

# "What is the I. W. W.?"

BY F. J. McNEY.

**D**URING the last year or so two pamphlets have been issued by the Industrial Workers of the World, both of which throw considerable light on the organization. That is, they propound and illuminate a great problem, but do not by any means solve it, although it appears to have been the aim of the publishers to do so.

One of the pamphlets has for its title the question: "What is the I. W. W.?" and the pamphlet, apparently, is an attempt to answer the question propounded. It is, we are told, "A Candid Statement of its Principles, Objects and Methods." The other pamphlet is entitled, "The Lumber Industry and its Workers."

As both pamphlets are published in Chicago at the headquarters of the organization, 1001 West Madison Street, we may consider them official and authentic documents and, consequently, while criticizing certain statements made therein, we cannot be accused of holding the organization responsible for statements made by members who are not thoroughly conversant with its aims and principles.

Before proceeding with our criticism, however, we must give credit where credit is due and admit that the I. W. W. has discarded a few of its worst fallacies. For instance sabotage is not once mentioned in either of the pamphlets, so we may assume that when Bill Haywood migrated to Russia he took the wooden shoe along with him. Also, we are advised to keep out of jail if possible; that is a great improvement on the old slogan "fill the jails." Furthermore, the I. W. W. has at last realized the fact that working class education is the great need at present and that there is no short-cut "across to the bread basket." It admits that any attempt to organize the workers for their emancipation while they do not yet understand their class position is foredoomed to failure.

These changes in the policy of the organization are very good and are to be commended, but, on the other hand, there are a number of old fallacies to which the I. W. W. still adheres as well as a few new ones it has attached recently some of which we will examine as we go along, and we do not have to read very far in the above mentioned pamphlets before we find something worthy of examination. In the pamphlet entitled, "What is the I. W. W.?" on pages three and four we find the following astonishing statement:—

"The I. W. W. has absolutely nothing to do with political revolution or with political action of any kind, as you will easily understand when you have read further. We do not ask a man what his politics are no more than we ask him what his religion is or what the color of his skin is. That does not interest us. In fact, so disinterested are we, as an organization, in political, religious or race problems that we prohibit all such propaganda within our organization, as tending to distract attention from our objects and conducive to strife and disruption."

There you are. You may talk to the ghosts with Lodge and Doyle, or wait till the spirit moves you with the Quakers. You may bathe in the holy water with the Roman Catholics, or in the blood of Jesus with the Salvation Army. You may roll with the Holy Rollers, or howl "Good Lord deliver us" with the Episcopelians. You may be a liberal or a conservative, a democrat or a republican. You may vote for the man who keeps us out of war or for the man who kicks us into war and still be a member in good standing of the I. W. W. All of which is, no doubt, a wise and necessary policy for any union, craft or industrial, but how any organization composed of individuals holding such reactionary and superstitious views and opinions can imagine itself to be revolutionary is a mystery to me, and how such an organization, for fear of strife and disruption, can prohibit all propaganda, and must, for the same reason prohibit all discus-

sion and criticism of religion and politics, and still at the same time consider itself an educational organization is "The Riddle of the Universe."

It must be pointed out before going any further that this haste and anxiety to build up a large and powerful labor organization, and to try to keep it together by the prohibition of all discussion and criticism of religion, politics or anything else that may have a tendency to disrupt it, is opportunism pure and simple. The same old reef that wrecked the whole fleet of Socialist parties known as the Second International. Opportunism, mark you, not the fact that they were political organizations. Evidently Nicholas Lenin knew what he was talking about when he said that Syndicalism was the twin brother of opportunism, for the American I. W. W. admits the fact that it is a near relation to the Syndicalist movement in other countries.

With regard to the attempt made to draw a parallel between a man's religion, or his politics, and the color of his skin, it is the worst kind of bunk. A man may be a revolutionist no matter what the color of his skin is, but it is not logical to suppose that a worker who is an adherent of any of the above mentioned religious sects or political parties can, at the same time, be a revolutionist. When a worker thoroughly understands his class position he does not believe in nor support any brand of superstition, and he certainly will not support any political party of the capitalist class.

