

# Draft of the Thesis on the Trade Union Question

The question of trade union policy today involves primarily the problem of organizing the unorganized industries which, in its immediate sense, means the possibilities and perspectives of the new industrial union movement. But a correct approach to this problem must equally take into account the present position of the American Federation of Labor and similar types of existing unions as well as their future perspectives. The problem of the former is closely bound up with a correct attitude toward the latter.

The vigorous growth of the American trade union movement and its militant struggles during the immediate post war stage of 1919-22 witnessed a change to a severe downward curve lasting throughout the period of bourgeois prosperity up until the most recent developments. Strikes decreased progressively, both in actual numbers and in numbers of participants. The trade unions deteriorated ideologically, decreased numerically and became weakened. The workers were lulled into a false sense of security. The unions failed entirely to take advantage of the bourgeois prosperity to strengthen their position. With the advent of the present world wide crisis, the heavy unemployment and the consequent slashing capitalist offensive upon the working class standard of living the A. F. of L. unions had reached the lowest ebb.

### The Prospects for the New Militant Unions

The prolonged crisis now the outstanding feature of capitalist economy, the misery of unemployment and the drastic reduction of the working class standard of living is reaching a degree of pressure which compels the workers to begin to seek the ways and means of resistance, and for those who are unorganized, to begin to seek organization. In this direction, the first manifestations are today visible in the mining and textile industries. And it is not at all accidental, as it is precisely here that the pressure upon the workers has been the heaviest. Therefore, similar manifestations may soon be expected in other industries as the pressure increases.

Thus the first half of 1931, despite the prevailing growing unemployment commences an upward curve in working class resistance and in militancy within the labor movement. It records an increase in strike movements. While these workers are still fighting entirely on the defensive, what is particularly new is the fact that, to an increasing degree, Communist leadership in these developing struggles is being accepted by the workers so often betrayed by reactionary leaders. On a whole the present objection situation marks the possibilities for the revitalization of the new union movement and the prospects for its attaining a mass basis. A factor contributing to these prospects is the more rapid narrowing of the proletarian basis within the A. F. of L. unions in recent years, the almost complete destruction of the United Mine Workers. Similarly, the continued absence of vitality within these unions; their utter failure to undertake any actual organization whatever among the unorganized industries; the proclamation by Green for the organization of the automobile industry, which never even reached a serious discussion stage; the feeble attempts at organization in the South which came to naught.

The organization of the unorganized through building the new industrial unions stands today more than ever as the center of gravity. To the Communists, it must become a serious duty and an imperative task, with the further deepening of the economic crisis and the wage-cutting campaign the present trends of resistance will develop into definite prospects for sharpened class battles. Even a possible early revival of capitalist economy could not seriously alter this perspective. On the contrary it will make more certain the coming workers' offensive for a revival can be accomplished only at the cost of heavier burdens upon the workers. Thus, the prospect for a rising movement is on the order of the day. In that particularly lies the favorable objective possibilities for the new industrial unions.

Should the Communists fail to utilize these possibilities, or to apply the correct tactics and methods which can insure successful developments of the new industrial unions and establish revolutionary leadership, such unions will be built without the Communists or in opposition to them. This problem still hangs in the balance between the alternative of revolutionary or reformist leadership. The former spells progress; the latter, defeat to the working class. In this sense the coming period will become a crucial one.

### The Position and Perspectives of the A. F. of L. Unions

Since the beginning of the crisis, the A. F. of L. unions, as well as the independent unions of the Railway Brotherhood type, have been utterly unable to maintain their gains of the past—mostly gains easily won. They retreated all along the line and have given up one position after another. The very backbone of the craft unions, the building trades, are facing a growing inability to maintain their contracted wage scale. To an ever increasing degree the workers in this and in similar industries, where the A. F. of L. has its main foothold, are losing their position of craft privilege due to advancing machine technique and other causes. But the reason for deterioration and decline is not only to be sought in these objective conditions, since particularly during the most recent period has the role of the leader-

ship of the A. F. of L. type of unions as agents of imperialism, first of all concerned with the interests of the capitalist system, become glaringly manifest. It has alternated, in conformity to this position, between the deceptive policies of class collaboration and that of outright treason to the workers.

