Analysis of the Akron Strike And the Role of the CIO

By A. J. MUSTE

The analysis of the recent strike in the Goodyear Tire and Rubber plants in Akron centers about three points: the role and temper of the strikers themselves; the role of and groups.

pany, the strikers were pitting their plausibly contend that there is real- taken by the majority. forces against the biggest of the ly no need for calling out the milboard of directors and offered his which the C.I.O. will support or be or for whatever reason wanted to strike-breaking troops to Goodyear. "forced" to make in situations like get back to work on pretty much On the other hand; the intensely Akron. competitive situation existing in the industry was favorable to the strikers in that Goodyear could not afford to lose business to other companies. From another standpoint proposed at the beginning of the were so clear and so desirable from it was this very competitive situ- strike. The effect of accepting it the strikers' point of view that any ation leading the companies to devise means to cut labor costs which brought the combination of wagecuts, speed-up, increased hours and March 14 "settlement" which was Workers officials and the C.I.O. lay-offs by the Goodyear Company rejected is not wholly clear. That were able to put them over only by

Vigilantes Crushed

The militancy and solidarity of the Goodyear strikers marked the improvement on those of the premen were assured of support even finance the company union, nor recfrom their own local and interna- ognize its representatives) which Goodyear plant and militantly and mise proposal, from which already Immediately thereafter the workers been eliminated, the previous week. in the Firestone and Goodrich It is also a matter of public record Project Workers Unions were mob- even feverish, public activity in orilized. They were set to pour out der to get the strikers to vote for tempt by any agency to break the opposed acceptance of the March 14 Goodyear picket line by force terms, it has to explain what in-When in one of the last weeks of duced it to make such frantic efthe so-called "forces of law and or- Sparks's "red scare" campaign dur-The strikers maintained their ranks and the present writer by name, and their spirit to the very end. stooping lower than A.F. of L. regained because of this.

Role of C.I.O.

The role of Lewis's Committee for Industrial Organization in the Akron strike, as in other situations in this period, was not a simple one and no simple and completely final estimate of it is possible. There is, helped in getting financial support ening of revolutionary organization, to be concerned over references to from union bodies throughout the The Old Guard, then, is fighting cossibilities of "conciliation with country, though that given by the a principled and uncompromising the Old Guard' which have been it was utterly insignificant.

said on the other side. The C.I.O. haps the inevitable concomitants of be eligible for Party membership. came out in support of the strike such political struggles. The trou- if-from whatever motive-they are only after the workers had shut ble with their fight has been not the prepared to work loyally within the down the plant. It made no effort, lack of principled character, but framework of the Party. But here although repeatedly urged to do so that their principles were wrong, it is a question of the Old Guard by militan' strikers, to extend the And. in this case, not merely wrong as such. The Old Guard, it is true, strike to Goodyear plants in other from the point of view of the his- makes clear that the only possible cities, an elementary step. By torical interests of the working "conciliation" from its point of speech and action C.I.O. represent class, but also out of line with the view would be triumph for itself tatives sought to tone down rather wishes and opinions of the majority and its ideas; and consequently any specific correct measure for than capitalize to the utmost upon of Socialist Party members and en- there is little probability that any which the C.I.O. may stand, for the militancy of the Akron work- rolled voters. ers. They agreed to permit tires to be moved out of the plant though the strikers were against it and there is every reason to believe that railroad men would not have moved any freight cars if a picket line

An Agency for Roosevelt

militia out of Akron-in an elec- ly personal and organizational weapons.

