Taft-Hartley

The Taft-Hartley Act, which was passed by Congress in 1947, is a prime example of how unions can be hurt by legislation. The Taft-Hartley law has within its framework all that an employer needs to render the union he is dealing with completely ineffective. If an employer is willing to put up the fight, spend the money and use Taft-Hartley machinery, he can just about reduce any union to uselessness insofar as carrying out the principal objectives of the trade union movement is concerned.

A case in point—among many, many others—is the strike of the Rubber Workers against the O'Sullivan Rubber Co. After the workers went on strike for better wages, O'Sullivan hired nonunion people and then, under the rules laid down by Taft-Hartley, got authority to call for an election as to whether they wanted to be represented by the Rubber Workers Union. And under Taft-Hartley's provisions, none of the workers on strike could vote.

Result: Complete wreckage of the union so far as a contract with the O'Sullivan Company was concerned.

'Right-to-Work'

Another law which serves to handcuff unions and shackle the feet of the men and women they represent are the misnamed "right-to-work" laws which are in force in many states.

These laws, of course, do not give anyone the right to work. They provide no rights. They provide no work. What they do is wreck unions. And that is all.

In a so-called "right-to-work" state, there can be no union shop. The union shop, of course, exists *only* when a majority of the employees decides in its favor and *only*—and this is important—when an employer agrees to include it in a union-management contract.

In many cases, an employer has been willing to sign up a union-shop contract—and has even *wanted* a union shop in order to guarantee that his work force will be filled with skilled and capable working men and women—but has been prohibited from doing so by a "right-to-work" law.

Taft-Hartley and "right-to-work" laws, of course, were put on the statute books by Congress and state legislatures, respectively.

They were written into law by men and women who were candidates for political office and were elected through the political processes.

Put another way, Taft-Hartley, "right-to-work" and all other *legal* restrictions upon the rights of trade union members are the result of political action.

2 WHAT LABOR HAS DONE

Politics Is a Trade Union Tradition

THAT STATEMENT WILL SURPRISE MOST NONUNION PERSONS, and many trade unionists themselves. But let's take a look at a little history:

In 1823, shoemakers in Philadelphia pleaded for their right to organize and improve their working conditions, and for a free public education system for children. They were asking, in effect, for the right to participate in politics. They were charged with a conspiracy and put in jail.

In 1881, the first convention of the newly-formed American Federation of Labor adopted a platform consisting of exactly 13 points. The first 12 called for passage of specific pieces of legislation. The 13th point called for *political action* to elect legislators who would pass the first 12. The 45,000 AFL members of that day realized that one law passed by a hostile Congress could wipe out all trade union gains and make the strongest labor-management contract a mere scrap of paper.

In 1906, the AFL Executive Council met with International Union presidents and drew up "Labor's Bill of Grievances" to counter the abuse of unions by both Congress and the courts. This Bill was