Would this present position of the A. F. of L. type of unions warrant a perspective of their uninterrupted deterioration and decline until their passing out of existence? Does it warrant even a perspective of a progressively diminishing role of their type of reactionary leadership? On the contrary! To preclude prospects of revival, expansion and growth of the A. F. of L. unions, both in influence and in an organizational sense, in the face of a period of coming struggles, would be false. Such prospects can easily materialize by pressure from two directions. First, by the direct pressure of the employers upon the workers to lower their standard of living, compelling these workers to seek organization. Many will undoubtedly join the ranks of the A. F. of L. unions, as their first step while in turn the A. F. of L. unions will be compelled, at least formally, to adapt themselves to these new requirements. Secondly, prospects for expansion and growth can materialize by outright resurrection attempts, by deals with employers who may even give certain concessions in appearance to A. F. of L. unions, out of fear of actual growth of the new industrial unions. That also would spell increasing force to the role played by the labor agents of imperialism.

A possibility of expansion and growth of the A. F. of L. unions embodies the possibilities of growth of genuine progressive sentiment and of radicalization within the membership. For this the pressure of the slashing capitalist offensive is already laying the basis. The increasing pressure and growing resistance throws to the forefront a multitude of problems demanding increasing militancy to approach a solution. Simultaneously, it also terrifically deepens the chasm of the already great contradictions between the vital needs of the masses of the membership and the obstinate reaction of the leaders. Some results have already been shown in rank and file revolts, which prove the absolute need of, and excellent possibilities for, the organization of the Left wing within these unions and for conducting the struggle for Left wing leadership.

However, with the growth of coming struggles there will also be increased manifestations within the A. F. of L. and similar unions of the appearance of pseudo-progressives. Even the agents of imperialism in labor's ranks, in order to strengthen their bulwark against Communism, will seek to attract the workers by creating "Left" coverings for their reactionary policies. In this sense the Musteltes within the A. F. of L., who are certainly typical of such "Left" cloaks, may be said to be only the forerunners of more definite developments of this character. But it emphasizes further the need of the Communists earnestly directing their attention to organizing the genuine Left wing sentiment. It is necessary to emphasize again that this work must go hand in hand with the central task of organizing the unorganized workers and building the new industrial unions.

### The Trade Union Policy of the Lovestone Group

The restatement of a correct policy for Left wing activities within the A. F. of L. unions has nothing in common with the proposals of the Right wing Lovestone group for a return to the old unions via the route of desertion of the Left wing. This has been so much more clearly demonstrated in their recent "practical" proposals for such return. For example, in the New York needle trades their call upon the workers to return, if followed, would mean the outright liquidation of the Left wing; the denial of the right to existence of the Left wing and their return to the bosom of Schlesinger and his agents, is today the actual role played by the Lovestone group. On a similar plane was the call by this Right wing group in the coal miners to cease building a new union and to return to the U. M. U., in the face of their growing revolt against the Lewis machine and their growing struggles against starvation conditions. To return to the Lewis union could mean nothing else but the betrayal of the miners' revolt and struggle.

But it is particularly in the recent developments in the Paterson textile workers' strike that the Lovestone group earns for itself the ineradicable stigma of absolutely shameless renegacy. Already so deeply involved in the cunning schemes of the A. F. of L. bureaucrats, working here in joint partnership with the social reformist Musteltes who function as their "Left" come-ons, the Lovestone group has completely adopted the latter's views toward the Communists and toward the official party. It sees in the party's direction of the N. T. W. nothing but a series of "anti-working class acts", and charges the party with nothing but disruptive and splitting activities in the same tone and spirit that has always characterized the assaults upon Communism by the A. F. of L. hierarchy.

The Lovestone group does not at all see the Communist party as a party of the working class whose interests are inseparably bound up with those of the working class, whose role, despite all the blundering mistakes of the leadership still is the one of leading sections of the workers in struggle for their vital needs. Hence it is natural that this group in the Paterson strike situation, has already

become a part of the anti-Communist front, part of the machinations to deceive the workers. In the trade union field, the Right wing discloses its liquidationist course with particular conclusiveness.

### The Status of the New Industrial Unions

A survey of the present status of the new industrial unions will reveal the following particularly notable factors: First, there are the most recent signs of great prospects available for the development and strengthening of these unions, their possibility of actually attaining a union basis and a mass basis. Secondly, it is necessary to note the general decline both of organization and in influence of the T. U. U. L. unions, with the exception of some recent limited forward developments. This decline reduced some of them to virtual non-existence, despite its occurrence in a period of objective possibilities for growth. Thirdly there is the development alongside of the T. U. U. L. unions of other new independent unions having their origin either in a revolt against and a split off from the A. F. of L., or in opposition to it—unions with a new type of leadership, distinctly reformist or pseudo-progressive, as for example, the miners unions of Southern West Virginia and Illinois. The main reasons for the first factor mentioned, the prospects of growth for the new industrial unions, have already been indicated.

