

Right Tendencies at the Trade Union Unity Congress

By WM. Z. FOSTER

THE Trade Union Unity Convention in Cleveland on August 31-September 2 will overwhelmingly endorse the present program of the T. U. E. L. as stressed in the League's actual practice, the convention call and various letters of the R. I. L. U. Briefly, this program calls for the establishment of a national coordinating center for the new unions and the left wings in the old organizations. It sees as the central task the organization of the unorganized masses and the bringing forward of the T. U. E. L. as the actual leader and organizer of the masses in their struggle against capitalist rationalization. It develops a militant fight against the social reformists—the A. F. of L. leaders and their S. P.-Muste aides—who are tools of American imperialism. The T. U. E. L. program calls for vastly intensified work amongst the Negroes, for arousing the masses against the threatening war danger, for the defense of the Soviet Union, for defense of the Gastonia workers, etc.

The correctness of this line, which is based on the Comintern and R. I. L. U. analyses, has already been sufficiently demonstrated by experience. The manifest growing radicalization of the workers as exemplified by the South, the automobile, needle, mining industries, etc., the treachery of the A. F. of L. leaders (Elizabethton, Atterbury scheme, etc.), the violent attacks of the government upon the workers (Gastonia, etc.) imperatively demand pushing forward with the whole program of the new unionism.

The mass of delegates, coming straight from the unorganized industries, will see the correctness of the T. U. E. L. line and will enthusiastically endorse it. Nevertheless there will be opposition present, some elements who do not agree with the main line. These oppositionists will be of both a right and "left" character. Although this opposition will comprise but a small minority of delegates, it is necessary that we analyze, evaluate, and fight the wrong tendencies it expresses.

First as to the "left" opposition. This will manifest itself by tendencies to diverge from the correct policy by proposals for the establishment of a new general federation of labor instead of a coordinating center for the new unions and left wing; for the wholesale desertion of the old unions and the surrender of them to

Green & Co., instead of intensifying our revolutionary work within them, etc., etc. But although these "left" opportunist tendencies have in them the elements of danger and must be fought, they by no means constitute the principal deviation. The main danger comes from the right.

The general trend of such right tendencies as will manifest themselves at the convention will be to "soften" the line of the T. U. E. L. They will aim at slackening the fight among the organized and unorganized workers against the trade union bureaucracy and will seek to confine the fight to a legal basis within the old unions. They will overestimate the difficulties in the way of the new unions and try to shift the center of gravity of T. U. E. L. work back into the old organizations. Such right tendencies will be based upon an underestimation of the radicalization and fighting power of the workers and an underestimation of the treacherous role of the trade union bureaucracy and the Socialist party. Their main drift will be to have the T. U. E. L. abandon its policy of class struggle and to slump in the direction of a program of class collaboration. Such a right line would tend to undermine the whole militant program of the T. U. E. L. and to reduce it to impotency.

Although the total number of right delegates at the T. U. E. L. convention will be small, the tendencies they represent are dangerous. They are the gateways of surrender to the trade union bureaucracy and to the employers. Hence, it is necessary to isolate and combat them. Let us see, therefore, how these tendencies will manifest themselves and what groups will express them.

First, there is the so-called Muste Labor Age group of "progressives." Although this group has officially decided not to send delegates, some, if not leaders, then rank and file followers, will probably be there. This group would constitute the extreme right at the T. U. E. L. convention. Its importance in connection with the T. U. E. L. convention derives not so much from the numerical representation it may have there as from the fact that its program is the goal to which all right tendencies as will exist in the T. U. E. L. convention naturally lead.

