

THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE TASKS OF THE PARTY

The Trade Union Resolution of the March plenum of the National-Committee presented an analysis of the situation of the trade unions in relation to the war, to the ruling class and the government and the contradiction between the class collaborationist attitude of the union leadership and the economic demands of the workers, as well as their historic political interests. The position taken in that resolution is adequate and correct as a guiding line of the Party today. The main Political Resolution of the Convention also presents in some detail an analysis of the economic and political status of the trade union movement at the present time.

The period since the Workers Party was founded has seen a great surge forward in the labor movements: great organizing drives and momentous conflicts have carried trade union membership to the highest point in history. Analysis and interpretation of these events have appeared in the Party press. This has been an outstanding achievement of the Party made possible by the attendance of the National Labor Secretary at important labor conventions such as the CIO convention last November, the UAW convention in August and the shipyard workers convention in September. This type of contact with the unions made possible improvement in presentation in the press and better insight into the realities of the trade union movement.

Outstanding events have been the growth of the whole labor movement, especially the phenomenal growth of the CIO unions. More significant has been the persistence of militancy despite the war, particularly in the CIO. This militancy manifested itself in a series of strikes that took on a political character. Notable among these strikes were Bethlehem, Allis-Chalmers, Ford and North American. The bourgeoisie and the government have not succeeded in completely regimenting the working class, even with the aid of their labor lieutenants.

The last desperate act in an attempt at "pacification" was the armed military breaking of the North American strike. This attack by the Roosevelt government undoubtedly had profound influence on the unions; especially on the leadership, who readily picked up the government cry that the strikes were being "fomented by Communists". The union leadership has learned however that complete submission to the bourgeoisie is difficult due to the pressure from below.

It has been demonstrated, as at the UAW convention, that the membership, in some elementary way is becoming conscious of the place of the working class in capitalist society. They tend to ignore demands and entreaties for full and practical support of the war, in favor of their own demands for an improved standard of living, more independence and greater freedom. The main weakness now - as revealed in every trade union convention - is continued incapacity to grasp and deal with political questions.

The CIO unions today are mass organizations of industrial workers who have demonstrated an aptitude for and a trend toward sustained militant action. These unions have an appreciable degree of internal democracy, notably demonstrated in the UAW. There is an absence of a hardened bureaucracy. The relative organizational immaturity of the membership and often of the leadership (Carey of the UMRW) is an outstanding

characteristic. The development of modern technology and the pressure of the government for war supplies make it possible for those with little or no skill to find employment in the factories.

This makes the organizational penetration of the unions in the mass production industries comparatively simple. In several instances already the Party has proven this in practice. This is not the case however with political intervention. Due to the political backwardness and prejudices of the workers, this is far more difficult. It must be emphasized though that political success for our Party, in the shops and unions, even when objective conditions are favorable, will result only from previous shop and union leadership. A party not rooted in the factories will have slight chance of assuming political leadership of the proletariat.

In light of the concrete situation in the country and the unions the tasks before the Workers Party are clear and definitive. The job before the Party now is a practical one and does not need to wait on further political or theoretical analysis.

The foregoing considerations lead properly to discussion of the meaning of our central slogan: INTO THE FACTORIES, INTO THE PROLETARIAT.

We have spoken of this as the Party's "industrial (proletarian) orientation". In order for the slogan to become effective, the whole Party must have this orientation. It is not enough for the orientation to become the private property of those already in the factories and the unions. This must be the pivot around which the whole Party turns; in its thinking and action. All, the entire Party work and organization must be reoriented to the end that the main focal point becomes the factory, the shop and the union. All the manifold problems faced by the working class concretely must be understood as the "American Problems" of this period.

In the future it will be necessary to conceive and plan all Party activity in line with the central idea of getting the party into the factories to the end that workers may be brought from the factories into the Party. This means coordination of all the work of the Party around the central tactical slogan. This is not the sole task of the Trade Union Department. It is just as much the task of the Education Department and the Finance Department. To follow such a line means that the educational work of the Party will escape from its abstract and routine character. The Finance Department will become a political arm of the Party, fund raising will not be purely administrative but directed toward concrete and specific political ends.

Properly understood, the Party proletarian orientation, if it is to become effective in the Party as a whole, means the functional reorientation of the Branches. This is absolutely essential if the orientation is to be carried out. Members of the Branch not in the factory must join hands with Party members inside the plants. The Party members in the factory, participating integrally in the work of the Branch to which they are assigned, must take the lead in posing the economic and political problems of the factory and the unions for a foremost place on the Branch agenda. This type of procedure will lift the Branches out of the customary dull routine, make for a more dynamic Branch lead-

ership and educate the membership not only on the specific political problems before the working class but also in the practical organizational and economic questions with which the real and living mass movement of the proletariat is concerned. This is not the case today. At present the political life of the Branch is divorced from the practical and theoretical problems of the labor movement. Also there is a tendency for the factory workers to become separated from the political life of the Party and become completely involved in the routine affairs of the trade unions. The politics of the Party do not enter the factory; the shop and union problems of the factory do not enter the Party.

Each member of the Party has a job to do in connection with carrying out the proletarian orientation of the Party. The distinction between the factory employed member and the member not in the factory, hitherto existent, must be dissolved. Members not in factories must carry the Party to the factory workers at the factory gate and in their homes. The activity of neighborhood branches should be concentrated mainly in those areas where workers live who are employed in factories where Party factions are employed. This means the distribution of Labor Action and The New International at the factory gate and in the homes of these workers. Also the non-factory members must be assigned for contact work and political and trade union discussion in the homes of the workers in these factories.

This will demand not only the general theoretical education of the Party membership but also education in the practical problems of the trade union movement. This should be mandatory on every Party member and a condition for continued membership in the Party.

Open air meetings and indoor neighborhood meetings should be conducted in the area of the factory concentrations. The theme for these meetings, in this period, should not just be on "the war" with the constant and routine reiteration that it is "an imperialist war". Rather should the meeting be definitely planned to present to the factory workers and union members a practical political discussion of some concrete event, act of Congress, the employers of the President. (an illustration is a practical educational or agitational political analysis of the tax bill or the rising cost of living and how these are the offshoots of the imperialist war.)

To carry this orientation into action requires of course complete liason between members in the factories and the Party on the outside. This liason takes place through the Branch of which both sets of comrades are members. The orientation also presupposes that all the Party has and understands the orientation. This applies especially to the leading local committees, and particularly to the National Educational Committee.

The Party proletarian orientation is based not only on concentration in certain specified industries but also in selected cities. The Party must insist that members going into the concentration industries, must go in with the perspective of remaining there and becoming workers in fact. The aims of the Party will not be advanced by those who have only a short term perspective for their factory employment.

In order to give practical application to this resolution the following tasks are proposed:

1. In the Party registration proposed in the supplement to the Political Resolution, each member of the Party not in a factory must be interviewed to discover his or her reason for not taking a factory job.
2. Branches are urged to impress on factory workers the importance of turning in the names of contacts to the Party.
3. Non-factory workers in the Branch should be directed to make contact with factory workers for personal interview and the distribution of Party literature. This work should preferably be with workers in concentration factories.
4. Each Branch should select a factory for the distribution of Labor Action, The New International and other Party literature. The Plant selected should be covered in a systematic manner weekly and for a period long enough to make a real test before a switch is made to another plant.
5. Branches must begin paying strict attention to the recruiting of factory workers.

Each Branch should consider setting a Branch quota for each of the above tasks, such quotas to be filled in a period to be determined by the Branch.

Submitted to the Second  
National Convention of the  
Workers Party