The reasons for the general decline of the T. U. U. L. unions are not in the main to be sought in the objective difficulties which had to be overcome, although there were such. No! The main reasons are very intimately connected with the false concepts and methods of Communist leadership as practiced by the Centrist regime of the party and of the Comintern. It is necessary first of all to record and condemn the false concepts of revolutionary unions in practice built on a basis which really left room within it only for revolutionists; and only of a certain type, excluding all revolutionists and Left wing workers not willing to accept the Centrist views of the party leadership and unable to submit to its arbitrary factional control. Some of these unions were merely minority sections withdrawn from the conservative unions which had the decisive bulk of the workers within their ranks.

In the second place, it is necessary to record and condemn the false tactics and blundering methods pursued by the party leadership in the new union field. Even the barest semblance of union democracy disappeared from the new unions dominated by the party leadership. They were not granted the least measure of autonomy necessary for unions to operate as such. Functionaries were arbitrarily replaced for reasons of party apparatus interests, without even as much as an explanation given to the membership. Such replacements were made in the National Miners Union and the National Textile Workers Union. Abortive strikes were launched without a consultation or

a vote of the membership, as for example the Illinois miners' strike in December 1929 and the later Philadelphia waterfront strike. Often strikes were called without a clear objective or demands, as was the case of the more recent New York needle trades strike of the industrial union. Generally they all wound up in certain defeat. There was a complete absence of activities within the reformist or conservative unions whose members were simply read out of consideration by phrases about "company union" and "social fascism". But above all, the party leadership's failure to apply the united front policy counted heavily in the decline of the new unions of the T. U. U. L. and is today endangering seriously their future prospects.

These are also the very important reasons for the rise of new independent unions alongside of the T. U. U. L. unions. It was precisely because of the failure of the N. M. U., under party direction, that the separate sections of new miners unions like the Southern West Virginia union and the Illinois union, first under the Howat-Walker combination and later under the Edmonson leadership, could come into existence. They are the first example of new unions organized without the Communists, with a pseudo-progressive and reformist leadership, but also anti-Communist in their make-up. Their role is, while today in opposition, to endeavor tomorrow to strike a bargain with the reactionaries, deceive the workers and again return to the reactionary camp.

Such pseudo-progressive leadership, whether it be at the head of new unions or merely functioning as "Left" coverings for the A. F. of L. reactionaries cannot be combated by the futile hurling of epithets of "social fascism" or by the worse method of alliance with them behind the backs of the workers. The Centrist party leadership swings between these two extremes. Its recoil from the isolation of the "Third Period" antics conceal the danger of repetition of the shameful alliance of the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee. Both extremes only weaken Communist leadership and further strengthens the "Left" coverings for the reactionaries. The latter can be effectively combated only by unmasking their role of coverings for the reactionaries on the basis of actual experience of the worker through a correctly applied policy of united front struggles, embracing the workers under reformist influence as well as those under Communist influence.

### Conclusion

1. The center of gravity of trade union policy today is the organization of the unorganized industries through the building of the new industrial unions. With the prospects of coming serious battles, the possibilities for this work is enhanced. However, among the essential conditions for its success is the necessity of removing all of the false narrowing concepts, all of the factional bur-

ocratic encumbrances to which the new industrial unions have been subjected. They must be allowed to develop as actual unions, ready to embrace all the workers in a given industry. They must be allowed to develop as mass unions. But serious care should be taken that they retain their militancy, their class objectives, and a revolutionary leadership founded upon revolutionary service and devotion.

2. It is essential and as a process going hand in hand with the organization of the unorganized industries, to take up seriously the work of developing and organizing the potentially growing Left wing sentiment within the A. F. of L. and the new independent unions under reformist domination. Not in order to split off minority sections from these unions but to win their members for Communism. One of the important duties of this potentially developing Left wing must be to defend the objects and principles of the new industrial unions which are under revolutionary leadership. Not only to defend them but to work actively for unity in struggle for class objectives jointly with the new industrial unions. There can be no objection in principle to splits but the fundamental basis must always be the one of winning the majority of the workers for the revolutionary objects. Under conditions where the reformist unions embrace the decisive bulk of the organized workers it is the task of the Left wing to help build and strengthen them but with the avowed object of winning the members and the new recruits for the policies of the Left wing.

