

The I. W. W. Needs an Industrial Encyclopedia

By John Sandgren.

We are constantly reiterating to the workers: "Organize into Industrial Unions by means of which you will not only be able to unite on a common battle-front in every industry, but also to take over the industry, using your Industrial Union as the new organ of production."

This is the "One Big Union Idea" which is now sweeping over the world. Hundreds of thousands are joining the One Big Union in the various countries as a token of their unqualified endorsement of this general principle, but we are not satisfied. We are not progressing in the direction of our goal with the speed that is necessary in order that we may be able to take over production and the whole responsibility for the smooth running of human society when capitalism collapses.

This collapse of capitalism appears to be so imminent, so close upon our heels, that the whole

structure may be expected to tumble down over our heads most any moment. The gigantic strikes taking place in every country, one after the other, signify a state of affairs that is very disquieting to anyone with a spark of a sense of social responsibility.

It is simply dreadful to contemplate what would happen if these strikes for some unforeseen reason should break out into a general social conflagration which would stop all the wheels of industry, or nearly all, and throw the world's hundreds of millions of humans into almost inextricable disorder, with no guiding principle for reconstruction and restoration of order and system, without which human society cannot exist.

"But," you will say, "have we not got the One Big Union of Producers as our guiding principle; is not that enough?"

Yes, we have, but as a matter of fact, the One Big Union is as yet little more than a "glittering generality" to an insignificant number of workers.

Here in this country there are close to forty million people in "gainful occupations." Of these we have taken in about 50,000 new members in the I. W. W. from Sept. 1, 1918, to Sept. 1, 1919. How long would it take to organize the forty millions or to teach them Industrial Unionism at this rate?

What means have we of reaching these millions and teaching them? Is there not every probability that the guiding hand of the capitalist master will become paralyzed and drop the reins and allow society to run away and go to smash long before we become strong enough to take up the reins?

It is imperative that we quickly devise some means of reaching the mass of workers, placing the means in their hands to maintain social order and continue production when capitalism goes helplessly on the rocks. If we would save ourselves and survive, we have to save the whole working class.

You may say we are doing the best we can; we are preaching Industrial Organization by word of mouth, through a score of I. W. W. papers and magazines and dozens of books and pamphlets.

The writer maintains that we are not doing the best we can. We could do much more, and we must do it.

Practically everything we say and write is along general lines, very little of anything along special lines. We have formulated the theory of Industrial Unionism, but we have only to a limited extent carried it out in practice.

Very often workers from various industries come to our general headquarters telling us that there is a strong sentiment for One Big Union in their industry and that the workers would like to have further information on the subject. We may be able to furnish a speaker, or we may not. He may understand the industry, or he may not. We show the inquirer our booklets and our papers, but we must with embarrassment admit to ourselves that there is little in them that would serve as a practical guide for the workers in fitting themselves to take over and run their industry.

Time and again the writer has felt the absolute and urgent necessity of carrying our theory more into practical detail if we want to educate ourselves and our Fellow Workers into taking over and running the industries.

This urgent necessity could in our opinion best be met by publishing special Industrial Union Handbooks for each industry.

The I. W. W. has now under preparation an "I. W. W. Handbook," which will probably be out by the first of the year. This handbook will fill a long felt need. It will be written in the simplest possible language and serve as an A B C book for the worker. It will introduce him to the labor movement, giving him a survey of the whole field and show him in a general way that industrial organization is the only way of saving society and civilization. So far, so

good. But there this general handbook must stop. It cannot go into practical details for each industry, for it would then have to grow from a handbook into an industrial encyclopedia covering many bookshelves.

It is such an industrial encyclopedia that the I. W. W. now needs and must have, an encyclopedia consisting of several hundreds of handbooks, each one covering a separate industry.

By issuing such a series of handbooks we would be able to say to the workers of every industry: "Come to us for information. We are able to tell you how to organize your industry so that you will be able to take it over and weather the coming storm."

To begin with we should elaborate and publish handbooks for the basic industries, for agriculture, forestry, coal mining, metal mining, the foodstuffs, the shoe and clothing industry, general construction industry, and all branches of public service, continuing with handbooks for, for instance, the steel industry, the auto industry, the electrical industry, transportation, and so on to the end of the line.

These handbooks should not, of course, contain such information as is given in industrial and technical schools to any great extent. There are already technical handbooks for that purpose.

What our Industrial Union handbooks should contain would be along this line:

1st. An introduction referring to the above-mentioned I. W. W. Handbook and giving a general review of our plan of economic reconstruction of society, pointing out the necessity of industrial organization for the taking over of production. This introduction could be nearly the same in all handbooks.

2nd. A general description of the particular industry in question, a drawing of its technical boundary lines and a survey of the closely related industries by means of which it connects with general production.

3rd. A geographical and statistical survey of the industry with tables, giving number, name, location of plants, number employed, quantity and quality of output.

4th. Present state of ownership and management, giving list of owners, principal stockholders and managers.

5th. A study of raw materials, quality and quantity, and where and how they are obtained.

6th. Disposition of the product, quantity and quality needed, best manner of distribution, where plants should be logically located.

7th. Present state of organization of the workers, in that industry as well as in the country in general showing danger of lack of organization, futility of craft organization and necessity of industrial organization.

8th. Giving complete description of Industrial Union needed in the industry, its branches, districts and councils, stating where they ought to be located and how they ought to function.

9th. Giving relationship to other industrial unions.

10th. Giving advice as to how to go about spreading this handbook to all the workers in the industry and building up the organization, suggesting committees and by-laws needed.

11th. The preamble and constitution of the I. W. W. and address of the Industrial Union office.

12th. A stirring appeal to the workers to wake up to a realization of the responsibility resting on them to take over their line of production to save themselves and their fellowmen from social destruction by doing their share in building up a society of industrial communism.

The above are only extemporaneous suggestions, calculated to give a general idea of the outline of each handbook. For many industries perhaps a somewhat different plan would have to be adopted. A handbook of this kind would perhaps cover from 100 to 200 pages and sell at 25-50 cents. The writer is absolutely confident that the workers of every industry would fight for the possession of such a handbook, because it gives a picture of himself and his relations to his fellowmen, his hopes and possibilities in life. It would raise him from a hypnotized, isolated, hopeless drudge without a rational aim in life to a consciousness of world citizenship, self respect and social responsibility.

There would be as many such handbooks needed as there are producers, that is in this country about forty millions of them.

Is the I. W. W. able to tackle such a tremendous undertaking? The writer maintains that it is. Sev-

eral of its industrial unions now have funds on hand to undertake it. The sale of the handbook would quickly bring the money back and make it possible to issue new editions until every worker has a copy.

The thing to do is to immediately engage a man of learning, or several, a capable writer, who can study and handle statistics and who has a good general insight into American industrial life. He must of course, be in sympathy with our aims. There are scores of such men available, men who would find the happiness of their lives in just such work. And we are able to pay them and support them while they are doing it for us. Anyhow, it will mean only a temporary outlay, as the money expended will rapidly come back. At our first opportunity we should establish a special "Bureau of industrial research" for this purpose under the supervision of the right kind of man.

As soon as possible we should extend this work beyond the basic industries and cover every field of human activity, thus bringing the gospel of industrial organization and the new society to every worker in the land.

The writer, therefore, makes the suggestion that everyone of our industrial unions, at its next convention, take up the matter of issuing such a handbook for their industry and that they pledge the general office financial support for the issuing of such handbooks for one industry after another.

Thus we are guarding against the imminent danger of a social calamity of terrible proportions and making this country "safe for Industrial Communism and Industrial Democracy."