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Labor and the Nation

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Out of the agony and travail of economic America the Committee for Industrial Organization was born. To millions of Americans exploited without stint by corporate industry and socially debased beyond the understanding of the fortunate, its coming was as welcomed as the dawn to the night watcher. To a lesser group of Americans, infinitely more fortunately situated, blessed with larger quantities of the world's goods and insolent in their assumption of privilege, its coming was heralded as a harbinger of ill, sinister of purpose, of unclean methods and non-virtuous objectives. But the Committee for Industrial Organizations is here. It is now henceforth a definite instrumentality, destined greatly to influence the lives of our people and the internal and external course of the republic.

This is true only because the purposes and objectives of the Committee for Industrial Organization find economic, social, political and moral justification in the hearts of the millions who are its members and the millions more who support it. The organization and constant onward sweep of this movement exemplifies the resentment of the many toward the selfishness, greed and the neglect of the few.



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The workers of the nation were tired of waiting for corporate industry to right their economic wrongs, to alleviate their social agony and to grant them their political rights. Despairing of fair treatment, they resolved to do something for themselves. They, therefore, have organized a new labor movement, conceived within the principles of the national bill of rights and committed to the proposition that the workers are free to assemble in their own forums, voice their own grievances, declare their own hopes and contract on even terms with modern industry for the sale of their only material possession -- their labor.

The Committee for Industrial Organization has a numerical enrollment of 3,718,000 members. It has 32 affiliated national and international unions. Of this number 11 unions account for 2,765,000 members. This group is organized in the textile, auto, garment, lumber, rubber, electrical manufacturing, power, steel, coal, and transport industries. The remaining membership exists in the maritime, oil production and refining, ship building, leather, chemical, retail, meat packing, vegetable canning, metalliferous mining, miscellaneous manufacturing, agricultural labor, and service and miscellaneous industries. Some 200,000 workers are organized into 507 chartered local unions not yet attached to a national industrial union.

This record bespeaks progress. It is a development without precedent in our own country. Some of this work was accomplished with the enlightened cooperation or the tolerant acquiescence of employers who recognized that a new labor movement was being forged and who were not disposed, in any event, to flout the law of the land. On the other hand, much of this progress was made in the face of violent and deadly opposition which reached its climax in the slaughter of workers paralleling the massacres of Ludlow and Homestead.

In the steel industry, the corporations generally have accepted collective bargaining and negotiated wage agreements with the Committee for Industrial Organization. Eighty-five per cent of the industry is thus under contract and a peaceful relationship exists between the management and the workers. Written wage contracts have been negotiated with 399 steel companies covering 510,000 men. One thousand thirty-one local lodges in 700 communities have been organized.

Five of the corporations in the steel industry elected to resist collective bargaining and undertook to destroy the steel workers' union. These companies filled their plants with industrial spies, assembled depots of guns and gas bombs, established barricades, controlled their communities with armed thugs, leased the police power of cities and mobilized the military power of a state to guard them against the intrusion of collective bargaining within their plants.



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During this strike, 18 steel workers were either shot to death or had their brains clubbed out by police, or armed thugs in the pay of the steel companies. In Chicago, Mayor Kelly's police force was successful in killing ten strikers before they could escape the fury of the police, shooting eight of them in the back. One hundred sixty strikers were maimed and injured by police clubs, riot guns and gas bombs and were hospitalized. Hundreds of strikers were arrested, jailed, treated with brutality while incarcerated and harassed by succeeding litigation. None but strikers were murdered, gassed, injured, jailed, or maltreated. No one had to die except the workers who were standing for the right guaranteed them by the Congress and written in the law.

The infamous Governor Davey, of Ohio, successful in the last election because of his reiterated promises of fair treatment to labor, used the military power of the Commonwealth on the side of the Republican Steel Company and the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. Nearly half of the staggering military expenditure incident to the crushing of this strike in Ohio was borne by the federal government through the allocation of financial aid to the military establishment of the state.

The steel workers have now buried their dead, while the widows weep and watch their orphaned children become objects of public charity. The murder of these unarmed men has never been publicly rebuked by any authoritative officer of the state or federal government. Some of them, in extenuation, plead lack of jurisdiction, but murder as a crime against the moral code can always be rebuked without regard to the niceties of legalistic jurisdiction by those who profess to be the keepers of the public conscience.

Shortly after Kelly's police force in Chicago had indulged in their bloody orgy, Kelly came to Washington looking for political patronage. That patronage was forthcoming and Kelly must believe that the killing of the strikers is no liability in partisan politics.

Meanwhile, the steel puppet Davey is still Governor of Ohio, but not for long I think - not for long. The people of Ohio may be relied upon to mete our political justice to one who has betrayed his state, outraged the public conscience and besmirched the public honor.

While the men of the steel industry were going through blood and gas in defense of their rights and their homes and their families, elsewhere on the far-flung C.I.O. front the hosts of labor were advancing and intelligent and permanent progress was being made. In scores of industries plant after plant and company after company were negotiating sensible working agreements.



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The men in the steel industry who sacrificed their all were not merely aiding their fellows at home but were adding strength to the cause of their comrades in all industry. Labor was marching toward the goal of industrial democracy and contributing constructively toward a more rational arrangement of our domestic economy.

Labor does not see industrial strife. It wants peace, but a peace with justice. In the long struggle for labor's rights it has been patient and forbearing. Sabotage and destruction syndicalism have had no part in the American labor movement. Workers have kept faith in American institutions. Most of the conflicts, which have occurred have been when labor's right to live has been challenged and denied.

