

# Appeal to the Party Members in the Needle Trades

FOR A UNITED FRONT OF THE PARTY AND THE LEFT OPPOSITION AGAINST THE REACTIONARIES, THE PSEUDO-PROGRESSIVES, AND THE RIGHT WING LIQUIDATORS! (the Lovestoneites)

The pressure of facts in the struggle, and the criticism of the Opposition, has compelled the party leadership to take the first steps in a turn from the former ultra-Leftist position it occupied in the needle trades situation. Insofar as you will compel the Centrist leadership to make it a real turn it will facilitate a closer working together of our joint forces. For this reason we approach you with the question of forming a united front against the black reactionaries, the pseudo-progressives and the Lovestone liquidators. A necessary preliminary to this is to put the situation in the needle trades clearly. The beginnings of the above mentioned turn are evidenced by the following facts:

## Indications of the Turn

1. The setting up of Left wing slates in various elections that have taken place in the Right wing unions: the Hatters, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Raincoat Makers etc., in contrast to the former policy which was tantamount to boycotting all these elections and leaving the workers in the Right wing unions at the mercy of the corrupt bureaucracy and the fraudulent "progressives".
2. The dropping of the policy for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of withdrawing every individual Left wing worker and affiliating him to the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union.
3. The recent meeting of the General Executive Board of the Left wing union, and subsequent declarations, in which the false analysis of the Right wing unions as "company unions" was partly abolished and those bodies were more properly characterized as reactionary unions in which the Left wing must function in order to win the workers to its cause.
4. The leaflet issued to Local 42 (Blockers) in which the "company union" policy of a few months ago is revised and the proposal made for a fight against the reactionaries within the A. F. of L. union, as the Opposition has been demanding for some time.

These are a few of the indications of the turn that is being made. The Left Opposition which has from the very beginning called upon the Communist workers to conduct a struggle against the pseudo-Communist policies of the party leaders in the needle trades, can only welcome this turn. The policy of yesterday which has not yet been completely cast aside, had the most pernicious results for the Left wing and its union. The once powerful movement influenced by the party in the needle trades was virtually wrecked by the policy of opportunism pursued in the days of the Lovestone leadership and the subsequent policy of ultra-Leftist sectarianism which was introduced by the present party leadership. The influence of the party and the Left wing has been radically reduced among the needle trades workers who once followed it by the tens of thousands. The Left wing union has been cut down to the merest shadow of its former strength: in the cloakmakers, furriers, milliners—in a word, everywhere except in the dress trade where it still has a small hold, it has been virtually eliminated as an organized force. Despite our warnings, the party leaders, under the inspiration of the spurious philosophy of the "third period", cast aside the tested policies of Leninism and adopted instead a narrow and sectarian policy. The Right wing unions, not the smallest reason for whose growth was the blunders of the Left wing, were simply denounced as "company unions" and boycotted. The proposals for Left wing work within these unions was rejected as the proposal of "renegades". The workers in the Right wing unions were lumped together with the bureaucrats and covered with the single label of "social fascists". In an attempt to retrieve ground lost by the mistakes of the past, the Left wing leadership embarked on a course of adventurism, organizing strikes without real foundation in the position of the union or the workers. As the result of the wrong appreciation of the Right wing unions, the Left wing was unable to make any progress in the strikes called by the Right wing: the party leaders could not even decide, at one stage in the Right wing strike, whether the Left wing workers should be called out as well or remain at work in the shops!

This uninterrupted series of mistakes of the past, for which the party leadership bears the entire responsibility, has not passed without leaving deep scars on the Left wing movement. Only a recognition, an examination and an absorption of the lessons of the past will enable the Left wing to lay a solid foundation to build on for the coming period. Without such a thorough study, the new turn will be a meaningless

bureaucratic maneuver which will only make the confusion worse confounded.

What must the Left wing understand before it can proceed with its work?

## Preliminary Steps for the Left Wing

The Right wing unions have been enormously strengthened. The drift of the workers has been in their direction. The Left wing has been defeated all along the line, and we must proceed with the open and honest recognition that we have suffered defeat. The bosses have become more arrogant than ever before.

The strategy of the bosses has been to support and even revive the Right wing unions through which their labor agents could help to weaken the Left wing and eliminate it as a factor. But the ideal of the bosses is not the Right wing union or any other union. Their ideal is a completely unorganized trade. They prefer the Right wing to the Left wing, and an unorganized mass to any union whatever. The bosses want the workers to bear the burden of the crisis of capitalism, to accept the old, murderous conditions of low wages, long hours, and intense speed-up.

The plans of the bosses to impose ever worse conditions upon the workers cannot be carried through without the open or concealed assistance of their labor agents, the Right wing union leaders. On the other hand, the workers, compelled for a number of reasons to join the Right wing unions, will resist these plans.

