

The Duluth Dock Strike

The dock-workers of the Duluth-Superior harbor went back to work on May 15 after an unsuccessful strike to resist a wage cut of 15%. Last season, this same group of workers successfully stopped a wage-cut of 10%. Since this strike is one of many defensive struggles being conducted by sections of the working class in Minnesota its lessons are of great value to the revolutionary movement. It is doubly important for all Communist workers because in this struggle the Communist party had a chance to show its leadership and failed because of its incorrect policies.

The Strike Starts Well

The strike followed the announcement of reduction in wages from 75 cents to 60 cents for all dock-men by the Great Lakes Transit Co., the association of all shippers. There was splendid response from the men. The partial success of the previous season strike was the reason. There was but little scabbing. The strike-breakers were imported from other ports. A strike committee of twenty-five was elected to lead the struggle. Mass picketing was started. Around six hundred workers were involved.

The Marine Workers Industrial Union and the Communists were popular at the beginning of the strike. To say they had the upper hand would be wrong. For a good percentage of the workers were former I. W. W. members and readers of its press. Another group were supporters of the Halonen section in the Finnish workers movement and as events showed, the weight of influence was with the Wobblies, and reformists. The latter's influence was not ideologically represented in any way in particular but by the mass of the strikers being ordinary, democratic-minded workers unattached to any organization.

The party, though it had worked all winter among the dock-men and sailors, was unprepared as usual and came late with its full forces into the strike situation. At the outset it offered its support and held rousing mass meetings for the strike. It influenced in part the mass picketing and militant conduct of the struggle. Good rank and file organizers were brought in. And later the relief stations set up were of a material aid to the strikers. Individual comrades did valiant work on the picket lines, winning the admiration and attention of the strikers. The I. L. D. distinguished itself by defending the strikers arrested on picket lines. Wherein did the party lose the confidence of the strikers?

In its bankruptcy of policy and tactics and in the personnel of the immediate top leadership of the field of struggle. Hurwitz and Miller, of the Party and the T. U. U. L., lost the confidence of the workers, with the result that the field was left open for another leadership and when that was not forthcoming the strikers submitted to the wage-reduction. Mechanically executing the "program" (they don't speak of policy in the party any more) of independent leadership by the "revolutionary unions" the incompetent petty bureaucrats, Hurwitz and Miller, failed even to win the confidence of the immediate party forces, let alone the strikers. Under the policy mentioned, the Marine Workers Industrial Union must lead the strike to the exclusion of all other groups. This led to frontal attacks upon the I. W. W., A. F. of L. (who also had offered assistance and support until the I. L. A. fakers came into confuse the workers and dicker with the company for the men's dues). The I. W. W. press had tactfully raised the slogan of "Solidarity", offered its hall, etc. The strikers interpreted "solidarity" to mean unity of all forces to win the strike. The I. W. W. feeling itself incapable of organizing the workers itself, delayed the question of organization, and advised the workers not to organize a union but win the strike. No amount of debates or newsprint could definitely settle what was in the minds of the leadership of I. W. W. Besides, there is no time for debates of this kind in a strike situation.

The M. W. I. U. speakers as well as the press begin a systematic campaign of attack upon the I. W. W. as strike-breakers, betrayers, etc. The question is put before the workers, to choose which is right, and which is wrong, for the I. W. W. press counter the party attacks with similar charges of "they want your money", "politicians", etc. The more decisive elements among the strikers already lean towards the I. W. W. They do not understand the party's attack against the I. W. W. as only an attack against the leaders. Their wobbly education tells them that there are no leaders in the I. W. W., so each attack upon the I. W. W. is an attack upon them personally. The result is that the Marine Workers Union and party speakers are chased from the lot, the same day that the

party press is announcing to the American workers, and the Comintern especially, that the Communist party and the revolutionary unions are independently leading the dock-workers' strike in Duluth.