On page 14 of the same pamphlet we find a few definitions which are interesting to say the least, so it may be well to examine them at some length. Here we are informed that:—

"Political or indirect action is that kind of action which the workers use when they seek to attain their object by securing influence over or control of the governmental machinery. Such action may consist of ballots, lobbying, bribery, so-called mass action, bullets and political revolution. These are all means of political action. The I. W. W. rejects all these methods of attaining the aims described above."

"Economic or direct action is that kind of action which the workers use when they seek to attain their object by securing control of the place of work, the factory, the mill, the shop."

"Direct action is such action as you use when you try to improve your conditions by acting in person, jointly with your fellows on the industrial field."

"Indirect action is such action as you use when you hire or elect representatives to improve your conditions."

It will be noted in the first place that political action and indirect action are here considered synonymous terms, that is, they are supposed to mean one and the same thing. Likewise economic action and direct action. Now if the words political and indirect mean the same thing on the one hand, and the words economic and direct mean the same thing on the other hand, why is it necessary to use the words direct and indirect at all, and why is it necessary to give them separate definitions after political and economic action have already been defined? Again, it will be noted that these definitions explain nothing if we except the definition of political action alone, which covers the point in a kind of a way but does not make it clear by any means.

In the definition of political action we are told, among other things, that "bullets and political revolution," are means of political action. We are further informed that the I. W. W. reject all such methods. If the phrase "bullets and political revolution," means anything as a definition in this respect, it means the application of armed force, which certainly is the main and basic form of political action. If, therefore, the working class cannot emancipate itself without the use of armed force it is doomed to wage slavery forever, for the I. W. W. reject all such methods. This pacific attitude is a new one for the I. W. W., and appears to have been swiped from the Socialist Labor Party.

As I have already pointed out, the above definitions explain little or nothing, so, instead of criticizing them I will give my own definitions of the terms mentioned, and my reasons for defining them so. To begin with, we must understand that action of any kind is a result of the application of some power. The first thing to be considered, then, is how the meaning of the word power is limited, or modified, by the addition of another word known as an adjective.

Now, when we use an adjective to describe or qualify the noun power, it means one of two things; it either refers to the manner in which the power is generated, or it describes the purpose for which it is applied, regardless of how it is generated. It is obvious, therefore, that the adjectives economic and political, used in connection with the noun power, refer to the purpose for which the power is applied. Economic power, then, is power applied for an economic purpose. But what is an economic purpose? We find that the word economic is an adjective, relating to the noun economics, which the dictionary tells us is the name of "the science that investigates the conditions and laws affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, or the material means of satisfying human desires."

Consequently, economic power must be the power to produce wealth. The power of man over nature. The power of man, individually or collectively to transform nature given material into things fit for human consumption.

Economic action is the result of the application of power to the natural resources of the earth for the purpose of producing wealth: The action necessary to the whole process of economic production and exchange. If this is not economic action, what kind of action is it?

Political power, is, the power to govern: The power of man over man: The power used by one class to keep another class in subjection.

Political action, on the part of the capitalists, as far as the workers are concerned, is any action they consider necessary (yes, even "lobbying and bribery"), to maintain their position as a ruling and exploiting class.

Political action, on the part of the workers is any action they may find necessary (yes, even "bullets and political revolution") to overthrow the political power of the capitalist class. To establish a proletarian dictatorship, or something of that nature, and maintain it until all danger of counter-revolution is past and until all the means of wealth production, now the property of the capitalist class, have been transformed into social means of production, to be operated in the interests of the whole people.

If the term "direct action" means anything at all it means efficient action. The easiest, quickest, the most efficient, or the only way to accomplish any purpose, no matter what that purpose may be. This applies to both political and economic action. The most efficient or the only possible economic action is "direct action," even though indirect methods must be used. Likewise, the most efficient or the only possible political action is also "direct action," even though indirect methods must be used. When this is understood, the term "direct action," taken by itself, has little or no meaning; it is superfluous, a confusing and unnecessary term.

If the term "indirect action" means anything at all it means "direct action." This statement appears paradoxical does it not? Let us see how it works out. It will be granted by every revolutionist that our aim is to abolish wage slavery. Well, why don't we fly at it? The I. W. W. gives the answer to this question on page 23 of the same pamphlet.

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