It is this conflict which deepens the gulf between the bureaucracy and the union membership and creates a broad basis for the activity of the Left wing and a revival of its influence. If the Left wing pursues a correct policy, it can again become the recognized champion of the interests and needs of the workers and win them away from the Right wing bureaucracy and into the ranks of the militant movement. The problem of the revolutionary elements at the present moment is the speediest accomplishment of this end.

How is this to be done? The Left wing must immediately proceed with the organization of all the militant and Left wing workers within the reactionary unions. Can this be done under the slogan of the workers in the Right wing unions joining the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union immediately? It cannot. All recent experience demonstrates that this is an abstract slogan for the Right wing union workers to which they pay no attention and which only alienates them further from the Left wing. The basis for the organization of the militants in the Right wing unions can only be: The fight for democracy in the union; the unrelenting struggle against the bureaucrats and capitalist labor agents in the organization; the mobilization of the workers for united action against the offensive of the bosses. Does this mean that the Right wing unions can be transformed into genuine instruments of struggle against the manufacturers? The party leaders reply with the categorical denial. To make such absolute declarations in advance means to place huge obstacles in the road of working within the reactionary needle trades unions. The fact is that this question can only be settled in the course of the struggle, which, in turn, cannot be fitted arbitrarily into a rigid mold cast in advance and so inflexible that it cannot be adjusted to meet the ever new realities of a situation. The fact is, and this is demonstrated by the recent history of the needle trades themselves, that the Left wing, by working persistently and intelligently, has been able to win the bulk of the workers in the reactionary unions.

This was the case in the Joint Action fight, in the furriers' union, and elsewhere. Despite the blunders of the past and the manner in which the official leadership of the Left wing has compromised the struggle, the lost ground can still be recovered and a beginning made.

## The Theories of "Social Fascism"

It is necessary in the first place to reject completely the whole theory of "company unionism" and "social fascist" unionism, as applied to the reactionary unions by the party. This theory only erects an artificial barrier between the workers in the Left wing union and those in the Right wing union, which only works to the advantage of the Schlesingers and their kin. The organization of the Left wing militants in the Right wing unions must be begun and carried on systematically and seriously. The immediate aim of the Left wing minority must be to oust the reactionary bureaucracy and introduce tested policies of the class struggle in place of class collaboration. We have no illusions about the "desire for unity" of the Right wing bureaucrats. They are the agents of the manufacturers in the

labor movement. There is not the slightest doubt that in a desperate attempt to break the workers away from the growing influence of the Left wing, they will again seek to split the unions. They have done this in the past and will in all likelihood seek to do it again. On the banner of the Left wing, however, must be inscribed the slogan of working class unity against the capitalist class. Our aim must be to unite and win over the working class. The bureaucrats are the splitters of the labor movement: the Communists and the Left wing are its unifiers, not in the name of an abstract unity for its own sake, but unity on the basis of the class struggle.

Is there a basis for Left wing activity in the Right wing unions? All the indications are that such a basis not only exists, but is constantly being extended under pressure of the contradictions between the labor bureaucracy and the real needs of the workers. The Left wing must build on this foundation.

Whose resistance, besides that of the bosses, the state and their direct labor agents, is encountered in this work of regenerating the power and influence of the Left wing?

1. The pseudo-progressives. These are people, like Levy in the cloakmakers' union and similar elements in the other unions, who have a thoroughly discredited past, but, in spite of that, are sensing the mood of discontent among the workers, and seek to mount the rising movement by attaching themselves to a few "progressive" phrases. These phrases mean nothing to them. People without principle—except the "principle" of clique control—they serve as channels into which the discontent of the workers is harmlessly diverted. They are the shields for the Schlesingers and Goldens. Their position in the struggle, which will assume an ever more dangerous aspect as the Left wing really begins its work, must be relentlessly exposed to the workers as a whole.

## The Lovestone Liquidators

2. The Lovestone, Right wing liquidators. The rôle of the Right wing faction is to liquidate the influence of Communism and the Left wing in the working class. Taking advantage of the blunders and false line of the official party, which are only a continuation in another direction of the blunders made yesterday by the Lovestone leadership, the Right wing has been able to mobilize a number of workers who reacted against the ultra-Leftist line. But instead of directing their protest in Communist channels, the Right wing has used these workers to pursue a policy of liquidation. The policy of the Right wing group in the needle trades particularly, is summed up in their bloc with the discredited Levy clique, which only serves to rehabilitate the Levys in the eyes of the workers and to hamper the development of a genuine Left wing movement in the reactionary unions. The problem of the Communists—to liquidate the Right wing liquidators—can not be accomplished merely by words or violence, but by opposing to their policy a correct policy, and an intelligent enlightenment of the workers as to the rôle they play. But a prerequisite for this defeat of the opportunists is a unification of the genuinely Communist forces, combined with a struggle within the party and the Left wing itself against bureaucratism and adventurism, the counterpart of the Right wing itself. It is towards such a unification that the Left Opposition is striving and is ready to cooperate on a comradely, militant basis with the members of the party.

