

A Concrete Program for Organizing the Unemployed

On August 14th, the *Daily Worker* carried an article by Jack Johnstone. The article begins: "What are workers to do when they are hungry, are being evicted from their homes, are out of a job, and can't find anything to do? This question is one that is being asked by tens of thousands . . ."

And what is Johnstone's answer? In effect it is: "Come to the mass meeting in Union Square, September 1st, 12 o'clock sharp."

But suppose the workers say, "We have demonstrated already for almost a year, before March 6th, on March 6th, on May 1st, on July 6th, on August 1st, etc. Is this all you have to offer us? Is there no practical program? What are we to do when we are hungry? When we are being evicted from our homes? When we are out of a job?"

This is surely what the workers will say. They are saying it now: March 6th—75,000, May 1st—30,000, August 1st—10,000 etc. They have been saying it with their feet!

It is up to every honest and serious Communist to understand that the Party leaders are politically bankrupt. We must unite all forces to the end that a real unemployment program is worked out and carried out. The question asked by the workers must be answered!

Unemployment to Become More Serious

The unemployment question will become more acute than ever this coming fall and winter. The world economic situation will grow worse. The home situation will grow worse. The industrial crisis will sharpen and will add to it a deepened agrarian crisis. The unemployment question must become the principal question of the day. It can become the lever for the organization of the unorganized for the building of a Labor Party, for mobilizing the greatest mass of workers around the Communists. It is indeed that link in the chain of events which the Communists must seize to move the whole chain forward.

The Communist object in the unemployment movement must be 1. The mobilization of the widest layers of the population, above all, of course, and mainly, of the working class 2. The revolutionization and activation of these sections and the development of leadership from their ranks. To win the widest strata, we must connect the unemployed with the employed, and throw the family as a whole into the struggle.

The line of the Party has been just the opposite in effect—to isolate the working class from the rest of the population, to isolate the advanced workers from their reserves, to isolate the vanguard from the unemployed, to place the workers in an impossible fighting position.

If the difficulties of work are extraordinary due to the mobility of unemployed labor, to the systems of intermittent and part-time work, etc., these difficulties are more than counterbalanced by far by the wonderful opportunities for work.

How shall we begin the work of actually organizing the unemployed? The first problem is the problem of reaching the unemployed masses of which the primary basic principle is that we must go to the masses and not expect them to come to us. But how is this to be done? The proletarian quarters of the city must be carefully mapped out. In a larger city there will be several such quarters, very often built around some large factory or several of them. Each quarter contains a number of blocks. The block organization must be the basic unit. Leaflets should be given out from flat to flat, from tenement to tenement, first with general propaganda on the unemployment question and then announcing a series of meetings. These meetings should be held where possible, outdoors, block by block of the whole district being systematically covered. Through these meetings and through the systematic distribution of leaflets, all the unemployed in a given block can be registered and the main bulk organized in a block council with its own leaders and executives, meet-

ing regularly in the block, carrying out a uniform policy and preparing for action.

How the Party is Working

Let us stop here briefly to contrast our position with what has been done by the Party officials.

1. The first difference is that instead of "showy" haphazard work there is systematic responsible work. For years, for example, Amter dabbled with unemployment work in Cleveland. With what results? When the Party reviewed its work after March 6th, it declared the situation in Cleveland disgraceful, that there was not even a council organized. Another example, was there any serious estimation of the organization problems set forth by the "organizer" Johnstone at the July 4th conference in Chicago?

2. The second difference is that we go to the masses, not await their coming to us. How were the so-called "unemployment councils" built up throughout the country by the Party? Let us take a typical case—Newark, New Jersey. There the Party is relatively small and weak. It has little money and poor guidance. (In a few months it had 4 different paid section organizers between spells of having none at all.) A few dollars are raised and spent on leaflets. A meeting is announced in their own hall. First a hundred or so workers come, then two hundred, then four hundred and the hall is packed to the doors.

But already the workers begin to feel disappointed. At every meeting the same wordy phrases are passed out. The workers begin to ask "What are we to do when we are hungry, are being evicted from our homes, are out of a job?" "Come to the next meeting!" is the answer. No practical plans are set at the meeting. Party members alone control. No one is elected on an executive. No discussion of local problems. No non-Party leaders developed. The original enthusiasm begins to cool a bit. Then comes a police raid. The few leading Party members are arrested. The attendance rapidly falls off. Detectives stand in the hall, forming a cordon through which workers, one by one, must pass. Police agents in the hall openly cast their shadow of terror over the meeting.

Is it any wonder that after March 6th everything melted away? Could anything be more amateurish? The workers say the Communists mean well but they are a bunch of empty-headed impractical persons who like to talk.

Let us take the Party figures on unemployment that one person is out of work for every 15 people. Newark is a city, roughly of 450,000 population. This would mean at least 30,000 out of work. The Party then asked these 30,000 to come to a hall holding normally 300 people. There is no hall in Newark that could hold 30,000 people nor can the Party afford to hire any larger one than what they had. But to the workers the situation was very clear. In reality what the Party was doing was exposing its vanguard troops to the withering fire of the enemy in the most foolish manner. The workers knew that and either never came around or withdrew. Only the foolish Communist Party "leaders" did not know this. In reality the Party was keeping out thousands of workers eager to join the movement, and was condemning those who came, to isolation. In reality the Party was stifling the movement!

The Basis for Unemployment Work

3. The third difference is that with us, the basis for unemployment work is the proletarian quarter of the city, not the factory gate, not the meeting "downtown", or speeches at "bread lines".

