

New Trends in the Evolution Of the Unemployed Movement

By A. J. MUSTE

The recent unification of all the leading unemployed organizations into the Workers Alliance of America marks a definite period in the evolution of the movement. It is important that the militant workers in the field should understand the road that has been travelled, and the trend which now prevails, and the policy which they must themselves adopt for the coming period.

To date the unemployed organizations have accomplished a number of important results. Their pressure has helped to keep relief standards from being scrapped completely. They have established and asserted the right of the unemployed to organize. They have corrected innumerable grievances of individuals and families. They have contributed some notable pages to the history of labor struggles in the United States. They have worked out the tactics, first applied on a large scale, in the Toledo Auto-Parts strike, of active participation in strikes of employed workers to an extent known in no other country. Through their work in connection with concrete needs of the unemployed and their educational activities, they have to a remarkable degree prevented Fascist or near-Fascist outfits from making inroads into the unemployed masses.

From "Self-Help" to Class Struggle

In the early months of the crisis when under the influence of various kinds of liberals and academicians many of the unemployed organizations were of the "barter" and "self-help" type, no results were obtained. A system of exchange among those who had nothing, still left them with nothing in the end. Conditions became worse and worse. It was when the unemployed began to "raise hell," built organizations on a basis (conscious or unconscious) of class struggle that some results were obtained. Not the least important result was that the unemployed learned the power of organization, realized their own strength, developed a fighting psychology. When the unemployed marched on Washington or other centers in 1932 to 1935 they were usually met by police on the outskirts of the city and prevented from entering or else so treated within the city limits that serious disturbances ensued. The some six hundred delegates at the recent unity convention of the unemployed in Washington in which the Workers Alliance of America absorbed the former National Unemployment Councils, National Unemployed League and a number of lesser organizations, convened in the spacious and imposing auditorium of the U. S. Department of Labor and their sessions were much more sedate than those of last fall's A. F. of L. convention! Much about the evolution and the present position of the unemployed movement is revealed in this contrast.

The Most Urgent Problem

The fusing of many organizations of relief recipients and proletarian workers into a relatively stable

Problems Arising from The Washington Unity Convention

national body at this date—seven years after the beginning of the Great Depression, and three years after the advent of the New Deal administration—confirms Harry Hopkins' recent utterance that "unemployment is still the most urgent problem before the nation" and suggests that the President's statement in his Baltimore speech to the effect that "no man who is sensitive to human values dares to accept the continued existence of a vast permanent army of unemployed" is the expression of a pious wish.

Yet the unemployed and their organizations are not the immediate and dramatic "menace" which they constituted a couple of years ago. Objective factors in the general economic and political situation play a part here. The upturn in business, such as it is, has eased the tension. Relief payments and project wages are pitifully inadequate. Harassed by the inadequacies of appropriations, administrators are constantly resorting to schemes to cut down payments to the workers. The threat of removal from the rolls hangs over the heads of tens of thousands. There remain plenty of grievances on which to build and hold together the unemployed unions.

Changed Situation

Nevertheless, the situation is less desperate than in those days when prosperity was supposed to be just around the corner, unemployment a passing phenomenon, and the only source of relief either the overburdened private charities, or bankrupt city, county and state treasuries. Then too the temper of the masses was more inflammable in those months when for the first time the ground was slipping out from under their feet, "upstanding Americans" were forced to undergo the humiliation of applying for relief, were evicted from homes they had built, etc., then it is now, when they have become in greater or lesser degree adjusted to a new status and a lowered standard of living. Another factor in producing a more stable situation is the fact that the Roosevelt-Hopkins policy of recognizing the "right" of the unemployed to organize but insisting that they behave in a "reasonable" manner, as against the Tory attitude of flatly denying the right to organize, is percolating all the way down into the heads of at least a large percentage of the local administrators and foremen.

Such conditions tend to develop an organization devoted mainly to "collective bargaining" between workers and management (in this case local, state and federal authorities) and lobbying for legislation in the interest of the group, rather than to agitation and "revolutionary" objectives. The establishment of the enlarged Workers' Alliance of America definitely marked the ascendancy of this trend in the

unemployed movement. The W.A.A. and its units will perform the function of "trade unions for the unemployed."

