

Next Steps in the Textile Field

Two new factors have made it imperative for the Left wing in the textile industry to adjust its policy more radically to meet the different situation that is being created in the Southern textile field. The first is the vicious sentences passed upon the victims of the Gastonia frame-up, the failure to indict anyone for the outrageous murder of Ella May Wiggins, and the similar failure to act against the lynch mob that attacked and beat up the union organizers Lell, Saylor and Wells. The second is the decision of the A. F. of L. convention in Toronto "adopted with a crusading fervor" to begin organizational work among the Southern textile mill slaves.

It would be futile to under-estimate the effect of these two developments upon the situation in the South. Only by evaluating it soberly will the Left wing be enabled to make further progress in spite of the enormous obstacles.

The court decisions will have a two-fold result. The Southern workers, the bulk of whom are entering the active field of class struggle for the first time and are, for that and other reasons, still weighted down by deep-seated illusions about our class society, will be jolted loose from some of these illusions by the crude class character of the court decisions. It will become clear to them that workers are sent away virtually for life because they were devoted fighters for labor, while the paid gangsters of the capitalists are set free when they "violate the law" by murdering and beating these labor fighters. For many of them it will be the first lesson in the capitalist class nature of the American government, its officials, and even its highly-praised judicial institutions. But, on the other hand, the decisions will undoubtedly have the effect of increasing the terror against the workers, and especially against those militants who stand out as the most active fighters for the union. The arrogance and brutality of the bosses and their armed agents will grow as never before. The courts have given them a free hand—and what are courts for if not for that—to beat, maim and murder any worker whose activity displeases the mill owners.

The bosses will undoubtedly succeed in intimidating many of the workers. But their success will be in inverse proportion to the success of the National Textile Workers Union in organizing a sufficiently broad movement in the South to form a protecting ring around every worker that can resist the disciples of Judge Lynch. The N. T. W. U. has an enormous advantage in this respect, since no matter how sharp is the threat of the lynching terror, the frightful exploitation of the mill slaves is still sharper and will find expression in strikes of the most desperate kind.

But broad movements do not arise from good wishes alone. Nor is it sufficient for them to exist only in the fabulous reports of inspired Party reporters. The policy of distortion and easily-revealed exaggeration practised by the *Daily Worker* and *Labor Unity* is wrong from any viewpoint, one of which is that reports of non-existing strength are guaranteed to lead to despair and disappointments in the future. The struggle for broad trade union organization requires not only militancy and persistence, but essentially a proper approach and policy of conduct. This has not yet been worked out by the Left Wing, although its urgency, advocated by us for many months, becomes more apparent every day.

The decision of the A. F. of L. convention will bring this problem to a focal point. It is entirely true that the A. F. of L. is not "going South" for the purpose of organizing the workers into a strong trade union movement to fight the bosses for better conditions. That is not the function of the A. F. of L. leadership, and their record speaks more eloquently of that than a mile of promises. The Gomperses, Greens and Wolls participate in struggle only to head them off into harmless channels, to stamp out every spark of militancy. They did that in the 1919 steel strike, in a dozen coal strikes, in previous textile strikes (Passaic) and a thousand other of lesser importance. In recent years, they have promised organization drives in the automobile industry, in the packinghouses, in the mine fields and elsewhere, but nothing materialized. The task of organizing the unorganized millions in this country falls upon the shoulders of the Left wing and progressive forces inside and outside the A. F. of L. Green and Co. will not do it, and the wreck and ruin of a dozen once powerful unions including the miners' union, the most powerful of them all, are a conclusive answer to those who think otherwise.

In other words, Green enters the South after the Left wing, and because of the Left wing, and only in order to wipe out the Left wing and its union which has drawn to itself the rising spirit of rebellion among the Southern workers. Green will do organizing work in the South only so long as the Left wing and its union are still a force to be reckoned with there. Then he will quit, because if the bosses prefer an A. F. of L. union to a Left wing union, they also prefer no union at all to the A. F. of L.

Against the N. T. W. U., Green will have not only the big financial resources and apparatus of the A. F. of L. but the tacit tolerance of the employers. And while it may be solacing to some to repeat over and over again that the Southern workers are completely disillusioned about the A. F. of L. and its traitorous leaders, the unfortunate fact remains that this is very far indeed from the truth. The A. F. of L. has become a tremendous force among the workers to be reckoned with, and which cannot be met with the ridiculous slogan (which we notice has now become an official, stand-

ing headline on the first page of *Labor Unity*) of "Fight the A. F. of L. and the Muste Reformists!"

