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DISCUSSION FOLLOWING LECTURE ON

"THE AMERICAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT"

BY

LIEUT. COLONEL JOHN P. FREY

Spec. Reserve

Q - What is the policy of the American Federation of Labor with regard to apprentices? Do you limit the number of apprentices? In a certain shop do you have to have a certain number of employees before a boy can be taken on as an apprentice?

A - That has always been the policy of the American Union and every union in the country. It is the policy of the committee on apprentice training.

Q - What is the proportion of machinists?

A - Just what it is with machinists I do not know, in my own union it is one to five journeymen. When the question comes up it is generally decided upon the individual necessities.

Q - If the establishment of trade schools or apprentice schools by industry were made obligatory on all Government contracts don't you think we would go a long way in remedying the situation?

A - Yes, it would. The vocational training which is under Federal the/office of Education exists for the purpose of doing that particular thing and provides a Federal fund for setting up these schools, but they are not for the training of apprentices - they are for the training of those already in industry - carrying the semi-skilled worker to a higher level and giving the man who is already a skilled worker some of the theory he did not get. The apprentice training exists entirely outside of the bureau of vocational training. However, they are not hostile or are not working at opposite ends.

Q - Will you say something as to the prospect of a five day week and a six hour day?

A - It is my opinion that the work day must be reduced, not because the worker is entitled to it but because it is seemingly an economic necessity. Pardon me if I go afield a bit. the United States has always exported a smaller percentage of its products than any of the other countries. From the Civil War to the World War our average was 7%. That included cotton, tobacco, etc., and during that period we had to consume 93% of what we produced or it was of no value. This country was the one in which mass production originated. It developed mechanically and electrically, and groups of engineers worked out American methods of production. These methods have been carried through our boys to the other manufacturing countries. There is no reason to believe our exports will be materially larger than in recent times so we may expect that we must consume some 94 or 95 % of what we produce. ~~xxxxxxx~~ We must be more or less self-contained. We have had six years of the depression and the number of unemployed we have depends on the way you look at it. Some say five million some say fourteen million. The American Federation of Labor which makes a research into it thinks the number should be about 11,500,000. We are supporting these people, in addition to those that are completely out of work and are part of the twenty-four million now on relief, we have perhaps three million at work on purely Government projects. This can't continue forever and unless there is some way of dividing up the work we are going to have a permanent army of unemployed, which is about as dangerous to the welfare of any country as cancer germs would be to the Army. It is an economical question that is involved; it is wages. If we are going to get

rid of the immediate problem of dividing the work so everyone will be employed, we have got to put them to work another way. A larger share of the wealthy group must come into it before we reach the stage where working hours will be subordinated to other things fully as important.

Q - Won't you tell us what is behind the Lewis-Green split in labor?

A - Certainly, the American Federation of Labor has existed for fifty years for good and sufficient reasons, certain men who were heads of their own organizations have never been given a prominent place in the American Federation of Labor because they have not been suitable and wholly disinterested, and what lies back of it is that some people who have been put off the quarterdeck come on the quarterdeck themselves.

Q - As you undoubtedly know, our present plans contemplate contact with Government and industries by war service committees. They are somewhat similar to code authorities under the N.R.A. and under these labor had representation. Do you think it advisable in war time to have labor represented on war service committees?

A - If war service committees have no representation of labor upon them, labor would be justified in being suspicious of everything they tried to do. There is only one way to get cooperation and that is to give voice to all.

Q - Can the Federation of Labor leaders control the left wing labor agitators in time of a major emergency?

A - In the first place, if Mr. Lewis and his industrial group succeed in organizing labor along those lines, the left wing would be in control. The other answer is that our experience during the World War

indicates that we can not only control them but smother them. Mr.

Gompers, who was as much a statesman as a labor leader, brought about a split in the socialist party which caused some of the men to quit the socialist party and work with the Federation of Labor.

Q - What effect has restriction on immigration had on the labor market?

A - Of course it has kept us from supporting so many more aliens. It has been helpful in that respect. It has been helpful in that it is giving us as American people a little better opportunity to absorb some of the aliens that came to us. We don't look upon the aliens just as aliens. Those who come from Northwestern Europe constitute a distinct type, as opposed to those from Southern Europe, those from the Near East are different; then the Slav constitutes a different type. We are gradually, I think, absorbing or assimilating many of those who are over here. We find that the second generation in particular drops many of the traditions and inhibitions that their parents brought with them, but they constitute a very serious problem. Those who come from any except the Northwestern Section carry age-old customs and prejudices that can't fit in with our American attitude and way of doing business because it runs contrary to their plans. They brought religious prejudices and racial prejudices just as deep as any in our own country.