—ALBERT WEISBORD
(To Be Continued)

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Wrong and Right Tactics in the Unemployment Movement

The unemployment situation in this period of depression following the period of overproduction and crisis of American capitalism brings forth a problem of greater magnitude than the unemployment accompanying the classical crisis of capitalism in its growth stage. A permanent army of unemployed due to the machine development and rationalization, aggravated by the crisis, swelling the numbers of the unemployed to over seven millions. Unemployment is the most pressing immediate problem of the American workers and every class conscious organization, reform group and the capitalist vanguard is vitally concerned with its solution; the working class with one aim and the capitalist class with the opposite aim.

The aim of the workers vanguard is to utilize this issue to strengthen the position of the working class and consolidate the ideological change taking place in the ranks of the workers. The aim of the capitalist class is to stem the tide, throw out enough crumbs to prevent this ideological crystallization and maintain their tottering equilibrium a little longer.

Not only can the two main contending classes use this issue to strengthen their position but the reformist and revolutionary wings of the working class movement are now in battle for a position in the American working class which will be an important victory in the immediate future and a big factor in determining the strength and duration of reformism in America. Therefore, tactics not only against the capitalist but especially against the reformist wing are vital problems in the unemployment activity of the revolutionary movement.

The Program of the Official Party

All the class conscious organizations are reaping some benefit from the favorable objective situation in spite of the fact that none of them has a concrete program for unemployment. The Communist Party, as the main organized force of these organizations, has done the most in this field and has a concrete program. But what kind of a concrete program, is another question.

Parties that only present an abstract program for the unemployed cannot be criticized in the same light the Communist Party must be. The Party at least attempts to solve the problem. It is its "Third Period" antics and non-Marxian analysis that causes all the trouble.

When the crisis began the Party issued the slogan of "Work or Wages". After the 7th Convention, when the crisis has deepened and is going deeper it shifted the emphasis to the Social Insurance Bill. The political analysis of the Party informs us, through the 7th Convention thesis, that we are in a period of revolutionary upsurge in America and yet this seventh convention gave birth to the Social Insurance BILL as the main activity in a period of "revolutionary upsurge".

The struggle for social insurance and the unemployment councils are elementary activities to mobilize all workers possible in order to use this mass against capitalism today and to win the most advanced section of this mass to our Party. The "revolutionary unions" of the T.U.U.L.: on the other hand, represent the most advanced section. To tie the unemployed councils organizationally to the tail of the T.U.U.L., is to cut off our advance. The Party must be the driving force and the T.U.U.L. must be the most active factor for organizing these unemployed but to apply the separate front in place of the united front, and mechanical control in place of control through Marxian policy, is fundamentally wrong.

The "Social Insurance Bill"

A struggle for social insurance is correct, but to direct our main energy in this field in the manner of the Party, means creating parliamentary illusions. Communist participation in elections does not guarantee revolutionary political action instead of parliamentary action. A struggle for social insurance does not mean the main weight should be placed on a BILL,

on the contrary the main emphasis should be placed on the industrial end with proper political coordination. This would easily enable us to draw a clear line of demarcation between our struggle for social insurance and that of the reformist and capitalist but at present the only distinction the Party speakers can find to prove that our bill is "revolutionary" is that we advocate \$25.00 and they advocate \$5.00. To compare our bill with "Roosevelt's Bill" in order to denote the revolutionary content of our social insurance struggle is another step in the swamp.

A struggle against unemployment must have the main emphasis on the field of struggle rather than in Congress and this activity (trade union, unemployment councils, shop committees, mass literature distribution of elementary educational value) should be coordinated with the parliamentary (elections, etc.) in order to strengthen our entire activity instead of arming the "industrial activist" on the one hand and the reformist on the other by stressing a Congressional BILL.

The United Front

This struggle against unemployment of millions of workers who are just becoming class conscious, with only a small section of this ideology crystallized, cannot be even started unless the Leninist UNITED FRONT is applied. The Party started at the beginning of the crisis with pure separate fronts and after the convention only gave lip service to the united front in a couple of half-hearted articles in the *Daily Worker* and *Labor Unity*. A united front with all the organizations of the workers, will enable us to gain and to expose the reformist. The reformist and trade union fakery have made this a big issue and our tactics are strengthening them. We need tactics that will strip these fakery before the eyes of the workers proving that their fight for unemployment is in name only.

The struggle for shorter hours is more important in content than a struggle for a social insurance bill. The main emphasis must fall on shorter hours. Such a struggle, like the 1830 struggle for the ten hour day and the 1886 struggle for the eight hour day are political struggles of basic working class content which is the distinction between revolutionary political action and "pure" parliamentary action. Not the slogan for the seven hour day but the slogan for the 6 hour day and five day week is what is needed.

Abstract propaganda for the Soviet Union means nothing to the average American worker who is separating himself from the capitalist and reformist. The sympathizer of the movement will be patient with any amount you give him, but we cannot base our propaganda on the circle we have already won. The slogan demanding credits to the Soviet Union is a concrete method of gaining the support of the workers. In the basic industries, those which produce the means of production which the Soviet Union needs and is buying, is where we can come to the American worker with a "Soviet issue" that means more than abstract support through convictions of a few based on scientific understanding. The approach should be through the bread and butter angle. It will tear down the walls of prejudice to enable us to present a scientific understanding to unbiased minds. And one may mention that credits to the Soviet Union is a burning issue with the plan of socialist construction.

The depression is growing deeper and this winter the conditions of the workers will be worse. Defensive struggle will reach a higher plane. There is still time for the Party and the revolutionary forces really to work out a concrete program of action for the unemployment situation and for the Party to shift from its reformist tendencies of main emphasis on a BILL to revolutionary political action.

—HUGO OEHLER

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