

West Coast Seamen to Continue Struggle for Militancy, Autonomy

By Glen Trimble

(Concluded from last issue)

So long as Executive Council's quarrel with the CIO was one over workers the A. F. of L. had failed to organize, the average unionist sided with the CIO or at least forced a hands-off policy on his officials. Today the CIO campaign is of direct and immediate concern. Every established union is confronted with an ultimatum to go CIO or face a campaign to split away sections of its membership.

This is the real root of the Teamsters-Longshoremen "beef." The Bridges CIO is actively working to bore from within and break off sections of the Teamsters Union. Teamster leadership here is largely of the reactionary old line A. F. of L. type. They take care of the boys and themselves and know nothing and care less about class solidarity. Nevertheless the Teamsters are solidly organized, have relatively good scales and conditions. A split can only serve to break down these conditions. The answer of the leadership to CIO raiding is counter-attack on the CIO and the membership back up their leaders. This was demonstrated by a solid turnout on the San Francisco waterfront. Longshoremen walked through teamster picket lines; teamsters called the "truce" with the frank threat that longshoremen would find their precedent followed when teamster respect for longshore picket lines was asked.

This threat is no idle one, for teamsters can virtually make or break a maritime strike, and with the continuation of the present provocative Bridges policy, the reactionary teamster officials, are almost certain to win membership support for the latter alternative. The Sailors' Union was wise in taking a neutral position in this ugly squabble, but it is equally plain that unless the CIO abandons its present policy the Sailors and the entire labor movement will be victimized by increasing civil war.

The case of the Sailors' Union and the Maritime Federation of the Pacific is the most flagrant, yet typical, example of CIO policy reversal. The CIO long ago recognized that the Federation was pivotal both because of principled agreement and outstanding prestige and strength. Their original attitude was consistent with their generally correct policy. The waterfront and seagoing workers were to maintain economic unity with the general labor movement. They were to undertake national organization unifying East and West Coasts, the Gulf and Great Lakes. Any possibility of creating a dual union situation in the maritime industry was to be avoided. Autonomy, rank and file control and West Coast conditions were the only possible basis for the National organization. As the one real organized force, the West Coast Seamen were to take the initiative in national organization of the sea going workers and their amalgamation into an industrial union. These terms were definitely and repeatedly stated by John L. Lewis and other responsible CIO leaders.

In rapid succession these terms were violated. John Brophy at the Maritime Federation Conven-

tion in Portland attempted to stampede the delegates into an affiliation vote. The question was referred to a referendum vote of the unions composing the Federation. Brophy's answer to questions revealed a curious hedging on questions of autonomy and democratic control. Immediately after the convention Lewis showed his real hand by arbitrarily appointing a Maritime Executive which gave no representation whatever to the S. U. P., one lone representative to the seafaring crafts and a clear majority to the Bridges-Stalinist crew who had been defeated on every major issue at the convention of the federation. To clinch the matter Marvin Rathborne, Bridges' stooge and chairman of Lewis' committee, emerged from its first session to announce that any West Coast unions which refused to accept its program would be immediately reorganized.

The CIO program was not organization of the unorganized East, Gulf and Lakes but "reorganization" of the solidly organized West Coast. This could only mean a CIO blessing for the Stalinists' consistent policy of trying to oust all independent progressive leaders on the West Coast. If any doubt were left it was dispelled by Bridges' appointment as West Coast CIO Director. The Sailors and Firemen immediately voted to destroy the affiliation ballots because the conditions had been misrepresented and were now the reverse of those originally advanced.

Stalinists Seek Control

The refusal of the seamen to buy a pig in a poke has brought a strong fire from the Stalinists and they have made repeated attempts to pack and capture the Sailors', Firemen and Cooks and Steward locals. Completely unsuccessful with the Sailors and with the Portland, Seattle and San Pedro branches of the other unions, they have been able by liberal use of longshore permit men and beached Stalinist seamen to hold the San Francisco headquarters of the Firemen and the Cooks. Though the unity of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific has proven the only weapon to defeat the shipowners, its majority is not under the Stalinist thumb, so a deliberate campaign is under way to undermine and wreck it with a Stalinized CIO as alternative!

