adequately served and protected" (p. 148). But Green carefully refrains from implementing this vague generality with proposals to restrict the sphere of private enterprise. He does not go as far as New Dealers generally have done in proposing restrictive regulations; much less does he make any proposals for municipal or government ownership, even of the mildest milk-and-water variety.

As one reads Mr. Green's shallow analysis and empty remedies for what ails present-day society and sees him thereby expose his com-

plete unawareness of the economic and class forces now in conflict on a world scale, one realizes afresh the grave unfitness of the top leaders of the A. F. of L. and how they obstruct the forward march of labor.

To establish the second general proposition of his book, that the A. F. of L. leadership is progressive, Green obviously has an impossible task on his hands. Every honest student of American labor history knows that the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, intent on its own narrow interests as a labor officialdom, has long been a stumbling block in the way of the workers' advance. Every progressive movement finds this labor officialdom in stubborn opposition. The modest progress that has been made recently in the A. F. of L.'s legislative program has been produced by rank-and-file pressure against the reactionary top leadership. Hence, Mr. Green, in his unachievable job of painting the A. F. of L. high command as progressive, has to resort to gross distortions of trade union experience. This invalidates his book as a contribution to the study of the history of American labor.

Of Green's many distortions, characteristic is the way he misrepresents the historical role of the Left wing of the labor movement. Lumping together the I.W.W., the Socialist Party (in its early years), and the Communist Party, he declares that they have exploited the workers' difficulties "in order to overthrow our present system of government, and establish a socialist state." One, of course, cannot expect the employer-minded Green to

appreciate the revolutionary educational work of the Left wing; but when he attempts to deny its long and loyal defense of the workers' immediate economic and political interests and its support to every progressive reform in the labor movement, this can only be classed as deliberate falsification of labor's history. Green crows that the A. F. of L. leadership defeated the I.W.W. and the Socialist Party (in its militant days), and he believes—a futile hope—that it has also licked the Communists.

Another gross distortion is Green's treatment of the attitude of the A. F. of L. to progressive labor legislation. He tries to portray the A. F. of L. leadership as champion of such measures as unemployment insurance and wages-and-hours laws. But the reality sticks out in trade union history like a sore thumb, that the old-line A. F. of L. leaders bitterly opposed such legislation as dangerously infringing upon the "natural functions" of the trade unions. Even as late as the Boston A. F. of L. convention of 1931, when 15,000,000 workers were unemployed, Green and his fellow leaders, in tune with the reactionary Hoover, were denouncing unemployment insurance as a deadly menace to the labor movement. It was mass pressure, largely organized by the Communist Party, that eventually forced the A. F. of L. leadership to retreat from this outrageous position.

These leaders set up similar opposition to the wages-and-hours law and to various other legislative proposals in behalf of labor until they were forced to retreat. To

clean the unsavory A. F. of L. record on these questions, Green puts much blame on Sam Gompers, while himself he portrays as a tireless advocate of social legislation who opposed Gompers on this issue. This is news to those of us who spent many years in the Federation trying to induce it to adopt a progressive policy toward social legislation. Characteristically playing down the Left-wing role, Green personally takes great credit (page 53) because he voted in 1914 for a proposed national eight-hour law, which Gompers opposed; but he conveniently forgets to mention that this bill was initiated by the Socialist Party, to which the Left wing was still affiliated, and that the Miners' Union, of which he was an official, was virtually controlled by Socialists.

Consider the way Green misrepresents the A. F. of L.'s record on industrial unionism. He blithely gives the Federation an O.K., and makes the whole thing a very simple and uncontroversial matter. He says that in 1890 the United Mine Workers of America, as an industrial union, got its charter from the A. F. of L., and that then "the Federation formulated its policy of organizing and accepting either industrial or craft union basis as circumstances and conditions might indicate that one or the other was better for a particular group"; a policy which, he says, has been followed ever since. What a caricature of reality! From its foundation, the Federation has been dominated by craft unionists, who have spared no means to prevent the development of industrial unionism, although the consolidation and trustification of

industry long ago made this type of organization literally a life-and-death question for labor. This is why a whole series of movements—I.W.W., Socialist Party, Communist Party, progressive trade unionists—fought relentlessly for more than a generation for industrial unionism, against the combined resistance of the top A. F. of L. leaders. The present-day struggle of the C.I.O. shows how necessary this fight has been. Even today the A. F. of L. craft union leaders have not been budged from their opposition to industrial unionism, as their "unity" proposals to split the C.I.O. unions according to crafts fully show.