The chief leaders of the W.A.A., Socialist and Stalinist, consciously encourage conservative trends rather than resist the tendency to conservatism in the movement. There were interesting illustrations of this during the convention. They displayed the greatest anxiety that delegations to Congressmen and the W.P.A. offices should behave like gentlemen, though they were actually going without meals and beds, and the authorities politically insisted nothing could be done about it. Foremost among the speakers who addressed the convention were liberal representatives and senators such as Lundeen, Marcanonio, Amlic and Frazier, some of whom are sponsoring social insurance and relief bills, and a personal representative of Harry Hopkins who calmly informed the delegates he could do nothing for their hungry stomachs and was politely applauded at the conclusion of his remarks. The Lasser-Benjamin leadership should hang its head in shame, if it is capable of that emotion, for permitting this insulting and degrading performance. Until recently no convention of unemployed would have submitted to it. It should never be permitted to happen again.

Secretary Frank Morrison of the A. F. of L. represented President Green, but there was no speaker from John L. Lewis' Committee for Industrial Organization! It is true that Norman Thomas and Mother Bloor also spoke but, doubtless in line with more or less direct hints from the officers, they refrained from putting forward the Socialist or the Communist parties respectively. All the recognized leaders spoke for a Farmer-Labor party to include also liberals and progressives, and the incoming National Executive Board is instructed to "explore the possibilities" of forming such a party on a national scale in 1936.

Power in United Body

The lowering of the temper of the unemployed organizations in recent months has been accompanied, significantly enough, by a considerable slump in membership. The W.A.A. grew stronger because of the accession of previously existing units, rather than the formation of new ones, and thus gained relatively to the Councils and the Leagues, but its strongest state organization, for example, the Illinois Workers' Alliance, experienced the same decline in membership and activity as was manifested in most other organizations.

Setting-up of a single national organization of unemployed in which Socialists, Trotskyists, Stalinists, etc., participate is in an important respect a progressive achievement. It will give considerable impetus to the organizing movement in the immediate future, though conflict among diverse political tendencies will not by any means be entirely eliminated. Until some substantial

change occurs in the general economic and political situation, possibly after the election, the policy of the W.A.A. is likely to reflect the general line and temper of the unity convention. This will be the aim of the Stalinists under their present undisguised and unrestricted opportunism and social-patriotism.

Only Struggle Effective

What this line means for the unemployed is already plain to everybody. A terrific drive to cut down appropriations in order to "balance the budget" is under way. Thousands are being dropped from projects. Except where vigorous fighting organizations exist, all kinds of devices for worsening conditions are resorted to. No amount of flirting with the Green-Wool outfit in the A. F. of L. or with liberal congressmen, no amount of gentlemanliness in dealing with the clever, no amount of polite lobbying by unemployed who have no money to bring into the lobbies, no amount of "resoluting" about fine-sounding but fake Stalinist farmer-labor or people's parties, will change this situation.

Whatever the unemployed got in the past, they got because they had strong organizations which went on the war-path. Building or reviving such organizations and carrying them into action is the job of revolutionists and militants today. A constant struggle with the state, with governmental agencies, is involved in the very nature of the unemployed situation and of any unemployed movement worthy of the name.

Link with Union Militants Needed

It follows, also, that the unemployed organizations cannot gain by being drawn down to the low level of militancy in many of the unions. On the contrary, the working class movement as a whole can gain only if the unemployed help to heighten the militancy of the unions. Consequently, the tie-up which the unemployed must seek is with the industrial as against the craft-unions in the A. F. of L. who have never evinced the slightest interest in the unemployed masses; and basically the tie-up must be not with bureaucrats at the top but with the militant progressive forces in the unions—a tie forged and constantly made stronger in the daily struggles of employed and unemployed alike.

Since it is impossible in an unemployed organization to establish a very strict centralized control from the center, nothing prevents the fighting spirits in city, county, state organizations from getting busy at once with building along these lines; with invading such reactionary strongholds as Tampa, Florida; with support of militant strikes as the Project Workers' Union in Akron stood ready to give the Goodyear workers recently; with large-scale local and state demonstrations. Thus will the W. A. A. be made into an important progressive force in the class-struggle in this country.

The Roosevelt - Lewis Coalition And the Farmer - Labor Party

By ARNE SWABECK

With the organization of Labor's Non-Partisan League, the Labor party question has come into new prominence. It is a peculiar kind of prominence and it is a new version of this question. At the same time it is the most genuine indication yet presented of what a future labor party will actually be.

The sponsors of this organization, among whom are John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, George Berry of the printing pressmen union and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, have announced that their present objective is the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936. That task accomplished, it is intimated, the League may become the precursor of an American labor party or third party of labor, farmer, liberal and progressive elements. This is the way it is now offered to the working class. Starting out with the re-election of Roosevelt, such a party, when emerging full fledged, would have for its base the New Deal program.

