

## BOOK REVIEWS

EDITED BY W. B. MUNRO

*Harvard University*

*History of Labour in the United States.* BY JOHN R. COMMONS, DAVID J. SAPOSS, HELEN L. SUMNER, EDWARD B. MITTELMAN, HENRY E. HOAGLAND, JOHN B. ANDREWS, SELIG PERLMAN. (New York: The Macmillan Company. Two volumes. Pp. 623, 587.)

The labor problem in the United States is one upon which it has been much easier to feel strongly than to think clearly. It is a problem upon which the partisan and the propagandist has had much to say, the scholar relatively little. The citizen or the student who has desired to approach it scientifically and dispassionately has found it no easy task to secure the facts upon which to base an intelligent judgment. Detailed studies upon special topics have not been lacking and will, it is to be hoped, continue to appear, but comprehensive and accurate data regarding the labor movement as a whole has been conspicuously absent. By supplying this great need Professor Commons and his associates have placed under a heavy obligation to themselves not only every thoughtful student of the social sciences but every other thoughtful person who wishes to have facts to serve as a background upon which to form opinions on the critical issues arising out of the present day relations of labor to capital.

The opening sentence of the first chapter accurately explains the purpose and scope of the work. It is there stated that these volumes "deal mainly with the history of labour conditions, of labour philosophies and of labour movements—not primarily with the structure or policies of labour unions, nor with the history of individual unions, nor with the legislative results of movements, nor with current problems. Their field is rather the background which explains structure, policies, results and problems." In accordance with this plan the authors have not dealt with such topics as child labor, the protection of women in industry, factory laws, the constitutionality of labor

legislation, nor any of the other questions relating to the formulation of governmental policies in respect to labor; they have dealt with the emergence of labor as a class conscious group in this country and with the efforts of that group to make itself coherent and effective for the purpose of promoting its own class interests.

These volumes are the product of coöperative scholarship. Six scholars, working together, have covered the entire field of the study, each assuming primary responsibility for a particular part thereof, but each working in coöperation with his associates as well as under the supervising direction of Professor Commons who writes the introductory chapter. This method made possible a comprehensive, unified, and painstaking study in a field of research so broad in scope as to have been in all probability beyond the capacity of a single scholar.

Professor Commons' introduction of seventeen pages gives the reader in broad lines a penetrating survey of the conditions which have influenced the labor movement, the fluctuating philosophies which have dominated it, and the features which have characterized it in the chief stages of its development. It affords the perspective and background from which to approach the closely detailed historical studies which follow.

The first section of the book, written by Mr. Saposs, is entitled "Colonial and Federal Beginnings." It occupies 140 pages and carries the history of labor to the year 1827. It is only in the latter part of this period, however, that labor begins to emerge as a distinct group in industrial society and to exhibit a semblance of class consciousness. With the development of the merchant capitalist competing vigorously in markets which had become national came heavy pressure upon the wage earner, in the form of wage reductions and the introduction of sweatshop methods of production. Here was the origin of the modern struggle between labor and capital and here also was the beginning of the efforts of the American workingman to organize for the protection of his economic interests. These early trade unions sought to maintain the standard of life of the wage earner by securing for him a minimum wage, reasonable hours, and adequate apprenticeship rules. Their methods were the strike, aided by the payment of strike benefits, coupled with insistence upon the principle of the closed shop. It was in this early period also that there occurs the first demonstration of the blighting effects of economic depression upon the life and efforts of labor organizations.

Miss Sumner deals with the period from 1827-33 under the caption, "Citizenship." This contains 163 pages, devoted to the history of the first plunge of the American workingman into politics. If the development of class consciousness during the late twenties made the wage earner aware of the legal and economic disadvantages under which he labored, the newly acquired franchise placed in his hands a means of reform. Workingmen's parties sprang up in most of the more populous centers, and those in Philadelphia and New York seemed for the moment to threaten the integrity of the older political parties. The demands of the wage earner were much the same everywhere. He demanded a ten hour day, so that he might have adequate leisure to enable him to assume intelligently the responsibilities of citizenship. He demanded free and adequate schools for his children, so that they might not fall prey to the political demagogue. He demanded mechanics' lien legislation, the reform of the compulsory militia service system, the abolition of imprisonment for debt, the simplification and publication of the laws, and the abatement of the evils of wild-cat banking. Some of these demands he succeeded in securing while the agitation for certain others did not bear fruit till later. The workingmen's parties themselves, however, did not survive, and the student of politics will examine with interest the causes of their failure. The change from industrial depression to prosperity turned the eyes of the wage earner once more to the allurements of collective bargaining. The parties were rent by dissensions, due partly to the conflicting aims and ideals of their own members and partly to the malicious encouragement of the professional politician from the outside. They suffered from their inexperience and lack of discretion in the selection of candidates, and finally they found the strength of their appeal to the voter diminished by the fact that the older parties proceeded to appropriate and support some of the more important and popular planks in their platforms.

The third epoch in the history of the labor movement extends from 1833-39 and is covered by Mr. Mittelman. This section is called "Trade Unionism" and comprises 135 pages. This period marks the transition from the old trade societies which had stressed mainly various benefit features to trade unions organized and equipped to engage actively in collective bargaining. They began as local or shop unions, but soon expanded into city central unions. They kept rigidly out of politics and confined their demands in the main to wages and hours. They undertook to prevent hasty and ill-advised strikes,

but supported financially the strikes which were sanctioned. The trade union movement during this period culminated in the formation of national trades unions the functions of which never passed beyond the stage of propaganda and advice. At least five national unions sprang up in individual trades, but this encouraging progress came abruptly and disastrously to an end with the economic and financial catastrophe of 1837.