What is required is multiplied work of organization by the Left wing in the South. In many, if not in most of the situations, the workers will follow the National Textile Workers Union essentially because it shows greater initiative and readiness to fight than the United Textile Workers Union, because it gets there first. What the Southern workers need and want is a labor union that will lead them in a fight against their frightful conditions of work. That is why any tendency to slacken down or decrease the forces of the N. T. W. U. in the South at the present time would prove disastrous for the future. On the contrary, the organizing forces and support must be greatly increased and the prestige already gained by the left wing union followed up.

In addition to that, however, the Left wing now needs more than ever before the policy of the united front.

The Left Wing and the Workmen's Circle

The National Conference of the Left wing and progressive branches and minorities in the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish labor fraternal order, held in New York City on October 11, 12 and 13, decided "unanimously" to call upon all of its supporters to withdraw from the Workmen's Circle and to join, in groups and individually, the Independent Workmen's Circle. The decision to split was, of course, initiated by the present leaders of the Communist Party, and it marks the temporary conclusion of the long, bitter struggle of Communist and Left wing workers to gain dominant influence and control of this big fraternal order. Unfortunately, it also marks another blunder of the Stalinist Party leadership. And finally, it marks a victory for comrade Costrell, who advocated the policy of splitting for many years, who was firmly turned down by the Party for just as many years. He can now feel consoled at the thought that his despised and bespattered ideas have finally been canonized by the new Party leadership.

The Workmen's Circle, an organization of some 75,000 members, predominantly Jewish workers, has been constantly under the control of a crude Right wing-Socialist Party clique. Under the guidance of the Communist Party, it was the policy of the Left wing and the progressives up to now to carry on their work and agitation inside the organization in spite of the difficulties, expulsions and persecution to which they were subjected. A few years ago, when scores of Left wing members and branches were being expelled and their rights violated by the Right wing, an "Alliance of Left Wing W. C. Branches" was formed; about 70 branches which refused to quit the "Alliance" were "dissolved" by the Right wing. But the Left wing carried on such a capable campaign that the re-entry of these "dissolved" members into the Workmen's Circle was successfully negotiated and the work continued.

Now, virtually out of the clear blue, comes the new policy of the Party to quit the W. C., singly and collectively and without a moment's hesitation. The best way in which to judge the correctness of this breath-taking reversal of position is to examine the six main reasons given in the Manifesto of the Left wing conference (*Morning Freiheit*, 10-14-1929.) Since a new policy is being adopted by the Left wing, it is under an obligation to show that a new situation has developed in the Circle. Or else, it should honestly admit to the workers that the Communists were entirely wrong and have been misleading them in these last years by insisting that every progressive worker remain in the W. C. and help to liberate the tens of thousands of workers in it from the baneful, reactionary influence of the Weinbergs and Baskins. But let us test the validity of the reasons:

1. The Workmen's Circle, says the Manifesto, "is under the black hand of the yellow *Forward*." But that is not new. It has been under that deadening hand for years, in 1920 and 1925 as well as in 1929.

2. "The W. C. is no longer a workingmen's circle. It is a business men's circle . . . In the W. C. there is not one class, but two classes—the working class and the bourgeoisie." Quite true. There has been and is a small element of petty shopkeepers, real estate sharks and merchants in the Circle who were and are the main support of the reactionary officials. But they did not come in yesterday. They have been there for years. To justify its new policy, the Party must prove that the social composition of the Circle has changed radically in the most recent period. But no such proof can be brought forward. The Circle is still predominantly working class in its composition.

3. The W. C. (the manifesto should say, The officialdom of the W. C.) has not supported the workers in a single struggle in the last few years, but the bosses and the union bureaucrats especially in the needle trades. But that, admittedly, holds true for "the last few years." A split for this reason was therefore just as imperative in 1926 as in 1929. The complaint that Baskin and Co. tax the membership for support to the I.L.G.W.U. led by Sigman and Schlesinger is equally invalid as a reason for withdrawal, for the Left wing has, quite justifiably, taxed the membership of branches under its control for the support of Left wing unions and institutions. Will a Communist leave the reactionary Carpenters' Union if Hutcheson imposes a membership tax for, let us say, the support of the American Legion? No, he will stay with the workers and fight against such measures

Our previous criticisms have resulted in a certain amount of polite acknowledgement of the need for this tactic, but it has largely remained on paper. It must be applied in reality. It will serve to mobilize the broadest sections of the Southern textile workers for a concerted struggle, to dispel any taint of sectarian partisan aims of the N. T. W. U., and to reveal the Green and McMahoos in their true fight. The present narrow policy of the Left wing will have exactly an opposite result, and involve a set-back for it of long duration. The Left wing must take the initiative in proposing joint action.

