

Organize the Unorganized Communists

By James P. Cannon

One of the most outstanding weaknesses of the American Communist movement has been the failure to organize into the party ranks the great numbers of revolutionary workers who are sympathetic to Communism and to retain those who have joined in the past. The great disparity between the sentiment for Communism among the advanced workers and the organized strength of the movement is a striking feature of the situation which reflects the bankruptcy of the party leadership. The growth of the influence of Communist ideas on the one side and the decline in the number of organized Communists on the other presents a crying contradiction, a great evil in itself and the soil for the growth of other evils, among them a strengthening of bureaucratic and clique tendencies which are already developed to an enormous extent.

We do not speak here of the failure to produce a "Mass Communist Party" which is promised every six months in theses and proclamations. The conditions for a Mass Party in the true sense of the word have not existed in America. Our reference is to the failure to utilize the actually existing possibilities and to recruit into the organized Communist ranks the workers who belong there. A consideration of only a few of the most indisputable facts will suffice to show how really great has been this dereliction, and to confront the Communist militants with a number of serious questions as to what the future holds.

Some Membership Figures

Let us first take some available figures which show the trend of organizational retrogression. The National Office financial reports for the first eight months of 1928 show an average dues paying membership of 7,277. Compare this figure with the 1925 Convention report which showed an average dues paying membership for the first six months of that year of 16,325. Here is a loss of 9,048 members—more than 55 per cent. This is the first shocking reminder, in terms of membership figures, of what the present leadership of the party signifies. And the figures do not tell the whole story. Since 1925 we have had the experience of a number of important strikes, the great Sacco-Vanzetti movement and other opportunities to popularize our movement among the workers. Why did not the party double its membership in the past three years instead of decreasing it by more than half?

Go back further. In 1919 there were more than 100,000 members in the Socialist Party, and the Left Wing claimed a majority. Even James Oneal in his book on "American Communism" conceded 35,000 members to the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party at the time of the two conventions in September 1919. This figure is almost five times the number of the present party membership. It may be argued that all these thousands of members of the Left Wing were not real material for the Communist movement and that the Palmer raids swept them away like chaff. Such a view brings us to a still more striking phenomenon. The report of the Unity Convention of the United Communist Party and the Communist Party printed in "The Communist" for July 1921 shows a dues paying membership of 12,028 represented in the convention. The underground movement nearly two years after the Palmer raids, conducting all of its work illegally, had 4,751 more members than the present party in the seventh year of its existence as a legal organization!

Loss of the Revolutionary Syndicalists

To the failure to retain more than a small fraction of the original members of the Left Wing in the Socialist Party and the failure to make as good a membership showing as the underground movement which worked under such great handicaps, must be added the inability to make any serious headway in recruiting from the tens of thousands of revolutionary syndicalists who should have found a place in the Communist ranks. Sympathy for the Russian Revolution which was and is the main spring of revolutionary tendencies in the labor movement was very strong among these work-

ers and remains so today. The Communist International regarded them as a necessary constituent part of the American Communist movement and included them in its invitation to the Second Congress. The theses of the Second Congress declared that the measure of success attained by the Communist Parties in gaining the support of the revolutionary syndicalist workers would be a criterion of their revolutionary effectiveness. The showing of the American Party in this respect is a dismal one indeed, and this has been a great loss to the movement. The repulsion of such genuinely proletarian elements has gone together with the facile attraction of petty bourgeois, intellectual and careerist elements. This two-sided process is reflected by the present leadership of the party.

These questions should have a prominent place on the agenda of the forthcoming National Conference of the Opposition. We are not merely waging a factional struggle; our responsibilities are deeper and broader. We must not only attempt to point out the right road for the future of the party, but we must ourselves take some positive steps on this road and undertake to carry out in practice the line which serves the interests of the movement. In the period that a corrupted bureaucracy forces a division within the Communist ranks—and in all our work we must acknowledge the actual existence of such a division—it is our duty to take upon ourselves directly all those tasks which we have the capacity to carry out.

Revolutionary Workers With Us

One of these tasks is to organize the unorganized Communist workers, to help to strengthen their grasp on basic Communist principles and to facilitate their training in the habits of disciplined organization. We have exceptional opportunities to make real headway with such an undertaking even now; and these opportunities will be multiplied as it becomes clear to the revolutionary workers that we are not held back from revolutionary duties by any organization fetishism or formalities.

