

Foster Urges A. F. L. Parley Delegates To Wage Battle for Trade Union Unity

Addresses His Call to All Locals and Entire Membership of A. F. L.—Stresses Defense of Basic Rights Against Employers' Attacks on Wages, Working Conditions, Living Standards and Against the Right to Organize—Cites Support Given to Bosses by U. S. Military Forces—Denounces Tie-Up Between A.F.L. Leaders and Johnson, N.R.A.

By William Z. Foster

William Z. Foster, speaking on behalf of the Trade Union Unity League, of which he is general secretary, has issued a statement addressed to all members of the A. F. of L. and to the delegates who will attend the 54th annual convention of the American Federation of Labor, to be held in San Francisco, beginning on Monday.

The statement follows:

TRADE UNION UNITY LEAGUE
799 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

Wm. Z. Foster, General Secretary
September 22, 1934

To the Delegates to the 54th Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor.

To all Locals and the Entire Membership of the American Federation of Labor.

Brothers:

We are addressing you on the vital question of the unification of the trade union movement for the defense of basic rights, against the ceaseless attacks by the employers on the right to organize and on wages, working conditions and living standards for the improvement of conditions, for the fight against company unions. We are proposing what we consider to be the major necessary steps to establish unification of the trade union movement in order to develop more effective action against the employers now more powerfully organized than ever before.

Your convention meets at a time when the labor movement and the workers generally are faced with the most vicious and concerted attack on the part of the employers. The National Manufacturers Association has publicly declared that it sees in the present great strike of the textile workers not merely the question of the struggle of the textile workers, but that the outcome of the textile strike will have great bearing on the whole of the future development in the labor movement. For this reason they declare they are opposed to any concessions to the textile workers. The report of the Winant Board, one of the most brazen disregard for the conditions of the textile workers, ordering a half million workers back to work at the point of the bayonet without any concessions, and already receiving the blessings of President Roosevelt, shows the extent of the attack against the workers now being carried through by the employers. The Hot Springs program of the Durable Goods Industries (monopoly capital), calling for further reduction of wages, unlimited increase of hours, abolition of government relief, uncompromising opposition to all forms of unemployment insurance, letting of all restrictions on mergers, trusts, cartels, etc., shows clearly that a well-defined and planned attack is under way against all workers and their organizations.

Cites Military Attacks

The employers in their fight to lower wages and destroy the trade unions are receiving the full support of the military forces of the government. At no time in the history of the labor movement have the military forces been mobilized to such an extent as in the textile strike. Already more than a dozen workers have been killed and hundreds wounded, while even larger numbers are thrown into jails and concentration camps as is the case in Georgia, the "adopted" state of President Roosevelt. These concentration camps are in no way different from those established by Hitler.

We believe that today every honest worker can see that the position our organization has taken from the very beginning on the N.R.A., has been proven entirely correct. We pointed out that the N.R.A. was an instrument of the employers for the purpose of defeating the demands of the workers through arbitration if possible, and through force and violence if need be. We branded as false the promises of the administration that the N.R.A. will do away with unemployment through shortening hours, raise wages through the introduction of the minimum wage codes, and give labor the right to organize through the Section 7A provision of the National Recovery Act. We warned that the labor leaders who accepted the N.R.A. and served on its various boards were really helping to chain the workers to the slavery program of the employers.

Greater Speed-Up

And what has actually happened? Is it not clear that the shortening of hours to the extent that they have taken place have been mainly at the expense of the workers, resulting on the one hand in lowering of weekly wages, and on the other hand has aided the employer, who introduced further speed-up of work? Is it not definitely established that the minimum wage codes, far from raising wages, have actually been used to lower wages to the level provided in the minimum codes, while at the same time most workers are not even receiving this minimum because the employers find many devices to get around the minimum provisions? And what has become of the famous Section 7A? Has it not been used to give standing and to help put over the company unions, while the workers' fight for the recognition of the trade unions has been met with dismissal of union members, terror against strikers and every known form of intimidation? Where the workers have been able to improve their condition and win union recognition, was this not because the workers were able through their own organized efforts and struggle to compel the employers to grant them these gains?

