

The Struggle in the Coal Fields

By Arne Swabeck

The most momentous struggle on a mass scale, of the recent period in American labor history, is undoubtedly the battle of the mine fields.

Here was a crucial situation with splendid possibilities demanding a clear policy and decisive action. Despite the formidable obstacles in the way and our limited forces, the opportunities have never been better for building a new union of a militant type, for developing a broad left wing movement and with it extend the mass influence and leadership of the Workers (Communist) Party. The leadership of the Party in this fight increased manifold its responsibility to the miners in particular and to the working class in general.

How has this responsibility been met?

The Party leadership, represented by the Pepper-Lovestone group, has failed criminally, and still is failing to respond to the imperative needs of the situation and to take advantage of the existing possibilities. The extent of the failures of the past are already brought out in bold relief by subsequent events. The whole course of the Party leadership has been sharply characterized by its general unscrupulous adventurist conception which looks upon workers in mass struggles only as objects of manoeuvre, not as class brothers in arms. Coupled with that went its conservative, opportunist outlook,—the greatest menace to the vigor and vitality of such movements.

The left wing had practically disappeared as an organized expression at the beginning of the national strike, April 1927. But the miners went out determined to beat back the attacks and the fields were seething with undercurrents of revolt against the whole treacherous policy of the Lewis machine. A clear duty faced the Party—to step forward and organize the left wing for a militant struggle against the operators and the Lewis machine. This policy was proposed by the opposition but shamefully rejected. In May 1927 the opposition brought to the Political Committee a series of motions outlining various steps to build the left wing, to sharpen the clash with the bureaucrats and to culminate in an open conference. Likened to the "horrors" of "dual unionism" and even "armed insurrection" it was rejected by the majority. The proposals for organization of relief activities, while accepted on paper, never became effective until many months after.

THE MINERS' FIGHTING SPIRIT

The evidences of the fighting readiness of the miners piled up everywhere, but not until February 1928 did the Party leadership give up its resistance and accept the policy of organizing a broad left wing, and urge the calling of the April first conference to engage in an open clash with the treacherous union bureaucracy. It was compelled by the sheer force of events. Yet the District Organizers in the two most important coal fields of the Pittsburgh and Chicago districts ingrained in the Pepper-Lovestone right wing ideology, still resisted the measures for an open conference and an open clash, to the last. However, the correctness of the policy, for which the opposition had fought so long and bitterly against the resistance of the Party leadership, was proven by the subsequent events. Once the first steps were taken they immediately let loose the tremendous latent forces which became openly crystallized in the gigantic "Save the Union" movement.

The continued resistance to a correct policy had cost the movement dearly and the consequences were serious. Firstly in failure to give any leadership at the early stage of the struggle; in lack of necessary organizational preparations; in failure to render more decisive assistance to and more effectively participate in the Pennsylvania and Ohio strike; and finally in lack of a sufficiently early and clear perspective. The left wing therefore stumbled along with, in many respects, inadequate preparations for the tempo of the movement. It thus could not carry the fight effectively to the unorganized fields until the Pennsylvania and Ohio strike became almost exhausted. When forced to act quickly for the April 16 strike of the unorganized fields, the preparatory organizational measures were entirely lacking. To this must be added the ferocious persecution and terror against the movement by the Lewis machine, the operators and the state authorities.

The Party leadership did not seem able to grasp a full perspective of an open split with the bureaucrats and the building of a new union. While it acquiesced it never changed its conservative outlook. Even at the time of the convention call leading Pittsburgh comrades, steeped in this never changing out-

look, opposed the calling for a new union.

The Pepper-Lovestone Party leadership gave its major attention to gaining factional positions in the new union to the detriment of its future success. Utterly unfit to lead a serious battle in the class struggle, incapable of grappling with its real problems, so often bound up in small sordid details, this group turned its attention to securing factional control which resulted in seriously narrowing the leadership of the new unions. Highly qualified and experienced comrades, already accepted as leaders by the miners' movement, were deliberately isolated for no other reason than factional group interests.