One of the most significant aspects of the struggle which broke out into the open with our expulsion six months ago are the almost universal manifestations of sympathy for our cause which have been shown especially by the former members of the I. W. W.—true militants of the class war—who are sympathetic to the Russian Revolution and to the main ideas of Communism, but who have been alienated and repelled by the party regime. There are good reasons for this. The proletarian and revolutionary essence of the Opposition Platform, on an American as well as on an international scale, is obvious to these workers and they feel an instinctive solidarity with our fight. The same is true in general also of the rank and file of the non-party communist workers who are the most free from bureaucratic influences and who have no axes to grind.

We ought to welcome this development and unhesitatingly facilitate their union with us. This is a many-sided task upon the accomplishment of which much of the future of the American Communist movement depends. It involves a program of practical activities in the class struggle which we must carry out without asking the permission of the party bureaucrats. It requires a widespread application of the tactics of the united front with these proletarian elements in joint activities and struggles of various kinds. It demands an approach to them as class brothers who have a rightful place in the movement of Communism.

For this a definite organization form is an absolute necessity. The direct recruitment of these workers into the ranks of the Opposition must begin and must be pushed forward with the greatest energy. It will be one of the most important duties of the National Conference of the Opposition to lay out the lines of this project and to decide on its organization forms. Such a decision will turn a new page in the

American Communist struggle. The program of the bureaucrats is to split the movement.

The Program of the Opposition is the unification of the movement on the line of Leninism, against the corrupted bureaucrats and opportunists. The more militantly we wage our fight on all fronts, the more firmly we organize our forces and recruit new ones, the sooner we will win the victory and accomplish our aims.

The Interview with Comrade Trotsky

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impossibility of finding lodgings in Constantinople right away, can one realize what it means for Trotsky, who was just the man who liberated the Crimea from Wrangel's army, to be literally thrown into this city where thirty thousand of Wrangel's men are located? It is pretty hard for Western comrades to grasp the full extent of this danger. I was convinced of it during my voyage.

Having no lodgings, the G. P. U. men chose a hotel for him. Under the threat of forcible expulsion in the middle of the night, our comrade was led to his present residence together with his wife and his son.

"I will tell all about this some day," he told me, "when I have the leisure for it. The comrades will see to what low police methods the struggle against the Opposition has descended."

In the meantime a burning question arises: How shall we provide for Trotsky's security? How shall we replace the protection that the presence of Sermouks and Posnansky would have provided?

In the course of these fruitful days where we confirmed our agreement by discussing the essential questions, the moments of relaxation were devoted to recollections. Recollections of the first years of the October. Recollections of Lenin, such abundant ones, where we perused some photographed letters (the originals having all been turned over to the Lenin Institute). Pictures of militants, of those who disappeared, of those also who rose in the harsh and thankless struggle of the Opposition, a Smilga, a Rakovsky, a Beloborodov and many others, young ones too, like Borish Lifschitz and Yakovin, who brought the contribution of their devotion and their work.

"You cannot imagine," Trotsky told me, "what the intellectual life of the deportees had to be to remain active. At Alma Ata, after the first few weeks, before the suppression of all correspondence and the rigorous isolation of recent times, we succeeded in establishing contact with many comrades, in spite of the fact that the G. P. U. was actively engaged in delaying letters, in intercepting them. All the great questions on the order of the day were taken up by our comrades, sometimes in simple letters, sometimes in serious, documented studies. What enthusiasm, what ardor in the discussion! (This is what Yaroslavsky, with the help of some stolen letters, interprets as the "decomposition" of the Opposition!) It is necessary that the comrades everywhere learn to know this movement of the deported Opposition, that they may know not only the repression suffered but also the work accomplished."

We will devote ourselves to this task.

... Very brief notes, written hastily since my return to Paris. I do not pretend to give here a writer's "impressions." I am not a writer and I do not feel the need of dwelling on the descriptive side of these days that will leave their mark in my life. I am a militant and I tell my comrades quite simply the emotion—the boundless emotion—that I felt on meeting again him who is our political chief.

Let this emotion be translated into work, into fruitful revolutionary action. That is the only thing that can interest my comrades.

The Illinois Miners Convention

By Arne Swabeck

Once again the corrupt officials in control of the United Mine Workers of America, Illinois District, have succeeded, through a packed convention, to squelch the opposition and further secure their domination of affairs for the next immediate period. While this union, due to the terrific attacks by the coal operators and treasonable conduct of its policies, has been cracked wide open and in many districts completely destroyed, in Illinois it still remains in firm control of all jobs functioning on a semi-company union basis.