This is not surprising. An examination of the present labor party trends, the position of the trade union leadership—which, it is to be remembered, is still the authentic spokesman of the movement it represents—and the actual role that a labor party can play in the stage of capitalist decay, should convince intelligent workers that what is intimated through the creation of Labor's Non-Partisan League is a fairly true picture of coming events.

Stalinists and Lewis

Let us compare this with the labor party idea sponsored by the Stalinists in their present hurricane campaign. There is no need to ignore their violent disavowal of the Lewis, Berry, Hillman coalition or its present aims, for even as a pretense that much would be necessary. With this we need not be seriously concerned. In politics, intentions or desires are of little account, even declarations have validity only when accompanied by corresponding deeds. But, above all, it is the objective logic of the position that is the decisive criterion. Leaving all outward appearances aside the fundamental issue therefore remains: what will be the objective result of these two positions on the labor party question? And in it we shall be sure to find a resemblance as striking as two eyeballs.

In outward appearance there are differences. In origin and gestation the differences may seem to the less discerning as if in open conflict. But opportunist trends easily meet regardless of origin. Labor's Non-Partisan League gestated from the New Deal program and its spokesmen are still very cautious about future perspectives. In words they

Lewis Takes the Wind Out of Stalinist 1936 Sails

indicate only vaguely the labor party or third party direction. They have no illusions about a serious labor party movement in 1936. But they see clearly the leftward trends in the trade union movement which have been manifested especially in recent strikes, and they understand that these trends will also sooner or later endeavor to find political expression.

A Shrewd Strategy

In regard to these developments the Lewis-Hillman group, which is credited with the new strategy, has again proven its ability to gauge the moods of the masses more accurately than the craft conscious bureaucrats. Progressives in certain questions of trade union organization, this group is Rooseveltian in political ideology. This means that it is a conscious supporter of the capitalist system. And for this reason it has set for itself the immediate task of canalizing the trends in the movement for independent political action into the safe channels of support of the pseudo-reform measures of the New Deal. To secure in actuality these measures—which are even too radical for finance capital and for the most part ruled out by the Supreme Court—with Roosevelt as long as this is possible and later through a new political instrument; this is the way the question is presented to appear in palatable form to the workers.

The contradiction of this strategy lies not in the linking of support to Roosevelt in 1936 with a labor party to appear later. The contradiction, insofar as the workers are concerned, lies in the blurring of the class issues, in the harnessing of the slowly developing political consciousness to a program and a movement based purely on obtaining concessions from capitalism at a time when real concessions can be wrung from it only to the extent that the working class advances and organizes along revolutionary lines. The history of the Roosevelt measures bears this out most clearly. Therefore, so long as the developing political consciousness of the workers can be thus harnessed capitalism remains safe to continue its exploitation.

Wither the "Peoples Movement"?

This is also the contradiction of the Stalinist campaign for a labor party. But this glib propaganda on the question, insofar as they influence class conscious workers, is far more dangerous and far more criminal. Attempting to delude their followers, who sincerely want to "fight against political reaction

and Fascism and against the threatening war," they present the labor party as a means to this end. At the same time the labor party, in their version, is to be "neither socialist nor communist," and still capable of performing these gigantic tasks. It is to be a "broad people's movement." What a welter of confusion and treachery. Any small town banker, or smart bourgeois lawyer, or battered down right-wing "liberal" politician may rightfully demand his place in the "broad people's movement." On what grounds could they be excluded? And why should a people's movement disparage the New Deal program?

For quite some time the Stalinists have addressed their appeals to the Lewis' group urging it to support the labor party idea. It now appears as if these appeals have not been in vain. Support for a labor party is at least intimated. Such a party would also bear prominently the imprint of the official trade union leadership and of the whole coterie of elements who have no difficulty in pronouncing the Roosevelt program and the labor party with the same accent. It is from these elements and not from the workers that the Stalinists may claim their just reward for services rendered in the cause of social reformism.

A Significant Omen

Labor's Non-Partisan League already claims for itself a widely extended support. Norman Thomas sees in this development a hopeful sign for a future farmer-labor party. David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers threw in his support immediately, and to leave no room for misunderstanding he resigned from the Socialist party. His loyalty, to the extent that he had any, had been with the Old Guard. On what good grounds can the Old Guard decline to follow his example?

