

## Labor, First of the Conscripts

ONE DAY it is announced that because the Ford

Motor Company refused to accept specifications pledging compliance with labor laws the government had awarded a contract to another, a higher, bidder. Next day an inquiring reporter is told by the President that the government is prepared to take over plants necessary for its armament program—implying that the Ford plant is no exception.

On both days newspapers ran side by side stories of strikes in "defense" plants. There is a parallelism of social importance in the news items that warrants their being so placed before the public.



But capital will not be the first object of State absorption in this country. The premier position is reserved for labor. We do not prognosticate this sequence merely on the basis of historic precedent; the regimentation of labor before capital is a practical necessity. Logically the seizures may be simultaneous, but it is impractical to seize capital first.

For capital is incapable of functioning without labor; plants without men to run them serve no useful purpose. When the State confiscates capital it does so because it needs the production of this capital, and feels that the ousting of the owners would accelerate such production. But labor is at least as essential as capital to that production, and therefore must be made equally and simultaneously responsive to the will of the State.

Theoretically the seizure could be simultaneous. But in practice labor "sticks its neck out" first, and is therefore the first to be socked. Rising living costs and low, sluggish wages create the unrest which manifests itself in strikes. This protest of the workers must antedate any recalcitrance by plant owners, simply because the difficulty of making a living will result in a stoppage of work long before owners of capital will kick over the traces. The problem of wages is more immediate than that of profits.

That is why the regimentation of labor always precedes the confiscation of capital. Labor leaders who are presently using the special privileges accorded their organizations by "labor" legislation are

speeding this step. Through the medium of war contracts they hope to force owners of capital to accede to the terms of this legislation; that is, they employ political power to entrench themselves. But they seem to overlook the fact that this same power will be used against their unions first.

However, when that occurs the labor leaders, or the most influential of them, will be the political power. A labor leader in politics acts exactly like any other man in that position.