We must state that the A. F. of L. Council and the leaders of the various International Unions affiliated to the A. F. of L. bear a great

responsibility for the present situation. Is it not true that the present conditions of the auto workers, the adoption of the "merit" clause and the legalization of the company unions have been brought about with the aid of the A. F. of L. Council, which, through its spokesman, President William Green, has endorsed the present set-up in the industry and has prevented the workers from gaining a possible victory at the moment when the workers' organization was at its height and the workers were determined to go into action, when tens of thousands of auto workers were already on strike? Has this same situation not been brought about in the steel industry through the intervention of President Green who, together with Mike Tighe, the President of the Amalgamated Association of the I. S. and T. W. U., ordered the strike called off after a special convention in April had worked out demands and decided to strike for these demands? As we write this letter news comes that the leaders of the U.T.W. are ready to send 500,000 striking textile workers back to work on the basis of the Winant report which brazenly calls upon the strikers to return to work without any of their demands granted. If this is done, the U.T.W. leaders will be guilty of the greatest betrayal in the history of the labor movement.

A. F. L. Leaders and Johnson

Permit us to mention one more instance in this connection. If we dwell on these subjects at length it is only because we wish to show where these policies of the A. F. of L. Council will lead the labor movement. Take the case of General Johnson. At the Washington convention of the A. F. of L., President Green in introducing Johnson to the delegates, stated, "I have been privileged to associate with General Johnson and to work with him and serve with him. . . ." "He is the very man who was needed to serve as Administrator of the National Recovery Act. . . ." "I want to repeat again what I have previously said, that if all others fail, if all other groups become discouraged and give up the fight, labor will stand with the General and see it all through. I pledge to him our support." The General has just made the most vicious attack on the heroic textile strikers. But this same General Johnson was on more than one occasion praised by the leaders of the A. F. of L. And the General also spoke very highly about the A. F. of L. leaders at a meeting of the outstanding capitalists of the country. Was this not because General Johnson, as the spokesman of the employers, was all the time aware that the A. F. of L. leaders were actually helping him put through policies in the interests of the employers and therefore against the workers? For it must be clear to us all that the interests of the employers and the workers are not and cannot be the same. While the workers are interested in high wages and better conditions, the employers are out for lower wages and more profits. Why did the A. F. of L. leaders make this "mistake" in General Johnson? Because it was not merely a wrong judgment of an individual. It was and is a wrong policy that they are following as far as the workers are concerned. Once they start out with the policy of "common interests of capital and labor" they cannot but serve the interests of the employers. It should have been clear from the start that General Johnson is a representative of the employers, an employer of labor who himself maintains in his establishment an open shop in the form of a company union. But yet when General Johnson went to California in an effort to break the general strike in Frisco, organized violence against the militant workers, the Communists, not only did the A. F. of L. leaders fail to denounce this strike-breaking on his part, but some of them, including President Green, denounced the general strike and the Communists. Is it not clear that both in Frisco and the textile strike Johnson was attacking the trade unions and serving the interests of the capitalists? But even now it is not enough to denounce General Johnson and at the same time praise Donald Richberg and Madame Perkins. Or is it possible to exempt President Roosevelt from the whole of the responsibility for the present attack on the workers? Certainly not. General Johnson, Richberg, Perkins and Roosevelt at their head are all defending the interests of the employing class.

New War on Communists

While the employers were and are making these attacks, the A. F. of L. leaders were engaged, not in attacking the employers and the N.R.A. officials, but the radicals, the Communists, the unions of the Trade Union Unity League, and other independent trade unions. Even today when it should be clear to every worker that the bosses are out to crush the trade unions and to worsen conditions, President Green has declared anew his unholy war on the Communists, calling for expulsion of radicals and Communists from the unions, calling upon the police to make war on militant workers, and upon the Labor Department of the government to carry through mass deportations. Are the militant workers and the Communists the enemy? Just look at the present textile strike. What are the radicals and Communists doing? They are bending every effort to win this strike, to win recognition of the United Textile Workers Union. Surely every worker in this country can learn the lesson of Germany. There the trade union leaders also spent their time attacking the Communists. And what happened? Only those who in time went over openly to the Hitlerites were spared. But the trade unions were destroyed and the leaders who fought the

Communists were, for the most part, not spared either.

