
Special News from France

by William Z. Foster

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Note.— *The author of these articles from France is a member of Spokane Local, IWW. He was arrested in the Spokane free speech fight while standing on the public sidewalk, and served a sentence in the jail. While in jail with other members of the IWW, he became convinced that the future was for the industrial revolutionary organization, and he immediately joined on his release. Up to the time of his arrest he was a reporter for a socialist paper in Seattle, and was reporting the free speech fight for the **Seattle Socialist** when arrested. Fellow Worker Foster has gone abroad for the purpose of studying the European labor movement in all its phases. He is earning his way with manual labor and is getting no remuneration whatever for the valuable articles which he so kindly supplies the readers of the *Industrial Worker* with. May we have some more Fosters of the same type.*

—Ed. [Fred W. Heslewood]

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During the past year there have been several important strikes in the building trades in Paris. These strikes have been largely failures.

One example of these failures is the plumbers', plumbers' helpers, roofers', etc. strike of a couple months ago. After an eight weeks struggle, 15,000 of these underpaid slaves were starved back to work, only a few of them securing concessions of any kind. On resuming their work, they declared that Act No. 2 of the strikes was about to commence, as they were going to systematically *sabote* their work. This was also the also the statement of the defeated masons, some several months previous. How well these promises have been kept may be judged from the following circular, which was sent to 38,000 of the principal capitalists of Paris:

Since 1906, under the impulsion of the CGT [Confédération générale du travail], strikes have followed one another without interruption in the building industry. During this period not **one building** has been erected without delays, which operated to the detriment of all concerned. To these strikes, **sabotage of material and labor** has been added and the cost of building has been **raised** without anyone profiting in the least therefrom.

The exercise of our professions has become almost impossible. This evil, far from abating, is **continually increasing**, and on Oct. 20 [1910] at the **union hall** of the organized workers, it was decided upon by a motion to **apply more than ever this system of sabotage and boycott**.

Until the present the contractors have fought this evil alone, but it will [be] evident to you that the landlords and architects should also aid in this **defense of property**.

In the presence of this **common danger** the defense must be **organized** and the responsibilities **shared in common**.

With this object in view there will be a large **private meeting** held Nov. 15, at 5 pm, in Cirque de Paris, Avenue de Lamotte Piquette, under the auspices of the Associated Building Contractors and Employers in various industries.

Then follows about 20 signatures of this legalized band of thieves.

In answer to this invitation, some 5,000 capitalists gathered and discussed the burning question of the *dangerous tactics* of the CGT. The *dangerous leaders* of this “anarchist” organization were given an severe verbal flaying. What a compliment to the French movement to have its “leaders” labeled *dangerous*, and they were threatened with all manner of boycotts and persecutions.

The President of the gathering proposed to form an organization of all the landlords, architects, etc., of Paris on the same lines as those of the admirable CGT’s, so that when the workers decided on a general movement the employers would be in a position to combat it by a general lockout, a proof of the fact that simply by carrying on an intense campaign of education the militants of the French labor movement have force the working class organizations to *develop more rapidly* than the capitalist class organizations.

Just the opposite is the case in the United States. The capitalist there who would attempt to form an organization patterned on the lines of the AF of L would be considered worthy of being *transported to the bug-house*.

Whilst the general audience was attentively listening to hot air and passing resolutions threatening the begrudged life of the CGT, a

committee of a few of the faithful and trusted capitalists was doing the real business behind closed doors. It is stated by revolutionists in a position to secure such information that a general lockout in the building trades of Paris is being planned for next spring, it being hoped that by a sever starving the workers in the building trades will be forced to give up their harassing tactics of *sabotage of material and labor*. Whether this theory is true or not it is evident that there will be something doing shortly and *that something* will be aimed to add to the widespread attempt to break up the CGT.

This meeting possesses a deep significance. It demonstrates that “*saboters*,” the hitherto almost invincible contractors, are finding foemen worth of their steel. The old, pure and simple *starve-me-to-death* strike was an easy matter for them to handle, but the never-ending, *costly, insidious sabotage* is a different proposition. This meeting marks an *epoch* in the development of *working class tactics*. The French workers are coming to realize (and to act accordingly) that the way to fight the boss is to *put a crimp in his pocketbook*, regardless of the means employed. They are learning the valuable lesson that capitalist property is not *sacred*, but that it is simply *stolen goods*. This is the fundamental lesson that the workers must learn. Let them once understand their true interests in regard to capitalists and capital — (namely that the capitalist has no more right to retain his capital than the burglar now has to retain his swag, and also the capitalists right to life itself is just as *sacred* as that of the burglar caught in the act) — the capitalist system *will melt like wax* before the “lawless” and unholy tactics a really rebellious working class will adopt.

Revolutionary Incident No. 2.

Some men in the labor movement talk of the *necessity of disarming the state* by capturing the political machinery before the *direct action* fight against the capitalists is possible.

The state is *founded on force*, developed from *ignorance*. In other words, the working class is ignorant and furnishes willingly the *force* — army, navy, police, etc. — without which no state could live. Remove the *ignorance* and the *force* removes itself. Witness a case in point and the first of its kind in France:

During the strike of the railroaders a month ago, as is well known, there were large bodies of scissorbill soldiers put at the vari-

ous scabbing jobs, such as operating and *protecting* the threatened capitalist property.

In the grand enthusiastic rush of the slaves to *defend their masters' property* and force even worse than the present wretched living conditions upon their relatives and fellow workers, there was one strange note of discord — a prophet of knowledge was speaking and acting in the wilderness of *ignorance*. One soldier at Bourgeto refused to go and be a *scab*. Hats off to Louis Lecoin (22 years old). In the following words he explained to his officer the reasons for his *traitorous refusal to defend his country*:

“*Je suis syndicaliste*, I am a syndicalist. That is to say to you, that I approve the movement of the railroaders. I therefore can't do what my conscience would reprove me for. I have always believed that the army was intended to go to the frontier and defend in case of danger our few liberties so dearly cherished and that it is not intended to simply sustain *the privileges of the capitalists*. Make me mount guard as much as you like at the barracks, but *not at the railroad station*.”

Lecoin was, of course, jailed and after waiting a month was tried. At his trial, when questioned again, he without boasting or bragging in the least, answered substantially the same as before, in the following words:

“*I am a syndicalist*. I entered the regiment with all my ideas. I abstained from propagating them, but it was impossible for me to march against my *comrades*, the railroaders.”

Lecoin's lawyer, in defending his conscientious stand, cited the case of the seizure of the *goods and chattels of the French Catholic Church*, some three years ago, by the state, when innumerable French officers, being Catholics, refused to take part in the general raid on church property, and their mutinous behavior was winked at by the lenient authorities.

But in Lecoin's case it is different, “don't you know.” This time the refusal of *duty* means something and somebody *must be punished*. It is a *working class protest* and therefore must be stifled.

Although Lecoin's company officers testified that he was a model soldier and asked for leniency for him, the Honorable Military Judge

frowned very severely on Lecoin and sentenced him to six months in prison for *his manly act*. Once again, *hats off to Lecoin!*

A few thousand Lecoins in the army and a few thousand *saboters* in each industry and capitalism founded on ignorance will totter.

Yours for a *direct action* movement,

W.Z. Foster.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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