Industrial Unionism in Mass Production Industry

The McGrady Arbitration

Now the C.I.O. was prepared to accept the McGrady arbitration ment that the terms themselves would unquestionably have been a criticism or opposition could spring betrayal of the strike. The role of only from dense ignorance or actual the C.P.O. representatives in the treason to the union. The Rubber against which the workers revolted. is not the case with regard to the daking a vote in an atmosphere of Roosevelt and the interests and March 21 terms, the acceptance of hysteria and without giving the forces which he represents made it is not the case with regard to the which brought the strike to an end. strikers a minute for real study of forces which he represents made it

Admittedly these terms were an 1936 and in some respects for the did not offer the strikers even that entire recent period in American minimum (of assurance, for examlabor history. Before the Goodyear ple, that Goodyear would no longer tional union, they closed down the they had laid down in a comprosuccessfully defied an injunction, certain important demands had plants and in most of the other in that the C.I.O. representatives suddustries in Akron as well as the denly launched the most vigorous, of the plants en masse and insti- the acceptance of these terms and tute a general strike at any at- so wind up the strike. If the C.I.O. publicly appealed for violence any important change during that against the strikers and their lead- interval either in the general obers, six thousand strikers gathered jective situation or in the temper challenged the vigilantes to do their representatives who had themselves worst. After all their loud talk, been the object of C. Nelson der" decided that their aim was ing the week put on a "red scare"

ing agency which just wanted the gift! strike prolonged so as to make mon-

any terms.

How the Agreement Carried

Secondly, it disposes of the argutaking a vote in an atmosphere of or not, Lewis's real master, i.e., the terms. Two large sheets of clear: "This thing has gone far high point in the class struggle for vious week. Admittedly also they them as they came to the meeting complicated nature were handed where the vote had to be taken, and this in spite of the fact that the strikers had been told two days before that they would be given several days to study the proposals.

One argument that has been presented by defenders of the C.I.O. role is that funds were low, money for feeding strikers was running out and the strikers were afraid to go on under these circumstances. One unwillingly admits the audacity of the cynicism that is implied here. It is generally agreed that the C.LO. with some of the mightiest unions in the country attached to it gave a paltry few thousand thinks that the employers in the ba- dependent part. sic industries in this country can | The Stalinists had some influence be licked on the basis of putting a on some of the militant rank and can expect to be taken seriously.

Timidity of Local Leaders

Still another argument used by simply to rally public opinion for against the Workers Party, Commu- the defenders of the C.I.O. role is an early settlement of the strike nist Party, "radicals" generally that the local and national officials them. They declared uncritically of the Rubber Workers Union were weak and timid, did not want a vig-Whatever was gained, in the strike, actionaries have ever gone in sim- orous and large-scale struggle, and that was considerable, was ilar situations in which I have been would not ask for money which had of "crazy Trotskyists." This, deinvolved by saying to reporters that virtually been put at their dispos-I must be acting for a strike-break- al. If they had only followed the

The S. P. Primaries

on the one hand, no question that this is the kind of Labor Party factional struggle be in the fuller cluded them among the critics of the C.LO, made contributions to which could alone be built on a sense educational and invigorating, his course. To date they seem not the strike. The moral influence of mass basis in this country. And it instead of petty and disintegrating, yet to have gotten a similar public its support counted for a good deal. understands that, under present for the party as a whole. And only vote of confidence from John L. The trained organizers sent into conditions, the Labor Party agitatin this way will the Militants lay Lewis or even from Adolph Germer Akron by the Committee had an im- tion can be utilized as by far the the firm basis for broader and deep- but perhaps these will also be obportant share in building up the most effective weapon against the er le'tward developments in the tained eventually-for a price! excellent strike organization. The progress of revolutionary ideas days ahead. fact of C.I.O. endorsement doubtless among the masses and the strength-

C.I.O. and the unions affiliated with fight. On the whole, it has been a made since the Primaries. Natur-There is, however, much to be slanders and exaggerations are per- reformist positions are and should

Lessons for the Militants

But, in spite of the fact that the Militants won in the Primary contest, there are lessons for the Militants to learn from the general character of the fight which the

well-fought fight. The occasional ally, individual workers who hold kind of actual organizational conciliation could be arived at under any formula. But the real danger in talk of "conciliation" is not an organizational question.

