

240

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CONTROLLED LABOR

by

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241

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Colonel Jordan and Gentlemen

It is my intention of speak to you extemporaneously. On previous occasions when I have had the privilege of addressing the classes at The Army Industrial College I have endeavored to analyze the structure of the American trade union movement and give the reasons why the American Federation of Labor had adopted certain policies. I did this so that the officers might have a better understanding of just what the structure of the American Federation of Labor was and how it endeavors to function. This made it possible to give an outline of the successive steps taken by the American Federation of Labor on the question of national defense so that the officers would know what the American trade union had in mind in their attitude toward national defense and specifically their attitude toward military authorities. This morning I am not in a position to do that because certain changes have been taking place abroad, and in our own country, which lead me to feel that it would be more advantageous to you to touch upon what is taking place at home and abroad so far as labor movements are concerned. I have no title for my remarks, but I think they might fall under the caption of "Controlled Labor" because labor always has been controlled and the type has had very much to do with the type of control.

I am not going back beyond our own lifetime to talk of labor control but rather call your attention to certain types of labor control which, I am sure, you are all more or less familiar with. Previous to the World War there was a voluntary trades union movement in Russia, that is, workmen of their own free will and accord, believing it would be to their interest, had organized trade unions. They were not national in their character because the industrial centers of Russia were far apart, so they were more of a local or regional character. There was a trade union movement of the Urals or of that section; there was a trade union which had its center in St. Petersburg, there was another one which had its center in Moscow. They were as anxious as any Russians, I presume, for a more satisfactory form of government but they did believe in the principle of free, voluntary labor organizations as compared with compulsory labor organization of any type. I knew some of their leaders personally, corresponded with them. One of the first steps taken after the

Bolshevik revolution was the assassination of practically all the chief officers of these three groups of organized Russian mechanics. There were two or three who managed to escape, and I had the privilege of talking with them in England shortly afterward. So what there had been of a voluntary labor movement, with somewhat the same objective as the trade union movement in other countries, was utterly uprooted. The leaders were killed, and a new form of labor organization was established. The Bolsheviks set up some thirteen national unions and compelled every worker to be a member of the appropriate union of the industry in which he was employed, so they became controlled. They were no longer free organizations. They were organizations composed of men who were compelled to belong to them whether they desired to or not. It was compulsory labor organization as contrasted with voluntary.

In Italy there has been a degree of voluntary trade union organization. It has been infiltrated, however, with political ideas and social and economic theories, and you are all aware of what took place in Italy as a result of this condition not long after the War. The workers, dissatisfied with their conditions, began to strike. The strikes were not successful. They then said "The difficulty is that our strikes are not sufficiently effective", so they took the next step and took possession of the plants. After they had taken possession of some of the largest metal manufacturing establishments in northern Italy (it centered with Milano as the focal point) they then undertook to carry on production themselves. In other words, they carried out to a certain extent the theory which was being advocated in Russia at that time. As a result of these seizures of plants and endeavors to produce as a voluntary group, a condition was created in Italy and in the public mind which more or less opened the way for the first step which Mussolini took to establish a dictatorship. His Black Shirts were opposed to this industrial condition. They attacked, and it was a man to man encounter in many of these industrial plants, until finally the Black Shirts were able to overcome the opposition. This one labor tactic seemed to do more to pave the way for the beginning of Mussolini's seizure of control than any other condition which existed.

In Germany they had as intelligently managed a trade union movement as in any country. My contact with them convinced me that they were more thorough going in their efforts to understand their own problems. They gave more time to self education. Shortly after the War they carried into effect a program which they had started previous to 1914, and

84

three of the leading German universities set up special courses for trade union officials in economics, in general history, in the evolution of industry, and in the law so far as it applied to labor. Officers of the unions were compelled to take these courses. There was rapidly developing among the officials of the German trade union movement a knowledge which perhaps gave them an advantage over the trade union officials of any other country. They were getting for six weeks every year a definite training under the ablest professors that the universities could supply. That was a voluntary trade union movement, it was not a controlled one. You may recall, and I am sure you do as I mention it, that at one time this voluntary trade union movement threatened a general strike to prevent the destruction of their republic, that is, the republic which had been established, because they felt that their entire future welfare depended upon maintaining free democratic self governing principles and policies in Germany. When the Hitler regime came into power they saw in this voluntary trade union movement the most serious menace to central government control. Their first practical step was to set the hour and the minute when the Nazi representatives would enter every local and national trade union office in Germany, seize all of the records, which included the list of the membership and their home addresses, seize their books, and confiscate the funds. At that time a number of the national trade union leaders were shot. The movement was completely destroyed. There was no place in which the membership could meet, and as the list of membership and their addresses had been confiscated there was no way by which those who had been officers and were still desirous of carrying on their movement could communicate with the others even in the same city. After this coup by Hitler the rights of the voluntary trade union movement in Germany passed out of existence and there has been a control labor movement ever since.

