

Convention of the Textile Workers Union

The delegates who gathered at Paterson to attend the second convention of the National Textile Workers Union had an enormous problem before them: the problem of organizing the hundreds of thousands of textile workers in the U. S., who are among the most miserably paid and unorganized in the country into the trade union movement. The extent to which this problem was tackled correctly is a reflection of the state of affairs both in the left wing movement in general and the labor movement as a whole.

Of the approximately one million textile workers in this country, only an insignificant handful are organized in the trade union movement. Those that are unionized, are divided in rival organizations, which at one time reached the number of sixteen but are now down to three important ones: the National Textile Workers Union, the Left wing organization under the influence and control of the Communist Party, the United Textile Workers Union, the A.F. of L. conservative organization, and the mildly progressive independent Associated Silk Workers. None of them has more than a few thousand members.

The Problem of the South

A big handicap in the work of organizing these largely unskilled workers is the fact that a large share of the industry is located in the reactionary South, with a working class that was only recently agricultural in customs and ideas, which has had practically no experience in struggles, and which, in its general outlook and as a general rule is far behind the northern workers.

Add to these conditions the fact that the textile barons are extremely powerful and arrogant that they never have had to work with unions as a recognized factor, that they resist the most modest proposals of their workers with a feudal ruthlessness and terror, and some conception of the hugeness of the problem can be gained.

But since the power of the capitalist class as a factor by itself, never been the only reason for the lack of organization, the causes must be sought elsewhere. One of them is the division of the labor movement itself. And that also, is as much or more an effect than a cause. Independent textile unions—outside the A. F. of L.—have arisen in the past because of the criminally neglectful policy of the well-fed bureaucrats, who have done as much and more for the textile barons as the government, its armies and police have done. Their role has been to prevent militant action by the workers wherever possible. And when it becomes impossible for them any longer to restrain the pressure of the workers, they have joined with and led strikes only to direct them into harmless channels, that is, harmless to the textile bosses.

The National Textile Workers Union was not born out of any academic decision to oppose the A. F. of L. union, but out of live and bitter struggles, out of the Passaic strike, out of the New Bedford strike, and out of the increasing need and desire to organize the hundreds of thousands of slaves in the industry.

That the N. T. W. had the wisdom, the foresight, the militancy and policy of struggle that were and are lacking in the leadership of the old unions is evident from even its brief period of history. It is inconceivable that the Wm. Greens or Wolls or McMahons should ever have the initiative or desire to plunge into the dangerous, vast field of the South, or conduct such a strike as Gastonia, or show even the most pallid resemblance to the spirit of battle, self-sacrifice, courage shown by the N.T.W. union members and leaders in spite of all the errors they made. Nor can one imagine a convention of the McMahon controlled union to resemble the convention of the N. T. W. U.

A Workers Convention

The tendency so profoundly developed of late among the Stalinist "leadership" of the Communist Party, to hold fake, inflated conventions was reduced to a minimum in Paterson. The delegates represented workers and were themselves workers from the mills of New England and the new-born South of the working class. The Southern delegates in particular most of not all of them new recruits in the movement were the liveliest section of the convention and discussed the problems of the union with a confidence that does not promise well for the Southern bourbons.

In fact, so prominently a place did these Southern non-Communist and non-

that they frequently took the C. P. fraction by surprise, so that hectic, anxious meetings of the fraction had to be held so as to push "the party face" more assertively to the fore in the sessions. Nevertheless, the activity of these workers is a healthy sign in two senses: it bodes well for their development as active, independent fighters in the class struggle and is a lively refutation of the new Stalinist theory that no trade union can make a step forward unless it is hugged in a mechanical, artificial, stifling embrace by the Communist Party. This is all the more true because these workers are not at all animated by any anti-Communist or anti-Communist Party motives.

Another step forward marked by the convention was the improvement of its directing staff. The chaotic conditions existing up to now in the national office of the Textile Workers' Union constantly worsened by the petty battles of the Lovestoneites and Fosterites, were partially alleviated. Unfortunately, there are far from adequate assurances that the new central office force will function as properly as the situation requires. The mediocre people who were put into the "office staff" were not chosen for their abilities as much as they were for their readiness to rubberstamp any decision made by the present party leadership.

