

## A Letter from Mr. Gompers

ON February 28th, Mr. Gompers wrote to the New Republic as follows:

Sir: It is with considerable interest that I notice in your publication that Mr. Sidney Howard has made an investigation and is writing a series of articles upon labor espionage in industry.

The purpose of my writing is to say that I have to correct the very serious mis-statement, more than likely unintentional, that "he (Mr. Sidney Howard) tells us, also that there were A. F. of L. officials who denied that industrial espionage exists." It is inconceivable how such a statement could be made by Mr. Howard for there is nothing else better known than the wide-spread labor espionage, which is being carried on and is so persistently followed by the numerous so-called private detective agencies. Indeed, it is generally known that more than 80 per cent of the activities of all the private detective agencies is to carry on the work of labor espionage and their operators, in addition, provoke controversies between workers and employers and use it for such provocation before the workers are at all prepared to meet the situation.

Before committees of Congress and before the United States Industrial Committee I produced documentary evidence showing the ramification of this labor espionage. I published considerable of their machinations in the *American Federationist*, the official magazine of the American Federation of Labor.

I repeat that it is almost inconceivable to me how Mr. Howard could have attributed the action to any officer of the A. F. of L., and I doubt very much that he could mention the name of one.

For the reason that I do not care to have our movement placed in so questionable a position, I ask that you may see the reason for the publication of this letter in your magazine.

SAMUEL GOMPERS,

President, American Federation of Labor.

We are glad to publish this statement from Mr. Gompers and we do not wish to press the matter to a controversy. Nevertheless, the statement made by Mr. Howard is true, inconceivable as it seems to Mr. Gompers and to us. That officials of the A. F. of L. should, in more than one instance, have put Mr. Howard off with a blanket denial of knowledge of espionage is only an additional bit of evidence of the insidious work of the System. His investigation convinces us that the ramifications of industrial espionage reach farther and higher than the public suspects or, perhaps, even than Mr. Gompers himself suspects. It has undoubtedly corrupted many elements in the labor movement and created an atmosphere of suspicion which, in itself, is a most serious evil.

We can furnish Mr. Gompers with an affidavit showing that on several occasions, local and national, A. F. of L. officials denied all knowledge of espionage to Mr. Howard. We are also prepared

to supply him with information showing with reasonable certainty that, in one large industrial city, a visit paid by Mr. Howard and Mr. Dunn to the office of the Federation was reported to a detective agency by one of the union officials with whom they talked. We are also prepared to demonstrate to him that, in the course of Mr. Howard's investigation, although he carried unquestionable credentials, he was denied access to much valuable evidence on espionage which, as he knew, had been gathered by A. F. of L. unions and placed in the hands of national officials, who, in turn, denied knowledge of its existence. Indeed, since the publication of the present series of articles commenced, although these officials have shown the material in question to associates of Mr. Howard's, they have persistently refused any cooperation to his investigation.

We draw no further inferences from these facts than that made in our introduction to Mr. Howard's series, i. e. that "there were A. F. of L. officials who denied that industrial espionage exists." The statement was made, however, because Mr. Howard's experience seemed to show that in the process of destroying this poisonous institution, it will be necessary to do a certain amount of housecleaning within the A. F. of L. itself. The matter requires an intensive federal investigation conducted with the full and fearless cooperation of all trade unions. The material now being published in Mr. Howard's series establishes a *prima facie* case of such weight that no group of men interested in decent industrial relations can afford to avoid pursuing the subject to its conclusion.

The material as published is naturally limited to those incidents so conclusively established as to be incontrovertible. In the course of the investigation, however, a great mass of material was turned up, providing clues for a much more intensive investigation, such as a government body or the A. F. of L. alone is in a position to make.

