

# Green's Cash Register Tinkles

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**T**HE American Federationist may be considered the theoretical organ of the American Federation of Labor. Replete with advertisements from such bulwarks of the open shop as American Airways, Shell Oil, the fashionable Congress Hotel in Chicago, and the Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corp., the January issue gives us the new theme song of the A. F. of L. "National Recovery is every man's job. Grit, and self-sacrifice, and intelligent cooperation. . . ."

To that tune the A. F. of L. leadership has profited handsomely since July, 1933. The A. F. of L. cash register has rung up big jobs in the National Recovery administration. Green has been given a free pass into industries which had barred any form of unionism. And there has been a membership gain of between four and five hundred thousand. (Claims of over a million are not to be taken seriously.)

The huge gain in the ranks of the A. F. of L. must not be looked upon as simply the result of compulsion by employers. The first reaction of the majority of the workers to the N.R.A. was one of illusion. Section 7A seemed to guarantee their right to any form of labor organization they desired. And great sections of the workers did desire organization. They accepted the first union that came along, and the A. F. of L. came along first in most instances, enabled to do so both by its new freedom of entry and by the slowness of the more militant unions. So one cannot refer to any such thing as a "trend toward the A. F. of L.," but rather a trend toward organization. In some of the big industries, however, the whole works was handed over to the A. F. of L. officialdom on a silver platter. The reason for this, and the history of the A. F. of L., in the past six months, will come to be regarded as of major importance in the whole history of the final stage of capitalism in this country.

In the summer months of 1933, which coincided with the initial days of the N.R.A., the mining fields were torn with struggle. It was a fight directed not only against the coal operators, but against the United Mine Workers machine as well. In Central and Western

Pennsylvania the leadership of the strike movement was in the hands of insurgents like Martin Ryan. In the southwest the National Miners Union led. The tie-up between the government and the A. F. of L. soon became evident. A telephone conversation between Roosevelt and Murray, vice-president of the United Mine Workers expressed it. "Philip," said the president, "I want you to get those men back to work." "I replied to him," said Murray, "that if there was anything in God's world I could do for him, I would be glad to try." The terror and the United Mine Workers officialdom finally defeated the strike. Their reward was the coal code and contract, which handed 300,000 miners over to the United Mine Workers. The check-off system (compulsory deduction of dues for the U.M.W.A. right out of the pay envelopes) and a clause outlawing strikes were inserted to doubly insure the U.M.W.A. control.

In Brockton, Mass., the N.R.A. representative tried the same stunt. The

shoe workers there were told that they were to belong to the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, and to stand for the check-off. But 9,000 shoe workers answered the N.R.A. with a strike, and established their own independent union.

In the Chevrolet automobile plant in St. Louis, the A. F. of L. organizer reported to Green that 1,000 workers wanted to strike "and I have my hands full to hold them back." The A. F. of L. itself reported in its publications that mill owners in a number of southern towns had invited it to come in. A spontaneous, unorganized strike of 500 or so mill workers in Anniston, Ala., marked by bloody battle, ended up with the Utica Knitting Mills frantically calling for the United Textile Workers Union. The U.T.W. men came—and the strike ended. The full-fashioned hosiery workers of Reading and Philadelphia grew tired of wage cuts, and began to vote on strike action. This was all the employers needed to grant recognition to the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers, in an agreement which outlawed strikes. Previously the A. F. of L. had found the Aberle, Berkshire and other giant hosiery mills impregnable.

In the steel industry the revolutionary union got the jump on the A. F. of L. A lightning series of strikes in some of the smaller plants followed. Victories were won by the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union in McKees Rocks, a closed town, and in a number of Buffalo mills. The men in the Weirton Steel Mills in Weirton, Clarksburg and Steubenville, who had joined the Amalgamated Association (the A. F. of L. Union) struck, 15,000 strong. They picketed and fought militant battles. One morning they read in the papers that the strike had been called off by Tighe and Long, the Amalgamated Association heads, and everything left to the National Labor Board. The result today is the establishment of a company union in the Weirton works, while E. T. Weir "defies" the National Labor Board with complete impunity. As for the A. F. of L. officials, they have about given up the battle.