The French have not had the same experience as Russia, Italy, and Germany. Their trades union movement has grown with exceeding rapidity, and for one of the causes which it will be necessary to bring up before this morning is over. The trade union movement, finding itself handicapped by the employer attitude and by governmental attitude, tried to force the issue last summer and so we had in the French industries in the textiles and the iron works in the northern part of France and in Paris itself, a large number of sit down strikes, the feature of which was that the strikers did not remain seated during working hours but that they took possession of the plants and tried to hold them. In the beginning the government endeavored to secure an adjustment of these strikes and they

were partly successful. As the sit down strikers were able to secure governmental assistance in bringing about an adjustment of the grievances which they believed they had, it inspired workers in other industries to do likewise, and although the Premier of France, Mr. Blum, was the head of the most friendly government to labor that France has ever had, he was compelled to use the force of the government to make these sit down strikes no longer possible.

With this brief background, I think we can move to our own country and examine what has been taking place here, and I do it with only two purposes one, to make it clear to those who may have heard me before why this morning I am not presenting the same subject which I have in years gone by, the other, to call your attention to the rapid developments that have taken place in the field of labor during the last two years or so. Changes always must take place - they take place with you. The man who was a Cavalry officer, proud of his horse, only a few years ago now encloses himself in a tank and directs maneuvers with fast moving objects that do not have to be fed oats. And you are prepared all of the time for these changes. You know that the weapons used in 1916-17-18 have been replaced by others which are quite different. Changes are taking place in equipment, changes are taking place in explosives, changes are taking place in everything that you have to deal with. We know that change is a necessary part of life. If there was no change of any kind taking place we probably would all stop living very shortly. We hold that changes, if they are normal, and no one can describe just what normal is, that take place normally constitute evolution, that is, the evolutionary process and when changes become so rapid that they cause confusion and dislocation then we are apt to term that condition revolution. If a change is so rapid as to bring entirely new methods and purposes into existence, if an industrial change is of such a character that it becomes manifestly dislocating, then perhaps we are passing through a period of industrial revolution, not necessarily revolution in the sense of marching men and deliberate armed conflict but none-the-less revolution.

This change which is taking place and which will vitally affect both branches of national defense just as it will industry, as it will methods and purposes which we will continue to have as Americans, is something which came because of something else. For a moment let me point out that the American trade union movement grew up under almost every difficulty that could be imposed upon it. In the beginning those who built up the American Federation of Labor were looked upon as dangerous, as

most Americans look upon the professional communist today, and so employers were opposed to their employees becoming members of the unions which compose the American Federation of Labor. The courts, in their construction of the law, seemingly gave more consideration to property rights than they did to the human rights of those who became involved in an industrial dispute. It is not difficult to understand why the courts should protect property rights because most of the law we have is intended to protect certain rights, including property rights. So the unions in the American Federation of Labor were without friends in high quarters, were without support from the courts for what they felt their rights should be, and they had the very active hostility of those who were large as well as small employers of labor. I think I need only call your attention to the testimony that has been brought out before the La Follette Committee recently to convince you that since the war many thousands of professional private detectives have been used for the specific purpose of destroying or preventing trade unionism from existing in the plants of many of our large corporations. The effect of all of this has been that the American Federation of Labor never had more than four million five hundred thousand members, and they represented perhaps at the height not over fifteen, eighteen, or twenty per cent of those who were properly organized into trade unions. The charge was also made against the American Federation of Labor that this failure to organize more workers was an evidence of incompetency.

Those workers who were not organized, particularly those in the manufacturing industries, felt resentment against the impositions that were placed upon them. When they saw men discharged because they had talked organization to their fellow workers and nothing done to protect them, they wanted to save their own jobs and so they were more careful in what they said to fellow workers, but down in their hearts there was a growing resentment toward a condition where they were not even able to enjoy free association with their fellow workers for the purpose of discussing industrial relations with their employer. Therefore, we have had, particularly since the War, a growing dissatisfaction in the minds of a large number of workers over what seemed to them to be an unjust industrial condition. They were controlled labor, they were controlled because of the employers' hostility to the existence of trade unions, they were controlled because of the extensive espionage systems which the employers had established in their plants by employing representatives of the so-called private detective associations. So the field was ripe in our country, particularly since the War, for those who held

communists saw their opportunities of disturbing, destroying this American idea of free institutions and self government. They carried with them the same fatalistic, fanatical belief in the rights of a militant minority to shape events as applied in Russia. The American trade union movement, because it has placed its entire faith on the democratic principle, the necessity, not the right alone but the necessity, of those who are members of the union determining in the end what the local and national policy should be, having a free choice of selecting their own officers, being the ones in convention to determine what the rules and regulations should be, what dues they should pay, what the policy of the organization should be, resented the things first, the theory of communism and then this dangerous doctrine of the militant minority, the minority seizing control and determining for the majority what they should do. And so the American Federation of Labor, as time passed, became more and more careful in avoiding a growth of communistic ideas within the trade union movement, until some years ago the majority of the international unions made it a part of their constitution, or their policy, that any member found to be a communist would be expelled from the organization, and furthermore, when it came into the convention of the American Federation of Labor it was decided that no delegate from a local union who was sent to a Labor Council or State Federation of Labor could be seated by those bodies if he was a member of the Communist Party.

