

Lessons of Economic Struggles, Tasks of Communists in Unions

Draft Resolution for the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party of U. S. A.

Bourgeois Offensive and Increasing Resistance of Workers

1. Tremendous changes are taking place in the ranks of the working-class and in the trade unions. The outstanding events of the recent period are a more rapid and deep-going radicalization of the workers, already expressed in the growth of a militant mass strike movement; the entrance of new hundreds of thousands of workers into the A. F. of L. unions, with the simultaneous growth of some of the unions of the T. U. U. L. and the rise of mass independent unions; the beginnings of a mass opposition within the reformist unions. All this indicates that we stand before great class battles that are maturing and that there is the possibility of rapidly developing a united mass revolutionary trade union movement. The bourgeoisie and the reformist trade union and socialist leaders are increasing their activity in the attempts to disrupt, disorganize this movement, and divert it from the revolutionary path. The role and activity of the Communists in this situation is at the present time of decisive importance and will determine who will gain the leadership of the leftward moving masses, the reformists or the Communists.

GROWTH AND POLITICAL CHARACTER OF STRIKES

2. This movement was already in the last year expressed by the strike struggles of over a million workers and extending to almost all industries and for the first time in a decade expressed in mass strikes of the auto workers, steel workers, seamen. The bourgeoisie through the N.R.A. and the reformist trade union leaders did not succeed in arresting the strike struggles, which in the latter stages took the form of strikes against the N.R.A. codes (second miners' strike, silk strike, etc.). The strikes were further marked by a growing stubbornness of the masses as seen in the great number of strikes where the workers came out again and again as they found themselves tricked by the N.R.A. and the A. F. of L. leadership. The strike struggles which were mainly for wage increases and for the right to organize bore a definite offensive character and more and more developed elements of political struggle. This was most clearly expressed in the New Mexico miners' strike with the raising of the demands on the government for the release of all strike prisoners as a condition for the settlement of the strike. In varying degrees such demands and elements of political struggle characterized many of the strikes. A further expression of the political elements of the strike movement was the general strike of the entire working population in Central Illinois, in connection with the strike of the shoe workers, the beginnings of political strikes in connection with the Austrian events, Scotland. Continuation of strikes despite the edicts of the National and Regional boards is becoming a mass phenomenon. In all the strikes one of the outstanding features was the solidarity of the employed and unemployed. Large sections of young workers in almost all strikes, increasing sections of women workers (textile, garment, etc.) and Negro workers (miners, steel, garment, food, etc.) participated in the strikes as well as masses of colonial workers (agricultural strikes).

STRIKEBREAKING ROLE OF N. R. A.

3. While in the first stages of the strike movement (before the N.R.A.) the strikers were able to gain concessions as a result of the struggle, the strikes in the latter part of the year were in a large number of cases disrupted through the N.R.A. leadership (Weirton, auto strikes, captive mines, etc.), as well as through open terror where the strikers were under militant leadership (Ambridge). Only where the strikes were led by the unions of the T. U. U. L. by militant independent unions, or where the left wing within the A. F. of L. unions exerted sufficient influence were the employers and the government, and their agents, the A. F. of L. bureaucrats, unable to completely trick the workers with the N.R.A. and compulsory arbitration schemes, and the workers were able to gain some of their demands (garment strikes, Paterson dye strike, etc.).

DISILLUSIONMENT WITH N.R.A. GROWS

4. The workers are rapidly learning the lessons of the strikebreaking role of the N.R.A. and the betrayals of the A. F. of L. leadership, the N.R.A., which promised without struggle better wages, shorter hours and the right to organize, is more and more being exposed as the instrument of the capitalists for the greater, more intensive exploitation and oppression of labor. The workers are more and more coming to this conclusion when they compare the promises of the government and the A. F. of L. leadership with the results of the N.R.A. While the N.R.A. has resulted in increased profits of hundreds of millions for the capitalists, the real wages of the workers are lower than before the N.R.A. as a result of: a) the utilization of the minimum wage clause to drive down the wages of the workers as a whole, b) the reduction of hours without corresponding compensation in weekly earnings, c) the rapid rise in prices, d) the greater intensification of labor. At the same time while the right of the workers to organize into unions of their choice is being met by the brutal suppression of the armed forces of the government the capitalists were able under the N.R.A. to increase their company unions from about a million to five million members.

