

The Question of Trade Union Unity

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

FOR MANY YEARS past, the left wing and many rank and file workers generally have been demanding unity between the AFL and the CIO. Now it appears more and more as though the two federations may be merged in the near future. Trade union unity is of great importance; it will be of historic significance to the



working class to heal the great breach that has split the labor movement for almost 20 years. But if this prospective unity is to achieve even part of its tremendous potentialities it must be pushed and shaped by the workers. Simply to leave the matter in the hands of the Meany and the Reuthers to work out in accordance with their narrow clique interests would mean to slash the benefits of the whole unity move for the working class.

Trade union unity must be much more than for the CIO merely to join the AFL, "returning to the house of labor," as the Meany crowd would have it. It must be a real merger. And this merger must be so organized that the industrial form and membership of the CIO unions will be fully protected and not exposed to the raids of the rapacious craft unionists.

Together with combining the two national federations, labor unity, to reach its proper scope, must also include the Miners Union, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the progressive and conservative independent unions. Labor unity, if its potentials are to be realized, should also be utilized to launch a broad organizing campaign, especially in the South, which could draw several million more workers into the unions. And of decisive importance there must be complete protection given to the rights of Negro workers to belong to all unions, to hold office in them, and to have full access to the skilled jobs in industry.

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THE FOREGOING are minimum requirements if the proposed labor unity is to be truly constructive. And there can be no doubt that the workers, if given a chance to express their opinion (which will not happen) would fully support these measures.

But the workers should make further demands upon their conservative leaders. They should not stop at the narrow organizational framework that the latter are discussing in their unity negotiations. The unification of the AFL and the CIO is a great historical movement in the life of the working class, and the workers should demand that it also be made the occasion for a long and badly-needed renovation of trade union policy. Both the AFL and the CIO are now afflicted with numerous reactionary policies which should be sloughed off and not allowed to hang further as a millstone around the neck of the amalgamated organization which, hopefully, will come out of the present unity negotiations.

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FIRST, in the fight for more protection for the workers against mass unemployment, there should be a break made with the Wall Street idea of keeping the industries limping along on the basis of war orders

—now at the rate of almost \$50 billion a year. This dangerous policy, if it does not lead to war, will bankrupt the country economically. Instead, the united labor movement, on the basis of the present official AFL and CIO economic programs, should put all the stress on better wages, shorter hours, public works, elaborated social insurance, health and education programs, and the like.

Second, organized labor in the new unity, should break sharply with the aggressive foreign policy of the government—the rearming of Nazi Germany and militarist Japan, the financial and military support of the political bandits Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee, the building of aggressive air bases all around the world, etc. Unified and awakened, the trade unions and their allies should develop a working-class policy of peaceful co-existence with the USSR and People's China, which is the only way to world peace.

Third, the fight against McCarthyism should be greatly stepped up. McCarthyism is fascism, and it should be fought as the most malignant enemy of the trade unions, the workers' living standards, Negro rights and American democracy.

Fourth, the unified labor movement should also put an end to the old bankrupt Gompers political policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies," which both the AFL and the CIO are following. At the present time, as the Communist Party Program points out, it is necessary to work within the Democratic Party (and where necessary also include the Republican Party) because this is where the workers are now affiliated politically. The workers must concentrate their heaviest blows against McCarthyism, fight for working-class candidates, and support progressive legislation. They should especially prepare for an all-out struggle to defeat the Republican reactionaries in 1956.

But all this political work must be carried on within the general perspective of eventually launching a broad labor-farmer party. A united labor movement of 16,000,000 members would be in a splendid position, along with its Negro, farmer and professional allies, to begin to orientate towards the eventual formation of a great independent political party of their own. This would be a tremendous step forward by the American working class.

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THE FOREGOING are some of the major potentialities inherent in the movement for trade union unity, if it is seized upon by the masses of workers and made a live and urgent working-class issue. Up to the present, however, there has been altogether too much worker passivity in the matter. It is all being pretty much left to a handful of reactionary top bureaucrats who, if they realize unity at all, will do it in such a narrow manner as to strip it of most of its dynamic possibilities.

In this important situation it is not the task of the Left simply to work out a few minimum planks for unity that will please the few bureaucrats who are controlling the negotiations, but especially to stir the masses to make unity demands upon these leaders that are in line with the basic interests of the working class.

The establishment of trade union unity is a vital political occasion and it should be fully utilized as such.