

The T. U. U. L. Conference

The achievements of the Cleveland conference of the Trade Union Educational (now Unity) League lie chiefly in the emphasis put upon the millions of unorganized workers in this country and the need to unionize them, and the fact that rank and file workers were gathered together from various parts of the country—Negro and white, young and old—under one roof to discuss their problems and outline the necessary plans to cope with them. These achievements have already been related in the Left wing press, and even exaggerated all out of proportion to their real and soberly considered significance. However, since the Party press has failed signally to indicate the enormous shortcomings and outright blunders made at the conference, it becomes a duty to point them out so that Communist and Left wing movement does not proceed blindly into deeper quagmires.

THE DELEGATION AT CLEVELAND

It is first necessary to estimate the real strength of the movement represented in Cleveland. For this, one must first strip all the reports of their exaggeration, bombast, circus-tooting and playing-for-the-record. We then find that the promised mass support for this new "revolutionary" federation of labor that is to challenge the A. F. of L. all along the line failed to materialize. The most tautly stretched reports of the credentials committee give a maximum representation of 70,556 workers, of whom no less than 57,000 are credited to the new industrial unions. Divide the last figure by two and you will obtain a still very generous estimate of the new unions. Shop committee delegates (picked out of thin air in many cases) represented less than 2,000 workers, and local A. F. of L. unions about as many. Of the 690 delegates reported, a round half represented the new industrial unions, i.e., more hopes than substance, with one or two exceptions. 107 delegates represented the largely paper shop committees (ranging from 3 workers upwards). In one part of the report, T.U.E.L. groups get 126 delegates, and in another, they are given 33 more. Fraternal delegates, i.e., Party and Left wing auxiliaries, ran to 44, and the National Committee had another 40, representing themselves. Not a very solid mass to tackle the exceedingly "revolutionary" tasks set the conference. Even the first convention of the I.W.W. had more than twice that amount represented.

The conference was organized by the Party, and controlled, in the narrowest, most mechanical, factional spirit. Little else could be expected, particularly with such a steering committee as Weinstone, Stachel and Foster, who, together with another comrade, were appointed for the task of working under the direction of the Comintern Commission. Opponents of the present line of the Party chiefs were sedulously excluded from all participation, to the great detriment of the gathering and all of Stachel's crowing about the absence of the Communist Opposition from the conference will not conceal the harm done by factionally excluding from T.U.E.L. work such comrades as Swabeck, Skoglund, Hedlund, Coover, Votaw, Angelo, MacMillan and a dozen other recognized Left wing leaders in their localities.

This ruinous factional course has now been established as a sacred principle. "Our organization," said Foster at the conference, "must be ready to wage a merciless struggle not only against the employers but against social reformism and right tendencies in the T.U.E.L." By this Foster means the exclusive legalization of the line followed by the Communist Party at a given moment, (it changes every month), and persecution of all who differ with it. This is guaranteed to transform the new movement into a battlefield of Party factions, with the same tactics applied to political opponents as are used by Sigman and Lewis. We have already seen the removal of Swabeck, of Coover, the attempted removal of Voyzey from his union post, the removal of Weisbord, the coming removal of Zimmerman. The new movement will hit a reef in no time if it charts such a course.

A FORUM AGAINST THE OPPOSITION

The conference was made a forum from which the Opposition was maliciously attacked. In the Party fraction meeting, Weinstone reported that Muste opposes the new unions, and Cannon and Lovestone are only little grouplets of Muste. The R.I.L.U. letter repeated the same guff. It was unloaded in barrels from the platform. Even little Johnnie Williamson earned his day's wage by parroting what he was told in his article in *Labor Unity*, and strove for a raise by adding the original contribution that we are strike-breakers to boot.

THE MILITANT

Published twice a month by the Communist League of America (Opposition)

Address all mail to: P. O. Box 120, Madison Square Station, New York, N. Y.

Publisher address at 332 18th Street, New York, N. Y.

Subscription rate: 1.00 per year. Foreign \$1.50

5c per copy Bundle rates, 3c per copy.

Associate Editors:

Editor
James P. Cannon
Martin Abern
Max Shachtman
Maurice Spector

VOL. II OCTOBER 1, 1929. No. 15.

Entered as second-class mail matter November 28, 1928, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879.