GAMBLING WITH THE WORKERS' INTERESTS

In this real test of mass struggle the Party leadership has shown its impotency and unscrupulous gambling with workers' interests. Even toward the Party union fraction a factional policy was maintained throughout. Following a correct attitude the Party leadership would have decided upon a general line of policy for the fraction to carry out in the convention. In addition it would have elected a qualified and experienced C.E.C. committee to constantly advise with the fraction. Such, however, was by no means the case. On the contrary, the Pepper-Lovestone leadership appointed a committee with a majority of its faction agents entirely devoid of experience and authority in trade union work. This committee assumed complete authority for all decisions, made all appointments for steering committee and candidates for office. Its decisions were binding, the members of the fraction merely taking orders and having no part whatever in making decisions.

The danger of such procedure can very well be visualized. First, it gives no opportunity to really develop the leadership of the fraction within the union. Secondly, it fails to fully utilize the experience of the comrades, the fraction members, who have been engaged in the actual battle. Thirdly, and most important of all, it destroys any basis for real Party democracy which can be founded only on the most intimate contact between higher bodies and the rank and file members, utilize the experiences and mass contact of the latter through joint deliberations and give them full opportunity for expression and criticism as the best guarantee for maintaining correct policies. This narrow factional line has not been relinquished to this date.

Such is the record of gambling with a mighty left wing struggle and a movement of splendid potentialities. The Party and the miners' movement have paid dearly for it. The crest of the first mighty wave has passed. The battle is now less dramatic but demands tenacious, painstaking work in building of the new union, so it may begin to assume leadership in local struggles for better conditions for the miners. The present Party leadership evinces no interest whatever and gives no support at all. While looking for objects for manoeuvres it has no faith in the mass struggles of the workers. Its attitude is largely determined by its own petty-bourgeois social background and concept. It has been and still is on trial before the American proletariat, particularly as expressed in this struggle. Only a correct revolutionary policy can stand this judgment.

The National Miners Union is based squarely upon recognition of the principles of the class struggle, the only possible orientation for a militant union in the present imperialist era. The Party leadership in its present "self-criticism" is making much ado about the "failure" of some of the comrades, including the writer, to adopt the wording "class struggle" for the constitution preamble. But one of my proposals for constitution submitted to the committee in charge, and contained in Minutes of Aug. 28, reads: "The declaration of principle shall be unequivocally based upon recognition of the class struggle."

The National Miners Union has been born out of the struggle in the coal fields. The operators are as determined as ever upon their strategy to smash all working class organization. In solid alliance with them are the fakers of the old union machine and the governmental institutions of court injunctions, jailings and police terror. Great are thus the forces opposing the new union. The last few years have been marked by the continuous surrender and betrayal policy of the old union bureaucracy. To effect the change from surrender to

militant struggle and real organization is the great task of the National Miners Union. To accomplish this it must have the full support of the left wing everywhere and that support must be mobilized by the Party.

THE NEW UNION MUST LEAD STRUGGLES

While a beginning has been made and a splendid record set by the left wing this union cannot grow in a vacuum of secret existence or semi-legality. It must step out and lead the struggles of the miners. With the proper Party support and active preparations conditions are favorable for a campaign of organization in the unorganized fields of West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. Conditions are favorable for its leadership in re-establishing union activities and union conditions in the former strike area of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Further struggles are impending in the Anthracite. The rank and file of Illinois and Indiana have shown great discontent and rebellion against the company union conditions imposed by the fakers who still maintain job control. They are looking toward the National Miners Union to give leadership. It must and can become a real force in the struggle for emancipation of the workers from capitalist exploitation.

This is an imperative task of the Party for which the objective possibilities are favorable. The absolute prerequisites for success in this task are a decisive change in the attitude of the Party and a reorganization of its leadership which will ruthlessly throw aside the adventurist faction mongers.

