

# Leadership in the Coming Struggles

By Arne Swaback

That increasing working class struggles will grow out of the present advancing industrial depression is a foregone conclusion. As to their present extent and rapidity of development we might only cast a glance back at the historical tradition of struggles of the American workers, marked by their convulsive but determined expressions. This may be said to be the prospect made possibly so much more acute by the rapid violent development of industrialization, its increasing class distinctions and the sharpness of the class struggle, which today makes up a special part of the internal contradictions of American imperialism.

This was strikingly set forth in Comrade Trotsky's letter to the American Opposition:

"We must not for a minute lose sight of the fact that the might of American capitalism rests more and more upon a foundation of world economy with its contradictions and crises, military and revolutionary. This means that a social crisis in the United States may arrive a good deal sooner than many think and have a feverish development from the beginning. Hence the conclusion: It is necessary to prepare."

## The Workers in the Basic Industries

The unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the basic industries compose the great majority of the working class and must naturally be the main basis of new union organization activities. Particularly during times of exceptional conditions, such as industrial crises, when many of the regulations of "normalcy" disappear, can these workers be expected to move readily into action. Their moves will not be hampered by special privileges. While today almost entirely unorganized, yet they are potentially the most revolutionary. But the American Federation of Labor and similar unions, even as now constituted, will not remain immune from changing economic conditions.

It is well to remember the widespread Left wing and progressive influence, particularly in its more elementary aspects, as represented by the movement for amalgamation, a labor party and recognition of the Soviet Union, growing out of the period of industrial depression and great strikes from 1919 to 1922. Many A. F. of L. local unions, and even higher bodies, were swept by that sentiment. The tactics pursued by the Left wing were correct. True, since then many expulsions have occurred. Yes, but is that not a certain form of proof attesting the correctness and effectiveness of the tactics of the Left at the time?

Our objects in endeavoring to arrive at a correct union building program today are mainly twofold: actually to organize the workers for the struggle and to extend Communist influence through the unions to the masses. Hence the conclusion that it is necessary to initiate organization of the unorganized, to give them fighting leadership as well as to build the Left wing movement within the existing unions in opposition to the capitalist policies of the reactionary leadership. These two tasks go hand in hand. This should be the essence of a correct Communist union building program. While this is today half-heartedly acknowledged by the Communist Party—on paper—it is entirely negated by its practice.

Just now can be noted the first effects of the pledges made to the Hoover industrial conferences. The big employers gave "promises" of extended activities and of no wage cuts. The A. F. of L. heads gave promise not to initiate any movements for wage increases, without even attempting to demand such elementary guarantees as: No further lay-offs, no further speedups and support for the unemployed. The employers naturally broke their so-called "pledges", never seriously made, and a few hours later the offensive against the workers began. It will become more intense as capitalism endeavors to overcome its economic difficulties by increased exploitation. As it proceeds, although contented swine can be moved only with a heavy stick, even the A. F. of L. "leaders" will have to answer to a rank and file becoming more critical.

## Communist and Conservative Unions

The next important question then arises: Should Communists help to organize unorganized workers into the existing conservative unions? The answer must be, YES: wherever these unions can be made to move. The inevitable pressure from

below in that direction should be intensified and unorganized workers drawn into the unions on the basis of the program of the Left as an additional reservoir for the necessary struggle against the domination and ideology of the labor lieutenants of capitalism. With such activities must be combined the fight for the organizations to be transformed to an industrial basis (amalgamation), which is absolutely indispensable; the fight for ordinary trade union democracy, for divorcing them from the capitalist political parties; for militant methods, etc.

Foster argues in his book "Misleaders of Labor" (published 1927) for the organization of the unorganized into the existing unions, as well as in some cases independently of them. He states in part (page 319) as follows: "...Besides, it must not be overlooked that, with the close of the present era of industrial activity and the precipitation of the inevitable industrial crisis, the trade unions, under capitalist attacks, will despite the reactionary bureaucracy veer sharply to the left, slough off many of their present conservative aspects, and tend to become very much more proletarian fighting organizations. The arguments of Lenin, Losovsky and others in 1920-22 against dual unionism applies today. Under present conditions there is no room for a general dual union movement in the United States, reactionary and decrepit though the existing unions may be."