This isolation of the party leaders from the meetings of the strikers almost coincided with the opening of the relief stations where the T. U. U. L. and workers organization were feeding the pickets, so contact was retained. The strikers would eat the food and sulk about the attitude toward the I. W. W. The leaders on top continued to attack the I. W. W., too narrow to see the attitude of the strikers. A day following one attack the workers almost entirely fell away from the relief station. There was no lesson in this event for the self-styled leaders. Of course, under these circumstances there was nothing else to do but slowly and painfully to organize a fraction among the strikers against the leaders, who, due to the peculiarity of this strike were hard to distinguish from the ordinary striker. Why is this?

Absence of Sound Leadership

The I. W. W. had no men capable of giving leadership. The A. F. of L. union leaders of the I. L. A. are discredited among the workers here because of their past betrayals. The party failed to win the confidence of the workers in this strike as well as the strike last season. The strike committee was weak, inexperienced and nor dominated by any decisive opinion. In the beginning it was influenced by the I. W. W. and the party to conduct a militant struggle. In the latter part of the strike, due to the absence of the party and the indecisiveness of the I. W. W. the strike committee was just as easily influenced by the Mayor's Committee for a compromise. Its leadership can be judged from the fact that it allowed a manager of the Shippers to speak to the strike meeting for an hour and a half, after which a vote was to be taken to go back to work. In the same meeting the membership decided to take the vote first and discuss the motion after.

The policy that should have been pursued by the Communists should have been the policy of united front between the M. W. I. U. and I. W. W. for the successful conduct of the strike to victory against the wage-cut, and for the defeat of the A. F. of L. fakers of the I. L. A., under the slogans of "Solidarity", "Win the Strike". The strike was defensive. A defeat of the wage-cut would have consolidated the workers' ranks and prepared them for further struggle. The I. W. W. leaders, if they were not sincere about their slogan "solidarity", would have been exposed and made to appear as enemies of solidarity to their own followers. The weakness and indecisiveness of the I. W. W. leaders (editors) would have been the basis on which, with correct tactics, the superiority of M. W. I. U. leadership could be established. Thus, in the course of the strike or after a victory, the policy of a militant leadership could be established—by fact, and not by bluff. Generally, the proposals of the T. U. U. L. and party to the strikers were correct: mass picketing, large strike committee, spreading of strike to boats, relief and lastly unity. This last can only have one meaning to strikers, and that is solidarity—"stick together, don't scab". It is one of our simplest and most easily understood slogans in strike struggles. In this strike it was the bureaucratic formalist conception of independent leadership and the premature attempt to "enforce" it that collided with the simple proletarian conception of unity in struggle against the bosses. The result of this collision was that independent leadership was smashed by the proletarian unity upon a less developed level of understanding. It shows that you

cannot force a real situation to be some thing else merely by bombast and newspaper talk.

Besides that, the policy is formulated incorrectly. Communists can win independent leadership of economic struggles of workers as against reformists and syndicalists when by their leadership, demands, tactics, and organization forms they win the confidence of the strikers. This concept is made over-simple by the present revisionist leadership of the party which creates ready-made "revolutionary unions" which it offers the workers for acceptance. The workers, however, do not know that this union is the best, and after you have the

Defend the Scottsboro Boys

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tance of these to the defense movement is self-evident. Without them there can be no real united front, no genuine working class movement. Only an aroused working class can save these boys. And the broadest masses of the workers can be rallied only on broad working class issues. The emphasis must, therefore, be inverted forthwith and a broad united front defense movement be set afoot.

An open appeal for a united front must also immediately be made to the Socialist party. This is of course of the utmost importance. Failure to do so up to now is a grave mistake. No opportunity must be overlooked to expose the hypocrisy of the Socialist party leadership before its rank and file and the whole working class.