The stifling mechanical control of the conference by the Party was manifest on all hands. The Party fraction was in the majority and off-handedly railroaded through any and all propositions. A "naive" non-Party metal worker from Chicago, who thought it would be proper to have chairmen elected from the floor, was guffawed out of court by Foster himself. Gitlow's resolutions on Gastonia and the Labor Party were never discussed, nor was his nomination to the National Committee. The steering committee yanked it off the floor and later brought in a number of motions disposing of the whole matter with a bang. Most of the time was taken up with reports, and very little for discussion from the floor. Members were nominated for the National Committee by the heads of the industrial groups without taking the trouble to get the consent of their respective delegations, as in the Marine workers' delegation. So raw were some of the methods—all so reminiscent of a good, factional Party convention!—that at the end of the first day, one seamen's delegate, Stuart MacDonald, jammed his hat on his head and threatened to go home.

The problem of organizing the unorganized was treated in a purely schematic, arbitrary and administrative manner. No realistic conception illuminated the reports or discussion. Instead, many stupidities were uttered and committed.

New unions are being formed in committee rooms without the masses every knowing a thing about it. Out of a clear sky, for example, we have the announcement of the "Metal Workers Industrial League, an organization affiliated with the T.U.U.L." (*Daily Worker*, 9-17-29). Or else, the utter insanity of this: "A construction section of the T.U.U.L. embracing a much larger field than the building trades was proposed by the conference, Rosen said, which included highways, workers on bridges, subways, etc. The situation is ripe for the organization of a new industrial union, he declared," (*Daily Worker*, 9-5-29). A new industrial union in the building trades is just that: utter insanity.

A serious review of the past activities of the new unions was entirely missing. There was no penetrating discussion of work, successes, and failures of the new unions now in existence. No attempt was made to probe the reasons for the present collapse of the Left wing Needle Trades Workers Union and the striking advance of the Right wing, and draw the imperatively necessary lessons. The rich lessons in strike strategy contained in the numerous recent defeats of the Left wing (particularly in the East) and the fallacious policy of the National Textile Workers Union which prevented it from getting a foothold in Marion and Elizabethton did not exist for the conference. It did not condemn either the vulgar collaborationist policies of the opportunist Needle Trades Union leaders on the one hand, or their sectarian standing aloof from the struggle of the workers led by the Right wing, in which they contented themselves with inanely shouting: "Fake Stoppage" and "Fake Strike," until the workers in one craft after another had registered with the Right.

Is the reconstruction of the Right wing and the virtual crushing of the Left in the Needle trades not a commonplace by now? Is not the passivity and lack of vitality of the National Miners Union (on a national scale) another commonplace? These "trifles" found no word of comment at the conference. They were orphans lost in a storm of wind and fury.

A NEW FEDERATION OF LABOR

The main work of the conference was the establishment of a new federation of labor, but the reasons given for doing it now are not valid. The *Daily Worker* (9-4-29) motivates it by the fact of the "signs of the oncoming rising wave of revolutionary movement" and points to Lodz, the Buhr, the Czech land workers, the Rumanian coal miners, India, Peru, Colombia, etc., etc. Therefore... "a new national federating body". But what about 1926? There was the strike movement in Syria, the Italo-French crisis, the Rakosi trial, and three little affairs like the Chinese revolution, the British miners' and General Strikes and the revolution in Indonesia. Wasn't 1926 just as good an occasion for a T.U.U.L. and a "new line." That wave, really revolutionary, was missed because the Comintern was too sound asleep in bed, wedged in between its friends Chiang Kai-Shek and A. A. Purcell!

There is a motivation for the building of a new national trade union federation at this time, but it lies in the attempt to cover up the opportunist, Menshevik sins of the past few years which cannot be covered up. It is the result of non-revolutionary disappointment at the tiresomeness and lack of immediate success of work within the old unions dominated by black reaction, and a consequent hopelessness and lack of faith in the masses still following the Honorable Mr. Green.

"But," says Foster, "this does not mean that the work in the old trade unions will be abandoned... There are approximately 3,500,000 organized workers, the T.U.U.L. will never surrender these to the Green-Wool bureaucracy." (*Daily Worker*, 9-14-29). Like a sinner who goes to occasional confession, Foster is careful to bow religiously, at least once in a while, to this formula which has been made absolutely meaningless by the line of the T.U.U.L. and its conference. Johnstone expresses it most bluntly when he says that we will work in the A.F. of L. only for the purpose of tearing off as much support from it to the new center as possible. Such an approach means guaranteed, automatic elimination of any Left wing from the A.F. of L. How long, for example, could a Rosen be a Left winger in the A.F. of L. with his senseless program? Or the few that are still in the A.F. of L.? No, Foster knows better than anyone else just exactly

how little, if any, work will be done in the A.F. of L. with the present line of policy and state of mind of the Communists' and Left' wing.