NEW WAVE OF STRIKES

5. As a consequence of the growing disillusionment of the masses with the N. R. A., the realization that under the N. R. A. the living standards of the masses have declined, there is now developing a new mass strike movement which has all the characteristics of becoming more widespread and more militant than last year, directed more openly against the N.R.A. This growth of the strike movement is already expressed in the first place in the mass strikes in the auto industry (Toledo, Wisconsin, Hudson, etc.), the strike votes in many auto plants throughout the country, the pressure of the rank and file of the Railroad Brotherhoods for a struggle to win back the 10 per cent wage cut, the beginnings of strikes in the steel plants, the strike of 5,000 workers in the Mellon aluminum plants, the general strike for the second time of the New York taxi drivers, the insurgent strike of the Negro and white miners of Alabama, the decision to strike of the West Coast longshoremen, etc. Emphasizing the class character of the N.R.A. as a weapon against the workers, the major demands of the developing strikes even more than before center around the issues of wage increases, against speed-up, for the right to organize and against company unions.

NEW ATTACKS ON MASSES AND ROLE OF A. F. OF L. LEADERSHIP

6. Faced with the developing strike movement, the capitalists, the government, and the A. F. of L. bureaucrats are trying by all means to dissipate the fighting moods of the workers, to disorganize the ranks of the workers, and prepare the machinery for the more brutal suppression of the struggles. The government is attempting to bolster up the N.R.A. in which large sections of the workers have already lost confidence, with new demagogues embodied in the Wagner Bill which, in the name of organizing company unions, in reality is legislation aiming to fasten compulsory arbitration upon the workers, giving a monopoly to the A. F. of L. bureaucrats where the employers can no longer keep the workers in check through the company unions. At the same time when the government tries to fool the workers that it is opposed to the company unions and publicly put forward the A. F. of L. leaders as a better guarantee against strikes than the company unions (speech of General Johnson to the chief capitalists of the country), the open shop employers (steel, trust, automobile chamber of commerce, etc.) are intensifying their attempts to fasten the company unions upon the workers (statement by the auto magnates, so called "democratization" of the company unions of the U. S. Steel, etc.) through the blacklist, intimidation, etc. The treachery of the A. F. of L. leadership in breaking the strikes of the workers through the N. R. A. (Weirton, Budd, etc.) is assisting the employers in putting over the company unions. The A. F. of L. bureaucrats, faced with the growing discontent of the rank and file, the actual strike votes, etc., is now being forced to talk of struggles which they have no intention to lead and which they are trying to prevent, while at the same time they are openly with the Socialist Party (Panken, Thomas endorsement of the Wagner Bill), sponsoring the Wagner anti-strike legislation in order to be able to more effectively break the strike struggles in the event that the workers go into action in spite of the A. F. of L. bureaucrats.

MOVES TOWARDS FASCIZATION

7. The present proposed legislation (Wagner Bill, Connery 30 hour bill, etc.) which is supported by the A. F. of L. leadership, is not merely a defense against the demands of the workers and the rising struggles.

With the tremendous rise of strike struggles, especially in the basic, decisive industries, the role of the Communists in these struggles becomes paramount. In today's Daily Worker we print the full text of the draft resolution on economic struggles and the tasks of Communists in the trade unions. This draft resolution to be submitted to the 8th Convention of the Party, though by no means to be considered as final, is the most detailed and thorough analysis of the recent and present economic struggles and the tasks of Communists yet published in our press.

Every Party member, every militant trade union member, should study this document.

As the draft resolution points out, our work in the trade unions has many shortcomings, especially in view of the gigantic stirring of the masses, the growth of the

high political importance of the strikes, the rapid change in the situation with the tremendous sweep of company unions, and particularly because of the growing fascization of the government strike-breaking policy, and the role of the A. F. of L. and Socialist leaders. The increasing need of working within the reformist unions, of strengthening the independent and revolutionary unions, struggle unions, on the basis of the United Front from below, are taken up in detail in this resolution.

We urge every reader of the Daily Worker to make the closest study of this resolution, to discuss it widely, and to use it as a weapon in the present strike struggles for the defeat of the increasingly fascist program of the Roosevelt regime, supported by the A. F. of L. leaders and their social-fascist aides.

"... WE HAVE CHARTED A NEW COURSE IN SOCIAL ENGINEERING IN THE UNITED STATES"—President Roosevelt