In nine weeks the only comment on the case made by its official organ the innocuous **New Leader** is an editorial on May 23 attacking—not the crime against our class—but the I. L. D. for its exposure of the hypocrisy and sabotage of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. This reactionary editorial also makes insinuations about the misuse of funds by the I. L. D. in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and promised to make revelations about this case at a later date. Such is the depravity of the Socialist party leadership! It is not enough, as the **Daily Worker** did on May 25, to answer these slanders with a paragraph of irrelevancies about Heywood Broun. The Socialist party must be offered a united front and the leadership hammered day in and day out for their silence, their slander and their reactionary attitude, until they stand exposed before the entire working class for what they are—traitors to the working class.

Another deficiency of the united front achieved by the party is the attempted exclusion from it of the Left Opposition. But the Left Opposition has not been and cannot be excluded. Wherever workers are in motion and wherever the party is engaged in struggle there the Left Opposition will be found marching side by side with the workers and the party ranks despite the slander, lies and the bureaucracy of the party leadership. It is discharging its duty in the Scottsboro case. By participating actively in the movement and by pitilessly criticizing the mistakes made by the party leadership and pointing out the correct line, the Opposition will contribute to the movement out of all proportion to its size but commensurate with its historic task.

The absence of delegates from all these organizations makes of the united front defense conferences very narrow united fronts of representatives of Negro churches, lodges, etc. and party organizations whose delegates applaud at the correct moment and are ready to throw every Trotskyist out of the door. This is exactly what happened at the Philadelphia conference. Comrade Morgenstern who, together with comrade Goodman will stand trial soon on the charge of sedition under the notorious

Flynn edition act, and whose defense is being shamefully neglected by the I. L. D., was forcibly ejected from the conference for taking the floor and speaking for a real united front with A. F. of L. locals and the Socialist Party included. The bureaucratic praesidium lamely explained to the protesting party rank and file that comrade Morgenstern was a visitor and had no right to speak. This explanation was shamelessly offered to workers who had seen comrade Morgenstern ask for the floor and receive it. Such is the spectacle to which are treated workers new to the Communist movement!

The New York conference, while not so rich in drama, was little better. It was equally narrow and just as mechanically controlled. Committees with prepared plans were instructed to retire and draw up the plans. The oratory was endless. Discussion by the delegates was limited and was the usual echo of the leadership.

The change in emphasis on the issues in the case will make possible a genuine united front movement and genuine united front defense conferences. No time must be lost in making this turn about face to the correct line. To delay or not to do it is to risk the lives of the nine boys and to guarantee in advance that whatever the outcome of the case to the boys, the party's prestige and its influence over the masses will suffer a serious blow.

In accomplishing this genuine united front movement it is necessary to put forward the correct slogans. There is now too much confusion in the party's slogans. The central slogan should be "Unite to smash the Scottsboro frame-up—Demand the unconditional release of the nine boys". The deceptive slogan of a half-Negro, half-white jury should be dropped. The phrasemongering slogan "Death to lynchings" should be dropped as a "third period" vestige. Other slogans to support the central slogan should be those which can rally broad masses of workers to struggle against lynching, segregation, discriminations, and for immediate relief.

The significance of the Scottsboro case is great regardless of outcome. The struggle correctly led by the party can strike a serious blow against lynching, against the persecution of the Negroes. It can make a long step forward toward uniting the Negro and white workers in common struggle against the capitalist class. It can draw the party closer to the Negro masses, and to the whole working class, and greatly increase its prestige and influence. All the more important and serious are the blunders of the party leadership. All the more important is the task of the Left Opposition to reveal these blunders and show where lies the correct line. This the Opposition will do.

R. T.

IN DEFENSE OF SCOTSBORO

The New York branch of the Communist League of America (Opposition) is holding an open air protest meeting against the planned lynching of the framed-up Negro boys of Scottsboro. The meeting takes place on Saturday, June 6, at 8 p.m. on the corner of 125th Street and Fifth Avenue, with comrade Martin Abern, of the National Committee and others to speak. All workers are urged to attend.

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