Q - In that question of figuring the total unemployed in this country. There is a floating population of probably three million who were never employed.

A - There are about two or three million

Q - Then there are about 11 million in addition to that?

A - No, we have included about two million who would not be employed anyway, we have about 9,500,000.

Q - Then you figure the total employables as about 45,000,000?

A - I had the good fortune of serving on a committee on labor and we wanted to get all the data we could, so we called upon the Department of Commerce, Interior, Labor, Census of Manufactures, for their latest information as to idleness. After we had gone over these studies that way, our report was that 25% were employable. That is the latest data that can be gathered.

Q - Would it not be a good thing to have some form of central gathering of statistics so we would know where we stood? What is the attitude of labor on that?

A - We wish the gathering of statistics ~~to be~~^{were} more efficient than it is but we recognize the fact that a census taken at any one time would be prohibitive because you would have to take the census of every home in the United States and while that may be humanly possible it is practically impossible both because of the lack of census takers and the enormous amount of money such a census would require. What is done by the Government is to take samples and from a sample census of various activities they estimate the number of unemployed. The American Federation of Labor in making these estimates uses data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Labor Department. The National Industrial Conference Board is an employers' association. Many of our international unions know to a man how many unemployed they have, in every local union they know how many men were employed the previous day. That type of data is more complete

and accurate than any made by an agency the Government can provide.

Q - In the operations of the non-partisan leader, could the action of the men be more effectively controlled by contact with them in industry or by various unions

A - That is an effort on the part of a few men to control the trade union movement.

Q - What is labor's attitude on some kind of price control of commodities and perhaps control of wages during war?

A - In the last war labor was represented on the War Industries Board and on practically all of the war boards and the position taken then was that wages must keep pace with the increased cost of living, i.e., that wages must be maintained. We very seriously question the advisability of too much private profit during a national emergency and we are not the only ones of the same opinion. Something must be done in another national emergency which would prevent anything like ^{the} profit-taking that occurred because the moral effect of that is disastrous. There were a lot of young men who gave up college and business and went with the colors and they learned that some of those who stayed at home had been piling up enormous fortunes which constitute part of the national debt, they were saddled with part of the taxes that must be contributed to pay the national debt to pay for the war. Politics have entered into war contracts and I know that the general position of the Federation of Labor when expressed in convention is that the element of private profit should be eliminated as far as possible so far as everything required for the prosecution of the war is concerned.

Q - In computing the number of unemployed is an attempt made

to estimate the number of former union members who dropped membership with the coming of the depression?

A - Most of them know that; they could give you that information to the individual man. Each international union has its own method of keeping records and although they are not all kept in the same form, they all have the individual card for each member showing where he has worked, what dividends he has drawn, when suspended for non-payment. After we entered the war the Government suddenly discovered it was necessary to build a large number of ships - over night, if possible. Much of ship-building is work done by boilermakers. They wanted 3,000 A No. 1 ship-builders and they sent to the office of the boilermakers' union in Kansas City, they immediately went over these files and found that about 5,000 of them were then in France. The company was compelled to take one competent boiler maker and endeavor to train a dozen in the shipyards. That took lots of time and those men were needed here.

Q - The American Legion advocates^a compulsory service bill instead of selective service law as in the last war. Can you state the attitude of labor towards such a bill and whether it could be put into effect?

A - The American Federation of Labor is opposed to compulsory service. If private profit can be wiped out entirely and every one brought into the service for whatever work was necessary, either with the colors or in production it would be different, but the American Federation of Labor ~~xxxxxxxx~~ has never been able to agree that labor was subject to subscription so long as there was private property in connection with production of war material. In our opinion, production under voluntary labor is more satisfactory - would be more satisfactory than under compulsory

labor. We are quite convinced, from our close contact with the membership, who frequently don't agree with us, that if their right to have a voice was taken away from them they would be like a horse that you drive to water ^{which} but/won't drink. The object during a national emergency is to secure the greatest production possible and we are convinced - and human elements are such and treaties are such - that if there were conscription, instead of getting the largest amount of production possible you would get much less than that. It would be fatal to management to be handling labor that was not voluntary. An example was the difficulty we had with the transportation system in the war. To secure production you have got to have cooperation between labor and management; the less compulsion the more opportunity for cooperation.