—By Burck



It is like the N.R.A. as a whole at the same time a further attack on the masses. The employers and the government, faced with stagnation of industry even though the crisis has entered the stage of a depression with a higher level of production than at the lowest point (March, 1933), faced with the growing acuteness of the struggle for markets, the necessity for more feverish preparation for imperialist war, are attempting to further drive the living standards of the masses, reduce the "cost of production," decrease the cost of all social benefits, balance the budget at the expense of the masses. The government has already taken the step of throwing the four million C.W.A. workers back into the vast army of millions of unemployed both for the purpose of reducing the relief to the unemployed and to make it all the more easy for the employers in private industry to reduce wages and break strikes. The attack on the postal workers, a prelude to a further attack on all the low paid government employees, the threat to veto the veterans bonus bill, etc., all this shows how clearly the Roosevelt government acting in the interest of finance capital is setting the pace for a renewed attack on the living standards of the masses. The efforts of the government to strengthen the hand of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy is an attempt to convert the unions more openly into organizations dominated and controlled by the government in the interest of capital, to create stronger guarantees against strikes, to assure the carrying through of the plans for a capitalist way out of the crisis through beating down the living standards of the masses, the greater exploitation of the masses in the colonies (Cuba, etc.) and through a new world imperialist war. The open shop capitalists who profess to oppose the new legislation, the extension of the role of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, do not, of course, fear any of the government measures, as they have already increased their profits with the aid of the N. R. A. and direct their "opposition" to the N.R.A. that helped the capitalists and the government to create illusions in the minds of the workers that the N.R.A. was in their interests. To the extent that there seems to be a difference of opinion on the role of the A. F. of L. leadership in the whole scheme, it is on the one hand a sham battle to create illusions among the masses and at the same time a fear on the part of the open shoppers that the A. F. of L. bureaucrats will be unable to control the rapidly leftward moving masses who become organized within the American Federation of Labor. While the Roosevelt government appears to be more outspoken in the necessity for putting forward more widely the A. F. of L. it by no means has any intentions of at this time doing away with the company unions or organizing the mass of the workers into the A. F. of L. unions. It is only carrying through such maneuvers where the mass discontent is rising, where the danger exists that the company unions will not prove themselves able to cope with the situation and where

Brotherhoods which although not affiliated with the A. F. of L. are in no way distinguishable from them. **EMPLOYERS BUILDING COMPANY UNIONS**

3. These figures show that almost half as many workers joined the unions outside the A. F. of L. as those who joined the A. F. of L. It is also important to note that while the trade unions grew by three-quarters of a million, the company unions now embrace many times that number of new workers, emphasizing that the movement of the workers for organization only resulted in part in the entrance of the workers into the trade unions. This, of course, is to be explained by the reformist and strikebreaking policies of the A. F. of L. leadership, and by the insufficient activity by the T.U.U.L. unions, in organizing and leading the struggles of the workers. The growth of the independent unions is explained by the fact that although there are large sections amongst the workers who no longer have confidence in the leadership of the A. F. of L. unions, these workers either have not as yet been reached or properly reached by the T.U.U.L. unions, or they still fear to become part of the revolutionary trade union movement. These latter unions are of diverse character as far as their program and leadership is concerned. Where the Communists recognized in time the situation and helped to organize these unions, they have in the main adopted a class struggle policy and selected reliable workers as their leadership. In the majority of cases especially when these independent unions were a result of a split from the A. F. of L. (miners) because of the weakness of the revolutionary opposition in these unions the leadership was taken by a new set of reformists who try to mislead the workers with left phrases but keep them chained to the old reformist policies. This is also true of these independent unions where the Communists and other revolutionary workers remained on the outside during the process of the formation of these unions (Mechanics Association, etc.).

STRIKEBREAKING ROLE OF SOCIALISTS AND RENEGADES

5. The Socialist Party leaders in all these struggles were part and parcel of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, carrying through all their treacherous policies. They repeated the words of William Green that "this is no time to strike" (Norman Thomas). They preached reliance upon the N.R.A. and the Roosevelt government. In the unions under their leadership they carried through the worst forms of betrayal of the workers. The "left" socialists tried to cover up their betrayal with mild criticism of the N.R.A. and were quick to recognize the mood of the workers against the A. F. of L. bureaucrats, even taking up the slogan of independent unions with the intention of bringing them into the A. F. of L. through the back door. The Mustelites played no independent role in the big strike movement, thus demonstrating their isolation and bankruptcy. In none of the important strikes did they participate through their organization, the C. P. U. A. (now the American Workers Party), or through their outstanding leaders. While in the beginning claiming to be against the N.R.A. and for the united front, they quickly exposed themselves as unwilling to support the fight for the united front (Paterson strike), or to support any of the struggles of the militant unions (steel). They, however, gave sufficient proof that their position was one of support for the A. F. of L. leadership with but mild criticism and a plea to Green that racketeering by eliminated from the unions. Only in the New York Amalgamated Food Workers did the Mustelites show any influence, and here not among the

ROLE OF VARIOUS UNIONS IN STRIKE STRUGGLES

4. The growth of the various trade unions runs in the main parallel with the leadership of the struggles by the various organizations, emphasizing more than ever the necessity to do everything possible on our part to organize, prepare and lead the developing struggles. Thus the A. F. of L. unions which have grown by some half million led 450,000 of the workers on strike during the last year and mainly the strikes of the miners, garment workers and textile workers. The T.U.U.L. unions which recruited some 100,000 new members led strikes of some 200,000 workers but because of the heavier attack on these unions and the inner weaknesses of the T.U.U.L. organizations were not able to fully consolidate under their leadership the masses who followed them in the struggle. The independent unions who also led strikes of some 250,000 workers (shoe, auto miners, taxi,

workers, but through some of the Lore top allies. The position of the Mustelites was, however, exposed through two of the members of their National Committee, Ryan of the Hosiery Workers Union, and the renegade Salutsky of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Mustel refused to take a stand against Ryan, who openly sabotaged the Cleveland United Front Trade-Union Conference, or against Salutsky, the editor of "Advance," official organ of Sidney Hillman, who became one of the outstanding advisers of Roosevelt and Perkins.

