

Mahon Surrenders to Mitten

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FOR the past several years, especially since the great defeats of 1919-22, the trade unions have been rapidly degenerating in the direction of company unionism. The decrepit, antiquated unions, manned by crooked, retreating labor leaders, have been unable to withstand the militant attacks of the capitalists. They are collapsing under the assaults of the employers. Whereupon the leaders, instead of rebuilding and strengthening the unions by amalgamating them, drawing in the unorganized, and embarking upon an aggressive policy, have thrown up the sponge altogether and plunged into a program of systematic surrender.

The leaders have given up all idea of fighting the bosses, proposing instead to "co-operate" with them by turning the unions into agencies for speeding up production. Their distinct tendency is toward the amalgamation, functionally and organizationally, of the trade unions with the company unions. In the "Workers Monthly" of January, 1926, I warned of this menacing amalgamation, as follows:

"On the employers' side it comes from the development of company unions, and on the bureaucrats' side from the degeneration of the trade unions through the B. & O. plan and other schemes of class collaboration. The tendency of these two converging lines of development is to culminate in some form of unionism between those of present day company unionism and trade unionism."

One of the latest and most significant manifestations of this tendency to degenerate and merge trade unionism into company unionism is the agreement recently reached between the leaders of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees of America and the heads of the Mitten traction interests of Philadelphia. In this agreement the union, according to the promotor of this understanding, W. Jett Lauck, "has accepted the Mitten Plan without reservation". In plain English this means that the union leadership has surrendered to the principles and practises of company unionism. Beginning in 1911, when T. E. Mitten was called in by the bosses to break the Philadelphia street carmen's strike, the so-called Mitten Plan of "co-operation" between workers and employers has been developing. It has finally resulted in the most elaborate system of company unionism in American industry. Besides a fake system of industrial democracy, or shop repre-

sentation, it has a veritable network of other class collaboration institutions, such as employee stock-buying plans, a "labor" bank, welfare work, etc. The whole system is saturated with skillfully propagated illusions about the "blessings" of worker-employer co-operation and the "futility" of all strikes by the workers against the bosses. Mitten, the founder, is one of the outstanding champions of "Capitalist Efficiency Socialism". In his statement boosting the Mitten-Mahon agreement he repeats the stupidity that if the workers would only save judiciously they "could within one generation control the entire financial structure of the country".

The essence of the Mitten Plan is to put into effect far-reaching programs of efficiency and speed-up, by means of economic terrorism (to beat back the more militant workers), petty concessions (to placate the more timid), and poisonous propaganda to demoralize the whole working force. For the workers this has developed in a system of open-shop slavery, with the disorganized workers practically helpless in the face of the powerful corporations. But for the companies the Mitten Plan has been a gold mine. Whereas in 1911 their Philadelphia properties, drowned in watered stock, loaded with parasitic debts, and encumbered with all sorts of uneconomic practises, were bankrupt, now they are rich and prosperous the envy of public utilities capitalists of the whole country.*

The Mitten-Mahon Agreement

It is this system of company unionism, so rich in profits for the employers, that the leaders of the Street Carmen's Union have accepted "without reservation."

In return, for the right to collect dues from the workers, which they hope will put their own fat salaries on a sound basis, they are going to work hand in hand to help Mitten exploit the workers more intensely. Inevitably, under such an arrangement the trade union, like any company union, becomes a part of the employer's production organization and its "leaders" degenerate into his agents for speeding up the workers and for killing all militancy among them.

But the wily Mitten, although signing on the

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* In a later issue "Labor Unity" will publish a detailed study of the working and results of the Mitten Plan.

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Street Carmen's officials as his efficiency agents and labor drivers, skillfully insists that they make good before they are given full access to the rich prize of a check-off of the workers' wages. The new "union management-co-operation" set up by the agreement does not go into effect in Philadelphia and other cities, which Mitten controls. They remain as before with purely company unions. The agreement will be applied "to properties that are to be acquired or operated by Mitten management in the future". Only if the "co-operation" is successful on these properties will the union be allowed to "organize" the street railway workers of Philadelphia and Buffalo. Failure to develop high efficiency will result in the cancellation of all agreements which only, "shall run during delivery of co-operative effectiveness".

Thus the plan of Mitten and the big capitalists associated with him is to acquire water-logged, bankrupt street car lines in various cities and then to use the leaders of the Street Carmen's Union as tools to put them on a sound financial basis through speeding-up the workers and otherwise exploiting them. Among the companies in prospect for such treatment is the notorious Interboro Rapid Transit Company of New York. What a prospect of exploitation for the workers, of guaranteed fat salaries for the union leaders, and of rich profits for the capitalists!

For the past two years the A. F. of L. leadership has been crying from the housetops that the trade unions are better instruments for speeding up the workers than are company unions. But for the most part, aside from special cases where

the unions were already established, as on the railroad, the employers have turned a deaf ear to the trade union leaders' offers to scab the company unions out of existence. The new Mitten-Mahon agreement is the first important instance where the A. F. of L. program has been adopted in an unorganized, key industry. It will make all the other salary-hungry labor leaders, whose unions because of a non-fight policy are falling to pieces before the capitalist offensive, lick their chops in the hope that the employers will also agree to maintain their company-unionized trade unions as instruments wherewith to exploit the workers.

Such agreements as the Mitten-Mahon, no-strike, speed-up pact are aimed at the very heart of trade unionism. Like the direct, open shop union-breaking campaign, they are part of the program of American Capitalism, in its period of expanding imperialism, to undermine and break up the resistance of the workers to its policy of intensified exploitation at home and world dominion abroad. The Mitten-Mahon agreement is a conspiracy against the workers, effected by the capitalists and their agents, the conservative trade union leaders.

The Mitten-Mahon agreement emphasizes the imperative need to drive the present reactionaries from control of the unions, and to revolutionize the organizations by amalgamating them and by organizing the unorganized. The union bureaucrats take no steps to stop the employers union-breaking drive, they co-operate with the employers in company-unionizing the unions. Their misleadership is leading the present trade union movement to destruction.