Mistakes can be corrected only when properly recognized and fully understood. This becomes a much more important maxim when viewing the attitude of the Party leadership towards the orientation upon a general policy of building new unions of the unorganized working masses. An orientation demanding ever more concrete action with the further completion of the general rationalization process of American capitalism. One recalls the timely criticism of Comrade Lozovsky last Spring, castigating our failure to see these unorganized masses, a scathing indictment of the official Party policy of manoeuvring on top while ignoring the militant mass potentialities. This was met with stubborn resistance from the C.E.C. majority; also Comrade Foster made this mistake. But not content with this the C.E.C. majority by its vote at the May plenum actually rejected the thesis of the R.L.L.U. World Congress demanding an orientation by our Party toward building of new unions of the unorganized masses. In reply to this Comrade Cannon wrote in the July Communist on the "Trade Union Question":

"The obstacles in the path of organizing the workers in the basic industries of America are truly enormous, and the present forces at our disposal are small. There is no need to minimize the difficulties, they will multiply and confront us at every turn. The state power of capitalism will obstruct the new union movement with the fiercest persecution; and the workers will soon find that they are not done with the treacheries of the labor fakers when they seek to form new unions.

"Between the decision to organize the unorganized masses and the actual formation and consolidation of new unions lies a long and stony road. But history has laid out that task for the Communist Party and the left wing, and we must begin the work in earnest."

This line was correct then and remains correct today.

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On the Eve of the Party Convention

THE Party convention, which had been scheduled for the first of February, has been postponed for another month by the cabled instructions of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, in the vain expectation that some secretarial machination or other can be devised to avoid the chaotic consequences of its policy which is plunging all the Parties of the Comintern into the deepest crises and splits. Such attempts will no doubt be made but they are doomed to defeat in advance. The more the present leadership of the C.I. proclaims that "the faction struggle has no basis in principle" the sharper grows the struggle in our Party no less than in the other sections of the International.

It is just these leaders who are chiefly responsible for the chaos and factional deterioration against which they complain. The determining factor in the factional struggles which rend the Parties of the Comintern is the unbridled factional crisis in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This factional struggle is the fountain head of all. Those who employ the weapons of expulsion, imprisonment, and exile—and, now banishment—against their Leninist opponents cannot show our Party or any other Party the way to solve its crisis by normal political means. Their "intervention" by cable or plenipotentiary will only make matters worse. Those who hope for help from this source hope in vain. An understanding of these facts is the starting point for any sensible analysis of the situation in our Party on the eve of the convention. Those who do not understand this are hopelessly at sea.

In our declaration of October 27, we predicted the whole course of developments and this prediction has been confirmed 100 percent in the ensuing pre-convention period. The Party "discussion" which has been going on will surely be an interesting object for the detailed study of the Party historian with lots of time at his disposal to study the reams of theses, proclamations, resolutions, confessions, etc., which have been issued. However, one who lives in the work-a-day world is obliged by sheer demands of time to confine himself to the salient points. We must confess that our own capacity to absorb these dull and windy proclamations reached the "saturation point" some time ago. The "discussion" has had three main aspects: The mutual accusations of the two "official" factions against each other, their joint "ideological campaign" against the Opposition and the "illegal" discussion carried on by the expelled Opposition.

If one were naive enough to take the declarations of the two factions seriously, where they give their estimates of each other, he would have to conclude that Lovestone and Pepper are preparing for the expulsion of the Foster group, while Foster and Bittelman on the other hand are laying the ground for a split. If the words do not mean this they have no meaning whatever. The generals on both sides of the sham battle, of course, utter them in the latter sense.

THE FAKE DISCUSSION

On the most important principle questions raised by the Opposition the two factions stand together and conduct a joint campaign against "Trotskyism." This campaign consists exclusively of denunciation without a single attempt to elucidate any of the disputed questions. The readers of the Party press are solemnly assured by all the statements and articles that the expelled Oppositionists, without exception, are traitors, etc., etc. Just what this treason consists of is not disclosed and no attempt is made to prove the accusation because there is no proof at hand. If we leave aside the yellow journalistic "exposures" based on stolen documents which nobody, least of all the authors, took seriously, it appears that the expelled comrades have become counter-revolutionaries overnight because they adopted the platform of Trotsky and the Russian Opposition. But what is the platform of Trotsky? How and why is it counter-revolutionary? To such questions, which immediately arise in the minds of grown-up people, the caucus politicians have no answer.