The Weak Opposition

This convention (still in session at the time of this writing) showed the same manifestations as those of previous years. Despite the many expulsions of left wingers which have taken place and the outright packing with delegates representing nobody, there was considerable opposition to the bureaucrats, but it was entirely unorganized and even without a unified policy. So far its main fire has been directed against the corrupt practices of re-statement of blue sky locals, the election steals by the Fishwick machine last November, the union investment of \$150,000 in a West Virginia "open shop" mine and the falsification of last year's referendum vote on the wage cut agreement. On all of these issues the machine steam roller carried the day increasing its majority as it went along.

The Illinois agreement, signed by the officials last summer, is to remain in force until 1932. It contained a twenty per cent wage cut, practically abolished the tonnage basis on machine mining, and established what amounts to an arbitration commission to which the operators can appeal for further reduced day rates.

By a majority of 3 to 1 the rank and file defeated this agreement in referendum vote, but nevertheless it was declared carried. The result has been a further rapid mechanization of mining with a terrific speed-up system, a general reduction of the standard of living and increased unemployment. Although there are 12,000 less miners, production in 1928 increased by 340,000 tons over the previous year but with the average number of days worked by the miners reduced from 172 to 114.

The Status of the Left Wing

In return for this agreement the operators consented to retain the check-off system, the main instrument through which the control of employment is exercised. Thus the United Mine Workers and the Fishwick machine of officialdom, with all its filthy corruption, holds full sway in the Illinois coal fields. The National Miners Union, which today represents the left wing forces, has not yet been able to break or make an appreciable dent in this strangle hold. Nor has it by far shown sufficient energy in undertaking this task, despite the fact that conditions for growing revolt of the rank and file against the intolerable situation are not lessening but rather increasing.

While the whole leading and active stratum of the left wing has been expelled from the old union new opposition has developed with great possibilities of growth, but it is as yet entirely unorganized and without a positive program.

Wherever isolated activities have been carried on for the organization of the National Miners Union the response by the rank and file has not been lacking, as evidenced by the recent activities in the South, in Franklin and Saline Counties. Naturally the function of locals organized is primarily the one of progressive groups within the old union fighting for the program of the new. It cannot be otherwise so long as the job control of the U.M.W. of A. has not been broken.

The Task at Present

Moreover it becomes necessary for the left wing coal miners, in view of the existing conditions—the absolute job control exercised by the Fishwick machine—to devise the most practical for carrying on this parallel work of organizing the National Miners Union and

simultaneously utilizing all these forces in an organized manner and with a unified policy to again take up and intensify the fight for the militant program within the old union. There is no other solution to the problem of replacing the old semi-company union filled with corruption to the point of saturation.

This will require that these locals of the new union, while compelled to a degree to hide their identity to avoid expulsion, must immediately take the leadership in the struggle to redress all the grievances of the miners growing out of the present conditions. These grievances are numerous. The pressure upon these workers is becoming ever more intense. Unemployment is growing, and the continual growth of opposition shows the readiness to fight. It is the duty of the left wing to put forward positive slogans for this struggle and build a solid organizational basis. In addition to the slogans already given of breaking the Lewis-Fishwick company union and building the National Miners Union, there should be such as: fight against the speed-up system, division of work with abolition of the machine differentials, abolition of the check-off, cancelling of the company union agreement and the inauguration of the shorter work day (six hour day).

With the correct tactics and energetic organization work the possibilities for growing success in the Illinois coal fields are good.

The Splitters at Work

The I. L. D. and the T. U. E. L.

The Stalinite splitters in the Party are beginning to transplant their reckless course into non-Party organizations. The Lovestone-Foster clique are following a line, begun in the International Labor Defense and in the Trade Union Educational League, which can lead only to the complete disruption of the movement.

Removed from the I. L. D.

In St. Louis, Missouri, the Party fraction called a special meeting of the International Labor Defense and removed comrade H. L. Goldberg from the position of city organizer and comrade Elmer McMillan from the position as member of the City Committee. NEITHER OF THE TWO COMRADES WERE CALLED TO THE MEETING AND THEY WERE NOT PRESENT WHEN REMOVED! No charges were presented to them and they were given no trial. They were both removed for the sole and simple reason that they had previously declared their support to the Trotsky Opposition in the Communist Party. For their political viewpoint in the Party, they were removed from their positions in the I. L. D., an ostensibly non-Party organization.