## Mine Labor Moves Forward

IT is difficult to overestimate the gains that have been won through the traditional methods of the trade unions. Where general economic conditions have been favorable to rigid craft organization, decent standards of living have been established, excessive hours and inhuman speeding have been abolished. What is of even greater importance, the whole working class has found its moral position strengthened by the example of wage earners living like free men, with a voice in the determi-

nation of their own conditions of employment. Absolute and arbitrary control of industry is no longer even claimed by employers of the better sort, although two generations ago such control was generally conceived to be the necessary and salutary concomitant of an economic system based upon private property.

All this and much more we owe to the activities of the old line trade unions. It is not surprising that most of the men who have given their lives to the elaboration of methods that have thus proved successful in a high degree should cling to those methods, as the dominant faction of the American Federation of Labor is doing, and should view askance anything that looks like a radical departure from them. And yet the old tactics appear, as the economists would say, to be subject to a law of diminishing return. Railway labor, for example, is evidently caught between the nether millstone of a public that can not pay higher rates and the upper millstone of a railway management that can not reduce the amounts appropriated to interest and dividends without incurring risk of insolvency.

The only way out, short of revolutionary change, appears to be elimination of wastes, increased efficiency. Here lies a vital interest of labor, then, which is not touched by the methods of collective bargaining, conciliation, arbitration of grievances. If railway labor wishes to maintain and fortify its standard of living, it can not remain disinterested in the broader problems of the industry. It cannot merely say, Raise our wages and find the money where you can. It will have to concern itself seriously with the problem of finding the money, and by other methods besides simply charging the bill against the public.

Even more instructive is the case of the coal miners. Much has been accomplished by the United Mine Workers, but no one would be so bold as to assert that the ultimate object of unionism, a decent democratic standard of living, has been attained. Nor is the attainment of that end in sight. The gains from improved wages are lost through irregularity of employment. Although the consumer's need for coal is persistent and growing, mining labor continues to live under the regime of feast or famine, with the famine predominant. Raising wages and charging the bill to the consumer appears a less and less promising solution with the lapse of decades. If the mine worker is ever to have an assured and comfortable existence, he must win it from the wastes that now characterize the industry.

That the miners themselves understand this fundamental condition was indicated by the action

of the Cleveland convention of 1919 in adopting a program calling for the nationalization of mines, the six-hour day and the five-day week. The significance of nationalization lies in the fact that it would make possible a rational plan of production and distribution which would eliminate the colossal wastes of mines opened and operated at haphazard, with incredible loss of coal in the ground due to the inefficient mining methods, and the diversion to landowners, speculators and superfluous dealers of an excessively large proportion of the price paid by the consumer. Nationalization would make possible the continuous operation which would give employment throughout the year and reconcile the interest of the consumer in a more abundant supply of coal with the interest of the miner in a more humane working week.

The Cleveland program indicated clearly enough the sentiment of the miners' representatives. What was the sentiment of the rank and file? Did they recognize the necessity of supplementing the conventional program of collective bargaining and conciliation of grievances by a more far-reaching program involving the reorganization of the industry? No doubt many of them did. And no doubt an informal work of education has been conducted persistently by their more progressive leaders. But until recently there has not, to our knowledge, been anything like a systematic effort to get the rank and file solidly behind the movement for the reorganization of the industry, although it must be plain to everyone that without the solid backing of the rank and file the movement can not succeed.

That is what lends extraordinary significance to the recent action of the special convention of District No. 2, of the United Mine Workers, held at Du Bois, Pennsylvania, on February 22nd. District No. 2 is one of the most important in the United States. It produces fifty million tons of coal annually, of the highest grade and most essential to the supplying of American industry and trade. It is well organized, the union membership being about 43,000. That it is in an excellent strategic position for leadership is obvious. Now, at the District Convention a program was presented by President Brophy and adopted, not perfunctorily, as is so often the case with general programs, but after discussion, point by point. That program recognizes that the old policy of grievances and small demands is worn out. It has not secured "a good American life for the miner." "The miners can go on with the present policy of grievances through the rest of the twentieth century, and there will still be rate cutting and discharges and transportation troubles." "Pool the grievances in the larger program of the miners. That larger prog-

ram will cut out waste, unreasonable profits, exorbitant prices, unemployment, ill will."