If there is to be peace in our industrial life let the employer recognize his obligation to his employees -- at least to the degree set forth in existing statutes. Ordinary problems affecting wages, hours, and working conditions, in most instances, will quickly respond to negotiation in the council room.

The United States Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and similar groups representing industry and financial interests, are rendering a disservice to the American people in their attempts to frustrate the organization of labor and in their refusal to accept collective bargaining as one of our economic institutions.

These groups are encouraging a systematic organization of vigilante groups to fight unionization under the sham pretext of local interests. They equip these vigilantes with tin hats, wooden clubs, gas masks and lethal weapons and train them in the arts of brutality and oppression. They bring in snoops, finks, hatchet gangs and Chowderhead Cohens to infest their plants and disturb the communities.

Fascist organizations have been launched and financed under the shabby pretext that the C.I.O. movement is communistic. The real breeders of discontent and alien doctrines of government and philosophies subversive of good citizenship are such as these who take the law into their own hands.

No tin-hat brigade of goose-stepping vigilantes or bibble-babbling mob of blackguarding and corporation paid scoundrels will prevent the onward march of labor, or divert its purpose to play its natural and rational part in the development of the economic, political and social life of our nation.



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Unionization, as opposed to communism, presupposes the relation of employment; it is based upon the wage system and it recognizes fully and unreservedly the institution of private property and the right to investment profit. It is upon the fuller development of collective bargaining, the wider expansion of the labor movement, the increased influence of labor in our national councils, that the perpetuity of our democratic institutions must largely depend.

The organized workers of America, free in their industrial life, conscious partners in production, secure in their homes and enjoying a decent standard of living, will prove the finest bulwark against the intrusion of alien doctrines of government.

Do those who have hatched this foolish cry of communism in the C.I.O. fear the increased influence of labor in our democracy? Do they fear its influence will be cast on the side of shorter hours, a better system of distributed employment, better homes for the under-privileged, social security for the aged, a fairer distribution of the national income?

Certainly the workers that are being organized want a voice in the determination of these objectives of social justice. Certainly labor wants a fairer share in the national income. Assuredly labor wants a larger participation in increased productive efficiency. Obviously the population is entitled to participate in the fruits of the genius of our men of achievement in the field of the material sciences.

Labor has suffered just as our farm population has suffered from a viciously unequal distribution of the national income. In the exploitation of both classes of workers has been the source of panic and depression, and upon the economic welfare of both rests the best assurance of a sound and permanent prosperity.

In this connection let me call attention to the propaganda which some of our industrialists are carrying on among the farmers. By pamphlets in the milk cans or attached to machinery and in countless other ways of direct and indirect approach, the farmers of the nation are being told that the increased price of farm machinery and farm supplies is due to the rising wage level brought about by the Committee for Industrial Organization. And yet it is the industrial millions of this country who constitute the substantial market for all agricultural products.

The interest of the two groups are mutually dependent. It is when the pay roll goes down that the farmer's realization is diminished, so that his loans become overdue at the bank and the arrival of the tax collector is awaited with fear. On the other hand it is the prosperity of the farmer that quickens the tempo of manufacturing activities and brings buying power to the millions of urban and industrial workers.



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As we view the years that have passed this has always been true and it becomes increasingly imperative that the farm population and the millions of workers in industry must learn to combine their strength for the attainment of mutual and desirable objectives and at the same time learn to guard themselves against the sinister propaganda of those who would divide and exploit them.

Under the banner of the Committee for Industrial Organization American labor is on the march. Its objectives today are those it had in the beginning: to strive for the unionization of our unorganized millions of workers and for the acceptance of collective bargaining as a recognized American institution.

It seeks peace with the industrial world. It seeks cooperation and mutuality of effort with the agricultural population. It would avoid strikes. It would have its rights determined under the law by the peaceful negotiations and contract relationships that are supposed to characterize American commercial life.

Until an aroused public opinion demands that employers accept that rule, labor has no recourse but to surrender its rights or struggle for their realization with its own economic power.

The objectives of this movement are not political in a partisan sense. Yet it is true that a political party which seeks the support of labor and makes pledges of good faith to labor must, in equity and good conscience, keep that faith and redeem those pledges.

The spectacle of august and dignified members of Congress, servants of the people and agents of the republic, skulking in hallways and closets, hiding their faces in a party caucus to prevent a quorum from acting upon a labor measure, is one that emphasizes the perfidy of politicians and blasts the confidence of labor's millions in politician's promises and statesmen's vows.

Labor next year cannot avoid the necessity of a political assay of the work and deeds of its so-called friends and its political beneficiaries. It must determine who are its friends in the arena of politics as elsewhere. It feels that its cause is just and that its friends should not view its struggle with neutral detachment or intone constant criticism of its activities.

Those who chant their praises of democracy but who lose no chance to drive their knives into labor's defenseless back must feel the weight of labor's woe even as its open adversaries must ever feel the thrust of labor's power.



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Labor, like Israel, has many sorrows. Its women weep for their fallen and they lament for the future of the children of the race. It ill behoves one who has supped at labor's table and who has been sheltered in labor's house to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace.

I repeat that labor seeks peace and guarantees its own loyalty, but the voice of labor, insistent upon its rights, should not be annoying to the ears of justice or offensive to the conscience of the American people.