On the whole it would be difficult to deny that all the signs of labor party developments point unmistakably in one and the same direction. It could not be otherwise once a reformist party is projected. Differences in outward appearances should not deceive anybody, for the objective logic of the positions advanced along the lines of social reformism must necessarily lead to one and the same general result. Today the most genuine indication of what the actual result will be, is furnished by the Lewis, Berry, Hillman coalition—for Roosevelt toward a labor party or third party based on the New Deal program.

This can hardly be the thing that class conscious workers are looking forward to. It can hardly be an object of support to socialist workers. Their job still remains the one of building a movement for socialism.

Problems for the Fourth Internationalists in Spain

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workers' organizations, however, remain completely enmeshed in the net of the People's Front. The convulsions of the revolutionary masses (without a program, without a leadership worthy of confidence) thus threaten to throw the gates wide open to the counter-revolutionary dictatorship!

Nin and Andrade

That the workers are driving ahead in a revolutionary direction is shown by the development of all their organizations, most particularly by that of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Youth. Two years ago we raised the question of the entry of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists into the Socialist Party. This proposal was rejected by the Andres Nins and Andrades with the disdainfulness of conservative philistines: they wanted "independence" at all costs, because it left them in peace and put them under no obligations. And yet, affiliation to the Socialist Party in Spain would have yielded immeasurably better results, under the given circumstances than was the case, for example, in France. (Given the premise, of course, that in Spain the great mistakes committed by the leading French comrades would have been averted.) Meanwhile, however, Andrade and Nin united with the confused Maurin, in order jointly to trot behind the People's Front.* The Socialist workers however, in their striving for revolutionary clarity, fell victim to the Stalinist deceivers. The fusion of the two youth organizations signifies that the best revolutionary energies will be abused and dissipated by the Comintern stipendiaries. And the "great" revolutionists, Andres Nin and Andrade remain on the sidelines in order to

carry on together with Maurin a completely impotent propaganda for the "democratic-socialist" revolution, that is, for a social, democratic betrayal.**

Nobody can know what form the next period in Spain will take. In any case, the flood tide which has borne the clique of the People's Front to power is too mighty to ebb in a short period of time and to leave the battlefield free to the reaction. The truly revolutionary elements still have a certain period of time, not too long a time to be sure, in which to reflect, to assemble and to prepare for the future. This refers in the first place to the Spanish supporters of the Fourth International. Their tasks are as clear as day.

Tasks of Fourth Internationalists

1. To condemn pitilessly and to pillory before the masses the policy of all the leaders participating in the People's Front.
2. To grasp in full the wretchedness of the leadership of the "Workers Party of Marxist Unity" and especially of the former "Left Communists"—Andres Nin, Andrade, etc., and to portray them clearly in the sight of all the advanced workers.
3. To rally around the banner of the Fourth International on the basis of the "Open Letter."
4. To join the Socialist Party and the United Youth in order to work there as a faction in the spirit of Bolshevism.
5. To establish fractions and nuclei in the trades unions and other mass organizations.
6. To direct the main attention to the spontaneous and semi-spontaneous mass movements, to study their general traits, i.e. (to take heed of the temperature of the masses and not the temperature of

the parliamentarian cliques.

7. To be present in every struggle so as to invest it with clear expression.

8. To drive constantly towards having the fighting masses form and constantly expand their committees of action (juntas, soviets), elected ad hoc.

9. To counterpose the program of the conquest of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the social revolution to all hybrid programs (a la Caballero, or a la Maurin).

This is the real road of the proletarian revolution. There is no other.

L. TROTSKY.

April 12, 1936.

*The turn of the Batalla toward the People's Front does not inspire us with confidence. One cannot say Monday that the League of Nations is a band of brigands, on Tuesday urge voters to vote for the program of the League of Nations, on Wednesday explain that yesterday it was only a question of electoral action and that today one has to resume one's own program. The serious worker must ask: and what are these people going to say Friday and Saturday? Maurin appears to be the very incarnation of a petty bourgeois revolutionist, superficial, agile and versatile. He studies nothing, he understands little and he spreads confusion all around him.