Danger of Conciliation had been maintained across the Old Guard conducted. The cam- such talk there can readily creep to see in the basic industries. paign of the Socialist Call compares a tendency to conciliate with Old | The solidarity and militancy disin many respects unfavorably with Guard ideas and policies, a tenden- played by the Goodyear strikers That the C.I.O. is an agency for the campaign of the New Leader. cy to retreat from the leftward and their fellow-workers in Akron rallying Roosevelt support from During the months preceding the front so far won, and march back achieved substantial results. They among the unions and the workers Primaries there was only one sub- along the road of disaster. What tied up the great Goodyear plants. generally has been openly demon-stantial article published in the has been won can be held only by They smashed an injunction. They strated since the close of the Ak- Call making a principled political boldness, not by timidity; social made a farce out of the vigilante ron strike with the organization by attack on the Old Guard. In the forces are in continual motion, and movement. They forced Goodyear Lewis, Hillman, Berry etc., of the time intervening before the national positions can be maintained only by to negotiate with a union commit-Non-Partisan Labor Committee. The | convention, the Call has a chance to | further advance and attack, never | tee. They won some concessions in Akron strike furnished an illustra- remedy this defect by setting itself by resting in the trenches. The Old the settlement. They laid the fountion of the equivocal role to which the task of clarifying political is- Guard has suffered a severe set- dation of a union, having proved to this leads in strike situations. It is sues, of stating and exposing before back organizationally; now is ex- themselves that they could stick togenerally understood that the "in- the party membership the precise actly the time to follow the blow up gether and fight. They are carryfluence" of Lewis and other trade political character of the Old with others still stronger, and to ing their struggle forward now in unionists with Roosevelt had an Guard and its policies, of lifting the add to the organizational the more the plants-well aware that the important bearing on keeping the struggle determinedly from a mere- powerful and more lasting political fight has not ended but has just be-

wishes and the lead of the C.I.O. much more might have been won. It taxes our credulity to pretty near the breaking point to believe this. An organization with prestige and money offers a victory and a anion to a group of new and ambitious union leaders on a silver platter, and the latter decline the

NEW MEELERAND

But let us assume there is some ey by cracking workers' heads. It basis for the argument, then what was in such an atmosphere of hys- follows? That these weak-kneed ization of the unemployed or of any teria that the strikers voted to ac- leaders and their course must be other group of workers. It would cept the March 21 terms and ended backed up by the kind of red-baitunion officials and in particular tion year in a key state. But this the strike, after the more militant ing campaing Germer of the C.I.O. John L. Lewis's Committee for In- means, for one thing, that in "grat- elements among them had criticized along with Burns of the Rubber dustrial Organization; and that of itude" votes are to be coralled for the terms and indicated their pref- Workers launched in the closing age trade unionist directly confronts the working-class political parties Roosevelt and for another thing erence for continuing the fight, but hours of the strike? That the "heat" that the strikers must be restrain- stated their readiness to accept loy- must be turned on as was done, on the week and the "political state" In tackling the Goodyear Com- ed so that the politicians may ally whatever decision might be the militants among the strikers to only infrequently, the unemployed force them against their will to ac- worker faces the "political state"— tion of the unemployed must deal Now in the first place any child cept this situation? Obviously, if the government-every single day with such problems-and it is imtire and rubber companies, which itia. Obviously, too, it is fantastic can see that the terrific effort that the job of organizing the basic inhad one of the oldest, and until the to suppose that labor leaders who was required, the barrage that had dustries is to be taken seriously, recent strike most "successful" base themselves upon Roosevelt can to be laid down in public and pri- then in such a crisis a (supposedly) company unions, and which had possibly push employers in the ba- vate, to put the settlement over dis- genuine and competent leadership very important connections with sic industries to a settlement that poses completely of the argument must find means of rallying the big corporations in steel and other costs them anything. And this that either the general run of strik- masses as against a false and inindustries. Thus Tom Girdler of point is of crucial importance in ers or the more conscious, militant competent leadership. We may sur-Republic Steel is on the Goodyear considering the strike settlements elements were tired or discouraged mise that John L. Lewis who still tions of capitalist politics, the capmaintains arbitrary provisional presidencies under his own direct control in most of the soft coal dis-

dustries through. There is but one logical conclusion. Whether in so many words will give without a regular fight. That we will not stand for, We will not hold back the militia any longer. Wind it up at any cost." And when it was wound up the rubber companies, Goodyear included, had tial and very serious weakness: the 36 to 40 hour week although only a month before a U.S. Department of Labor Committee had stated flatly that there was no excuse for the abandonment of the 30 hour week. Furthermore, the companies laid the basis for recouping any losses and fattening profits by an increase in the price of their prod-