Does the program of building a Left wing within the reactionary unions mean the liquidation of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union? Not at all! That is the aim of the Lovestone Right wing, but it is not our aim. The greatest hindrance in the way of the clarification of the Communist workers is the unprincipled and cynical identification of our line with the line of the Right wing, which is made without conviction or proof by the party leaders. The Left Opposition proposes a program to strengthen and not to liquidate the N. T. W. I. U. The truth is that the whole sectarian course of the party up to now has resulted in a weakening of the Left wing union, and helped greatly to liquidate it in practice. The responsibility for this ruinous course cannot be shifted onto our shoulders, but must be borne by those who pursued the course and defended it, who still excuse it today, and by creating this bureaucratic confusion made it difficult to adopt a correct course, to carry out a REAL TURN TO THE CORRECT POLICY.

The N. T. W. I. U. must be built up,

not on the basis of abstract or false slogans, but in the process of struggle. We have pointed out the need of organizing the Left wing in the reactionary unions as an aid to those workers organized in the N.T.W.I.U. Equally important is the need of systematically organizing the Left wing workers into groups in the shops controlled by the Right wing union. In the unorganized shops, a profound and well organized campaign of organization into the N. T. W. I. U. must be started. We speak of a serious campaign and not one based on paper, with headlines in the party press as their main substance, which naturally die out in a few weeks. In the mixed shops, i. e., where there are Left wing and Right wing workers, the militants must work for the formation of Joint Committees of Action of all workers, at the same time strengthening the N. T. W. I. U., by recruiting into it all possible individual workers. These Joint Committees of Action, which have a basis of existence in hundreds of shops, can become a powerful lever for ousting the labor bureaucrats from the trade union movement and strengthening the Left wing immeasurably.

Should not these policies be taken up later, after the dress strike is over? No. On the contrary, they go hand in hand with the question of the dressmakers strike, and their execution will be of great aid to its victory. The strike will never be won by the dressmakers alone. It will be victorious only if the workers in the other branches of the industry are aroused to its support, organizationally as well as financially. These policies are correct for adoption now. The Left Opposition is wholeheartedly behind the strike. Our criticism, which we do not withdraw at any time, of the false leadership, of its lack of preparation, of the half-way measures that are being taken to win over the workers in the Right wing union to the support of the strike—all this does not for a single moment affect our complete support of the workers in this struggle. On the picket lines, in the strike committees, in our press, in our meetings and organization—everywhere, our comrades will be found in the most active ranks of the strike, fighting for its success. The proposals we make for the strike, like our other proposals, will always be dictated by the deepest concern over the strength and triumph of the Communist and Left wing movement, for we have no interests separate from the interests of the working class in general, and the Communist movement in particular.

## One Step Forward Has Been Taken

That is why, especially in this critical period of the Left wing's existence, we greet the partial turn in the correct direction, which the party has made, although we realize thoroughly all the limitations of the turn, the fact that the old and false foundations have not yet been destroyed, the fact that those who are in the leadership, who are to execute the turn, will heap blunder upon blunder because Centristism is politically incapable of pursuing a persistently correct line.

It is precisely because of this inherent feature of the Centrist leadership, that we raise here, also a warning against the danger that, turning from the position of ultra-Leftism that it occupied yesterday and still occupies in part, the leadership will move rapidly to the position of open opportunism. Disappointed in its failure to weaken the trade union bureaucrats merely by calling them "social fascists", the Centrists will tend to swing in desperation—as they have done in the past—to a policy of unprincipled alliances with sections of the union bureaucracy. An alarming symptom of this swing to opportunism is seen in the helpless vacillations of the party leadership in making a decision on the dressmakers' strike! In the latest meeting of the party fraction, the leadership came forward with a proposal to put aside the demands for wages and conditions and to strike only for the recognition of the union. In this connection they no doubt have in the back of their heads, the idea of a quick dickering with one section of the bosses thus robbing the strike of all validity. This is not a revolutionary trade union policy—this is business agent unionism. There has been more than enough of this opportunism in the party for which the Foster and Lovestone factions, jointly, were responsible.

We do not therefore conceal the fact that we are not in the slightest degree reconciled with the Centrist leaders of the party, or with their Centrist policies. We propose the unification of the Communist and Left wing ranks. Side by side in the struggle against the bosses, against the pseudo-progressives, against the Right wing

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