

The Struggle for the South

Green's Pleas to the Bosses, the Progressives and the Communists

By James P. Cannon

The theses of the unlucky leaders of the Communist Party nowadays seem to be written in order that events may speedily refute them. Such is the fate of the Foster revelation of a year ago regarding the "decline of the A. F. of L." The formal opening of the A. F. of L. campaign in the South brushes this theory into the discard, while, incidentally, it confirms all that we said in the subject in our Platform (The Militant, 2-15-1929).

The conference at Charlotte, N. C. was staged on a scale designed to attract the maximum of attention, and the resources placed at the disposal of the United Textile Workers ought to remove all doubt that the reactionary McMahon organization henceforth will contest the field with the Communists far more aggressively than was the case in the year just passed, which marked the entrance of the National Textile Workers Union into the South. The Federated Press dispatch of January 16, states that 15 organizers have been assigned to the work of organizing the Southern cotton mill workers into the U. T. W. and that 25 will be in the field in the near future. Along with this goes the announcement of imposing financial support to the campaign. Discounting much of this as typical promotion talk, the entry of the A. F. of L. as a real contender in the Southern labor situation remains a clearly established fact which none but fools can deny.

The A. F. of L. Program

In all the preparations for their campaign in the South the reactionaries run true to form as "the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class", as DeLeon called them many years ago. Peaceful partnership with the bosses and war to the knife on the workers' vanguard—the sword and shield of labor reaction—is the undisguised program, as frankly proclaimed at the Charlotte conference. "No strikes are to be called," is the promise to the exploiters of labor by Thomas F. McMahon, president of the U. T. W., and "give us a trial" is the supplementary plea of William Green, in the name of the A. F. of L. Coupled with this supplication to the bosses to give them a chance to "be of service" is the inevitable declaration of war on the Communists. "There will be a never-ending conflict between the American Federation of Labor and these destructive people," is the pledge made in Green's speech at the conference, reported in the New York Times (1-7-1930).

The whole strategy of the reactionaries is elucidated here: To make their appeal to the employers and offer them a safe alternative to the Left wing unions.

In all this there is nothing new, much as it may surprise the ignoramuses who explain this—and all other—phenomena by the newly baked theory of "social-fascism". In offering itself as a strike-breaker and bulwark against radicalism, the United Textile Workers is repeating its own inglorious role of the past. During the Lawrence strike of 1912 it made a contract with the mill owners and attempted to stampede the strikers back to work on the bosses' terms—a maneuver exposed and defeated by the militant I. W. W. It did the same thing in the Paterson strike of 1914, coming in at the height of the strike and openly conspiring with the bosses and police to break it. Such instances in the American labor movement are innumerable. They can be found in every field where labor militants have come to the front as the organizers of the workers. Even today's strike of the Amalgamated Food Workers in New York against restaurants "signed up" with the A. F. of L. union is an old story. The writer recalls an identical situation in Minneapolis in 1914 when I. W. W. restaurant workers on strike were confronted one morning with a card in the window proclaiming the establishment to be a "union house". The theory of "social fascism" is not necessary to explain the A. F. of L. campaign of treachery in the South to anyone who knows the A. B. C. of American labor history and the role of the "labor lieutenants" of the bosses. This hare-brained theory serves no purpose except to muddle and confuse the workers and thus, in its objective consequences, to weaken them in their fight.

What part are the "progressives" of the C. P. L. A. playing in this conflict

in the South? They are playing a characteristic one which gives the honest progressive worker a good opportunity to compare their words with their deeds and to judge them accordingly. In a New Year's manifesto, A. J. Muste, the head of the C. P. L. A., called for "militancy, determination and idealism" in the labor movement and predicted: "The year 1930 will be a year of strikes and of renewed aggressiveness on the part of the American workers." These are the words, and they are fair ones. What of the deeds? Several C. P. L. A. leaders are assigned as organizers in the A. F. of L. campaign with its pledge of "no strikes" and its war to the knife on the Left wing exponents of "militancy, determination and idealism" in the labor movement.