Parties in the Strike

Finally a word about the role of political parties and groups. The dollars to the strike fund. Let us local S.P. in Akron is small and atthe strike, the company inspired forts to put over only slightly imthe organization of a vigilante or- proved terms a week later. There situation might occasion, and sim- S.P. leaders in Akron were attachganization on a large scale and is not the slightest indication of physical convention boiled down to the fu-

on the picket line openly armed of the strikers. In the effort to put few thousand dollars into a strike filers. When the "red-baiting" startwith clubs and other weapons and over the March 21 terms the C.I.O. against Goodyear Tire and Rubber ed in the closing hours of the strike, involving fifteen thousand workers the Stalinist representatives took to crawling on their bellies before the union bureaucrats in the abject manner which has become so familiar by now and so easy for for the settlement terms before seeing them and laid any opposition that was being voiced at the door spite the fact that one who reads between the lines of the Daily Worker articles following the strike, gets even there a confirmation of every criticism we have made in this article. In exchange the C.P. received an "apology" from Vice President Burns of the Rub-(Continued from Page 1) | plane. Only in this way will the ber Workers Union for having in-

revolutionary elements. The better control of the new organization as mittments that would tie them to organization of these elements is

a crying need. To summarize: Militants must make every use that can be made of the C.I.O. They rightly support example industrial as against craft unionism. At no time can they simply uncritically identify themselves with the C.I.O. or foster the illusion that the C.I.O. as such can be trusted to carry through the ter-The real danger is that behind rifle struggles which we are bound

gun in real earnest.

Unification of the Unemployed and the Task Ahead

(Continued from Page 1) tions, politics in general, can or should be excluded from the organbe even more absurd to try this among the jobless than almost anywhere else. For, whereas the averhis "individual boss" every day in stressed by more than one delegate them entirely—it was the job of es to be "quite" a capitalist govto the convention, should be enough the progressive elements in the to indicate how exceptionally pre- convention to counter the tactics posterous it would be to attempt to of the Stalinists. More easily said rule out "political questions" in than done, however! such a movement-be they ques-

class politics. The convention was divided, so find healthy or fitting in the labor conduct during the convention. movement-there were other features of the convention which revealed what we consider its essenthe absence of firm, consistent and well-prepared guidance. With the exception of the question of unification itself, on which the leadership of the W.A.A. took a positive and generally correct stand, its sails were set in such a manner on virtually every other convention question that they could be blown by winds from almost any direction.

What the Stalinists Wanted

sion between the Alliance, led by militants of the Socialist Party, pline. and the Unemployment Councils, led by the Stalinists.

Councils because they are headed! a miraculously naive person would throw prudence and vigilance to the winds when effecting such a unification. For a grown-up person to be taken in by the pious humility and amicableness of Benjamin, who represented the Councits, is really inexcusable. The Stalinists are motivated in their Atlantis.

played a highly creditable part in were bent so exclusively towards to discussion speakers. the strike in line with the policies committing the new organization Important for our theme, howsketched in this articule. The Ak- to their views on these subjects, or ever, is the fact that, leaving apart ron strike, like all the recent strike preventing committments to con- the principle differences we have position of a group of progressives ends, towards obtaining as firm- of the F.L.P., they are entirely corand militants including conscious even if anonymous -- a measure of rect in their resistance to any com-

APRIL ISSUE OF THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

IS OUT Articles by Trotsky, Sidney Hook and many others. A critithe New Republic, and a reply by George Novack. "Will Roosevelt be Re-elected?" by John West; "What Is this Business Revival?" by Arne Swabeck; and much other material.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

Maurice Spector will speak on the "Changing Line-up in European Diplomacy," dealing specifically with the question of "Sanctions," at Irving Plaza Hall, 8 P.M. Sunday, May 3. THERE WILL BE NO MEETING ON SUNDAY, APRIL 26.