Here we have the matter stated, although with some exaggerations, fairly correctly. Yet the party leadership, headed by Foster, in its official policy and practice carries on the exact opposite. What has happened since to make this prediction, estimation and conclusion, in its main aspects, incorrect? Have the existing unions disappeared or become worse than stated above? That is impossible. These unions have even made, under pressure, the first slight moves toward organization of the unorganized. True, the working

class has shown unmistakable signs of radicalization; but that was implied in Foster's prediction from which the conclusion was drawn. Still it could not be claimed that in the United States, political, economic or working class developments have reached a point (or seriously approached it) where a mass basis can be secured for a (dual) independent "revolutionary union" movement. The major section of the workers have not even had actual experience in ordinary trade unionism; not to speak of being able to correctly estimate the strike-breaking role of the present trade union "leadership". What then has happened? Oh yes—we have entered the "Third Period" with its blatant drivel about social fascism.

With the Stalin leadership of the Comintern the case stands no better. The thesis of the 10th Plenum shows utter confusion particularly on this important point of conservative mass unions and "revolutionary unions". It is characterized by the complete absence of a definite line.

## Problem of the United Front

The third question of importance to consider is that of the united front policy. Unity of organized and unorganized in times of struggle is always essential. Of similar importance is the need of unity of action between employed and unemployed. Carried out correctly the united front becomes an important medium in certain important stages of the class struggle. It can unquestionably become so in the organization of the unorganized and particularly where a situation exists of rival unions—new industrial unions and old conservative unions. The struggle of the textile workers in the South is about the best example. Violent assaults upon both unions as in Gastonia and Marion; the rank and file defending themselves and fighting back, in Gastonia under militant leadership, in Marion under reactionary leadership, from which a sell-out could be expected more readily than a forward move, for such was the record established.

## Practical Strike Demands

A fourth question which, because of

recent experiences, requires consideration is the one of correct slogans for organization and demands in strikes, for there can be no doubt that organization of the unorganized will be closely connected with strikes. In the recent Illinois miners strike for instance, led by the N. M. U., most of the demands were entirely too general and even too abstract in character. There was little or no concentration on the simple demands most closely connected with the actual working conditions and corresponding with the most outstanding grievances. Slogans and demands must not overshoot their mark.

Perhaps the best example of such wrong direction can be found in the manifesto of the party at the time of the murder of Ella May Wiggins in Gastonia, calling upon the workers to "Prepare for a strike of protest and sympathy for the heroic fighters in Gastonia who are fighting your battles". The best test of this overshoot aim is the fact that there was no response anywhere. The workers, not even the new industrial unions, were by no means prepared for such a political strike. A far more correct way would be to stress particularly the issues of the workers in industry, the grievances at the job, to lay the proper basis for extension of strike action in order to, on that basis, impart more political content. From such experiences lessons should be learned.

Very closely connected with this also is the necessity of actually giving the new industrial unions a mass basis. Without that they will become impotent sects and will not serve the cause of the general advance of the revolutionary movement.

To conclude from the few points emphasized here that revolutionists may hold out hopes or possibilities that the existing trade unions can be captured, in so far as taking possession of the apparatus is concerned, is, of course, ridiculous. While this may or may not be accomplished in certain instances, it is not the issue. As stated at the outset, the real object is to actually organize the workers for the struggle and to extend Communist influence through the unions to the masses. And these points here emphasized, in harmony with the Communist Opposition platform, certainly go in the direction toward a correct solution of the problem.

## The «Third Period» Mistakes of the Comintern - - By L. D. Trotsky

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must not be understood a strike during which the Communists carry on political agitation, but a strike in which the workers of all trades and enterprises conduct a struggle for definite political aims. Revolutionary agitation on the basis of strikes is a task of Communists under all circumstances; but the participation of workers in political, that is, revolutionary strikes, presents by itself one of the sharpest forms of struggle and occurs only under exceptional circumstances, which neither the party nor the trade unions can manufacture artificially according to their desires. To identify economic strikes with political strikes creates chaos which prevents the trade union leaders from correctly approaching economic strikes, from preparing them and working out an expedient program of workers' demands.