The Stalinists were so frightened by their previous experiences with Weisbord, Dawson, Keller and others that they calculated upon avoiding any future "deviations from the line" by installing a hand-made, hand-picked committee distinguished by nothing except a vast capacity for obedience and an even drabness of ability. Worse yet, there is not a single non-party worker on the staff, although any number of them might have been chosen, much to the profit of the organization and its proper working, as compared to some of those who were selected by the party.

Shortcomings of Conference

Another, and more serious shortcoming of the conference, was the program of work and policy it adopted. The main resolution on the situation and tasks of the union was drawn in the style, tone and content of the political resolution at a Communist Party convention. There is no question of a technical distinction here, but of the documentary reflection of the position taken by the party for the creation of simon-pure Communist unions which result in the final analysis to narrowing down these organizations to party members and their sympathizers. Whoever fails to draw these lessons from the decline of the Left wing needle trade unions under that policy is riding for a fall in the textile union as well.

The main problem before the union—the organization of the textile workers into a militant class union—was not properly dealt with in the convention or the resolution. To read the latter, one would never imagine that it was adopted by a body incorporating approximately five to six thousand members out of about a million workers in the industry.

What the resolution particularly failed to consider adequately was the coming campaign of the A. F. of L. in the South. For analysis, it substituted denunciation. While all the attacks made upon the A. F. of L. bureaucracy are justified a thousand times over, it is insufficient simply to declare that "we must carry on a continual campaign of exposure and open struggle" against it. The fact remains that the bulk of the Southern textile workers do not yet distinguish between the militant Left wing unions and the reactionary A. F. of L. unions. To assert the contrary is self-deception and nothing else.

The workers learn to separate friend from foe by experience in the struggle and not by decree or thesis. The American workers particularly will yet go through a thousand betrayals and defeats before they take the path of revolutionary struggle. The task of the Communists and the Left wing is to hasten this process by exposing the labor lieutenants of capitalism in the very heat of the struggle, by diminishing and trying to eliminate the experiences of defeat and treason by guiding and teaching the workers while they are fighting.

In the United States at the present time the best means to this end is the tactic of the united front. For those who have conceived of the united front in the past as an alliance of leaders at the top, the proposal now may seem to be a "conservative"

ed front as an instrument for uniting the advanced, revolutionary workers with the backward, conservative workers in a struggle not only against the capitalists but also against their labor agents, the proposal still holds good.

The tactic of the united front is the way in which the true role of the Greens, McMahons, and Mustes of all varieties—who do not want to and will not unite with the militants for a common struggle because that is not their function in the labor movement—will be demonstrated even to the most backward worker. And they are the ones to consider in the South,

The Daily Worker Gasps for Arguments

At a complete loss to reply with any reasoned political arguments to the viewpoint and criticism given by us in the *Militant*, the *Daily Worker* has constantly been compelled to resort to the old, reliable but not very honest expedients of misrepresentation and slander. Throw a lot of mud—some of it must stick! The new experts in fighting Trotskyism calculate that Mark Twain was probably right when he remarked that a lie will travel all around the world while truth is pulling on its boots. One of the purest (in the chemical sense) examples of this method of argument can be found in the *Daily Worker* (12-30-1929) under the title "Economic Crisis and the Crisis Among the Opportunists".

The section of that editorial devoted to Lovestone is too obvious and needs no particular comment. Nowadays, anyone, even the muddled Centrists of the Stalin school, is capable of politically and theoretically annihilating the national-reformist and petty bourgeois ideology of the Right wing throughout the International. All the Centrists have to do—and that is what they actually do—is to look up the articles and documents of the Opposition written years ago and borrow their arguments wholesale from this inexhaustible arsenal. The veriest pop-gun from this store of weapons, even when it is held in the unskilled and trembling hand of the Centrists, is heavy enough against the primitive defense of the Right wingers.

Centrism Out of Its Element

But when the Centrist turn to attack the Communist Opposition, he finds himself gasping out of his element. He dares not, and does not any longer pretend, to discuss the fundamental questions of principle and strategy that divide the Communist movement: national reformism (socialism in one country) versus revolutionary internationalism; subordination of the proletariat to the colonial bourgeoisie (Chinese revolution) or the socialist path in the colonial countries; workers and peasants versus proletarian parties; etc., etc., etc. The same holds true in virtually every important issue of the day in the class struggle, be it in the trade union field where the Centrists hop from one position to another without the slightest knowledge of where they are going, or in any other. The only thing left, then, is misrepresentation, insinuation and slander. The above-mentioned editorial is a classic example. It says:

