

The Party's Unemployment Drive

The course pursued in the past period by the party in its work among the unemployed is rich in instructive material. A survey of a number of its outstanding features will be of help to the movement in orientating itself in the future.

At the beginning of the struggle for the unemployed stood the philosophy of the "third period" which though dead, revisits our press from time to time. When the crisis came, the American "theoreticians" came forward and from the bastard philosophy of the "third period" fished out as a basis for the party's work the absurd contention of a wide-spread, deep-going radicalization of the American working class. They were followed by the "tacticians" and from the above premise were made the following deductions about unemployment:

The Stalinist Analysis

In a period of such radicalization, the workers are ready for action on the political plane and those whose misery is greatest, the unemployed, on the highest political plane. The lever which can set them immediately into motion on this plane is the issue of unemployment insurance. This will be the central slogan of our unemployment work: the fight for unemployment insurance from the city, state and national governments. With the workers ready for action on this plane, it is unnecessary to win influence over them by patient, day-to-day, elementary educational and organizational work in proletarian neighborhoods, among the broad masses of workers of heterogeneous races, trades and varying degrees of political development. We can plant our banners almost anywhere and the workers will rally around them. We have only to call and the "radicalized" workers will come. The greater their misery, the prompter will be their response to our summons and the more "radicalized" they will be. We can recruit them from breadlines, flophouses, relief agencies, etc. The workers will come but they are unorganized; we must be ready for them.

In the equatorial jungles of Guiana, there are trees whose upper branches, closely pressed by the surrounding vegetation, send down air-roots which dangle above ground, swaying in the air currents. After this model the party organized its unemployed apparatus. Before it numbered a hundred unemployed workers under its influence in the fight for unemployment insurance, it established a National Unemployment Council which today, like the "third period" and other inventions, is a sensitive memory. From this center, it sent down instructions to the party and appeals to the masses to organize into district unemployed councils on the basis of the fight for unemployment insurance. Such was the air-root procedure.

Nor were these councils deliberately located in proletarian neighborhoods, whereupon the application of correct policies and tactics, they could have taken root and grown into a genuine mass movement. They were established on the principle of organizational convenience. For the most part they are located in the headquarters of party organizations a few of which are situated in working class residential neighborhoods, and the greater number of which are not. At the same time, the party was mobilized, the cadres were sent into the councils and from there to the breadlines and flophouses to recruit "radicalized" workers to fight for unemployment insurance.

The strategy of this fight was of necessity derived from the untrue estimate of a wide-spread, deep-going radicalization of the masses. It had, therefore, the impossible task of producing results commensurate with that estimate. Any attempt to do so would inevitably reveal the contradiction between the estimate of such a radicalization and the results possible in such a period, and the party's feeble influence over the masses and consequent failure to produce such results. Such failure would result in loss of prestige and influence of Communism over the masses. Moreover the strategy was to be applied at that stage of the crisis when it was descending swiftly to even lower depths. The contradiction between estimate and results would therefore be emphasized sharply and more quickly revealed. This factor imposed on the strategy to be used the task of producing quick results.

The Party's Demonstrations

The strategy used against this impending and, under the circumstances, inescapable disaster sought to hide this contradiction. Action on the political plane made the attempt possible. For quick results the party decided on demonstrations. To hide the feebleness of its influence, the party made the demonstrations spectacular and

highly exaggerated the numbers who attended.

There was a third tactic by which the party sought to escape the consequences of its false estimate and incorrect policies. From demonstrations against municipal governments, the party leaped over the state governments and demonstrated against the federal government on February 10. It was repulsed. It recoiled and demonstrated—is still demonstrating—in isolated, uncoordinated hunger marches against state governments. This strategy is manifestly incorrect. From demonstrations against city governments, the movement should have risen with the increasing depth of the crisis, misery of the masses growing organizational strength, to a higher political plane, in demonstrations against state governments. And as these factor grew apace, the movement should have been brought to a climax in a tremendous demonstration against the national government.

But this is precisely what the party could not afford to do. It would have been to reveal in a harsh light the feebleness of its influence, the ineffectualness of its spectacular campaign and as a conclusion, the falsity and absurdity of its estimate. Yet this essentially correct strategy which the party did not follow is claimed for it by Wagenknecht in the March 26, 1931 issue of the *Inprecorr*. In his article "The Struggle Against Unemployment in the U. S. A.", he deliberately creates the impression, by inference, that this was the strategy followed by the party.

This strategy has not been discussed in the party press. All articles of criticism and evaluation ignore it. Why? Is it because the party considers this strategy manifestly correct? Then why does Wagenknecht try to create the impression that another strategy was used? Or is there something to conceal, some weakness in it known to the leadership which discussion would reveal? Are they not silent, rather, because, foreseeing failure for the fight for unemployment insurance on the basis on which it was conducted they arranged this strategy to provide a back door out of which to draw the body of the movement they almost wrecked? What other explanation is there?

This program of demonstrations covered more than a year, during which the roots sent down from the national center took no hold in the masses and are today still swayed by whatever bureaucratic current blows.

The result in terms of relief and unemployment insurance is almost zero. The party claiming one million unemployed in New York City points with pride to the million dollars appropriated by the city for unemployment relief, following its October 16 demonstration. Yet, Wagenknecht, writing in the *Daily Worker* on March 7, 1931, can say: "We fail to take cognizance of our achievements!" Other achievements in this direction even of the same microscopic nature there are none.