The position of the American Federation of Labor on this question of minority rule has been very definitely established. However, communism has now secured a very strong hold in the new trade union movement which is growing up. They have been able to do that because one of the characteristics of communist policy has been to scrap anything which did not work. Another outstanding quality has been obedience to rules. Where you ally yourself with a group and pledge yourself to be governed by the authorities in that group and accept the doctrine of the militant minority as the rule to go by, you then carry out orders without questioning because they are the orders from superiors and the superiors are those who are the ones in control of the policy which the minority attempts to force upon the majority.

The communists understand, better than any one else, that their hope for success in any country depends first upon capturing the trade union movement or a large section of it,

and so in this country, particularly after the war, they made active efforts to secure internal control of the trades union movement. They called their policy "Boring from Within", they called their program "The Organizing of Cells", which meant a little group of communists organizing cells inside of local unions and organizing cells inside of industrial establishments. Finding that that policy was not working rapidly enough, they organized what was called "The Trades Union Unity League". William G. Foster was the organizer. This league was to be an educational arm of the Communist Party in this country. It was to work among members of trades unions. Its entire purpose was to carry the "boring from within" policy several stages in advance of what it has been, and they applied this method for some five or six years. It ended about two years ago. It ended because Moscow, studying the progress made here, had found that the Trade Union Unity League was making no headway, and they were practical enough when they found that a tactic did not bring results to scrap it, and it was scrapped. One of the happy conditions where a minority are in control is that a few people can get together, decide on a policy, issue the orders, and everybody else unquestioningly must carry them into effect.

An angle of what has developed here and created what is growing a serious problem was applied first in Europe. Communists found in their efforts to build up communism in other countries so much resistance, and progress so greatly handicapped that they looked around for a new way by which they could make more rapid progress, and so they applied a program or a policy which has gone under two names one is "Popular Front" and the other is "United Front". It compelled communist groups and the communist organizers to abandon all former tactics and to combine with what they called "The Forward Looking Groups" in the country, the more radical, the more revolutionary groups that might have developed, and then to bring into these groups those with the best of intentions and with no practical experience in the affairs of life, (and I do not want to use the term "professional reformer" because that really isn't adequate) these other groups who have been more favored all through their lives than the majority and who feel that something has been done, and to bring these groups together so they would all work for a common purpose, the communist being convinced that with the type of organization he had built up, if he had the opportunity of getting into federations no matter how loosely formed of these other groups, he would be in a position to dominate policy and eventually to seize control. That was the condition we were in in the winter of 1935.

For a while there was growing dissatisfaction in the American trade union movement. There were groups who believed that progress was not as rapid as it should be, who believed that the policies which had been built up as a result of years of experience might have been justified then, but were no longer adequate to meet existing industrial conditions. It was known, after our convention in San Francisco in 1934, that there was a growing division among the leaders of the American Federation of Labor and that some of them, principally Mr. John L. Lewis, were determined to have certain changes made, and it was with this knowledge in mind that the Communist Party in this country sent representatives over to Russia to discuss coming industrial changes in the United States. As a result, again they showed their willingness to scrap every program they had, and in the winter of 1935 the Communist Party in this country, with the approval of the representatives of Moscow, scrapped their entire program in the United States. They insisted that from now on the progress of building up a communist party must be laid on the shelf and revealed only for window dressing purposes; that the program of the United Front or the Popular Front must now be applied in the United States. One of their instructions here was that every communist, that is, member of the party, must immediately join the union of the industry, in which he was employed, that he was no longer to attack the American Federation of Labor, that he was no longer to advocate communism, but as a member of the union was to advocate but two things: first, the necessity for the so-called vertical type of labor organization, and, secondly, the necessity of organizing a labor party, in which, of course, the communist hoped to get control. Before the C.I.O. came into existence as a reality the Communist Party in this country had already scrapped its previous program and adopted one which would enable it to work hand in hand with the C.I.O. Now it should be stated, and I do so as emphatically as I can, that probably no officer in the American trade union movement was more opposed to communism as a theory, or as it had been applied, than Mr. Lewis. The communists had almost wrecked the United Mine Workers at one time. Mr. Lewis had a study made in 1924 showing from official records the methods by which communists had endeavored to seize the United Mine Workers and use it as a wedge for the introduction of communism on a large scale in our country. He knew the character of the communist leaders in this country and for years he had done everything he could to prevent their making any headway. I am not in his confidence since the convention of the American Federation of Labor in 1935 because at that time I did what lay in my power to show that the program he was advocating inside of the trade union movement was inconsistent and that he himself was inconsistent. I doubt whether my arguments influenced the delegates very much but they voted that way anyway, and so