Comrade Goldberg was one of the founders of the I. L. D., as was comrade McMillan. The latter is one of the defendants in the Michigan Communist case.

In Chicago, Illinois, comrade Arne Swabeck, one of the founders of the Party and of the Trade Union Educational League, has just been removed from the local executive committee of the T. U. E. L. His crime is the same as that of the St. Louis comrades. He supports the Opposition led by Trotsky. He is removed because of that alone from an ostensibly non-Party body. The vote of the executive committee that removed him was "unanimous"—since every member but one is a Party member and all are under discipline to carry out the instructions previously arrived at.

But even before the executive committee in Chicago removed Swabeck, the National Committee of the T. U. E. L. removed his name from that body's call for the Cleveland conference of the organization. Comrade Swabeck was unanimously elected to the National Committee at the last T. U. E. L. national conference in New York. He is now removed from the National Committee without charges presented against him, without a reason being given, and without a trial being held.

Attempt to Remove Voyzey

In the Illinois mine fields, the Party fakers are trying to repeat this criminal work with regard to comrade George Voyzey, who has been expelled from the Party for supporting the Opposition. Comrade Voyzey is one of the best known leaders of the left-wing miners. He was Communist candidate for president of the U. M. W. A. against Lewis in 1924 and would have been elected if the ballots had not been "counted" in typical Lewis style.

He is now President of the Illinois District of the National Miners Union, and his tremendous popularity among the miners makes the Stalinite splitters proceed a little more cautiously with their attempts to remove him from his position in the Union. But the attempt is being made! Again no charges, for the crime of "Trotskyism" is sufficient. Voyzey was expelled by Lewis from the United Mine Workers of America for being a Communist. Is he to be removed from his post in the National Miners Union by the Stalinites for the same reason?

The ruinous, catastrophic results for the entire movement of such a policy should be clear to all workers. Such a course inevitably brings with it the narrowing down of the Party, and OF ALL LEFT WING ORGANIZATIONS, such as the I. L. D., the T. U. E. L., the new left-wing unions, TO A HOPELESS SECT! It will end in a policy of excluding ANY ONE AND EVERY ONE who is not a servile hand-raiser for Stalin, from any work in these movements. In the I. L. D. it will mean that members of the I. W. W., of anarchist groups, independent rank and file socialists, members of the Communist Opposition and other workers will be thrown out or leave the organization. It will mean that in the T. U. E. L., the movement will be narrowed down to a narrow, tight circle of Party members only.

In the new unions under the direction of the Party it will mean that such a tight mechanical, arbitrary control will be established that the non-Party masses will be impossible to hold, and it will be even more difficult to attract and recruit new workers.

The policy of expulsions and removals from non-Party organizations for political views will, furthermore, strengthen the hand of the reformist, right wing fakers in organizations which they control. When they continue their splitting policy, the Party will be unable to protest effectively. The right wing fakers will say: "Don't kick. You are doing the same thing in the organizations you control!" The entire moral and political basis of the Communists and the left wing will be swept from under foot!

What Will Be the Result?

Every worker who has the interests of his class at heart will protest against this reactionary course of the Stalinites before it assumes larger proportions. We know where this course leads to unless a swift end is made of it: First, Communist workers are expelled from the Party; then from positions in the left-wing non-Party organizations; then from the left-wing unions and other bodies ALTOGETHER; will it end by them being driven off their jobs where the left-wing unions have control?

We are sounding a warning. Let every worker, the Communist workers in particular, stop and think. Sigman-Schlesinger-Shiplacoff-Beckerman and Company began the same way. First the Communists were expelled from the Socialist Party, then from the unions, finally they were removed from their jobs. The Stalinites have taken the first step of the Sigmans by expelling us from the Party. They are beginning the next step by removing our comrades from the non-Party organizations they control.

The workers must reply with a swift, loud "NO!" to this criminal course.

MASS MEETING IN TRENTON

On Sunday, March 31, comrade Martin Abern spoke to an audience of 150 workers at the Labor Lyceum in Trenton, N. J. The meeting was held under the auspices of a group of comrades in Branch 77, Independent Workers' Circle. Comrade Abern spoke for two hours on "The Truth About Trotsky and the Platform of the Opposition" and then the interested audience put a number of questions to the speaker and participated in the general discussion.