The Decline of Support

Politically, the party can justly claim one victory. By its demonstrations and agitation it forced the issue of unemployment and its magnitude upon the consciousness of all classes. Otherwise, the year represents a minus. On March 6, 1930, the party claimed it mobilized a million and a quarter workers in its demonstrations for unemployment insurance, etc.; in its February 25, 1931 demonstrations for essentially the same demands it can claim only four hundred thousand. Both figures, of course, are highly exaggerated and intended for Moscow consumption. Incredible as it may seem, this tremendous loss in influence is made to prove the very opposite. Earl Browder, in the *Daily Worker* of March 6, 1931, says: "Superficial examination can easily make a case to show that the movement has declined since March 6 of last year. . . . But we must look beneath the surface, examine the realities and judge the quality, the fighting power of the movement. Such an examination must, with all allowances for serious weaknesses in the movement, register a decisive advance in the year." So! A loss of sixty-seven percent in revolutionary capital is now offered to us as a "decisive advance"!

Nor has the party succeeded, as it claims in expansive moments, in disillusioning the American masses about the willingness of American capitalism to relieve their misery. This is a curious and interesting point. To some extent the party has demonstrated the anti-working class nature of police, courts and municipal and state governments and their relief agencies. To a larger extent this disillusionment has been the simple result of workers putting two and two together. But neither the party nor events have removed that basic

illusion of the workers that the crisis is only temporary that they have only to hang on and weather the storm—"prosperity" will return. Until the party grasps this, it will never be able to understand why the members of its Unemployed Councils, men, many of them, with no economic resources whatsoever, who eat on breadlines, have no homes and sleep in flophouses, are not only not militant but apathetic. And until the party attacks and with the help of events, destroys this illusion, it will call, in its unemployed Councils, upon dwin-

ding memberships for its spectacular demonstrations and sorties against breadlines and relief agencies.

—THOMAS STAMM.

(Note: This article, written by a comrade of the left Opposition who is very active in the work of the New York Unemployed Councils, is to be followed by others in coming issues. The next articles will deal with other phases of the problem: the condition of the Unemployed Councils, the turn in the party's policies etc., etc.—Ed.)

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- Organization Notes -

MILITANT SUB DRIVE

In the subscription drive the Chicago branch is still maintaining its lead with a fairly good margin. Its total number of subs collected up to date of going to press is 44. However, it will now face a serious contest from the New York branch which has begun to get real busy during the last week and a half and as brought its total up to 30 subs.

The next branch in order of subs turned in St. Louis with 23 which is but a slight increase from the last report made. The Minneapolis branch has remained static since the last report, its total collected not having reached above 22 subs. A number of other branches have made a small beginning bringing the total of subs collected since the beginning of the drive up to 147.

This is entirely too modest an accomplishment particularly in view of the fact that the next issue of the *Militant* will begin the weekly publication. But if we are to take the splendid promises made by the New York branch seriously they should still get very close to reaching their total of 100 subs pledged before the drive concludes. In other words if the New York comrades keep their word they will by far outdistance Chicago, that is, provided Chicago does not meanwhile tighten up its forces and continue in the lead. However it by no means precludes that Minneapolis and St. Louis may still become serious contenders for the first prize.

PROGRAM OF EXPANSION CAMPAIGN

In previous issues we have been able to announce that the accomplishments set for the Program of Expansion to be realized step by step are actually ahead of the amount of contributions collected. The Pioneer Publishers are now distributing literature on a more effective basis than we have been able to heretofore. The *Weekly Militant*, which we advanced to the second step begins definitely with the next issue, two weeks from today.

A comparison of the main contributions made on this Program by those branches who have maintained the lead may give a good deal of food for thought for those who are entirely too far behind. New York comes in as the best to date with a total of \$451 collected. This is our biggest branch. Minneapolis comes second with a total of \$152 collected. Third in line is Kansas City, which is really our smallest branch with \$100 collected. Then follows Boston with \$40 collected, Montreal with \$20, Chicago with \$18, Toronto with \$12, the balance being scattered amongst smaller branch contributions and individual contributions.

We are still \$100 below the thousand dollar mark which is the minimum prerequisite to assure *The Weekly Militant*. We urge the comrades and sympathizers to speed up and complete this second step and then proceed onward.

Contributions received since last report are as follows:

2,000—

1,750	New York (M. Engel)	\$5.00
1,500	New York (Capelis)	6.00
1,250	New York (Lankin)	1.00
1,000	New York (Burns)	1.00
750	New York (Berman)	10.00
500	Youngstown	2.50
250	Kansas City	17.00
	Previously reported	\$44.50
	Total to date	\$57.00
		\$901.50

REACTIONARY FANATICISM

The *Empros*, official organ of the Greek Bureau of the Communist party, is carrying on a campaign for 1,000 new subscribers. I was asked by some Greek comrades to undertake getting a few subscriptions, since the nature of my work brings me many acquaintances and into close contact with the Greek Workers and sympathizers in the Communist movement. In a short time, I was able to get two subscribers and intended to get more, but my activity was unexpectedly upset by the disturbed nerves of a former Lovestonite.

"You have no right to get subscribers for *Empros*. You are a Trotskyist, an enemy of the Communist International," he told me in the real tone of the Stalinist bureaucrat. He said that I was doing the work mainly in order to take advantage of it to propagate my "counter-revolutionary Trotskyism". So, in compliance with his command, I had to return the subscription receipt book. A sincere Greek comrade, more realistic than the other, showed some signs of discontent and disapproval and condemned his sectarianism.

"Listen, if you don't agree with me, bring it up at the next Greek fraction meeting", this comrade was answered by the newly baptized Stalinist who happens to bear my name.

Chicago

JAMES ECONOMOU