But this program, the convention recognizes, "is still a paper program because it has not worked down into the miners' consciousness. The facts are not known to them. They do not daily discuss it at home and in the mine and at the local." Therefore the report proposes a campaign of education. Pamphlets are to be prepared on such subjects as the mismanagement of the coal mines, the question of profits, on what the miners' next step should be, and these pamphlets are to be distributed to the whole membership. It also proposes to form groups throughout the industry to educate themselves through discussion of such questions as nationalization, workers' control, etc. Further, it is proposed to launch a labor paper, and to employ experts to collect and order the facts of the industry.

In the days of mercenary soldiers it used to be said that those who wielded the implements of war must necessarily win control, in the end, in war and peace. The present is a time when the dominating implement of industry is knowledge, knowledge of technical processes, of economic relations, of commercial practices and requirements. The present control of industry by the employing class is based very largely upon the fact that the employer alone knows how to keep the industrial machine running, through his own faculties or through the faculties of men hired by him and assimilated to him in tastes and social standards. And if ever the employer is to be made to surrender any considerable share of the control, it will be when labor has educated itself to a general understanding of the industry, as the United Mine Workers of District No. 2 are now setting out to educate themselves.

## Dry Rot in the Civil Service

CONTRARY to popular opinion, the United States Civil Service is not made up solely of "government clerks." It contains a vast array of scientists—biologists, agriculturists, civil, electrical, hydraulic, mining, sanitary, railway, and road engineers, foresters, livestock experts, entomologists, geologists, astronomers, and specialists of every sort; a huge corps of administrators, lawyers, financiers, economists, statisticians, judges. It is these men, plus the clerks, that form the continuous, uninterrupted, highly specialized means of carrying on the enormous business of government, irrespective of party lines or changes of administration. It is they who administer the laws of the United States, who carry out the injunctions of Congress, who protect the far-flung domains of the people. All in all, they number in the neigh-

borhood of five hundred thousand employees, selected in accordance with the Civil Service laws, free from the obnoxious influence of political favoritism or partisanship. The administrative branches of the government attract many capable men who are moved by a genuine desire of public service and who are prepared to make reasonable personal sacrifices in order to serve the nation.

Even the enemies of "paternalism" will admit that the business of government, so far as it is tolerated at all, ought to be carried on efficiently, that permanent careers ought to be afforded to those who have prepared themselves for government work, that a maximum of stability in trained personnel ought to be assured. It was precisely to accomplish these things that the Civil Service was constituted on the "merit" system; and it is precisely these things that the Civil Service is in part failing, through no fault of its own, to accomplish.

A great many men and women, with years of expensive training, paid for by the people of the United States, are being driven from the government service every year. They are driven from it by a fatal policy of penury, a policy of miserly wages that compels those who have the courage to stay, to live in less than respectable poverty. If the annual turnover of Civil Service personnel due to low pay were known and properly understood by the nation that foots the bill of wasted training and interrupted service, the authors and exponents of the system would not fare well in popular opinion.

A cheap and inefficient government is highly expensive; cheap labor is always synonymous with waste and discontent and low morale. The government of the United States is rapidly drifting towards cheapness and inefficiency and all their accompanying evils.

The causes of this dry rot, which annually costs the nation a huge penalty in poor service, are a natural outgrowth of the peculiar constitution of the Civil Service. Civil servants are absolutely barred from taking part in any sort of political activity, even from sharing in a local prohibition campaign. They cannot hold office in political clubs. They are allowed to hold their own private political opinions, provided they do not express them too contentiously. The rules against political activity were aimed at the pernicious influence of the spoils system. Practically they have resulted in all but disfranchising the members of the Civil Service. In a democracy where self-protection demands political expression, half a million government workers are to all intents politically powerless.