By taking the stand that they did in the matter of the recognition of their union by the manufacturers against whom they were and are on strike, the IWW\(^1\) silk weavers of Paterson, N.J., have made history.

“Recognition of the union by the employer!”—lo, an old-time slogan of AFL and kindred “unionisms.” It is a slogan that sounds plausibly bold, plausibly in favor of the workers, plausibly sound in labor tactics, yet in fact, it is a slogan under which actual defeat has been covered, under which future defeats were insured, under which the sellout of the labor leader was promoted, and under which the enslavement of the workers could be carried on unperceived.

An instance, taken piping hot from the oven of the American labor movement, will illustrate the point.

Just about a year ago there was a big cloakmakers’ strike in this city. For a while the struggle raged with unusual fury. Finally a board of arbitration was elected by the contending parties—workers and manufacturers—and the strike was settled. The

\(^1\) The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in 1905 on a socialist revolutionary basis. In 1908, however, an anarcho-syndicalist element, using strong-arm methods, captured the organization’s convention and threw out the political clause from the preamble of the IWW’s constitution. The socialist elements in the IWW then set up headquarters in Detroit, and for a number of years there were two organizations calling themselves “IWW.” The IWW that led the silk workers’ strike discussed by De Leon was the socialist or “Detroit IWW.” “The Chicago IWW,” as the anarchists’ organization came to be known, barged into the Paterson strike, depending on the notoriety of William D. (“Big Bill”) Haywood in its attempt to take over the strike and the strikers.
protocol, drawn up by the arbitrators as the seal of settlement, contains these closing words:

"In conclusion, we wish to express our gratification at the fair and harmonious relations between the parties to the protocol, and our conviction that eventually the arrangements between employers and employees as embodied in the protocol will develop into a lasting and permanent adjustment of the relations between the employers and employees of the cloak manufacturing industry, and will serve as a model for many similar industries."

Here we have “recognition” self-pilloried. “Recognized” by the employer, the union is made, by its representative, Mr. Morris Hillquit,2 to surrender unconditionally the cause of labor. The irrepresible conflict between master class and wage slave is denied by the clause that expresses the hope of “a lasting and permanent adjustment of the relations between” the two. As a consequence, the protocol has been of benefit only to the employer and the leaders through whom he dominates the union. He is violating the protocol at all turns, while the rank and file can hardly make a turn in the shop but the same is pronounced “a violation of the protocol.” It is so in all instances. The price that the union pays for “recognition” is to be sold out.

The Paterson IWW silk weavers on strike were equal to the occasion—and to the experience. Foaming at the mouth, the manufacturers, one after another, surrendered to the scale

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2 Morris Hillquit (1869–1933) was a leading figure in the conspiracy to split the socialist movement in 1899 and to set up the reformist “Socialist Party” (today’s SP-USA) in opposition to the revolutionary SLP. He was a corporation lawyer, as well as a lawyer for the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union and other unions. According to the Biographical Dictionary of American Labor, edited by Gary M. Fink and published by Greenwood Press, Hillquit “was a member of the negotiating committee that secured a settlement in the 1910 cloakmakers’ strike and led to the Protocol of Peace, which provided for conciliation machinery in labor disputes in the garment industry”—the same protocol that De Leon refers to in this editorial. The quality of Hillquit’s “socialism” is displayed by the insidious notion that “capital and labor are partners” implicit in the protocol of the contract he drew up. Nevertheless, Hillquit is still presented as a “Socialist authority” by historians.
‘Recognition’

demanded by their employees, but refused to sign under the seal of the IWW. This was, in fact, a double recognition of the IWW—first, the recognition of the IWW demands, by surrendering to them; second, the recognition of the IWW organization by playing the ostrich act.

The Paterson IWW weavers, enlightened by experience, avoided nailing themselves to an empty form. Their leaders, not anxious for fraternal junkets with the employer, did not sacrifice the interests of the rank and file to a shadow. For all practical purposes the manufacturers did recognize the IWW. Not from manufacturers but from the working class does the IWW sue for recognition. They decided to ignore the manufacturers’ refusal to recognize the IWW.

The Paterson IWW weavers planted themselves by their decision upon ground on which a victory cannot be turned into a defeat; upon ground that protects them against AFL sellouts; upon ground on which no future shackles, except such as their own negligence may forge, can be forged against them.

The sun insists not upon formal recognition. It enforces the same de facto. The declaration of the IWW weavers on strike, made at their monster meeting of the second of this month, is a new note in the labor movement of the land, uttered deliberately, free from the luridness of anarchy. It is a notification that the IWW places its dependence, not upon the smiles of the master, places its dependence solely upon the working class.

*Daily People*, Vol. XII, No. 250. Wednesday, March 6, 1912