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### The Radical History of Unions

Unions come in all shapes and sizes, purposes and philosophies and goals. However, throughout history, business unions have been the most prominent. Leftist and radical unions have not been in the dominant position. In Paul Swanson's Introduction to Capitalism, he talks almost entirely about business unions, those unions that focus on higher wages and better working conditions, nothing larger than that. Unions advocating for political change have existed and have subsequently been shut down or structurally weeded out.

In Introduction to Capitalism, Swanson mentions and discusses unions, however focusing on "business unions." Business unions, rather than fighting for political change, fight only for immediate issues, such as wages and working conditions; the unions Swanson discusses are more reformist, wanting to stay in the capitalistic structure. But how did those unions get to be that way? The purpose of unions is to increase the collective bargaining power of all the workers by unifying, implying that unions exist to make situations of workers better, why then aren't they more radical? The answer, and history ignored by Swanson, is fairly tumultuous.

During World War I, the National War Labor Board was created by President Wilson to help keep peace between laborers and employers and attempting to take care of labor problems by allowing workers to organize unions. The Espionage and Sedition Acts were enacted in 1917 and 1918 to criminalize any activity or manifestations that would not support the cause of the

war, thus giving the government the ability to interfere with unions by criminalizing a number of activities, labor radicalism being one. The First Red Scare took place immediately following World War I—carried out by the Attorney General Palmer and J. Edgar Hoover, who would become to be head of the FBI—and consisted of raids targeted at any supposed Leftists (socialists, communists, anarchists, etc.) resulting in mass purging of unions. Thousands of former union members were arrested and punished without trial, many people were deported; unions were raided and bombed, all on the accusation of Left ideals and the association between Left ideology being Un-American.

Fordism, essentially the next phase of Taylorism, was developed around 1914 with the reorganization of machinery to speed up the production process by creating an organized structural flow and giving more power and control to management, essentially introducing the assembly line into the production world. There were many aspects, some being: the creation of machines to produce standardized, interchangeable parts, more planning and organization in place by employers and management, further alienating workers from many of which would later be adopted and adapted by General Motors and other manufacturers. Fordism had three distinct political eras with the first being bribery, a response to the number of walkouts and inconsistency of workers (who were responding to the intensity and pace of the new assembly line routine). Ford implemented his famous five dollars a day, for eight hour workdays to encourage well-behaved and constant employees. However this was only possible for eligible candidates: employees who had good standing with the business and passed the Sociological Department's evaluation. In 1919, there were huge strikes (not necessarily successful ones), advocating for higher wages to match the inflation that came in with the war, and in response to

the wave of (defeated) strikes, the American Plan was put into place. The American Plan was the response of employers to reestablish their power through means such as reorganizing the production process to increase productivity and efficiency of businesses, increasing profit however not increasing wages or living standards of workers.

The next stage of Fordism, coercion, began in 1921 with Ford's implementation of the Service Department, a euphemistic term for Ford's industrial secret police, comprised of former police and convicts, mobsters, boxers and wrestlers, all to keep the regular Ford employees in line and to intimidate them not to act out or stand up. Not only was their job on the line, but their general wellbeing; it was no longer fear of unemployment, but also fear of abuse. They were subject to any acts by the secret police for almost anything, ranging from laughing at work to participating in a union. In 1935, the Wagner Act was passed, giving legal permission for industrial unions to form, setting the stage for the last era of Fordism, consent. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) came about, encouraging industrial unions to organize and expand. The quickly growing number of these industrial unions in the next few years had quite an impact; the United Automobile Workers (UAW) not only forced GM to accept union organization, but were finally able to institute an organized union at Ford, and with that, abolish the Service Department.

The final political era of Fordism, consent, and the implications of the CIO go hand in hand. There was now legal validity to organizing unions, a minimum wage was established and overtime pay for over 40 hours was required, the National Labor Relations Board was put in place to settle any other disputes. With the significant rise of unions (because of CIO expansion), employers were compelled to engage in long-term and stable relations with employees, finally

link real wages with the actual productivity of the establishment, and grant benefits to the employees such as healthcare or pension plans. The other side of the deal is that unions accept the authority of management and agree to stay peaceful and to punish unruly (radical) members, leading to internal hierarchy within unions. With radical or extremist members being disciplined, the dominant philosophies of these unions became less and less politically focused, shifting from an overarching social movement to the wage-gearred unions focused on immediate working conditions within the business.

Swanson doesn't mention these original primarily Left movements, or how they're repeatedly suppressed by weeding out those radical and progressive members who stand up. The Cold War Red Scare that happened following WWII is yet another example of this—the CIO itself, to prove Americanism, held eleven raids on their own unions, to remove any members who might have any communist sympathies. There was another mass purging of all Leftists, radicals, activists, and with them, those ideals, further shifting the union movement away from political change. Again and again this happens. Unions are not inherently business unions, and the notion that political change cannot be achieved through such unions is a harmful one, and another synecdoche of the overarching hierarchical system, and how it bleeds into everything else.