Convention at Washington

the relationship of forces and their against another imperialist governrenowned skill at manipulation ment in alliance with the Soviet

would permit. 'Militants' Disorganized

To the extent that the organiza-

The Stalinists came to the convention in the usual manner. They italist government, or working were prepared in advance to act on every question, and what is more, to act as one man. In a tricts of the U.M.W. is not likely to speak, into two parts. The first word, they were a disciplined poto see eye to eye with the rank and was devoted to the sessions of the litical force. The same cannot be file or insurgents as against officials old Workers Alliance, which cul- said of the Socialists. Except for in such situations. But that is an | minated to all intents and purposes | Lieberman of Pittsburgh and one other reason for concluding that he when the resolution in favor of or two others, the Old Guard of cannot be relied upon to see the unity was adopted by an over- the S.P. was not even represented job of organization in the basic in- whelming majority of the votes, at the convention (work among the The second part was participated lowly jobless is hardly a dignified in by all the fusing groups and it occupation for a respectable social was here that the elections of the democrat!). But while the bulk officers and the National Executive of the Socialists in the W.A.A. are Board and the adoption of resolu- supporters, in the S.P., of the Militions took place. Apart from the tants, and even count among the fact that every single session was best Left wing elements, there was mimeographed material of a very enough. Goodyear is giving all it presided over by the same chair- no noticeable unity, and certainly man-a custom which we do not no efficiency in action, in their

No Unity in Action at Meet

On those questions in which the Stalinists are vitally interestedand rightly so; everybody else the representatives of the S. P. did the S. P. Militants at the con-With the bulk of the National ing opinion is a correct one), but in the violation of agreement made Unemployed League having merged what is worse, this lack of harmo- on representation from the "indeinto the Workers Alliance even nious view was translated on the pendent caucus'-could not be the essential problem before the committees and in other commit. Socialists.

The entirely proper sentiments of many of the S.P. Militants to or-Now, although only a reactionary ganize a unity of action, while it did rank and file workers gives would oppose unification with the resulted in remedying conditions in high promise that they will take. some measure, did not prove suffi. But it is also a matter which jusby Stalinists, at the same time only ciently effective in attaining that tifies apprehensions about the necessary level of discipline particularly demanded by the presence of the organized Stalinist phalanx.

The Farmer-Labor Party We limit ourselves to a few illus-

trations.

employed to approximately the familiar Stalinist view; the S. P. cordingly. same extent that the writer is ani- Militants' view in favor of a "genmated in his actions by his concern uine" Farmer-Labor party but not over the flora and fauna of sunken in 1936; and the revolutionary Marxian view held by many of the To put the matter bluntly and delegates of the former National squarely, the Stalinists today see Unemployed League. Aroused out in the movement of the unemployed of their hypocritical meekness when a vehicle for the formation of their end of the convention, the Stalin-

convention, the Stalinists virtually shouted through a "substitute moworded in such a manner as to cism by George Soule, editor of | leave the door wide open for the C.P. agents in the W.A.A. to manenver the organization into precisely the position the Socialists do not want to take. How? Mainly because the Stalinists acted on the rule of every man as one, while the Socialists acted mainly on the rule of every man for himself.

The War Question

Similarly on the question of war. With trifling exceptions in formulation, the resolution originally drafted by some of the Militants in capitalist government of the U.S. gardless of who its allies may be.

already recruiting troops for before it,

AReport of the Recent French imperialism. Are the Stalists against imperialist war? Absolutely! They will vote against it any day in the week and twice on Lenin's birthday. But, if the imperialist government fights a war Union, then, do you see, it is no longer an imperialist war. Or, if the "capitalist" government is allied with the Soviets in a war against another "capitalist" government and its war is not "quite" a capitalist war.

Is this merely a question of petty factional bickering between Stalinists and Marxists? If it is, then at the same time it involves nothing less than the life of the labor movement, and literally, the lives of millions of workers in the world war to come. It is such a "trifle" that the hawk-eyed Stalinists promptly pounced upon it, with the result that the phrase underlined above was deleted from the final draft of the resolution. The Stalinists were vigilant, aggressive, organized. The Militants were not. with the result that they ceded ground where they had no need to, where they should, instead, have advanced.