The Muste group is a fig leaf for the reactionary A. F. of L. bureaucracy. Its so-called progressive program, embellished with various left wing slogans, is designed to bewilder the masses and lead them into the class collaboration trap of the A. F. of L. leaders. It is an anti-class struggle group, and it has shown its treacherous face at New Bedford, Passaic, Elizabethton, etc. It is one of the negative manifestations of the radicalization of the workers. Its role is not to fight the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, which it weakly pretends to do, but to fight against the Communist Party,

the T. U. E. L., and the whole left wing program of aggressive struggle. It seeks to reestablish the prestige of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy and to extend their control over the unorganized masses. It is an enemy of the new union movement. Such proposals as adherents of this group may make at the T. U. E. L. convention will so definitely lead in this direction that the delegates will unquestionably be able to dispose of them.

Second, there is the Cannon-Trotsky elements. This group will try to make a mobilization of its forces at the convention, although at the best it will net but a small delegation. Notwithstanding the fact that the Cannonites appear as "leftists" on the Trotsky issue, covering up their counter-revolutionary attack on the Soviet Union and the Communist International by revolutionary phrases, they will come to the T. U. E. L. convention with an openly right wing trade union program.

The outline of the Cannon trade union program is contained in the *Militant* of July 1, in an article entitled "What the T. U. E. L. Conference Should Do." The substance of it is an attack upon the whole new union program of the T. U. E. L. and an attempt to shift the center of gravity of the trade union work back into the old unions on the basis of an alliance with the Muste group. The article is a long diatribe against the "sectarianism" and "leftism" of the present T. U. E. L. program. The Cannon "lefts" sneer at the new unions as being "brand new," "perfection itself," etc. Not a word is said about organizing the unorganized. No need is seen for a national coordinating center, but the warning is sounded in all keys not to make this R. I. L. U. center in the United States real and substantial as the leading organ of the class struggle unions. The whole Cannon line amounts to a liquidation of the program of building new unions and the restriction of our work to the A. F. of L. organizations.

The article mentioned puts as the center of its line an alliance in the old unions with the so-called progressives, which means the Musteites. And cynically, to buttress the wrong line, it quotes from my book "Misleaders of Labor" to the effect that united fronts with the progressives against the reactionary bureaucracy constitute a correct strategy. This raises an interesting question:

Undoubtedly in the past the T. U. E. L. has made serious mistakes in its united front policies. It is correct to make united front movements with progressives, but only on the principle of the united front from below, that is to say, united fronts with the rank and file progressive elements against the fake progressive leaders of the A. F. of L. This the T. U. E. L. must do on the broadest possible scale to win away progressive workers from the corrupt Muste

leadership. A mistake of the T. U. E. L. in the past, and this to some extent is reflected in the various left wing statements and documents, including my book, was to have based its united front movements often on alliances with so-called progressive trade union bureaucrats. For this the T. U. E. L. was sharply and properly corrected by the R. I. L. U.

Cannon, who has the brass to claim he is furthering the revolutionary movement by attacking the Soviet Union, was one of the very worst defenders in the erroneous united front policy of the T. U. E. L. He understood it and fought for it to mean that we should make alliances with every crook and faker in the labor movement who made even a pretense of being in opposition to the ruling labor bureaucracy. This was the substance of his conception of trade union work, which not only carried with it this right wing conception of the united front policy, but also proposed to surrender the leadership in such united front movements to the so-called progressive bureaucrats.

Cannon now carries his trade union line to its logical conclusion by his more or less open alliance with the Muste group. His whole trade union program is only Musteism thinly veiled. At the T. U. E. L. convention this veil will be stripped aside and his program will be shown for what it really is, a surrender to the trade union bureaucrats and an abandonment of all real efforts to organize and lead the masses of workers in their struggle against capitalism. The convention will overwhelmingly reject Cannon's brand of Musteism.

Besides the above mentioned Musteites and Cannonites, there will undoubtedly be some manifestations of the Lovestone right tendency at the T. U. E. L. convention. Lovestone rejects the Comintern repudiation of the theory of American exceptionalism. That is to say, he persists in his claims that the position of American imperialism is an exceptional one, which means that the world crisis of capitalism does not effect American imperialism in the same basic sense that it does European capitalism, and that consequently, the Comintern line does not apply to the United States. This constitutes an overestimation of the power of American imperialism and leads directly to an underestimation of the radicalization of the American workers. Lovestone has given ample proof of this underestimation of the American workers' radicalization. This means that he can see no real basis for the building of the new trade unions.