We believe that the present situation which is so menacing for the entire labor movement demands the united action of all workers and all workers' organizations to defeat the bosses' attack. We believe furthermore that if such an approach is taken that it should be possible to create in this country a UNITED trade union movement, and not only of the millions now organized, but of tens of millions, most of whom still remain unorganized. We repeat to the whole labor movement, to the whole working class, that we on our part stand ready today as we have always been ready to do all in our power to create in this country a strong and united trade union movement. We also must repeat therefore that the responsibility for the division in the trade union movement which has weakened the struggles of the workers and above all has kept millions of unorganized away from all unions lies upon the shoulders of the A. F. of L. leaders who have split the labor movement.

One Union in Every Industry

While it is true that the Trade Union Unity League is based upon principles which differ fundamentally from those now being put into practice by the leaders of the A. F. of L. unions—such as our policy of struggle against the employers as against the A. F. of L. policy of common interest with the bosses, the principle of industrial unionism as against craft unions, etc.—it was not these differences that brought about the formation of the unions of the Trade Union Unity League. We have always believed and believe now in the principle of trade union unity of one union in every industry. We do not believe in the policy of organizing the more advanced and radical workers into separate unions. As proof of this we cite the fact that within the unions of the T.U.U.L. there are all kinds of workers, workers of varied political opinions—Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, Communists, Syndicalists and others. We believe that the trade unions should be open to all workers irrespective of their race, creed, color, religion or political opinion. But we do also believe that on the basis of the principle of democracy the workers shall have the right to propagate their opinions within the unions and that all questions of policy shall be democratically decided.

The unions of the T.U.U.L., as well as other independent unions, all whom today number many hundreds of thousands and in some industries, as for example, shoe, fur, among others constitute the main bulk of the organized workers, were organized primarily for two reasons, both of which clearly show the responsibility of the A. F. of L. leaders for the division in the trade union movement; these reasons are the refusal of the A. F. of L. to organize the millions of unorganized over a period of many years, and secondly, the non-democratic and expulsion policy of the A. F. of L. leaders, not only of minorities of the membership (New York garment workers, etc.). Not only the unions of the T.U.U.L. but such unions as the Progressive Miners, the United Shoe and Leather Workers Union and numerous other independent unions arose as a result of the splitting and anti-labor policies of the A. F. of L. leadership. Already we can observe new moves in the direction of independent unions, both among organized (A. F. of L.) and unorganized workers, because of these policies.

T. U. U. L. Aims for Unity

The T.U.U.L. unions throughout their existence have never failed to work for fraternal relations with the members of the A. F. of L. trade unions, to aim to unite the ranks of the workers of all unions in every struggle against the employers. We feel proud of the fact that since our existence we have always to the best of our ability organized the resistance of the workers to the attacks of the employers. While President Green joined with President Hoover in the so-called agreement to prevent strikes, it was the unions of the T.U.U.L. that organized and led the strikes of the workers, often gaining improvements in conditions, and on the whole checking the further onslaught of the employers on the living standards of the workers. We believe that these struggles conducted during the last four or five years have been of great help to the workers in their recent struggles because it was our policy that the workers now take up in their struggle against the employers. It is no accident that among the miners, textile and garment workers, where our organizations were most active, the workers were best able to carry on the struggle and force the employers to recognize the unions. The heroic struggles of the textile workers of Gastonia led by the National Textile Workers Union have laid the basis for the present militant actions of the textile workers.

The 54th annual convention of the A. F. of L., if it will carry out the wishes of the rank and file of the membership and meet the needs of the present situation, must adopt a platform which should in our opinion include the adoption of the principle of working class struggle as against the policy of class collaboration, the true characterization of the N.R.A. as the bosses' weapon against the workers, the unconditional right to strike, including the sympathy strike and the General Strike, against arbitration, the results of which can be seen in the auto, steel and other industries and now in the Winant proposals for the textile workers. That the convention adopt the policy of genuine industrial unions, based on the class struggle and not the sham proposals of John L.