Matters stand still worse with the general economic orientation. The philosophy of the "third period" demands at all costs and immediately an economic crisis. Our wise trade unionists, therefore, close their eyes to the systematic improvement of the economic conjuncture in France for the past two years at a time when without a concrete estimation of the conjuncture it is impossible, in turn, to work out correct demands and to struggle for them with success. Claveri and Dorrelle would do well if they would think the question through to the end. If the economic rise in France should last for another year (which is not out of the question) then primarily the development and deepening of the economic struggles would soon be on the order of the day. To be able to adapt themselves to such circumstances is a task not only of the trade unions but also of the party. It is insufficient to proclaim the abstract right of Communism to a leading role; it is necessary to conquer this by deeds, and at that not within the narrow frame of the trade union apparatus but on the whole field of the class struggle. To the anarchist and trade unionist formula of autonomy of the trade unions, the party must oppose serious theoretical and political aid to the trade unions, making it easier for them to orientate correctly in questions of economic and political developments, and con-

sequently, the elaboration of correct demands and methods of struggle.

The unavoidable change in the rise produced by a crisis will change the tasks, taking the ground from under the successful economic struggles. It has already been said above that the coming of a crisis would serve in all probability as an impetus to the political activity of the masses. The strength of this impetus depends directly on two factors: on the depth and duration of the previous rise, the sharpness of the crisis that has come. The sharper and deeper the change will turn out to be the sharper will be the action of the masses. The reason for this is not difficult to understand. By the power of inertia, strikes generally acquire the greatest impetus at the moment when the economic rise begins to pass into depression. It is as if in the heat of running, the workers encounter a solid wall. With economic strikes you can then accomplish very little. The capitalists, with the depression under way, easily utilize the lockout. It is natural if the class consciousness of the workers which has risen begins to seek other roads for itself. But which? This already depends not only upon conjunctural conditions but on the whole situation in the country.

To declare in advance that the next conjunctural crisis will create an immediate revolutionary situation in France, for that there is at present no basis. Under the juncture of a series of conditions overflowing the boundaries of conjunctural crisis, this is quite possible. On this count only theoretical suppositions are thus far possible. To put forward today the slogan of a general political strike as an actual one, on the basis that the coming crisis may push the masses on the road of revolutionary struggle, means to attempt to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow. When Molotov stated at the Tenth Plenum that a general strike has already practically been put on the order of the day in France, then he only showed once too often that he does not know France nor the order nor the day. The anarchists and syndicalists do not a little to compromise the very idea of a general strike

in France. Official Communism apparently travels the same road, attempting to substitute goat-leaps of adventurism for systematic revolutionary work.

The tide of political activity of the masses, before it assumes a more decisive form, may, for a certain and for that matter a lengthy period, express itself in a greater attendance of meetings, in a wider distribution of Communist literature in the growth of electoral votes, increase in the number of Party members, etc. Can the leadership adopt in advance a purely a priori orientation on a stormy tempo of development at all events? No. It must have its hands united for one and for the other tempo. Only under this condition can the party, not deviating from the revolutionary direction, march in step with the class.

At the expense of the above-developed considerations I can already hear the caring voice of the tin rattle accuse me of "economism" on the one hand and capitalist optimism on the other, and of course of social democratic deviations. For the Molotovs, everything they cannot grasp, that is, a great deal, is related to the domain of social democratic deviations, just as to barbarians, ninety-nine percent of the universe is related to the domain of the activity of bad spirits. Following Molotov, Semard and Monmousseau will teach us that the question is not exhausted with shakings in conjuncture, that there are many other factors, for example, rationalization and the approaching war. These people talk about "many" factors all the more readily when they are incapable to explain a single one of them. Doubtless, we will reply to them, the war would have overthrown the whole perspective and would have opened, so to speak, a new chronology. But in the first place, we do not yet know today when the war will come, nor what gates it will come through. Secondly, in order to enter a war with open eyes, we must carefully study all the curves in the road that leads to it. War does not fall from heaven. The question of war and its date is connected most closely with the question of the processes of the world market.

Prinkipo, December 27, 1929.