

# The I. W. W. and the Communists

By Earl R. Browder

ONCE holding the position of foremost exponents of revolutionary unionism, the Industrial Workers of the World have today the doubtful honor of being the only labor organization that expels Communists for their political opinions. And now, the recent convention of the "wobblies," by approving of the past administration's activities and the expulsion of Brown, Hardy, Novak, Newman, and others, has carried that organization into company with the most reactionary bureaucrats of the world's labor movement. In the American labor movement, it is the I. W. W. alone which has made it a crime against the union to advocate affiliation to the Red International of Labor Unions.

The I. W. W. has often protested against the expulsion of rebels from the trade unions, and made great arguments thereon. But few records of violent suppression of minority opinion in labor unions are more complete than that of the 'wobs' against "The Temporary Committee for Working Class Unity," formed to propagate affiliation to the R. I. L. U. after the I. W. W. had denounced that organization. The details, published in the *Unity Bulletin*, issue No. 3, leave nothing to the imagination. The story of the kidnapping of Bartell, in Detroit, by Raddock, secretary of I. U. 440, and a gang of fellow workers, and the robbery of his papers and \$213 in money, still stands unrefuted and unrebuked. The assaults upon the persons of Joe Carroll, Lorence Borzik, Walter Bates, and Mike Novak, are there recorded as typical of many others; the attack upon the members of the Unity Committee went to the length of a raid upon the home of Newman, the seizure of his desk, typewriter, money, and other personal property. Any one who said a good word for the R. I. L. U. was called a Communist and treated as an outlaw.

## Leaders of Reaction

These methods are worse than those used even by Gompers, the arch-reactionary. In the capacity of president of the A. F. of L. this bureaucrat recently excluded a union of office workers in New York because it was officered by rebels and communists. But when the *Locomotive Engineers' Journal* reported this as an exclusion of radicals, Gompers took pains to get in the record his denial that the action had any political significance. He placed the entire case upon the ground of the immediate functioning of the union, without any consideration of the radical views of those excluded. In the whole American labor movement it is only in the I. W. W. that

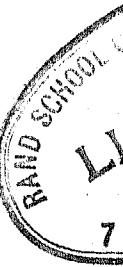
'communism' is sufficient ground for expulsion.

Not content with leading the fight upon the Red International, the I. W. W. blazed the trail later followed by Abe Cahan in the *Forward*, Jewish Socialist daily, by attacking the work of the Friends of Soviet Russia. Without the slightest evidence, they published statements that famine relief money was being diverted to other uses. But they went further than any other group has cared to follow; they physically interfered with famine relief collections, an act without parallel in this country, and only equalled in Europe by the most reactionary Governments. On Christmas evening, 1921, an entertainment was held by the Jugo-Slav members of I. U. 440, to assist the famine sufferers in Soviet Russia. This gathering was invaded by Bowerman, secretary of the I. W. W. Union, with a bodyguard, who demanded that the receipts of the entertainment be turned over to him. Not caring to make a fight, the Jugo-Slav members allowed him to get away with it. They saved some of the money for the famine stricken workers of Russia, however, by presenting bills for the services of the performers, which was later turned over to the famine fund. But the General Headquarters officials took away \$57.12 intended for Soviet Russia's sufferers.

The confiscation of the membership card of H. S. Calvert, but very recently, demonstrates that this spirit continues unabated. Calvert is an I. W. W. of some years standing, who went to Russia in 1921, and was one of those instrumental in launching the Kuzbas industrial colony project. For a year he has been working in America on that project, which has the approval of the Soviet Government of Russia. As a further demonstration of their disapproval of anything even remotely connected with the Red International, via Russia, the officials of the I. W. W. took advantage of Calvert's presence at a union meeting, where cards must be presented, to confiscate his. They did not take the trouble to prefer charges, or to hold any proceedings whatever.

## "Democracy" Gone to Seed

It has seemed to many observers that the I. W. W. was definitely setting out on the road of the anarcho-syndicalist organizations of Europe. But their recent convention has shown that there is nothing so positive even as this left in the organization. What seemed like vigorous action in that direction was only fear of the new ideas brought into the movement by the Red Inter-



national. The I. W. W. is not going anywhere. It is just drifting and decaying.

