

# The Strike Strategy of the Left Wing

By ARNE SWABECK

In a serious discussion of problems of strike strategy the most determining factors should receive first consideration. Unfortunately that has not been the case with the recent experience of the revolutionary movement. In an effort to overcome that failing, but with no pretense of having ready-made solutions, we enumerate the following points:

1. The problem of correct analysis of existing conditions.
2. The question of attitude toward union organization.
3. A well defined Leninist united front policy.
4. The strike issues, demands and slogans.
5. Independent leadership of the revolutionary vanguard.

It should be quite superfluous to emphasize here that the general attitude toward strike policy of the present reactionary A. F. of L. officials can only be the sharpest condemnation. As agents of capitalism, progenitors of the theory of partnership between labor and capital, their views are definitely against all strikes. When compelled by rank and file pressure to get into motion they seek to limit the strikes within narrow craft bounds and look toward the first avenue of escape through betrayal. This must always be borne in mind and as much as possible guarded against in a strike situation. Moreover, this very question assumes vital proportions even in case of strikes led by independent unions of the T. U. U. L. At least in all such instances in the recent past the A. F. of L. officialdom, or sections of it have played their part.

## What Strike Strategy Is Not

But we have recent experiences also in the attitude and conduct of the Left wing in serious workers' struggles of what strike strategy is not. For example, the irresponsible manner in which the slogan for strike has been promulgated. One need recall only August first two years ago when the party leadership called for strike against the war danger. The American workers would have been quite justified then in posing the question, why strike against war danger on just that date? To such a strike call not even the independent unions, (which then had somewhat of a membership) under the party control, could respond. And, of course, there was no strike.

We may also recall the time of the dastardly murder of Ella May Wiggin by the Black Hundreds of southern reaction. The party leadership immediately made a grand gesture, calling upon the American workers to strike in protest. Such a strike, if it came, would naturally be of a highly political character and require at least some ideological preparation. Such was not the case and the call left the workers entirely untouched. Neither in this case could be independent unions even think of getting their members to respond, and they did not try. Strikes are quite serious actions, and should not be played with in such light-minded fashion.

In the simple matter of the method of calling strikes we have some very good lessons of how not to do it. When, for example, the Marine Workers Industrial Union under party leadership, called the strike of the Philadelphia water front workers last year, the small matter of first consulting the workers was entirely overlooked. So at least reported Wm. Lawrence in his "self-criticism" in the *Daily Worker* at the time. Is it any wonder that the strike extended only to the party functionaries of the union? These light-minded, bureaucratic triflers came in grave danger of being run off the water front. But what is far more serious is the fact that the union lost all prestige on the water front because the grievances of these workers were sufficiently deep-seated for serious strike action. Similarly in the Illinois miners strike, during December 1929, the Centrist bureaucrats in leadership did not consider it necessary to take a rank and file strike vote or to make any serious preparations for strike. Hence, despite the favorable situation of miners being aroused by the heavy assaults upon their working conditions and being in revolt against their old union officials, the strike failed to rally any appreciable support. It was easily crushed by the united efforts of the mine owners, the old union reactionary officials and the state armed forces. As a consequence the National Miners Union was wiped out in Illinois, leaving no trace behind.

When the results of the present strike of the New York Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union can be fully accounted it is quite certain that another sad chapter may be added to this blundering policy.

Revolutionary strategy must particularly take into account the basic tendencies

of the given period. In a strike situation it assumes the form of very definite factors to be correctly analyzed, viz.: What is the basic curve of the working class movement, is it an upward or a downward one—an offensive or a defensive one? How fully have the issues matured and preparations been completed? What is the relationship of forces and how fully can the workers be mobilized?

Needless to emphasize that in the examples already cited on this very first essential, the one of correct analysis, the party leadership also made its first mistakes. From wrong estimates naturally flow wrong conclusions. However, when correct estimates are made, other factors being equal, a revolutionary strike leadership, while it can never guarantee victory in advance, can at least secure a basis for growing influence upon the masses.

The question of union organization—the relation of the independent unions to the A. F. of L.—is by no means settled by the empty formula of "revolutionary unions" versus "company unions". Neither of these terms are correct in the present situation and when made the foundation for a revolutionary attitude towards the problem become entirely false. Unions in order to function as unions must naturally embrace a sufficiently decisive section of the workers in an industry. As such they will reflect the general level of the working class and cannot at this time become a simple reflex of the revolutionary party. Nor should they be made a battle ground for its possible political differences. This the party leadership has attempted with its independent unions and it is one of the reasons that they have been reduced in several instances to paper organizations.

The object must not be to transform the independent unions into auxiliaries of the party for momentary aims. It must be rather to gain influence over the masses through the unions.

The A. F. of L. unions are, of course, not company unions but merely organizations of workers under the influence and domination of the reactionary officials and their policies.

To assume the attitude of A. F. of L. company unions will inevitably create a wall of hostility between these two sections of the workers where, instead, efforts toward rank and the unity in struggle should be applied. Problems of strikes are intimately bound up with union organization. With a coming rise of the labor movement, which is bound to occur, the prospects for organization of new independent unions are very good. But we may conclude that for some time to come, at least, the A. F. of L. unions will be a factor to reckon with even in industries where new unions can be organized,—and likely a major factor. Success for the new union movement can best be assured with corresponding efforts also to influence the workers through the A. F. of L. In other words it involves also the problem of building a Left wing in the old unions to become an instrument for co-operation in the task of organizing the American working class into militant unions.

