

# Who's "Red" -- and Why?

By MARTIN ABERN

"The American worker is not class-conscious; he's hopeless; the foreign worker is the one who understands that he is a wage-slave and why he is one". Such remarks, or similar ones, have no doubt been heard by many. And the "radical" or "revolutionist" who utters these words feels that he has said all there is to be said on the subject, and he is discouraged and hopeless over the future of the workers. "The American workers will never wake up, anyhow, so what is the use of wasting our energy?" And discouraged by the apathy of the American workers, many of these "revolutionists," leave the revolutionary movement, and thereafter content themselves with criticism of the movement, what ever be its value, or with an "I told you so" attitude.

Now let us grant, for argument's sake, that the European worker is class-conscious and that the American worker is capitalistically minded. Like in many other things, there is truth in the statement, yet it is not entirely true. If the American worker is not conscious of his class interests, it is not sufficient merely to say so, but it is necessary to know why this is so. To declare that "he won't wake up", is to say, virtually, that the American worker is so differently constituted that under political, economic, social, etc. factors similar to those of the European workers, he will not react towards them in a manner indetical with the foreign workers. Certainly such a belief would appear as ridiculous and puerile to the merest tyro in social theories. So let us dismiss that proposition from our discussion.

We must view conditions and ideas historically and objectively. We cannot separate a particular phenomen from those that surround and effect it and then fancy that we can understand that phenomenon correctly. We must proceed from a certain set of facts, correlate them properly to arrive at a sound conclusion.

Is not the American worker class conscious and if not, is there no hope that he will become so? And if the foreign workers are class conscious, why are they so?

In the American Revolutionary wars of 1776 and 1812, the American bourgeoisie class freed itself from the British ruling class, and in particular, from the British commercial and trading land owning interests. And freed from interference by the

British land-owning and trading class, the rising American bourgeoisie started out on the road of developing American capitalism and establishing firm political and economic power for themselves. Unlike the bourgeoisie of the European countries, the American commercial interests did not have to engage in a struggle for power with a feudal ruling class. Easily overcoming the Indians, with the aid, before American independence was obtained, of European powers, and, of course, the small working class colonists, the American bourgeoisie could set themselves to the task of developing and exploiting the vast virgin natural resources of America. But wage-labor was, comparatively, scarce. Hence, the worker could demand a high wage, relatively. Moreover, lands were wide and many. Where there is plentiful free land to be exploited, the worker can not be gotten so easily to work for another for wages. Rather, he goes "back to the land" himself. And so with these lands and the natural resources upon and within them fairly begging to be used, the workers were at first "independent". There was, in a sense, equality of economic opportunity for all. This was the period when the developing bourgeoisie required that individual enterprise and initiative. And despite the fact that the constitution so cleverly framed, by the "fathers of our country", that it meant a continual concentration of the wealth, land, and resources into fewer and fewer hands, and that, actually, it handed over political power firmly into the hands of the capitalist class, still the economic conditions of the time resulted in the workers receiving some semblance of civil and political rights. In that way arose that American "spirit of independence", "every man has an equal chance in this country" and those other perfumed nostrums. The psychology of the oppressed was not very strong, if there was any at all, in the American worker. These men had come "to God's country", to "freedom's country" from monarchically ruled Europe. In this "land of golden opportunity", could a class consciousness among the workers prevail? Not very strongly at that time.

Now let us take the European worker immigrating to America in recent years. Why does he think differently, comparatively, from the native wage-slave? And is he, therefore, to be accepted as the thinking worker and the American as the eternal ninny? When the foreign worker comes to these

shores, he comes with an inheritance. For hundreds of years back, the class conflict idea has been strongly ingrained in him. This struggle has been real, cruel, tyrannical. From the days of slavery, the hundreds of years of feudal enslavement, and then the deadly system of capitalism, the European worker has felt the lash, the club, the bullet, the scourge of poverty, an ever-increasing misery. One does not have to tell him that there is a class struggle; he has felt its stings and torments too keenly for that. Power for the working class is his aim. And when he comes to America, he retains his class-consciousness. He is not easily fooled by the sham forms of democracy. He can not help but think in terms of the class struggle, of an exploited worker. And because circumstances—his terrible struggles for hundreds of years—have made him understand and to think unlike the American worker who has lived for years under other political and economic conditions, does he deserve any special commendation therefore and the American worker, on the contrary, derision and contempt? No to both. As before, the proper answer or question is not: he is, but why is he?