For over twenty days, from Nov. 11 to Dec. 5, the 14th Convention sat in session to do the business of not more than 15000 members. And in all that time there was hardly one clear and definite action taken. Following up their doctrine of "democracy," one side of which is their constitutional provision that officers can serve but one term, the forty delegates each spoke on every question that came before them. The nature of this "important" business is illustrated by the debates of seven days upon the officers reports, of three days on the question of remitting debts of a few hundred dollars owed to the organization by the retiring officers, and others of the same calibre.

When the appeal of the expelled communists came before the convention, however, they were quickly disposed of. Mike Novak, one of those appealing, was present and requested the floor to defend himself. He was refused, and the convention even excluded him from the hall while they considered his case. He was then told that his appeal had been referred back to the Industrial union to which he had belonged. But the official organ of the I. W. W., *Industrial Solidarity*, later stated that the expulsion had been upheld. In no other labor organization in America would it be possible to witness expulsions being confirmed without even allowing the victim to be heard in his own defense.

#### Following Gompers Internationally

In the question of international affiliation, the I. W. W. followed the examples set by Mr. Harding and Mr. Gompers. That is, it adopted a policy of isolation, prefaced according to the Harding-Gompers manner with protestations of desire for international amity and accord. The only line which means anything definite in the international resolution adopted by the convention is that which reads: "Resolved, that we do not send any delegate to any international at the present time." The leading element in the organization is favorable to Rudolph Rocker's "international" but is afraid that affiliation would cause another loss of dues-paying membership.

Typical of the general drift of the I. W. W. (and the outstanding characteristic of the organization today is the complete lack of any kind of leadership—it has merely drifted into the currents of counter-revolution) is the case of John Sandgren, a notorious anti-Russian propagandist. Everyone thought that he had been thoroughly discredited, and so he had. His name is now carefully kept in the background, but actually he is the theoretician and "intellectual" of the I. W. W. today. Whenever it is necessary to

produce a document of a theoretical nature, John Sandgren is the man called upon. He it was who wrote the recent reply of the I. W. W. to Losovsky's appeal to the rank and file of that body. Sandgren has come back, but the fact is not generally known or acknowledged.

#### Dual Unionism the Issue

The explanation of this entire course of events, the expulsion of the Communists, the attacks on Russia, the refusal to affiliate with the Red International, etc., is a simple one. The I. W. W. has gotten into its present deplorable position by its reaction of fear of the new tactics of the world revolutionary movement, of the slogan of "back to the mass unions." Based from the beginning upon the conception of dual unionism, the tactic of splitting the old unions as the beginning of building new ones, it could not understand or assimilate the R. I. L. U. tactic of solidarity, of industrial unionism through amalgamation, and the unity of all the revolutionary forces of a given country upon a common plan of action. For too long I. W. W. militants had made their organization the all-in-all, refusing to recognize the existence of anything outside of it as worthy of a moments consideration. The year of 1921-22 found them incapable of changing to meet the new epoch now opening up. As a consequence they are now definitely outside the stream of Labor's revolutionary movement.

Many alleged theoretical differences are trotted out as the reasons for opposing the R. I. L. U., but the only effective reason is to be found in the issue of dual unionism. These chronic dualists cannot bring themselves to unite with the mass unions, which they would have to do in the Red International. To prevent such a thing they bring forth the most elaborate sophistries. But if the Red International would accept their dual unionism, the I. W. W., in all likelihood, would quickly dissipate all their other objections.

When one recalls the splendid revolutionary fervor formerly animating the I. W. W., typified by such men as Ralph Chaplin and Harrison George, which made that body of men objects of admiration even on the part of those who disagreed most strenuously with their dual unionism, the present nondescript organization which bears the name made famous by former heroes appears as a tragic example of degeneracy. The reactionary poison has gotten in its work. Many militants who have hoped against hope for the past few years, that the organization would redeem itself, are now turning their faces toward the future. The dead past must bury its dead, which includes the former revolutionary spirit of the Industrial Workers of the World.