1919-06-01


Tarbell, Ida M.

http://hdl.handle.net/10456/39743

Allegheny College. All rights reserved.

All materials in the Allegheny College DSpace Repository are subject to college policies and Title 17 of the U.S. Code.
WHEREAS, Many steel corporations and other industrial institutions have instituted in their plants systems of collective bargaining akin to the Rockefeller plan; and

WHEREAS, Extensive experience has shown that while the employers are busily carrying on propaganda landing these company unions to the skies, as a great improvement over trade unions, they are at the same time just as actively enforcing a series of vicious practices that hamstring such organizations and render them useless to their employees. Of these practices the following are a few:

1. Unfair Elections and Representation—The first essential for the proper working of a genuine collective bargaining committee is that it be composed entirely as the organized workers may elect and altogether free from the company's influence. Only then can it be truly representative of the men and responsive to their wishes. Upon such committees, bosses, representing as they do the antagonistic of the company, are so much poison. Not only is it impossible for them personally to represent the men, but they also negate the influence of the real workers' delegates. Knowing this very well, the steel companies, through campaigns of intimidation and election fraud, load their company union committees with bosses, usually to the point of a majority. So baneful is this practice that, were the company unions otherwise perfect, it alone would suffice to entirely destroy their usefulness to the workers.

2. No Democratic Organisation Permitted—It is common knowledge that, in order for the workers to arrive at a uniform understanding through the systematization and formulation of their grievances and demands, it is necessary for them to enjoy and practice the rights of free speech, free assembly and free association. They
must conduct an elaborate series of meetings under their own control, and generally
carry on their business in a democratic organized way. But with the company union
system this is impossible. All independent organization and meetings are pro-
hibited on pain of discharge. Consequently the workers are kept voiceless and
destitute of a program. They are deliberately held down to the status of a mob.
Under such circumstances, intelligent, aggressive action by them is out of the
question.

3. Intimidation of Committeemen—As part of the general plan to keep their com-
pany unions from being of any possible service to their employees, it is customary
for the companies to summarily discharge committeemen who dare to make a stand in
behalf of the workers. The records show a multitude of such cases. Being unor-
ganized, the men are powerless to defend their representatives. The natural con-
sequences are that the committee soon degenerate into groups of men supinely sub-
servient to the wishes of the company and deaf to those of the workers.

4. Expert Assistance Prohibited—When dealing with their employees in any
manner, employers always thoroughly safeguard themselves by enlisting the aid of
the very best brains procurable. The only way the workers can cope with this ar-
ray of experts is to have the help of experienced labor leaders, but under the
company union system this is impossible. All association with trade union offi-
cials is strictly prohibited. The company reserves to itself the right to expert
assistance. As a result the green workers' committee, already weakened in a
dozens ways is left practically helpless before the experts upon the company's
side.

5. Company Union Lacks Power—In establishing wages, hours and working condi-
tions in their plants, employers habitually use their great economic power to en-
force their will. Therefore to secure just treatment, the only recourse for the
workers is to develop a power equally strong and to confront their employers with it. Unless they can do this their case is hopeless. In this vital respect, the company union is a complete failure. With hardly a pretense of organization, unaffiliated with other groups of workers in the same industry, destitute of funds, and unfitted to use the strike weapon, it is totally unable to enforce its will, should it by a miracle have one favorable to the workers. Weak and helpless, all it can do is to submit to the dictation of the company. It can make no effective fight for the men.

6. Company Diverts Aim—As though the foregoing practices were not enough to thoroughly cripple the company unions, the employers make assurance doubly sure by seeing to it that their committees ignore the vital needs of the workers and confine themselves to minor and extraneous matters, such as fake safety-first movements, problems of efficiency, handing bouquets to high company officials, etc. Discussions of wages, hours and working conditions are taboo on pain of discharge for the committeeman who dares insist upon them. Thus the company unions complete their record of deceit and weakness by dodging the labor question altogether.

WHEREAS, In view of the foregoing facts, it is evident that company unions are unqualified to represent the interests of the workers, and that they are a delusion and a snare set up by the companies for the express purpose of deluding the workers into the belief that they have some protection and thus have no need for trade union organization; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That we disapprove and condemn all such company unions and advise our membership to have nothing to do with them; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That we demand the right to bargain collectively through the only kind of organization fitted for this purpose, the trade union, and that we stand loyally together until this right is conceded us.
Your committee concurs, with the following exceptions, that in the first resolve the word "heartily" be stricken out and insert the word: "disapprove", and make the first resolve read, that we "disapprove and condemn."

The recommendation of the Committee was adopted.