The C. P. L. A. people are playing the role of come-ons for the labor fakery. They were present at the Charlotte conference but the reports contain no reference to any protest on their part against the reactionary program. One of the committee of three appointed by Green to direct the campaign is Paul Smith, who is not unknown to the "progressives" of the West. His sole occupation as the A. F. of L. "organizer" for several years has been to break up Central Labor bodies tainted with signs of "militancy, determination and idealism". The Central Labor Councils of Detroit, Seattle, Minneapolis, Great Falls and other cities which supported some of the planks in the C. P. L. A. program know him for this work and for no other. The Federated Press release for January 8 says "Smith...is regarded as a policy man within the A. F. of L." You bet he is. His policy is reaction, and it will govern the campaign as everybody knows. The "progressives" will work under him and according to his policy.

The Bosses' Program and the A. F. of L. Program

The A. F. of L. chiefs want to serve the interests of the employers but they are not the same as the employers and their programs at the moment are not identical. If one is to understand the labor situation in the South it is necessary to see this important differentiation, much as it conflicts with the dogma of "social fascism". The Southern bosses are not yet ready to accept the A. F. of L. as an alternative to Left wing unionism. They are determined to fight it also as they did at Marion. They want no union at all. The mill owners' press greeted the Charlotte conference with full page advertisements against all labor organizations, citing the case of "ruined Massachusetts" where unionism is alleged to exist. From this conflict of programs great struggles may arise despite the wishes of the A. F. of L. leaders and their program of "no strikes". Even if the reactionaries succeed in temporarily defeating the Left wing union the issue will be by no means settled. It is quite possible that the struggle between the Right and Left for the leadership of the workers will take other forms than those indicated at the moment. The clearer this is seen the better will be the safeguards against pessimism and panic in the event of a temporary defeat of the Left union.

Under the present conditions, the center of gravity lies in the head-on fight between the rival unions—the reactionary U. T. W. and the Left wing N. T. W.—for the support of the workers. The support of the N. T. W. is the first duty of the class conscious workers. This applies not only to the Southern textile workers but to the proletarian vanguard throughout the country; the textile workers cannot be organized against the bosses and the A. F. of L. without the help of the entire American movement of militant labor. Of what should this support consist? Well, first of all it should be to try to understand the whole situation and then to tell the truth about it. This is the way a Communist approaches every problem of the class struggle. The robot like support of everything said and done in the name of the Left wing union regardless of its wisdom or its folly; the craven acquiescence in false policy which throw the new union off the track; the treacherous silence of accomplices in factional disruption which plays the game of the mill owners and the labor fakery—all this is the business of soulless functionaries who have lost

sight of the interests of the workers. Communist revolutionaries will scornfully reject these criteria of "support" which are designed only to shield the Foster wrecking crew from accountability to the workers.

Mistakes of the Party Leaders

The Party leaders, by false policies and by factional jugglery of the most criminal kind, have laid heavy handicaps on the National Textile Workers Union, and are sending it into the great contest weakened and ill-prepared. They threw away the great opportunity to dramatize the Southern struggle around the Gastonia case and to mobilize all the best forces of the working class for the support of the N. T. W. By abandoning the historic struggle of American labor against the frame-up system they lost the chance to line up the Northern workers and they cleared the way for multiplied persecution in the future—one of the greatest obstacles to the organization of the Southern textile workers.

Their failure to employ united front tactics of approach to the Marion strikers and to link this situation up in a national agitation with the Gastonia fight was likewise a costly blunder. The striking workers of Marion who were shot down on the picket line belong to us; it is thanks only to the multiplied bungling of the party bureaucrats that McMahon and Co. are enabled to wave the tradition of Marion as a banner for their reactionary campaign.

On the organization side the Foster leadership has no less to account for. Considering the great historical importance of the struggle in the South and the immensity of the task the organizing force and the financial support assigned to it were ridiculously inadequate; and the constant juggling and shifting of forces, dictated, as a rule, by party factional exigencies, greatly hampered the campaign. These mistakes of the past might be passed by if there were signs of change and improvement; but this, unfortunately, is not the case. The latest exploits of the Party bosses in the N. T. W. are blows against its future.

The Removal of Weisbord

The principal achievement of the recent convention of the N. T. W. was the elimination of the three former officials—Weisbord, Keller and Dawson, who, it is reported, are tainted more or less with Lovestonism—of carrying over one might say, the official Comintern line of 1928 into the year 1929. So far as the Lovestone clique of leaders is concerned, we have recorded our opinions fully and adequately many times, and not since yesterday. We need not repeat these opinions here except to remark that everything to be found in the Party campaign against them which has political complexion and substance is borrowed almost literally from material written by us long ago when the present leaders of the Party were united with them like a band of brothers in the war against "Trotskyism", i. e. against the fundamental teachings of Marx and Lenin. The task of educating the Communist vanguard in the ideological struggle against the petty-bourgeois theories and practices of Lovestone, Wolfe and Co. is one we have not shirked in the past and will not shirk in the future.