3. Particularly in the trade union field are there now rich possibilities as well as an imperative need for a genuine united front policy. Its correct application is a serious duty devolving upon the Communists. The recently developed situation in the mine fields and in the textile industry testify eloquently to this need as well as to its practicality of execution. It can, however, not be carried out under the maneuvers of trying to fool the workers or inviting them to desert the unions to which they belong to enter a so-called "united front from below" under the narrow banner of party controlled unions. Much less can the united front be established by maneuvers behind the backs of the workers of alliances or deals with "Left" come-ons. Both methods defeat the very objects and purposes of the united front, weaken Communist influence and strengthen the hold upon the workers by the reformists and reactionary imperialist agents. An honest united front policy implies a recognition of the existing unions as bona fide bodies composed of workers whom it becomes the duty of the Communists to bring together to fight side by side, actually to unite and, in the process, to defeat the deceivers and betrayers and thus to demonstrate the superiority of the revolutionary program, objects and leadership.

Translated into practical action it

would mean, for example in the miners situation, that the National Miners Union recognize the unions of Southern West Virginia and Illinois as bona fide bodies of workers who have rebelled against and split off from the imperialist agents of the Lewis machine. The N. M. U. should, upon the basis of such recognition, take the initiative in calling them together to find the best ways and means for a united struggle and to hammer out the common objectives of the struggle. In the textile workers' situation, an approach to a solution should proceed on a similar basis. Such a united front policy, correctly applied, can become a real source of strength to the revolutionary section and contribute toward the defeat of the reformists. The united front policy must become a means to the ultimate establishment of trade union unity.

4. With the further progress of the slashing capitalist offensive, it is to be expected that there will to an increasing degree be a resorting to the most brutal suppression of all the elementary rights of the working class. It is to be expected not merely as a preventive against the workers' resistance but also as a means of continually keeping them on the defensive. Where, in a rising movement, deception and treason may not serve the capitalist employers so well, it will be substituted by open brutal force—increased injunctions, police persecution, deportations, evictions, denial of political rights, etc., etc. In this situation, it becomes a duty of the Communists particularly to raise the slogan of "fight for the democratic rights of the workers"; to unite the workers' forces and to organize the fight so as to bring out fully its political character and completely connect it with the trade union issues.

5. The Left Opposition will continue its fight fraternally to assist the party toward correct views and practices of trade union policy but unsparringly and intransigently against the false maneuvers and blunders of the party leadership. We decisively condemn and will continue our fight unrelentingly against the essentially reformist views of the Right wing Lovestone group, which, in the name of unity, proposes to harness the developing revolts against the A. F. of L. bureaucracy within reformist channels, to bring about their defeat by pleas to return to the old unions. The policy of the Lovestone group is the liquidation of the new unions, the liquidation of the Left wing—and the strengthening of the reactionary imperialist agents. Our policy is the building of the new militant unions under revolutionary leadership and the developing and strengthening of the Left wing wherever the masses are grouped.

6. The Left Opposition proposes this policy to the party, to the Communist movement and to the Left wing trade union workers. Our members wherever they are in the trade union, be it the new industrial unions or in the A. F. of L., will work as a Left Communist fraction fighting for the application of this policy. Continuation of the party leadership in resisting our proposed policy can only urge our members and supporters to intensify their efforts throughout the trade union field.

## LETTER FROM TORONTO

### The Red Raids in Canada

(Continued from page 1)  
of a complete embargo on trade relations with the Soviet Union may possibly satisfy the Archbishop of Canterbury but scarcely contribute to industrial revival.

Meanwhile unemployed demonstrations throughout the country have shown the temper of the jobless victims of the system to be rising—they have not always been ready to disperse submissively at the first threatening gesture of the police. Relief has been pitifully inadequate. To proposals for a system of social insurance Bennett replies that never, never, will he undermine the sturdy independence and pioneering spirit of Canadians with the infamous "dole". Fearing the radicalizing effect on the masses of starvation in its several degrees, the possessing classes view the approaching winter with uncertainty and uneasiness. Shortly before prorogation of Parliament, the Cabinet rushed through a bill in terms unparalleled since the War Measures Act conferring dictatorial powers "upon the governor-in-council (that is, itself) in respect to unemployment and farm relief; and for the maintenance of peace, order, and good government in all parts of Canada".

In explanation of this measure Bennett declared that "we will take such action as in the judgment of the executive of this country . . . will free this country of those who have proved unworthy of our Canadian citizenship". He referred to the Immigration Act as already enabling the denaturalization of a naturalized citizen, and of course his subsequent deportation. His relief pro-

posals amounted to a scheme of public works, road construction, etc., to which the registered unemployed will be drafted to work at such wage-rates as the government sees fit. It is a choice between a form of industrial conscription at the lowest possible standard of living or outright starvation. In plain words, the Government gave notice that every manifestation of class consciousness, every attempt to bring home the responsibility for the crisis on capitalism, every movement of industrial or political opposition in the working class to the measures of the government, will be met with censorship suppression, imprisonment and deportation. And the Communists, as the militant vanguard, are to be singled out especially.