Mr. Hoagland treats the period from 1840-60 under the title "Humanitarianism," and devotes 136 pages to the task. The panic of 1837 and the years of depression which followed destroyed the labor organizations and rendered hopeless any attempts in the direction of collective bargaining. It was easy, therefore, to lure the wage earner into schemes of speculative reform and to arouse his interest in various panaceas. The early part of this period is accordingly marked by experiments in association and coöperation. Plans of land reform were projected by agrarian reformers, and the movement for a shorter work day was pushed as a means of "making work." These humanitarian projects never succeeded in enlisting the whole-hearted support of labor, and the ventures in coöperation failed because of lack of capital and business ability as well as hostile competition from the outside. In the early fifties the skilled trades began to organize and to make attempts at collective bargaining. But the unions thus formed shortly suffered disintegration as a result of the severe economic depression. This disintegration, however, was not so complete as formerly and the nucleus for future resuscitation and development remained.

The period of "Nationalization" extended from 1860-77. Mr. Andrews is the author of this section, which is 188 pages in length. With the return of business prosperity during the Civil War trade unions began to revive. The nationalization of markets through effective means of transportation made necessary national trade unions, which brought in their wake the national organizations of employers, violent and disastrous strikes and a strengthening of the laws against conspiracy and intimidation. The trade unionism of the period was, however, weak. It aimed merely at the loose federation of autonomous unions; it lacked a national benefit system; the low dues required from members prevented the accumulation of strike funds; and finally the leaders who were capable of guiding it wisely were unable to resist the temptation to go into politics. During this period also occurs the first national labor party in the form of the National Labor Union. Working for two primary ends, the eight hour day and greenbackism,

it followed the policy of pledging the candidates of the older parties to these principles rather than putting its own candidates in the field. With the abatement of public interest in the greenback issue trade union action came once more to supplant political action in the minds of labor leaders and the National Labor Union disintegrated.

By far the longest section of the book is that covering the period since 1876, to which Mr. Perlman has given the title "Upheaval and Reorganization." To this study 342 pages are devoted. Here is to be found an accurate analysis of the beginnings of American socialism and the influence of that movement upon the principles and progress of American labor. Here also is traced the development of the rivalry which at last became so bitter between the Knights of Labor, seeking both through strikes and through political activity to further the interests of the unorganized and unskilled worker, and the American Federation of Labor, a cohesive organization of the skilled trades, relying almost exclusively upon collective bargaining and concerning itself with politics only when necessary to protect itself from legislative infringement of its freedom of economic action.

The success of the American Federation and the disintegration of the Knights afford the key to the present alignment of groups in the laboring class. The unskilled workman remains largely unorganized and is inclined to turn a sympathetic ear to the arguments and programs of the socialist, the syndicalist, the anarchist and the Industrial Workers of the World. The federated trade unions comprising in the main the skilled workers have achieved a distinct consciousness of their own interests and power; they are unwilling to weaken an organization which has so far weathered the storms of economic strife by admitting the unskilled worker, and they are also unwilling to deviate from the use of collective bargaining which has proved their most effective weapon. They refuse to ally themselves with any political party or to exert vigorous efforts to secure labor legislation. While not assuming the rôle of prophet Mr. Perlman makes this very pertinent observation: "So long as the majority of the American trade unions refuse to make labor legislation a corner stone in their program, so long as their chief concern with politics remains merely to protect their economic freedom of action, just so long will they lack an adequate incentive for forming an independent labor party." Although general tendencies since 1896 are noted in a concluding chapter of sixteen pages, the detailed treatment of the labor movement ends with that year.

So successful have the authors been in the execution of their coöperative endeavor that the reader is hardly conscious of a change in point of view or method of treatment in passing from one section to another. Elaborate documentation citing original source material gives evidence of a most scrupulous regard for historical accuracy, a virtue which is still further attested by the entire absence of anything savoring of a propagandist viewpoint, or a desire on the part of the authors to defend any particular thesis.

It can hardly be said that the book makes easy reading. The style throughout is compact to the point of dullness, which is, no doubt, the price which the authors pay for writing two volumes instead of four. The reader will find himself frequently floundering somewhat helplessly in a sea of detail, out of which he is able to emerge only with difficulty by the aid of the elaborate analytical table of contents which proves to be more descriptive than analytical. The average reader would doubtless be grateful for a summarizing paragraph at the end of each chapter with perhaps a slightly longer summary to conclude each section. The volumes are provided with a satisfactory index and an exceedingly valuable classified bibliography of nearly fifty pages.

ROBERT E. CUSHMAN.

*University of Minnesota.*

*Origin of Government.* By HUGH TAYLOR. (Oxford: Blackwell. 1919. Pp. viii, 259.)

*Die Moderne Staats-Idee.* (Deutsche, zweite vermehrte Ausgabe.) By DR. H. KRABBE. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. 1919. Pp. xi, 311.)

Dr. Taylor's little book embodies a bold attempt to formulate a new and self-sustaining theory, not only of the origin, but also of the evolution of government. In a field of supreme human interest in which from Plato's day to our own research and speculation have ever continuously been engaged in constructive effort, the author brusquely sweeps away all previous explanations as worthless and rears his edifice *ab initio* on the foundations of the Darwinian law of natural selection. "All theory with regard to the origin of government, of society, or of civilization must, as a matter of fact, start completely afresh with Darwin and the struggle for existence."

Assuming a primordial condition of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, in which the struggle for survival among individuals follows the laws