An especially treacherous role in the strike movement was played by the renegades, the Trotskyites (Cannon and the Lovestonites). However, only in the food union did the Trotskyites play any considerable role, and here the Trotskyite Field betrayed the strike of the meat packers in an alliance with the renegade Gitlow. The Lovestonites became the mercenary troops carrying through the most treacherous policies for the labor bureaucrats. Chief among them were: Charles Zimmerman in the needle trades, Keller in the textile industry, and I. Zimmerman in the shoe industry. None of these groups has as yet been able to hire out its services in the basic industries. Their whole policy cannot be distinguished from the Green-Woll policy, except, perhaps, by the fact that they act as the provocateurs against the Communists for the government and the top leaders of the American Federation of Labor.

ACTIVITY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

6. The Party played an important role not only in the strikes led by the T.U.U.L. unions but played an increasingly important role in most of the strikes led by the A. F. of L. and independent unions. This was especially true of the strikes in the textile industry, the strikes of the taxi, hotel workers, the garment trades, and to a lesser extent in the strikes of the auto workers and the miners.

Our Party was, however, slow in taking advantage of the favorable situation for the organization of the struggles of the workers. One of the reasons for this was the still existent underestimation of the moods of the masses for struggle (mining, needle, textile, auto, Paterson, Allentown, Detroit, etc.). As a result of this the Party organizations and the fractions were not fully orientated for the leadership and the development of the struggles. In addition to this the following characterization of the Twelfth Plenum of the E. C. C. I. as to the failure of the Communist Party to rouse the masses for struggle fully applied still to our Party:

"The chief cause of the insufficient development of the struggles is the still unsatisfactory application of the line of independent leadership of the economic struggles, on the basis of the tactics of the united front from below, the underestimation of the partial struggles in the weak contacts in the factories and among the unemployed, in the weakening of the revolutionary masses, in the reformist trade unions, in the inability to expose the maneuvers of the reformist trade union bureaucrats, openly or concealed by 'left' phrases."

Added to this must also be the failure of Communist fractions in the T.U.U.L. unions to fight decisively for the consolidation of the gains in the struggle and to utilize them for the further development of the struggle (auto); the failure to build the union while at the same time leading the struggle on the basis of the united front (April miners' strike); failure to quickly recognize a changed situation (growth of the U. M. W. A. in the Pittsburgh area); failure to adopt mass methods of work corresponding to the degree of activity of the masses (steel, auto), etc. All these weaknesses in the work of the Party and the Party fractions in the T. U. U. L. and the A. F. of L. unions contributed to considerable lagging behind and the loss of initiative to the reformists (Paterson, second mass automobile strike of Detroit, miners' strike, dress strike in New York, etc.).

HIDING FACE OF PARTY

7. The leadership of the Party in the trade union work remains extremely weak despite the Open Letter and control tasks adopted by the C. and the Districts. The majority of the Party members remain outside of the unions in most of the districts (including such concentration districts as Chicago, Detroit); in the Party as a whole, the important progress made was with but a small section of the Party membership active in the economic struggles. Communist fractions, without which there can be no real leadership by the Party in the work of the trade unions, remain weak and receive little attention. The District Committees do not yet even have the responsibility for constantly guiding, controlling and improving the work of the fractions. In many cases the fractions do not exist at all. There still persists a social-democratic division between

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HIDING THE FACE OF THE PARTY IN TRADE UNION WORK.

"There still persists a social-democratic division between Party work and trade union work.

"Still less attention is paid by the Party organizations in the development of work in the A. F. of L. unions, the Railroad Brotherhoods, etc.

"In recent strike struggles we saw a resistance of some Communists active in the strikes to building the Party, to distributing the Daily Worker and other Party literature, while the Party organizations also gave but little attention to utilizing the strike struggles for bringing forward the Party among the workers."

—From the Resolution.

SOME TASKS OF COMMUNISTS IN TRADE UNIONS

"Mobilize the entire Party membership for revolutionary trade union work. Enroll every Party member eligible into the trade unions, on the basis of a thorough enlightenment of the membership as to reasons for our emphasis on work in the factories and trade unions.

"In raising before the Party, work in the factories and trade unions as the central task, care must be taken to overcome the opportunist conception of trade union work.

"Our trade union work is not an end in itself—the trade unions are for the Communists a bridge to the masses."

—From the Resolution.