Lovestone has definitely assumed a right wing position, but he has not yet completely formulated his program, on the basis of his theory of exceptionalism. We may rest assured, however, that a very central portion of this right program will deal with the question

of trade unionism. And it can only take one form, an attack against the program of new unionism which is so inextricably bound up with the Comintern and R. I. L. U. analyses of radicalization, which Lovestone so definitely rejects. Lovestone's right trade union line has already been foreshadowed by his lukewarm attitude towards the new unions.

Insofar as Lovestone's right influence is felt at the T. U. E. L. convention, either through the action of his sympathizers in the Party or by the development of an avowed Lovestone tendency among the convention delegates, it will go in the same general direction as Cannon, that is, towards Muste, by minimizing the new union program, by trying to shift the center of gravity to the old unions, by creating alliances with progressive leaders, etc. Lovestone formerly showed the same wrong tendencies as Cannon in T. U. E. L. united fronts. This was no accident, as recent events graphically demonstrate. It is far from the impossible that within the near future, these two brothers-in-arms against the Comintern, Cannon and Lovestone, will be found shoulder to shoulder fighting for the slogans of their right wing trade union program and trying to draw the T. U. E. L. forces under the hegemony of the Muste progressives.

These right tendencies of the Muste-Cannon-Lovestone groups base themselves upon the skilled workers, the aristocracy of labor, whereas the T. U. E. L. bases its program primarily upon the masses of unskilled and semi-skilled, the most exploited section of the working class. The rights tend to put the emphasis on the old unions and drift in the direction of a program of class collaboration, while the T. U. E. L. stresses the building of new unions and the furtherance of their program of class struggle. The Convention will show the trade union program of the Muste, Cannon and Lovestone tendencies to be essentially of the same cut and pattern.

The rights are due for an overwhelming defeat at the T. U. E. L. convention. The best guaranty for a correct line at the T. U. E. L. convention, as well as for the initiation of real work for organizing the unorganized, is a big mass representation of delegates coming from the unorganized basic industries. These workers will easily understand the necessity for the building of the new unions, for militant leadership and aggressive struggle against the social reformists of all hues. It is our task to build such a delegation. This must be done, not on the basis of simply gathering together immediate supporters of the T. U. E. L. and sending them to the convention as "delegates," but by establishing real organization amongst the unorganized workers, through the estab-

lishment of shop committees, the extension of the new union locals and the building of the left wing groups in the old unions.

The T. U. E. L. convention must be a real mass gathering of all the left wing trade union forces of the country. It must be a convention in which the mistakes made in the past are frankly discussed and corrected, thus laying the basis for an effective strike strategy. It must be one that does not simply pass its time in talk, but outlines active campaigns of practical organization work in all possible industries. It must thoroughly expose the reactionary role of the trade union bureaucrats and their Muste supporters and unite the workers against them. It must arouse the workers to the imminence of the war danger. It must give tremendous impulse to trade union work amongst Negroes. It must build youth and women's work and lay the basis for the building of Labor Unity into a real mass organ. It must be a great mobilization point for the struggle of the American working class against the detrimental effects of capitalist rationalization.

In connection with the T. U. E. L. convention, it is necessary that the Party, in addition to building T. U. E. L. forces, shall also build its own Party organizations, shop nuclei, trade union fractions, etc. The work of organizing the unorganized cannot be successfully carried through unless the Communist Party exists as the strong steel backbone of the whole left wing movement. The development of the T. U. E. L. organization campaign not only gives the Party an excellent opportunity to recruit new members, establish new shop nuclei and build new trade union fractions, but it throws upon the Party the imperative duty of carrying through these tasks efficiently and energetically.