Perhaps no better proof of this profound retrogression from Leninist teachings on working in the reactionary unions can be afforded than the following parallel of quotations:

"We cannot ask the workers to join the corrupt A.F. of L. Unions."

"The A.F. of L. is a prop for this system (capitalism); we must knock out that prop."

"The A.F. of L. has succeeded only in debauching the working class in the interests of the capitalist class. The new T.U.U.L. will succeed because it is the workers' federation of labor."

"I would cut off my right arm rather than join the A. F. of L."

"The 28,000 local unions of the A.F. of L. are 28,000 agencies of the capitalist class."

"It has been said that this convention was to form an organization rival to the A. F. of L. This is a mistake. We are here for the purpose of forming a labor organization."

The three quotations on the left side are, in order, Foster (*Daily Worker*, 9-2-29); Foster (same issue); editorial (*Daily Worker*, 9-3-29). The three on the right side are all from speeches of Bill Haywood! Is more of the same needed? It is available by the yard. The *One Big Union Bulletin* of Canada (8-29-29), prints parts of an article by Leslie Morris who wrote on the 10th Plenum of the E.C.C.I. that "all talk of capturing the apparatus of the reformists' unions is hopelessly wrong; that the reformist bureaucracies are an integral part of the bourgeois machinery of state", and comments: "Gee whiz! it's too bad it took the Plenum nine years to find this out. The O.B.U. told these masquerading revolutionists the same thing just nine years ago."

There we have precisely the type of "Leftism" that our Stalinists have imposed on the movement today. "Ascribing the most extravagant virtues to their utopian dual organizations... they looked upon the trade unions (A.F. of L.) as a sort of conspiracy carried out by the employers against the working class, as capitalistic organizations which, yielding no benefits to the workers and utterly incapable of evolving into genuine labor unions, had to be ruthlessly destroyed." Who wrote this once upon a time? Foster! Against whom? Against romantic "Left" revolutionaries and syndicalists! To whom does it apply today? To Foster!

The conference adopted a wrong attitude towards the progressives. By some queer twist of the mind, its directors concluded that in new unions, under Party control, there would be no need to worry about the progressives. But this is no truer than it is in the old unions. If the new unions are to become mass organizations, they will include reactionary workers and Communists, Catholics, Jews, Protestants and atheists, Republicans, Democrats and Socialists. Will it be necessary to have the proper approach to the progressive elements of these variegated strata of workers in order to safeguard the militant character of the unions? Of course. It will be necessary to work together with them, to draw them into leadership of the unions, to make united fronts with them against conservative and reactionary elements.

If the new unions are to be mass organizations, they will have enormous numbers of reactionaries and conservatives in their ranks for the simple reason that the overwhelming majority of the American workers are today still dominated by bourgeois ideology. Is it not true that many members of the National Textile Workers Union and the I.L.D. in the South are also members of the Ku Klux Klan and see no conflict between these organizations? (*Daily Worker*, 9-2-29, page 5). Will not such examples be multiplied a hundred times as the movement really begins to grow? The conference, however, obviously thought that its stereotyped denunciation of Muste ended the problem of a correct Left wing approach to the backward and the weakly developed progressive elements in the American working class.

THE "LEFTISTS" AS OPPORTUNISTS

Lack of space prevents us from more than mentioning the opportunist resolution adopted on the Labor Party, which calls for a "revolutionary" Labor Party organized so that no "reformist elements can sneak into its ranks"—a viewpoint distinctly reminiscent of Pepper and his Federated Farmer-Labor Party. Or of the resolution on imperialist war which asserts "the right of labor organizations to train their members in the use of arms, to organize special companies and to select their own instructors," which means—if such fantastic infantilism can mean anything at all in this country at the present time—the "right" of the reactionaries to organize black gangs of armed trade union hoodlums against the militant workers.

Scandalous as such a suggestion may sound nowadays we would nevertheless propose that the American Communists begin to read again and study the classic work of Lenin on the Infantile Disease of Left Radicalism. It will be a healthy antidote to the virulent policy that had its day at Cleveland. The present ultra-"Leftist" spree of the Party will cost the Communist and Left wing movement very dear and lose it the influence among the workers painfully gathered for years. There is no virtue whatsoever in this "Leftism" and the ease with which this cloak is draped around the shoulders of such confirmed opportunists in the Party as Stachel, Weinstone, Bedacht, Foster et al, is sufficient indication of how little it has in common with the genuine Bolshevik teachings of Lenin. Too much damage has already been done the movement to permit the continuation for another day of the disastrous policy that dominated Cleveland and prevented it from accomplishing its great tasks.—S.