## The United Front Policy in Strike Strategy

This brings us to the question of applying the united front policy as Lenin taught it. Particularly is this imperative in the union field and in strikes despite the resistance that reactionaries will offer. Their charges against the independent unions of being rival or dual unions should not frighten anybody. But we must recognize that the independent unions so far are rather insignificant, hampered in their natural growth by all sorts of foolish blunders and wrong conceptions, though even with this being eliminated they will perhaps for some time remain a minority. However, being organized on the basis of the class struggle they must become the initiators of the united front policy, particularly in strikes. With the Left wing co-operating from within the old unions the prospects for success become more favorable. With such a policy pursued preparatory to and in the present strike of the New York Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union the outlook would have been a different one.

It is perhaps best to illustrate by a concrete example how the united front policy could be correctly applied. During the struggles in the Southern textile industry we recall that with short intervals the strikers of Gastonia and of Marion suffered the murderous attacks of the Black Hundred gangs organized by the textile barons. The former were members of the N. T. W. affiliated with the T. U. U. L., the latter were members of the U. T. W., affiliated with the A. F. of L. The National Textile Workers Union, directed by the party leadership, made an effort to unite the workers of both mill towns for the struggle under its own auspices. The results were practically nil and most likely due to the fact that this effort was tantamount to asking the Marion workers to give up their organization, which could not be expected. Undoubtedly, the possibilities were excellent for the setting up of a genuine united front body comprising the local membership of

both organizations. The fact that the reactionary leaders of the U. T. W. would resist should have been no deterrent. The workers would be sure to be in favor, which would swing them all the more under the influence of the correct policies proposed by the Left wing.

## Clarity of Strike Issues Essential

Too many strikes of recent date, under party leadership, have suffered from lack of clarity as to the issues involved. In some cases the demands have been altogether out of proportion to the objective possibilities, while others have experienced so many detailed demands that the vital issues have been obscured. Consequently the slogans became too far removed from the life of the workers. Demands and slogans must first of all be based on the correct objective analysis of the workers needs, of the basic tendencies available and of the possibilities at hand. They must particularly have the quality of setting the workers into motion and unifying them in struggle. Naturally this does not preclude the necessity, at times, when settlements are to be arrived at, of certain compromises being made.

Thorough preparation in an ideological sense, so that the workers may clearly perceive what the fight is about, should be a foregone conclusion. But just as essential is thorough preparation of the strike itself, its machinery, etc.

To attain independent leadership by the revolutionary vanguard in strike struggles is, of course, our aim. But that is by no means reached by the method of splitting off small working class sections to lead. The real object should be to win the working masses away from their present reactionary leaders and bring them under our influence. Workers are quite unsophisticated and do not accept as their leaders those whom we may think should lead, merely because of our thinking so. They accept as leaders only those who by virtue of their accomplishments have shown their ability and the superiority of their program. Labor skates may lead for a time but ultimately correct programs, courageously applied, will win.

## The Anti-Red Drive in Greece

For several years now, the white terror of the Venizelos dictatorship has been ravaging the labor movement of Greece with particular viciousness. By means of the outrageous Anti-Communist Law, the best revolutionary elements in the country have been thrown into the prisons of the dictatorship in hundreds, and subjected to unheard of torture and repression. In the army too, an insufferable régime has been instituted, producing widespread discontent and even mutiny: Of late, the government's reprisals have taken on an especially acute character, hitting hardest the members of the Greek Communist party and our comrades of the Left Opposition, the "Archio-Marxists". In face of all this, the necessity of united class action and workers solidarity in the struggle against the terror is slowly penetrating the consciousness of all Greek communists.

Recently, the mutiny of Kalpaki, (a military concentration camp) led by the Communist army nucleus there, has resulted in a broad protest movement in the Greek working class. The soldiers of Kalpaki,

under the leadership of comrade Vlatas, had petitioned against the intolerably long hours of hard labor imposed upon them. When their petition was answered by increased arrogance on the part of the officers they refused to return to work. The sergeant in command fired on them, whereupon the Communists Markovits and Panousis jumped forward and unarmed him, receiving wounds in the shoulder and in the leg. A drum head court martial condemned the two Communist soldiers to capital punishment. Immediately, a defense movement arose in the industrial cities in Greece, in which the Communists have taken a leading part. The movement is still growing and is assuming international proportions.

Thus far, the consolidation of a fighting united front in defense of Markovits and Panousis, has made but little progress. Communist soldiers of the Left Opposition who had served at Kalpaki have been refused by the party lawyers of the Greek I. L. D. as witnesses in the retrial of the two militants. The party has not yet answered officially to the Opposition's united front proposal. Nevertheless, the "Archio-Marxists" are, for their part, applying the tactic of the united front in practise, regardless of the party's attitude.

On January 12, the retrial was to be held. A week before the trial our comrades issued a leaflet calling upon the workers and students of Athens and Piræus to demonstrate and bring pressure upon the court. Two of our comrades, who were distributing the leaflet in Piræus, were attacked by the police and wounded. In response to the leaflet, about 800 workers and students came to the demonstration. Although our comrades were in disagreement with the party's slogan to meet at a distance away from the courthouse, and for a demonstration right in front of it, they nevertheless complied with the party's slogan so as not to divide the forces. In the Islands (Crete, etc.). 5 of these comrades made a real united front with the C. P. comrades, our comrade S . . . receiving a fractured arm, while defending a placard bearer of the party. 20 comrades were arrested. The tribunal has condemned 18 of them to from 8 to 10 months imprisonment and to 5 months of deportation to the Islands (Crete, etc.). 5 of these comrades are members of the Left Opposition.

The Greek press reports that the police has discovered an Archio-Marxist nucleus at Salonica. Among those arrested were four women comrades, two of them students, one a teacher and one a working woman. At the same time there are reports that the police have information about several ele-

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