But this educational work will be hindered and not advanced by the arbitrary removal of their adherents from the Left wing unions. Such a course will have far-reaching consequences, leading to the disruption of the unions—or their transformation into impotent sects, which amounts to the same thing, and we declare emphatically against it.

The "victories" of the Party caucus do not pass unnoticed either by the workers or their enemies. The masses of the textile workers who saw in Weisbord the organizer of the great Passaic strike, the symbol of their aspiration for militant organization will not be enthused by his removal for purely party reasons.

Labor leaders, able to arouse and organize the masses, are not manufactured so easily in a Party caucus or a caucus bound convention. To his faults, many and serious, we have never been blind; we had occasion to speak of them more than once when he was being artificially, and quite disgustingly, promoted and advertised like Barnum's white elephant. The elements of the careerist intellectual in him, which determined his affinity for the Lovestone faction, were as plain as a pike-staff and these odious traits were stimulated by his factional exploitation during the Lovestone regime in the Party.

But in throwing Weisbord aside without any serious or valid reasons, the Party

Prospect Bad for Builders

By T. P. LEWIS

CHICAGO—(FP)—Now that the data is available, building trades workers can size up the prospects for work and organization in the industry for the coming year. The first, work, depends on both the volume of building to be done and the technical advances in construction. The outlook is bad. With regard to organization and union demands, the ensuing year will in all probability see many struggles between associations of employers intent on doing away with what they term "prosperity" working conditions and building unions loath to give up the advantages won during the past eight booming years.

Peak Reached in 1928

The outstanding characteristic of the industry from the point of view of the worker in overalls is and probably will continue to be throughout the year, a dearth of jobs. The present slackness in employment is much more than the usual winter layoff. The all-time peak of building production was reached in May, 1928. From that peak to the following February, 1929, the drop in building activity was 44%. In Oct. 1, 1929, when the stock market crash occurred contracts awarded had already been declining for 17 months.

December 1929 was the lowest December recorded in the records of a statistical organization operating in the 37 Eastern states for all time. Almost the entire drop is in the residential section. In fact, non-residential construction as a whole showed an increase of 4% in 1929 over 1928. It was mainly the booming condition of residential building which includes apartments that gave jobs to so many workers.

The advancing technique of construction has wiped out many jobs. High building costs in 1929 were an incentive to speed-up, both directly as noticed and complained about by many union workers, and in new methods. Here are a few examples of expedited construction: In Mississippi a 22-story reinforced concrete structure was placed in seven weeks. The merchandise mart in Chicago, the world's largest building, was the scene of the most comprehensive assemblage of building equipment ever brought together. Cement was distributed pneumatically and concrete was placed by conveyors. New developments in scaffold erection and high-speed hoists have materially cut down on time.

Burden Workers with Losses

Grumbling about high wages is already heard in boss circles. In spite of professional optimists paid by trade journals or hired by the bosses' organizations to spread good cheer, the employer knows 1930 will be a lean year in the building industry. He saw his profits cut in 1929 and is preparing to pass some of his losses on to the workers, forgetting the fabulous profits that in the main have made seven fat years for him.

NEW YORK—(FP)—Exploitation of child workers as young as 10 in scallop sheds along the southern shore of Long Island is under attack. The children await the arrival of the scallop fisherman late in the afternoon and work on the docks of in badly ventilated board shacks until late in the evening shelling and packing the scallops. Paid by the gallon, they rarely earn as much as \$2 a day.

manipulators are discarding a valuable and necessary force in the struggle to organize the textile workers against the mill owners and the A. F. of L. reactionaries.

But the harmful effects of these latest removals go deeper than the question of the individuals involved. It is another advertisement to the world that the Foster bureaucrats demand a hand-picked administration of yes-men in the unions under their control and that no dissenting opinions will be tolerated. A persistence in this course over a long enough period will seal the doom of the Left wing unions as mass organizations and give the game to the exploiters and their labor agents. This course is today a cancer eating the vitals of the N. T. W. The struggle for a correct line of policy and a drastic reformation of administrative methods is a pressing duty of Communist workers, in the North as well as in the South, who want to give real support to the National Textile Workers Union.