### Police Terror in Toronto

The Ontario provincial authorities have quickly taken their cue. Not that their action will be entirely a new departure. Ever since the advent of General Draper to the police administration in Toronto, so-called civil liberties have been conspicuous by their absence. Draper proceeded to give the most convincing ocular demonstration of Lenin's thesis that bourgeois democracy is a sham and a lie. Open-air meetings were dispersed on every occasion by police clubs, speakers were cruelly man-handled and beaten. Hall owners were prevented from renting out their assembly halls by the fear of losing their license. A few pacifists and professors uttered a feeble protest for free speech in the name of "British justice". The "labor leaders" and social-democrats either maintained a cowardly silence or warned the police

that their methods would only create more Bolshevism. But the capitalist press with few exceptions virulently urged a holy war of "Christendom" against "Soviet dumping". The pillars of Business and Finance, including the Chief Justice of the Province, gave Draper's faith and works their heartiest approval. Liberalism could only emit its odor of decay.

The latest stage of the persecution of the party is by far the most serious, since it attempts to place the Communist program itself under indictment. Upon the comrades selected by circumstance to represent our doctrine rests therefore a great responsibility,—to utilize the occasion despite the technical difficulties of court procedure, as a forum from which to appeal to the working class. **It is capitalism that must be placed under indictment.** The Communists must show that they have no interests separate and apart from the rest of the workers. If they are on trial at this moment, it is for no "advocacy of force or violence" but because they are leaders in the immediate struggles of the workers against unemployment, against wage-cuts, against capitalist militarism, for the defence of the Soviet Union, for freedom of speech and assembly, etc., and because in the course of these struggles the Communists must expose the mechanism of capitalist exploitation and the class-character of the State.

The Communists make no secret of their aims. Our program is dictated by an objective consideration of the motive forces of history and capitalist society. We are well aware that the government regards the use of "force and violence", whether for the prosecution of war or the suppression of strikes, as its exclusive monopoly. The "democratic" state is the executive of the capitalist class and an organ of exploitation and coercion of the proletariat. If bourgeois democracy is based on consent, it is the "consent" of the victim who has been stunned or drugged. But constitutional problems are in the first place questions of power and legal institutions change with the social structure. The Communists do not "create" revolutionary situations; they only organize the workers to reap the advantage. Revolutionary explosions must occur when the contradiction between the character of the property relations and the mode of production of a given society becomes unbearable. In this sense it is true that on a world scale capitalist economy is ripe for social revolution. But the workers conquest of political power is not a simultaneous act. It is fought out in national forms. Not only is a thor-

ough-going social and political crisis and the sufficient degree of demoralization of the ruling class necessary but a majority of the workers at least must have accepted Communist leadership.

### A Trial Out of the Past

The Attorney-General must know as well as we do that the party in Canada cannot yet boast such a following and that there is no immediate revolutionary crisis. If there were such, he must further know that the methods of a jury trial would by mutual consent be altogether inadequate. He has apparently not learned, however, that he cannot for a long time hope to stem the tide of revolutionary agitation, propaganda and organization by proscribing the revolutionists. Bismark's anti-socialist legislation failed ultimately to prevent the expansion of the social democracy and in our day, the Communist movement. Attorney General Price may not have heard of the trial, following the revolution of 1905 of 52 delegates to the Workers Council of St. Petersburg. They were arrested and tried under section 101 and 102 of the Czarist Criminal Code as having "attended and participated . . . in an association which knowingly set itself the purpose of violently overthrowing the legally established form of government of Russia and replacing it with a democratic republic". The proportions are different but the example is instructive. The 52 were condemned to long terms of imprisonment and Siberian exile. With what results?

There can be no question of the position that every class-conscious worker must take up towards this trial—absolute, militant, intransigent struggle against the forces of reaction. The workers must organize in a broad united front, whatever their political or industrial affiliations, to protest against the wave of terror which the capitalist authorities have let loose against the militants of their class. Every ounce of energy must be thrown into the defense of the comrades and the right of the party to continue above ground. We Communists of the Left Opposition have serious internal differences with the Centrist leadership of the party touching policy and principle. We do not minimize the importance of these differences for a correct revolutionary Marxian development of the party, but that cannot deter us from rallying to the party in every crisis and emergency and for a united struggle against the reaction. We ask today as before to be re-instated in our membership rights and we are prepared to submit our differences to be resolved by the processes of party democracy. Toronto, August 1931.

—MAURICE SPECT

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