**Marx wrote in 1876 on the falseness of the term "social democracy": socialism cannot be subordinated to democracy. Socialism (or communism) is enough for us. "Democracy" has nothing to do with it. Since then, the October revolution has vigorously demonstrated that the socialist revolution cannot be carried out within the framework of "democracy." The "democratic" revolution and the socialist revolution are on opposite sides of the barricades. The Third International theoretically confirmed this experience. The "democratic" revolution in Spain has al-

Townsend Plan Hits The Downward Trek

Sixty-six years went by before Dr. Francis E. Townsend of Long Beach, California, noticed the injustice of this world. For sixty-six years he was content to struggle onward over the backs of the working class to a comfortable political post in the City Health Department.

Then at a ripe old age the middle class crusader lost his job in a political overturn. And as he counted his meagre savings and faced a jobless and poverty stricken senility he was overcome with a humanitarian impulse.

Looking out of the window of his little house he observed three old women rummaging through the garbage looking for something to eat. This observation late in 1933 seems to have been not only the beginning of the Old Age Revolving Pension Fund idea, but also the first time that Dr. Townsend became aware of the fact that all was not roses and soft jobs in Long Beach.

Birth of Movement

Like many other workers throughout the country the three old women lived on the garbage of capitalist civilization long before Townsend lost his job with the City Health Department and are probably still scavenging under the new Health Department.

But in the meanwhile a new movement has arisen to save Townsend and tens of thousands of other middle class old people from a fate the working class faces every day of every year—poverty.

Dr. Townsend sat down at his desk and figured out an economic scheme highly naive and unsound already been carried out. The People's Front is renewing it. The personification of the "democratic" revolution in Spain is Azana, with or without Caballero. The socialist revolution is yet to be made in impenetrable struggle against the "democratic" revolution and its People's Front. What does this synthesis, "democratic-socialist" revolution mean? Nothing at all. It is only an eclectic hodge-podge.

branch lobby office in Washington, D.C.

In the spring of 1935 the Townsend Plan was introduced into the House of Representatives by J. S. McGroarty, poet laureate of the state by special act of the California legislature. It received some fifty votes from Congressmen anxious to bolster their precarious reputations at home.

During 1935 the movement continued to grow until the founders claimed more than twenty million signatures to petitions and memoranda to Congress; a monster demonstration of social unrest. It became a menace to the federal government for it threatened to reveal to the middle class and deluded working class supporters of the Plan the complete dependence of the "people's representatives" on big capital.

The Investigation

Instead of answering the plan, instead of concerning themselves with the economic terror it reflected, instead of proposing serious alternatives, the august bootlickers in Congress decided upon a campaign of personal slander and insinuation against the leaders.

A congressional investigation was launched in the hope of destroying the Old Age Pension movement by discrediting Townsend. The same congressmen who can contemplate with indifference the expenditure of thirty million dollars on a wild and useless Trans-Florida canal for the purpose of raising a few thousand Democratic votes in Florida suddenly become indignant and self-righteous at the thought of an organization which collected a bare fifty cents per member to a total of not more than a million dollars.

Committee's Revelations

Despite a great hullabaloo raised by the investigating committee about Townsend's methods of organization, his accounting for funds, his management of the paper, etc., it appears that Townsend is no more of a crook than a congressman, and draws about the same salary.

The investigation is not yet complete but there are already rumors of political disagreements among the committee members. No doubt some of the congressmen foresee the failure of the investigation, and

are anxious to reinstate themselves with the Townsendsites.

It remained for the Stalinists to jump into this mess of middle class messiahs and vote-anxious congressmen to lend the movement the invaluable advice and aid of the beloved leader of the world proletariat, Stalin. In a pamphlet on the Townsend plan Alex Hittelman, the second string authority on counter-revolutionary Trotskyism, hails the Old Age Revolving Pension Plan as a movement of the "masses of the toilers," in a "powerful protest . . . against the policy of monopolies." (!)

A Revolutionary Attitude

The workers can have no use for this vicious middle class scheme for raising pensions at the expense of the workers. They want old age pensions for all productive workers regardless of citizenship, and they want them raised by income taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations.

More than this, the workers should know from experience that poverty in old age is only one facet of a system that condemns the working class to poverty, insecurity and unemployment every day of the year.

Naturally the Townsend movement has certain fascist potentialities. The O.A.R.P. already has the reform socialist demagog, the rank nationalism, and the messianic leadership of the fascist movement. But in these times of comparative capitalist security and business recovery the Townsend movement is probably doomed to end in another EPIC fizzle. It serves a purpose in exposing the hopeless and reactionary nature of middle class reformism, the cynical indifference and servility of the capitalist government, and the stupid and equally cynical attempts of Stalinism to capitalize on all this petty bourgeois swill.

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