When we were expelled they promised a "broad ideological campaign" to clarify the Party on the questions raised in our declaration of October 27 in support of the Russian Opposition. This campaign still waits. Not a single one of the Trotsky-killers has ventured to take issue with the Trotsky platform on a single point. It is simpler and easier to pass the whole thing by with denunciation and epithet. So reason the petty bureaucrats of the two factions. The Party member who is not satisfied

with that, who asks questions and demands information is forthwith expelled. Then he becomes a "renegade" too.

By expulsion and terror they sought to prevent discussion even during the fraudulent "discussion period." But they failed. They only succeeded in making it "illegal." They drove it "underground." It has a lively existence there. The Party members are discussing the forbidden questions universally. These questions dominate the Party thought. Fundamental principle questions are occupying the attention of the comrades to a greater extent than at any time since 1919. More than 100 Party members have openly proclaimed their allegiance to the platform of the Opposition at the cost of expulsion.

A FACTIONAL EXCRESCENCE

The tactic of Lovestone and Pepper in the pre-convention struggle was ordained by all the circumstances and by the whole nature of the faction. Its "leadership" rests upon an exclusive preoccupation with internal factional manipulation, subordinating all Party interest and activity to this main "work," and combining it with assiduous wire-pulling in Moscow. This faction is an excrescence which could not possibly be at the head of a healthy workers' party under normal conditions. It is a product of the times. The political and ideological life of the Comintern during recent years has been the fight against "Trotskyism." The leaders for the various Parties have been artificially and mechanically selected from above on that basis. The readiness of the Pepper-Lovestone clique to support any infamy in the fight against Trotsky, and even to demand "harsher" measures, has been their charter from the E.C.C.I. to control the Party.

Construing leadership solely in terms of control of the Party apparatus, and not at all from the standpoint of the larger aspects of this function, their whole pre-convention strategy has been to maintain and strengthen that control. To expel the Opposition; to prevent a discussion of fundamental questions shaking the Party to again establish their prior claims in Moscow in the fight against "Trotskyism"; to terrorize the Fosterites with the Trotsky scare and make them do the scavenger work in the campaign; and to encroach still further toward a monopoly of the Party apparatus—such was the "strategy" of the ruling faction.

The cowardice and characterlessness of the Foster faction facilitated this strategy all along the line and assured in advance the victory it has already recorded in the District Conventions. The pitiful attempt of the Foster-Bittelman faction to "take the leadership in the 'ideological campaign'" against us only undermined its own position. They were "ahead" of Lovestone only in the sense that the boots of the latter were behind them, driving them forward as captives. The Fosterites who really believed the statements of their leaders to the effect that our stand is "counter-revolutionary" naturally and logically decided to subordinate everything to the fight against it and passed over to the C.E.C. majority. Those who did not believe it passed over to us. This process of disintegration which flows inevitably from the untenable position of the Foster group, will develop with cyclonic speed after the convention.

On the surface the ruling faction of Lovestone and Pepper has an overwhelming victory. In the New York District, for example, it registered a majority of more than ten to one in the District convention. The Fosterites were allowed only 3 delegates to the National Convention against 32 for Lovestone and it is almost completely wiped out of the newly-elected District Executive Committee—all of its effective representation being eliminated. On one pretext or another the Fosterites are being squeezed out of organizational positions and practically all the posts vacated by the expelled Oppositionists are taken over by the faction agents of Lovestone.

On Oct. 27 we said "the whole course of the Lovestone group, which has no roots in the labor movement, is toward a monopoly of the Party apparatus and cannot be otherwise." This is what is taking place. This is what they mean when they issue proclamations for "Unity."