Ford workers in Chester struck, marched on the Edgewater, N. J., plant, and induced the workers there to strike, defying the orders of Hugh V. Reilly, A. F. of L. organizer. Reilly forbade militant tactics, induced the strikers to cancel their caravan march to Detroit, limited picketing to a few strikers. The strike was lost as a result of such dilatory tactics. Reilly stated only the other day that "further effort is useless." (Let it be noted that the Chester workers dissolved the A. F. of L. local, and mailed back their charter.)

The 5,000 shipyard workers who were out on strike until a month ago in the Robbins, Morse, Tietjen, and other drydocks in Greater New York, had recently been organized into the A. F. of L. They too fought hard. Then came a round-table conference between the union leaders and the N.R.A., in Washington. The settlement that followed gave up the right to strike; the burning question of wages and conditions was left to some future conference. Disgusted, riggers, caulkers and

carpenters in the Hoboken yards have organized an independent union.

These are typical chapters from the more recent history of the American Federation of Labor. Carte blanche into industries in order to stifle developing struggles in those industries.

There is yet another salient chapter in this history. The A. F. of L. is recognized by the N.R.A. and the government. Its leaders are given key positions in the Roosevelt administration. A Hillman directly in the N.R.A. apparatus; a Fechner in charge of the Reforestation camps; a McGrady as Assistant Secretary of Labor; a Rose Schneiderman sent to Porto Rico to give the workers there the benefits of N.R.A.'s labor sections. It points to something. As the N.R.A., and the New Deal prove greater and greater flops, the ace-card called Fascism assumes greater importance for the capitalists. The incorporation of the labor unions into the government apparatus—the "corporate trade union" idea of Mussolini, is essential under Fascism.

The incorporation of the reformist unions into the government apparatus of the United States is even now well under way.

The fight against it must be waged within the American Federation of Labor and the other conservative unions. Thousands of those who joined the A. F. of L. unions in recent months are leaving them. This is no victory for militant unionism, if they are lost track of. The examples of the great rank and file demand which resulted in the shoe workers amalgamation; the great fight developing against racketeering in the New York unions; rank and file opposition in the United Mine Workers convention, are only a few examples of crystallization of the wide current of rebellion within the A. F. of L. The organization of a national opposition center under the leadership of the A. F. of L. Rank and File Committee for Unemployment Insurance means that the battle for rank and file, honest control of the A. F. of L. is assuming larger proportions.

## 77 cents a Week for Food

JOHN STRACHEY

LONDON.

**T**HE FIRST impression made by this country upon one who returned to it this winter after an absence, can be summed up in the one word "stagnation."

On the surface all is quiet on the English front. The British capitalist class, which has become adept these fifteen months past at making the best of a desperately bad job, is busily congratulating itself on certain signs of comparative stability in its position—signs which have appeared in the last six months.

And undoubtedly from the point of view of the richest monopoly capitalists there is some improvement. But what is of course carefully suppressed is the fact that this improvement for the rich has been achieved by drastic attacks upon the standard of life of the whole of the rest of the nation. The budget has been balanced, but only by cuts in the wage scale of government servants and by swinging taxation on the necessities of

life (by way of import duties and depreciation of currency.) The position of some parts of the agricultural industry is slightly improved, but only at the cost of artificially maintaining the price of food stuffs, which would have dropped, not only by severe import duties but by the elaborate schemes for the restriction of home production which are being imposed by the Minister of Agriculture.

Thus the much vaunted British "revival" is no revival at all for the mass of the population; and even for the capitalist class itself it is but a pale shadow, not only of the overweening prosperity of the British capitalists before the war, but even of their one period of comparative stability since the war, the period from 1924-1929.

But this has not prevented an outbreak of the unparalleled smugness of the British capitalists. During the early weeks of January the British press was full of two subjects alone; "prosperity stories" about the alleged revival, and what is called "the Loch Ness Monster."

The American press has no doubt told its readers of this gigantic silly season stunt; but it must be hard for Americans to realize that the world crisis, becoming ever more threatening both in Europe and in the Far East, was for a time almost swept off the front pages of the English newspapers by this mythological appearance in the Scottish fjords.

The monster, however, has now disappeared again. The only recent mention of it was when the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, went to Leeds on the 23rd of January to open a great platform campaign designed to revive the popularity of the National Government. He was greeted by the audience with the mass cry of "Here comes the Scotch Monster."

The revolt of the British working class, at whose expense the present "revival" has been almost exclusively achieved, is, however, taking a more practical and definite form than humor at the expense of that national butt, our Prime Minister. It is significant that