As the political, economic and social conditions change, a corresponding change in the mental processes or ways of thinking will result in the American worker. After the Civil War, American capitalism developed at an enormous rate. Means of transportation and communication increased swiftly. Railroads spread themselves everywhere, the telegraph made communication simple. Iron ore production jumped tremendously. Steel and iron were needed in ever greater quantities. Inventions in all lines of production came about. Lands were no longer as free to the mass of the population as in former years. Theirs was coming to be plainly the lot of the wage-slave. And with this change in economic circumstances, there was something of a change in the American workers. The formation of the Knights of Labor is an indication of the changing thought in the American worker. He began to feel the need of organization. And crude tho the conception of organization was, that he had, still, it was encouraging. Men develop with conditions, not ahead of them. And old ideologies are not destroyed at once, even tho the economic and political factors producing those ideas in the past, have been destroyed. Some rubbish yet manages to cling after the garbage can has been emptied. In this wise, could we show the steady development of the consciousness of the American worker in the various periods of capitalist development. But that would take too long and is unnecessary for our purpose.

Let us just now briefly view the World War, the

epoch of imperialism and with it the rise of America to one of the greatest, if not the greatest, imperialist power in the world. Has the American worker learned anything thereby? Yes, tho during the war, he failed miserably again. The press jingoism was too strong for him—yet. He retained the illusions of democracy—yet. This was still the “land of freedom”. Ideas drilled into him so many years back, ideas which no longer fitted the clothes of American capitalism, clung to him. The past weighs heavily upon all.

But the needs of imperialism compel it to strip from its back even those cheap colored clothes spotted with perfume, which give imperialism, to the worker, the “odor of sanctity”. Imperialist capitalism strips bare. The veils of “democracy” are tossed aside one by one. This painted beauty is now revealed in all her ugliness and dripping sore spots. The poisons were seeping thru the clothes all the while. Her foulness becoming obvious, she no longer makes pretenses as to beauty and cleanliness. Snarling, this naked beast, capitalism, now strikes out openly at those worshippers, the workers, who would now destroy this shattered idol... Conscription, “work or fight”, criminal syndicalism and espionage laws, the destruction of virtually all “civil rights”. So this is “democracy”! Glad to know what you are. Charmed to be rid of you.... Unemployment, open shop, longer hours, starvation wages, use of the soldiers, gunmen and thugs against striking workers, anti-strike laws and Industrial arbitration laws—so this is what we “fought the war for democracy” for!—well, well, a little warring for ourselves might not be out of place now. Thank you for the lesson you taught us.

The reaction to all of that is taking place in the minds of the American worker. Inarticulate quite often, not exactly sure of what is needed, groping here and there, stumbling, but nevertheless going forward, the American worker, is sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly, learning that there is a class struggle. And he is learning in the daily battles how best to fight and whom to fight. Capitalism and the capitalist state, he is finding out, are his enemies. These must be overcome if hell is not to be his eternal working place. The European workers learned the lessons from experiences, from daily struggle. And the American worker is doing likewise. He learns no less swiftly than the foreign worker. The foreign worker had hundreds of years start on him, but the intense exploitation and oppression of American capitalism results in the American worker making some rapid jumps and runs.

*(Continued on Page 13)*

# Who's "Red" -- and Why?

*(Continued from Page 10)*

So it seems that there is no need of lamentation and discouragement. The foreign and American worker are the same—exploited workers. And if the foreign worker knows that he is so, the American worker is coming rapidly to know that he is also. Time will make the American working class revolutionary in thought, desires and action. Meanwhile, away with the easily discouraged "radicals" and "revolutionists". As well as we can, let us be on to the task of educating and organizing the workers. The road thru hell, thru capitalism, is hard, but we must pass thru it if we would get to the bonny fields of communism. Slow tho it be, yet ours is the task.