Mr. Lewis looks upon me probably as a man whom he no longer cares to have in his confidence. However, I am convinced, although he has not talked to me about it, that in the beginning of his drive some fourteen months ago he was as fearful of the communist infiltration in the C. I. O. as I am of the communist infiltration in our trade union movement, but circumstances, which govern us to such a great extent, made it impossible for him to prevent their infiltration. They were even more thoughtful and better planners than he was, because understanding that he would endeavor to organize steel they had set up headquarters for organizing steel in Pittsburgh and in Chicago four months before the Lewis steel organizing campaign was set into motion. They were there, they had been talking to the steel workers. Many of these steel workers looked with more favor on the general communist program than they did upon the institutions of our country, which is not surprising because so many of them are, or so many of their fathers come, from those European countries where not only labor but the citizenship had been oppressed for many, many centuries. And so the communists began to organize. In the recent conference of General Organizers of the American Federation of Labor held in this city last week, I gave to them a list of some fifty-five members of the Communist Party, a number of whom were district organizers of the Communist Party, one of whom is a member of the central committee of the Communist Party, all of whom at the present time are on the payroll of Mr. Lewis' organization. So now we have for the first time in our country communism thoroughly infiltrated into one portion of an American trade union movement, and therein lies one of the most difficult problems which any trades union movement has ever had to deal with, a problem in its political potentialities which is the gravest one, in my opinion, which our country has ever been compelled to face, because this movement which Mr. Lewis has started, and which it is quite evident he can no longer control, has something farther than an industrial motive. It has a very definite political objective. It is the intention of the communists, it is the intention of a very large number of Americans who are not communists but who have been influenced by this development under the C. I. O., to organize a political party which should be a labor party and which this time will be an effective labor party because it will have the means of financing itself - I need only call your attention to the six hundred thousand dollars that were contributed by the United Mine Workers Union, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the Organized Clothing Workers Union to the last political campaign. The Congressional Committee on Elections has given these figures. We now have a new industrial technique being applied in our country in dealing with employers, we have perhaps, let me say, a novel point of view manifested by some authorities as to these new methods,

we have a press which has given very much encouragement to this new leadership, and we shall have in the very near future, unless this movement disintegrates because of its own weight, a political party based on new ideas to any we have ever had in our country, with a financial basis which no other labor party has ever had except the British Labor Party for a few years - the ability to collect through control of militant minorities so much weekly dues from every member for political purposes.

I do not want you to think that, having pictured a somewhat serious condition, the leaders in the American trade union movement are alarmed to the extent of being jittery. I do not want you to feel that there is any thought on their part of abandoning the position they have always maintained. I think most of them enlisted for the duration of the war, that they put up their flag, and there they are going to stand so long as they live, but there is this added danger and I see it quite clearly: the industrial tactics which we have seen applied within the last month or six weeks, the attitude of public executives, the action taken by the court and the inability of the courts and the officers of the law to carry out legal decisions because executives say for the time being it will make the condition worse, has led to a very rapid increase of this new policy being applied by the C.I.O. It has been our experience as a people that when any popular movement moves very rapidly and swings so far that the pendulum is almost certain to swing the other way. Because the mass of this country has absorbed certain thoughts concerning personal liberty and free institution, which they may not be able to define clearly if they are suddenly called upon to do so, but which is a part of their life and their attitude and their relationship to everybody in the community, there will be rising objections. You have already seen it - already a couple of United States Senators have felt called upon to mention this condition which I am referring to. There will be more of that. There may come a demand for restrictive legislation, and then we will face another danger that in order to have legislation sufficiently complete to prevent these excesses which we are now witnessing the legislation will be so complete that it will make it difficult and perhaps impossible for a legitimate trade union movement, such as that that has been built up under the American Federation of Labor, to function satisfactorily.

I have taken up more time than I should, you may have noticed that I did not use any notes this morning. I did not

847

want to. Perhaps for that reason my remarks have not been as connected as they otherwise would have been but I have talked to you as a man would talk to you who had been on the firing line for a long time and knew just what was taking place there and endeavored, not from his emotions but from his knowledge of what was occurring on the firing line, to make those who were not present have a better understanding of the situation.