"The Trotskyite opportunists waited more than two months before they could pick up courage to utter a word of analysis of the crisis... But finally they have decided they simply must speak, even without the long-awaited directives from Constantinople." As for the "blistering sarcasm" about the "long-awaited directives", it is to laugh considerably. But before you laugh, bear in mind that the people who write so "ironically" about directives from afar are precisely the same ones who did not know for many long months whether American capitalism had reached its apex or its Victorian age, and finally had to be told in the "long-awaited directives from Moscow" that they were all wrong on everything but their mutual charges of unprincipledness. They are the very same people who cannot sleep, eat, drink, think, white, act or do anything at all without first inquiring from Stalin whether it is in accordance with the latest "line". They are the people who make "analyses" and work out "lines" yesterday only to repudiate and condemn them today

where they predominate. They are the ones who will at present follow the A. F. of L. If it arrives first on the scene and shows the necessary initiative and they will follow the National Textile Workers Union if it is the one that gets to the workers first. It is to show the workers that the Left wing holds the banner of unity in struggle, that it is ready to unite its forces with every worker, no matter if he still has some faith in the Greens for the moment, that the N. T. W. must adopt the tactic of the united front. That this was neither done nor considered at the Paterson convention marks a weakness in the union's position traceable to the present line of the Communist Party leadership. But the course of the struggle will convince the militants in the organization of the right path to pursue.

discarded—by command—tomorrow. Their political life is the survival of the fittest—stomach, i. e., the stomach that can digest or give forth any and every policy rammed down its throat by the ruling regime in the Russian Party.

We already outlined and analyzed the character and the outcome of the American depression and crisis in the Platform adopted by our first national conference in Chicago seven months ago. Since our analyses were not made and remade to fit some fatigational emergency, our platform stands, and its predictions are steadily verified by the course of events. Anyone who reads the *Militant*, and certainly the avid readers of the *D. W.* knows that we have referred to this analysis and repeated it on numerous occasions in the recent past. Therefore, when the *Daily Worker* says, "In the *Militant* of December 28, we finally receive the first word of Trotskyist analyses of the economic crisis", it is stating a limping falsehood calculated to avoid the discomfort of arguing against our analysis.

Not satisfied with this, the *D. W.* needs resort to the shabby trick of yanking a sentence or two out of a news story and presenting it as though it were our first and last word on the economic situation. The scintillating facetiousness of the *Daily Worker* on the question of long skirts is merely unvarnished dishonesty: "The quotation it makes from the news story in the *Militant* refers exclusively to the dress industry and the factor played in it by the so-called 'long skirt models'. The upright *Daily Worker* 'overlooks' this 'little point' and makes it appear as though the *Militant* maintains that what is wrong with American industry today is the failure of the ladies to buy long skirts instead of short ones! Is this not profound? Is it not a conclusive proof of the renegacy of the Trotskyists? Does it not expose and annihilate them the thousandth time, annihilate them?"

Well, we can be even more "revolutionary" than the *Daily Worker* on the question of the crisis. It says for instance, in the same issue: "Crisis Becomes Severe in 50 years; 5,000,000 Jobs" and proceeds to remark that "no one mentioned a specific figure of national employment of the working class. The *Daily Worker* has placed the number in excess of 5,000,000!" We think that to a genuine revolutionist in these momentous days of the Third Period and the New Line, the *Daily Worker* should have written "Crisis is worst in world history. American capitalism on the brink of collapse. Communists ready for power. Trotskyists shamelessly announce 5,000,000 unemployed. *Daily Worker* places number higher than 10,000,000. We are twice as radical as Trotskyists."

As it hobbles painfully to the conclusion of its "arguments", the *Daily Worker* announces that "pending their formal amalgamation", and "while the Right wing (Lovestone) and the Trotskyites are formally separated at the top, they already have a practical amalgamation of the machinery of distribution of their papers at the bottom." (This penetrating wisdom flows from the fact that the *Militant* and *Revolutionary Age* are sold at the Rand School news stand). As for our "formal amalgamation", the *D. W.* has probably confused us with the recent amalgamation of Stalin and Bucharin. Nevertheless, we would be very much obliged to the *D. W.* if it would answer a question:

Why not fix the final date for our amalgamation with the Right wing thereby getting the matter off your mind and allowing the suspense of your new nerves