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Green also goes to extreme lengths of misrepresentation to give the A. F. of L. leaders a progressive record in regard to the organization of the unorganized. Thus, in 1933-34, he pictures tremendous (imaginary) efforts by the A. F. of L. top officials to organize the workers in the steel, auto, rubber and other mass production industries, and the great success that, he claims, came as a result of this work. This is all hog-wash, of course. The plain facts are that the organizational work done in this period of great strikes was carried on chiefly by the spontaneous action of the workers themselves, by the organized effort of the unions which later formed the C.I.O., and by the intense activities of unions under the leadership of the Communists. As for the A. F. of L. top leaders, they were distinctly a hindrance as they have been during every progressive advance of the masses. They checked the whole

organizational campaign by calling on the workers not to strike, by trying to force the mass production workers into obsolete craft unions, by foisting upon them such reactionary leadership as that of Tighe in the steel, and Dillon in the auto industries, and by steering their movements (steel and auto notably) into government boards which cut them to pieces. It was precisely because the A. F. of L. leaders, in line with their traditional craft policy, refused to organize the unorganized masses of workers that the C.I.O. came into existence. Typically, Green, although claiming great credit for organizational activity on the part of the A. F. of L., does not even mention the decisive fact that at least 3,000,000 workers have been organized as a result of the C.I.O. campaigns.

Mr. Green makes many similar distortions of labor history, in order to prove his impossible point—that the A. F. of L. leaders are progressive. Among such distortions are his glossing over the Gompers clique's betrayal of the workers during the World War, his misrepresentation of the disastrous New Wage Policy of the Coolidge period, his ignoring the gangsterism and racketeering that has disgraced A. F. of L. official circles, etc.

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Having given the A. F. of L. leadership a progressive front, to his own satisfaction at least, especially with regard to matters of social legislation, industrial unionism, and the organization of the unorganized, Green assumes that he has destroyed any possible legitimate basis for the

existence of the C.I.O. He then proceeds to reduce the whole controversy between the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. to a matter of union "democracy." He repeats the false A. F. of L. charge that the split was precipitated because the C.I.O. unions, especially John L. Lewis personally, violated the principles of majority rule. Green's idyllic picture of the tender culture of democracy by the A. F. of L. leaders cannot fail to bring a smile to anyone who knows how autocratically ruled the A. F. of L. actually is. It is a safe bet that if there were any way by which rank-and-file members of the A. F. of L. unions could vote on the policies and leadership of their national federation, they would create an entirely new set-up. But Green and his fellow "democrats" carefully see to it that the membership will get no such chance if they can possibly prevent it.

Union officials holding office from year to year without elections or conventions; racketeers exploiting union official posts to fatten their private bank accounts; Matthew Woll acting as propagandist-in-chief in the A. F. of L. for reactionary business elements, and, without rank-and-file mandate, voting to exclude the Soviet trade unions from the Amsterdam International; Green and others echoing employers' wishes by ceaselessly carrying on a slander campaign against the U.S.S.R.—these are a few examples of the A. F. of L. Executive Council's practice of "union democracy."

Green gives a curious example of his conception of democracy by the very style of his book. Mussolini himself would hardly present the

leadership of Italian fascism more as a one-man affair than Green does that of the A. F. of L. All through the book Green talks of himself ceaselessly and of the various policies he has proposed and executed. Hardly anybody else comes into the picture, even for formal mention. Probably half his book deals with the history of the U.M.W.A.; yet, besides himself, the only other prominent labor officials named are John P. White and, of course, the chief devil, John L. Lewis. Mr. Green, in dealing with the A. F. of L., makes no mention whatever of such figures as Woll, Hutcheson, Frey, Morrison and the hundreds of other officials of the A. F. of L. and its constituent unions. Even Gompers is passed over with formal praise and a few uncomplimentary remarks.

Green presents no serious outline of demands or plan of action for organized labor. He says that democracy must be preserved and that this can be done only if the unions are fully recognized by the employers and the government. Beyond this generality he does not go. He gives us no definite economic or political program, either for the present alleviation of existing social evils or for their final abolition. He presents no plan for worker-farmer-professional political cooperation; no means whereby unemployment may be solved, reaction beaten, and peace achieved. His book constitutes a plea for the workers to continue the A. F. of L. policy of trailing behind the capitalists, accepting what few crumbs may fall from their table. It is a perspective of deepening misery and hopeless servitude

for the toiling masses. The book is an exhibition of the political bankruptcy of the A. F. of L. top leadership in these days of the profound crisis of the world capitalist system, when, as never before, it is imperative that the workers should have at the head of their unions leaders capable of understanding the interests of the working class and of fighting loyally to defend them.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

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### THE TRIUMPH OF SOCIALISM VERSUS THE FAILURE OF CAPITALISM

*TWO SYSTEMS.* By Eugene Varga.  
International Publishers, New  
York, 1939, 286 pages, \$2.00.

**T**HERE is hardly any disagreement among economists that the capitalist world is sick. Even the most orthodox bourgeois economists have to admit that there is something wrong with a system that is unable to find employment either for its equipment or its labor force. "Idle men and idle money" has become the perennial problem of both theoretical and practical capitalist economics.

Virgil Jordan, President of the National Industrial Conference Board, the research institution of Big Business in the United States, diagnoses the alarming state of ill health of American capitalism since 1929 in the following manner:

"For ten years, the strongest and richest people of the world have been standing still, or slipping backward. We have not only been growing poorer as a nation, but weaker