

Rail Labor Paper Needs Progressive Track

By WM. Z. FOSTER

Labor, the official national organ of the score of railroad unions, which boasts a weekly circulation of 750,000, is now celebrating its 25th anniversary. But from the workers' standpoint there is not much to celebrate, as over the years the paper has not too well fulfilled its stewardship. It has disappointed the hopes of the progressive forces which gave it birth a quarter of a century ago, and it has long since degenerated into a house organ of the most conservative elements of the railroad craft union leadership.



When Labor was born, in 1919, the railroad workers, then the most progressive section of American labor, were in the midst of a great forward movement. The unions, after a generation of uphill struggle, had spread, during the war, like wildfire over the vast network of American railroads.

This numerical strengthening was accompanied by the formation of local, system, regional and national federations among the many

unions, and the movement was leading to the establishment of a single federation of the entire body of railroad workers. The railroad unions' program, in addition to its many other progressive planks, called for government ownership of the railroads and provided for united political action by the workers, farmers, and other democratic masses. This great postwar political movement, led by the railroad unions, culminated in the Presidential candidacy of LaFollette in 1924.

DIDN'T COME THROUGH

The railroad journal, Labor, was created in the midst of these stirring events and was an essential part of them. The active trade unionists who backed the paper throughout the thousands of railroad unions and worked for it in season and out, were sure that, in launching a central organ for the more than 2,000,000 railroaders, the most strategically situated body of workers in the United States, they were developing the most powerful newspaper the American working class had ever known. But Labor did not live up to these fervid expectations. Except for its first four or five years, it has been quite undistinguished for its progressivism.

During the great 1922 railroad shopmen's strike, whose loss cost the railroad union several hundred thousand members and crippled their organization for 15 years, Labor, untrue to the solidarity spirit which had originally created it, was anything but a crusader against the fatal policy of the Brotherhood leaders who kept the running trades at work while the companies wiped out the shopmen's unions. And when, during the Coolidge-Harding "prosperity" period from 1923 to 1929, the railroad unions fell victims to the illusions of labor banking (which eventually cost the union workers about \$12,000,000 in lost funds), and the B. & O. speed-up plan (which took all the fighting spirit out of the unions and reduced them to impotency), Labor went right along with the whole reactionary development.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The stand of Labor during the recent presidential election likewise showed how far that paper falls short of giving the railroad workers real leadership. The great body of the workers on the railroads, anywhere from 70 percent to 90 percent of them, realized the need of supporting Roosevelt. They understood that Roosevelt was win-

ning this great war in which the very existence of our country has been at stake; they understood the fact also, that arraigned against Roosevelt were the united reactionaries, pro-fascists and union-smashers. They knew, finally, that it was only under Roosevelt's New Deal that the railroad unions, shattered by many years of misleadership, were finally able to pull themselves together again and to be a solid protection to the workers' interests. So the men and women who operate our railroads went all-out for Roosevelt and were a real factor in his reelection.

But not "their" paper, Labor. For reasons best known only to themselves and to the Dewey elements in the upper ranks of labor officialdom, the editors of Labor, saturated with LaFollette isolationism and a hate-Roosevelt spirit, did not give any endorsement whatever to Roosevelt. On the contrary, all through the campaign they kept up a sneaking, sniping attack against him. They were a real help to Dewey, the candidate of reaction. And to make matters worse, Labor endorsed a list of candidates for Congress which contained many of the worst isolationists and war saboteurs in this country, including such names as Fish, Nye, Danaher, Maas, Day, etc. And when the people of the country, disregarding the advice of Labor, reelected Roosevelt and threw into the discard a big bunch of Labor's favorite reactionaries, that paper came out with a loud squawk after the election, bemoaning that such "reliable friends" of the workers as Senators Danaher, Nye and Davis had been defeated. Not a word of hopefulness or satisfaction did Labor have to say editorially upon the reelection of Roosevelt.

In the AFL, as in the CIO, there are numerous progressive labor papers. But there are also many AFL, railroad and miners papers that pursue a reactionary line such as that of Labor. These latter papers will have to learn that they are living in a new day. Our people are fighting to win this war, to wipe out fascism, to establish a solid postwar peace organization, and to work for world economic prosperity, and they are supporting the Roosevelt Administration to these ends.

It would be well for Labor, then, in its 25th anniversary year, after blushing for its shameful course in the elections, to refresh itself in the great progressive tradition that gave it birth and then get into step with the mass of the railroad workers, by giving hearty support to the Roosevelt Administration.

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