The aim of the Lovestone faction is to split the Party. Their expulsion of the Opposition and their whole approach to the convention signifies this and nothing else. One must be completely and hopelessly blind to be unable to see this and to draw the bolshevik conclusions from it.

The District Conventions, which show a ten to one majority for Lovestone, do not reflect the

actual relation of forces in the Party. The gerrymandering, packing, "colonizing" and manipulating of elections in our Party under Lovestone and Pepper have become an art from which Lewis and Green could learn. The votes at the membership meetings showed a solid one-third of the Party voting against the regime in the face of wholesale expulsions of the Opposition, the support of the E.C.C.I., the campaign of terrorism and the miserable, cowardly, and apologetic stand of Foster, Bittelman & Co. These remarkable figures, listed in the *Daily Worker* reports of the membership meetings, give the lie to Convention "unanimity". They demonstrate the failure of the Lovestone bureaucracy to gain a decisive hold of the membership and foreshadow the collapse of the regime. The convention which will meet under the sign of "unity" will confront a divided Party—with the most conscious and militant fighters against the Lovestone leadership expelled and a remaining third of the membership in irreconcilable opposition to it.

What does this opposition vote of a third of the Party, after our expulsion, represent? Nominally the bulk of it was cast for the Foster platform but it would be absolutely false and superficial to count it as the strength of the Foster group. *This vote represents primarily and above all opposition to the Lovestone-Pepper leadership.*

Under normal conditions, with the Opposition remaining in the Party and forcing a discussion of the principle questions, this minority would expand and become a majority. A real discussion would shatter the bureaucratic stranglehold of the Lovestone faction. Under the present conditions, with the discussion prohibited, without a clear comprehension of the inseparable connection of the issues of our Party with the fight of the Opposition on an international scale, and with the club of expulsion swinging over their heads, the proletarian elements sought a legal expression for their opposition stand. The Foster faction, in the abnormal circumstances, became the temporary concentration point of the proletarian opposition on its road to further development and clarification.

THE ROLE OF THE FOSTER GROUP

There is a danger in this which must be clearly understood and fought in the most uncompromising way. Like all centrists, the Foster-Bittelman group of leaders act as an aid to the right. Their function is to give "expression" to the proletarian tendencies, to confuse and muddle them, to halt their progress in the direction of an understanding of the principle questions and eventually to dissolve them into a false "unity" under the hegemony of the opportunist-adventurers.

Foster and Bittelman are fooling the proletarian fighters in the Party with all kinds of rumors, illusions and false hopes. They are waiting for a "cable"; a new secretarial decision; a new "concession" from Moscow. This "concession" will come but its whole import will be to further entrench the Lovestone faction and disarm its opponents. The present leadership of the E.C.C.I. is primarily responsible for the chaos of disruption in our Party. It is responsible for the domination of the faction of callous adventurers which ruins and discredits the Party. Help from "Moscow" for the proletarian tendency in our Party will come only when the purifying principle struggle of the Opposition against the present leadership of the C.P.S.U. and the Comintern has been crowned with success.

The proletarian-revolutionary elements whom Foster and Bittelman are exploiting must understand this and begin a serious study and discussion of the prohibited world questions which are the key to our own Party problems. To the extent they will do this they will safeguard against "unity" betrayals and capitulation which the unprincipled leaders are already attempting to prepare.

The Convention will not and cannot end the faction struggle. It will only clear the ground for its higher development into a struggle for the reconstitution of the unity of the Party on the basis of principle. The end of the fake discussion which "prohibits" the real issues will mark the beginning of a new and broader wave of discussion of precisely these issues inside and outside the Party ranks. In this discussion the Communist vanguard of the future will be consolidated.

OPPOSITION MEETING IN BOSTON

A mass meeting on the subject, "The Truth About Trotsky and the Platform of the Russian Opposition" will be held in Boston on Friday, February 15th, 1929, 8 P. M. at the Credit Union Hall, 62 Chambers St., Boston, Mass. Comrade James P. Cannon will be the speaker. Tickets in advance at 25 cents can be obtained at Shapiro's Book Store, 8 Leverett St.