That the labor fakers will reject it is not of decisive importance in the long run. The masses of the workers, even the inexperienced slaves of the South will understand the fight for unity conducted by the Left wing. They will welcome it and regard the N. T. W. U. as the ever-ready champion of the united struggle for their interests. Such a course can only strengthen and increase the ranks of the Left wing union, set larger groups of workers into motion, and increase in them the distrust and contempt that the class conscious workers already have for the professional agents of capitalism in the labor movement.

and such a leadership.

4. The W. C. has joined openly with counter-revolution in the United States by endorsing the Socialist Party and donating money to it. Can the authors of the Manifesto recall a single convention of the Workmen's Circle in the last ten years in which these endorsements and donations were not given? The only thing that is new is that the Right wing will now have an absolutely free hand to endorse and donate to the socialists without there being the tiniest voice of Left wing protest in the organization or a single branch to balance off this support to the politically bankrupt S.P. by moral and financial support to the Communist movement.

5. The W. C. has not supported any of the big strikes of recent times, particularly those led by the Left wing. This "news" is at least three years old. And it is only partly true. The reactionary officialdom did not support these strikes. But the Left wing and progressive branches and members did support them. This "reason" is a condemnation of the W. C. leaders, and a good reason for continuing to fight them for the control of the membership and the organization. As a reason for withdrawing from the organization, however, it is worthy of people who have lost their heads or never had any.

6. The W. C. supports the counter-revolution in Russia. A "splendid reason" for withdrawing—but just as good in 1922, because the Toronto convention of that year adopted a position which the Left wing has since then correctly labelled support to the Russian counter-revolutionary Mensheviks.

The fact is that the Party can show nothing new in the situation to warrant a new policy, except its own impatience, its desperation, its straining at quick—and quickly dissipated—results, its new narrow, sectarian line, its capitulation before difficulties.

The new policy becomes only more dangerous and fruitless in view of the present status of the Left wing movement among the Jewish workers in this country, which makes it imperative for the Left wing to intrench itself even more deeply in the mass organizations of the workers. Two or three years ago, when the Left wing movement—especially in the unions—was swiftly gaining strength among the Jewish workers, there may have been some faint justification for this policy. But precisely now, when the Left wing has been weakened in the Jewish field by the series of mistakes by the Party, when it is plain to the naked eye that it has lost ground heavily both in the needle trades and in the Workmen's Circle, the adoption of the new policy is sheer folly, which will only net the Left wing a series of disappointments. The Left wing will succeed in drawing a maximum of 2000-2500 members out of the W. C., add them to the approximately 7000 members of the Independent, and leave tens of thousands of workers in the Workmen's Circle to be misled, mis-educated and mulcted by Baskin, Weinberg and Co. who are as happy as larks that the Left wing is leaving them an uncontested field.

This is quite clear. It is involuntarily substantiated by Melech Epstein, who writes about the W. C. bureaucrats with such violently and fearlessly radical phrases that an ordinary, timid soul would never suspect that he absorbed his Bolshevism, before coming to the *Freiheit* a little while ago, from the ultra-pious atmosphere of the Zionist *Jewish Zeit*: "Without the Left wingers and progressives, the black forces will lose the last bit of restraint that they felt upon themselves. With all their insolent attitude towards their political opponents in the order, the *Forward* and S.P. politicians nevertheless had to conceal their deeds from time to time . . . Now the policy will become as naked as Adam. The dictatorship of the *Forward* will become still tighter and stifling. The dance will become still wilder." (*Morning Freiheit*, 10-16-1929.) In other words, the withdrawal of the Left wing will result in the surrender of the remaining tens of thousands of workers to the insolence, the stifling dictatorship, the will dance of the *Forward* and its kindred.

There is still an urgent need for the unification of the two Circles, and for the development and strengthening of the Left wing within the united organization until it has won the support of the decisive sections of the working class membership. Splits which give such small results as 3 or 4 percent of the membership to the Left wing and the balance to the Right wing are indefensible. There is nothing revolutionary in a policy that yields such results.