Q - Could you give us an approximate idea of the total strength of the federation of organized labor at the present time and the men affiliated with the American Federation of Labor?

A - I think there are over 5,500,000 organized workers in the country; some four millions are affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. If you take the four railway brotherhoods - locomotive engineers, firemen, trainmen and conductors and put them in the American Federation of Labor that would be over a million men.

Q - Will you give us labor's appraisal of the N.R.A.?

A - It was a splendid purpose handled disastrously; I happened to be a member of the Labor Advisory Board so I can speak from experience. It failed in its purpose because its basic principles are unsound but very largely because some very able men were put in ⁱⁿ important positions

and some others because they knew why they were placed there.

Q - I take it that you did not mean that labor was opposed to selective service for military purposes?

A - Labor favors selective service but in an emergency the competent mechanics should not be permitted to enlist because their services are required for production. There are always a sufficient number of others to put on uniforms. It is not a matter of patriotism at all. I know that if selective service were applied there would be on the part of a large number of our mechanics but industrial production is so all-important to an army that if we are good citizens we are going to fight the war where we can be the most help, and the place for the skilled mechanics is in the manufacturing industries instead of with the colors.

Q - That brings up another point, in early mobilization voluntary recruiting will be intensified and the quotas will be filled up before the selective law would go into effect. Has labor considered any way in which the men can be kept from enlisting?

A - Yes, the enactment of legislation by Congress made after the declaration of war which will prevent enlistment of these men needed for productive purposes.

Q - Can American labor prescribe to the regimentation of both employer and employee such as Mussolini has where you have courts of arbitration?

A - The A. F. of L. has been opposed to the general practice and methods of Mussolini in Italy, Stalin in Russia and Hitler in Germany. Perhaps that system can work with some peoples, we are quite convinced it won't work with Americans. The moment you attempt to regiment Americans

then the funs begins.

Q - Are the labor provisions of the code being carried out generally by industry?

A - The reports that we received while we were meeting under the coordinator would indicate that there has been a rapid breaking away by them from the hour standards and wage standards but a number of our largest corporations have maintained the hours of their code and have maintained the approximate wages under the code. There is a difference of opinion of employers on the question. Some of them recognize the fact that the value of their investment depends on their being able to make use of it and sell goods and the only way to do that is that people have money to buy them so they are thereby increasing consumer capacity

Q - Are the school teachers' organizations of the country still affiliated with the A. F. of L.

A - There is an American Federation of School Teachers affiliated with the A. F. of L.

Q - At the beginning of your talk you spoke of the demands of labor to try to bring about a negotiated peace. Do those demands have the backing of England, ^{and} Germany, and if not, would not it be possible for labor to undermine the principles on which war was begun?

A - The German Government made use of the German trade union movement for the purpose of settling with the allied countries. The British Government was so opposed to all this that they called on President Wilson in 1918 and that is why we went over there. It was really to smoke prominent men out and compel them publicly to change

their minds, and they did.

Q - Could you give us a general idea of the program adopted by the committee on apprentice training?

A - The committee first of all had to set up certain standards. One was that an apprentice must be some young person who is now under written agreement to work as an apprentice, it must contain a provision that 144 hours each year shall be devoted to school room work under proper supervision, that the apprentice shall be paid 28% of the journeyman wage, and covering the period of apprenticeship should receive an average of 50%, it states that apprenticeship training should be a cooperative effort between employer, boards of education and labor to carry out its functions. There has been set up a committee on apprentice training. They have adopted the general policies laid down and they function exclusively through industrial committees. The Federal committee has representation of management of labor, the state committee must have equal representation of both and the industrial committee must have equal representation of management and labor.

Q - A recent speaker gave us this solution of the problem of lack of skilled workers that the foremen of the plants be educated to train apprentices, a condition which he inferred did not exist today.

A - That does not exist today and nothing would be more fatal to the training of apprentices than to divide the foreman's responsibility between production and the training of apprentices. He could not do it. Furthermore, his tendency would be to train that apprentice so he would be particularly apt in doing just the work under his supervision. The purpose is to give the boy an all-round knowledge of the arts and mysteries

of the craft.

Q - Is it possible to determine the actual number of skilled machinists today? Would it be possible to chart the approximate number?

A - Yes, that could be charted without much difficulty.

Q - What is the attitude of labor toward the situation of the Government taking over the manufacture of munitions during the war?

A - Labor favors that; labor feels that when it comes to the final fabrication of battleships, guns and carriages, etc, during a national emergency it would be better to have the Government itself as its own producer than to depend too much on private industry.