The "Independents"

The contrast of firmness and looseness, manifested in these two situations, was not absent in other convention fields. The Councils acted as a unit, as did the C.P. stooge organizations in the socalled "independent caucus" which was rigged and :ramed with all the should also be-such as the Farmer- expertness that comes from years Labor party, the C.P. representa- of Stalinist training. The W.A.A. tives showed both aggressiveness acted like anything but a unit in and unity. Barring isolated cases, the convention, and the S. P. Militants acted like anything but a showed neither quality. It was evi- unit in the W.A.A. Result: the dent to the observer that not only work of the Stalinists was facilitated, both politically and organizavention display a deplorable lack tionally. Even flagrant (and charof unity of opinion (which is far acteristic!) acts of disloyalty of from a vice, providing the prevail- the Stalinists-such as was involved

the road that must still be trav elled by the Left wing in the Socialist Party-a road which the presence at the convention of splencourse which the Stalinists will take in the immediate period to follow, during which arrangements are to be completed for the holding of various unification conventions on state-wide scales. A repetition of what happened in Washington, There were really three views on an even more injurious scale, represented in the convention on is inevitable, unless its lessons are conduct by the interests of the un- the "Farmer-Labor" party: the learned and steps are taken ac-

The N.U.L. Delegation

A word remains to be said about the ranks of the former N.U.L. Its delegation of close to 100 men and women from the field made an im--as in every other movement-(1) the question arose toward the very pressive showing, especially by the side of the-financially-infinitely fraudulent "Farmer - Labor" or ists stormed and shouted from floor more resourceful Stalinist Councils, "People's" party, and (2) a re- and platform in favor of their whose convention had only a score cruiting ground for the war of the standpoint. A few Socialists also more in attendance. A lamentable "good, peace-loving" imperialists took the floor for contradictory contrast to this showing was made The Workers Party group in Ak- against the "bad, bellicose" imperi- speeches in line with their own by Arnold Johnson, former national ron has for two years been in close alists, presumably in the interests views. But the representatives of secretary of the N.U.L. and belated touch with the militants among the of the "defense" of the Soviet Un- the third tendency sought in vain convert to Stalinism after months rubber workers. Through them they ion. That is why their energies for even the five minu: es allotted of protestations of fealty to the Fourth International. Despite all the C.P. support and Daily Worker ballyhoo behind him, Johnson was only able to muster a good baker's struggles, demonstrated the key trary views, and, to further these with the Militants on the question for his "convention," which promptdozen from nowhere in particular ly dissolved into the "independent caucus." The business meeting of the kite of a Stalinis Farmer-Labor by a special investigating committhe former N.U.L., after a report Pary hoax in the 1936 elections. tee which heard both Johnson and Nevertheless, even though they the loyal officers (Ramuglia, Mcwere presumably a minority in the Kinney, Selander), voted unanimously to endorse the action of the tion" by their spokesman, Weisman, Johnson from office in the emergency he had created, and in joining forces with the Workers Alli-

> The delegates present at the N.U. L convention could count themselves among the most devoted and experienced front-line fighters in the movement of the unemployed, and for that matter, in the labor movement generally. Their entry into the ranks of the united organization, reinforced by the election onto the new National Executive Board of such well-known militants as Ted Selander of Toledo and Sam the W.A.A. was flawless from a Gordon of Allentown, brings to the working class standpoint. It pledged merged movement the best of the the organization not to support the traditions of the National Unemployed League, the best of its in any war it may undertake, re- fighters, its experience, its ranksconstituting, all together, one, and Now, this last clause is far from not the least, of the guarantees for a trifle, for if you wish, it is around the great future of aggressive this "trifle" that the Stalinists are struggle that the new Alliance has

NEW TRENDS IN LABOR STRUGGLES [A. J. MUSTE]

GERMANIA HALL: 16th St. & 3rd Ave. SUNDAY, APRIL 19th, at 8 P. M.