

THE GREAT SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL STRIKE

WILLIAM F. DUNNE



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1st Edition

978-1-300-46782-3



William F. Dunne

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Republisher's Note

Prairie Fire Publishing is proud to present this riveting historical account of one of the U.S. proletariat's fiercest battles, *The Great San Francisco General Strike* by William F. Dunne. This work documents one of the most significant labor struggles in American history — the 1934 San Francisco General Strike that paralyzed the Bay Area and demonstrated the power of organized labor in the midst of the Great Depression.

William F. Dunne provides a firsthand account of this momentous event, chronicling the development of the strike from its origins among maritime workers to its expansion into a general strike involving over 125,000 workers across San Francisco, Oakland, and the Bay Counties. His reporting captures the militancy of the workers, the solidarity between employed and unemployed, and the violent repression unleashed by the State and employer organizations. This edition preserves Dunne's original text, which was written in the immediate aftermath of the

strike while events were still unfolding. His perspective as a labor journalist and Communist Party member offers valuable insights into the class dynamics, organizing strategies, and political forces at play during this pivotal moment in U.S. labor history.

The San Francisco General Strike represented a turning point in American labor relations, demonstrating both the potential power of worker solidarity and the lengths to which Capital and the State would go to suppress working class organization. The lessons drawn from this struggle remain relevant for understanding labor movements, class struggle, and organizing strategies today. *Prairie Fire Publishing* offers this volume as part of our commitment to preserving and disseminating important works of working-class history. We believe that studying the struggles of the past is essential for building effective work in the present.

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I. PRELIMINARY

The general strike of some 125,000 workers in San Francisco, Oakland, and the Bay Counties, organized in unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labor, with only such exceptions as the Marine Workers Industrial Union, affiliated to the T.U.U.L.,¹ in support of the general strike of 2,000 miles of coastline of the members of 10 maritime workers' unions for better wages, working conditions and against company-controlled hiring halls (the open shop machinery of the shipping and stevedoring companies) brought the nationwide strike wave that began late in 1932 to a new high point.

The strike, centering around the elementary demands of workers in the key marine transport industry for the right to organize in unions of their choice free from

¹Trade Union Unity League. The T.U.U.L. was founded in 1929 under the direction of the Communist Party U.S.A. and aimed to organize, principally, the industrial and agricultural proletariat through forming independent revolutionary unions. T.U.U.L. was a member of the Red International of Trade Unions (Profintern), an international body established by the Communist International (Comintern). — *PFP*

control of company agents, for the union shop versus the open shop, for decent wages and some measure of control over working conditions, shook the A. F. of L. hierarchy, the Roosevelt administration, and the various organizations of the employers, from head to heel.

The general strike in the principal port of the West Coast of the United States, developing out of the organization campaign initiated by local workers and rank-and-file organizing committees in the ports — from Seattle in the North to San Diego in the South — the campaign which organized the longshoremen who had been defeated and had had their organization shattered in the struggles of 1921, affected all workers in the industry precisely on that coastline which is bound to be a main military and naval base of American imperialism in the event of an outbreak of war, resulting from the growing imperialist contradictions in the vast Pacific area. This fact alone could account for the ferocity with which the employers and all their government agencies attacked the strike itself, the waterfront workers and their

organizations — and the Communist Party, whose program and influence accounted in the main for the solidarity of the mass movement and the fact that the working class was able to resist successfully the efforts of the employers and their government to smash the unions and institute the open shop all along the West Coast as they had planned.

The employers, however, had other and more immediate objectives than the establishment of a “sanitary zone” along the West Coast in preparation for war as the way out of the five-year crisis. The employers and their organizations — The Waterfront Employers Union, the Industrial Association, the Chamber of Commerce and the collection of other organizations of exploiters and their hangers-on gathered around these dominant groups — were concerned with securing a further reduction of the starvation wages — longshoremen were making from \$40 to \$60 per month in one of the most hazardous occupations — and were preparing to “teach labor a lesson,” *i.e.*, either to defeat and destroy the unions or to place them more firmly in the control of such dependable allies