Lewis, head of the U.M.W.A., who every miner knows, denies the miners their most elementary rights and works hand in glove with the operators, through which alone the many millions of unorganized can be brought into the unions. That the convention go on record guaranteeing full equality to the Negro workers and for a fight against discrimination against Negro workers in the factories. That the needs of youth and women labor be fully brought forward; that the convention endorse and take steps to carry on a struggle for the Workers Unemployment Insurance Bill; for the right of all unemployed to membership in the trade unions; against support in elections of candidates of the capitalist parties. That the union dues and initiations shall be brought down to the level making it possible for all low paid workers to join the trade unions. That a real campaign be undertaken to defeat the growing menace of the company unions, and in general a fight be decided upon against the menace of fascism and a new imperialist world slaughter, the danger of an imperialist attack on the Soviet Union.

Denounce Anti-Soviet Stand

In the struggle against the danger of a new imperialist slaughter the convention should repudiate the policy of the A. F. of L. Council which is still that adopted at the 1917 convention in the midst of the last World War. The A. F. of L. Council claims to be against politics in the unions, yet Mr. Green, Woll and others are the most vicious in attacking the Soviet Union. The convention should also condemn Vice-President Woll who by his position and activity as acting president of the National Civic Federation, is carrying on activity against the anti-Nazi boycott, is acting in direct violation of the Washington convention decision.

But above all, we urge the decision for full democratic rights of the membership, the free exercise of the democracy by the rank and file, repudiation of the attack on militant workers and Communists and the announced expulsion policy; an end to gangsterism, racketeering in the trade unions.

We feel that such a program which is called for especially by the present situation would make possible the building of a powerful and united trade union movement. The A. F. of L. can become a great organization of labor only on the basis of a complete break with its former policies, which have proven ruinous to the labor movement. This militant strike of the textile workers on the one hand and the stubborn attack of the employers prove that only on the basis of the fighting policies we propose can the A. F. of L. unions grow into powerful organizations capable of defending the interests of the workers and defeating the bosses' attacks.

Calls for Militant Program

The Trade Union Unity League and its affiliated organizations would only welcome such a change in the policies of the A. F. of L. organizations. This would surely open the way for the unification of the trade union movement and the unions in the respective industries. It would make possible not only to unite the T.U.U.L. unions with the A. F. of L. organizations, but we would use all our power to influence the other independent unions towards the same end.

We do not place as a condition for the unification of the trade unions that the above program be adopted in full, although we are convinced that only such a program meets the interests of the workers.

We state that we are ready to urge such unification on the basis of the defense of the workers against the bosses attacks, the guarantee that provisions be made to organize all the unorganized, to open the unions to all workers, to make it possible for all wage workers to become organized, to readmit all members expelled for fighting for their rights, and provided further that the A. F. of L. and its affiliated national and international unions guarantee full rank and file democracy to all members to fight for their opinions, to fight for the policies in the interests of the workers, development of the initiative of the rank and file, the free and democratic elections to all positions in the organizations. It was the absence of these two conditions that gave rise to the unions outside of the A. F. of L. primarily. And if these conditions are removed, then the way is open for the unification of the trade union movement.

Fight for Class Unity

The rank and file of the labor movement have shown by their great and courageous struggles of the last two years, in the tactics they have used, in their resolute attitude in the face of unprecedented use of force by the employers and the various government agencies, by the united character of these struggles, by their sympathetic strikes, by the fact that the issue of the general strike arises now in almost every struggle, that the great majority of the organized workers in the basic industries are in favor of such a program as we propose.

We will continue to fight for this program irrespective of the decisions of the 54th annual convention of the A. F. of L. We are sure that more and more the rank and file of the A. F. of L. will make this program their own. The unions of the T.U.U.L. will continue to organize the workers around this program and everywhere strive to establish united action against the bosses with the unions of the A. F. of L. and the independent unions. We will at the same time irrespective of the decisions of the convention continue and intensify the fight for the fighting class unity of the trade union movement of the United States.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD
TRADE UNION UNITY LEAGUE