The Sailors' decisions on affiliation and amalgamation are likely to prove effective answers to these maneuvers. The demand for a public and open reply from both CIO and A. F. of L. on affiliation terms forces both to show their hands. The Sailors are plain-spoken in their own statement addressed to Lewis and Green and printed in the West Coast Sailor. It reads in part:

Sailors Reply

"The question of national affiliation, as far as the Sailors' Union of the Pacific is concerned, is a practical question.

"As an organization of seamen we are interested in uniting the seamen in one strong National Seamen's Union, organized under a structure most beneficial to the seamen.

"Past experience has proven that as far as the seamen are

concerned this must be on an industrial basis; by that we mean that the various seamen's divisions, for instance, sailors, firemen, etc., must be organized in a National Organization which will guarantee the rank and file membership control of their union from the bottom up—and not from a top executive board or top committee, which never has and never will work out for the best interests of the seamen. This was proven in the case of the ISU; and is again being attempted on the East Coast by the N.M.U.

"Would you be willing to consider the following:

(In the letter to the A. F. of L.: Wind up the affairs of the defunct ISU completely and cancel its charter.)

1. Offer the SUP a national charter covering the unlicensed personnel, the offer to embody these guarantees:

a. Complete autonomy in the determination of policies, and the conduct of its own business.

b. Absolute control of funds, property, without possibility of confiscation by anyone.

c. The right to negotiate and

sign its own agreements.

d. The rights of the membership to referendum votes on the question of calling strikes; both on and off.

e. The right of the membership to determine the name of the National Organization.

f. A guarantee that we will not be assessed for any political purpose.

g. The right to elect our officials on referendum vote.

h. We are told that there is grave danger of the "check-off" system of deducting dues, assessments, fines, etc., from the sailors' pay by the shipowners who turn them over to a Top Committee of some seafaring Union. In other words, that the Shipowners would act as financial secretaries for the Unions, under this system. We would expect a guarantee that such a system would not be attempted in the seafaring Unions."

Decision is Sound

The effect of this decision is to put the major questions of progressive trade union principle ahead of the tactical one of affiliation. This is sound and genuine progressivism. It provides a real basis for democratic decision by seamen on all coasts.

In the meantime the SUP is cooperating with the seagoing Firemen and Cooks in an aggressive drive toward completing industrial organization on the West Coast by amalgamating the three crafts. Success in this will provide a nucleus for rallying the entire Maritime Federation of the Pacific and, in turn, the seamen nationally to a progressive program and for solid, industrial organization.

N.Y. Election Drive Notes

In a straw vote of City College students, James P. Cannon, Socialist Party, Left Wing) candidate for mayor showed surprising strength by running Mahoney a close third. The vote was LaGuardia, 1,320; Mahoney, 72; Cannon, 62. Incidentally, Norman Thomas, the surreptitious candidate of the conscience-stricken Clarityites, got 15 votes.

Election day this year will witness not only the close of one of New York's filthiest election campaigns but also the culmination of the biggest People's Front yet on a municipal scale. La Guardia expressed this when, in a fit of enthusiasm, he declared, "In 1937 I'll be elected, supported by the greatest combination of groups ever seen in American politics—conservatives, liberals, standpatters, progressives." He forgot to add fascists, "social-communists".

Norman Thomas, in a generous mood last week, passed out some compliments to the head of the People's Front ticket. He remarked that "the Mayor's action were often better than his words" and that the LaGuardia administration had made some "real progress in honesty." Since the S.P. expelled the revolutionary socialists it seems to have adopted new political standards.

Thomas also took exception to his being quoted in the press as having said that the ALP was still the tail of a kite. He said, "I held that view of it in 1936 but not of it in 1937." We have to disagree with Norman. The ALP's tail this year has branched out so that now it follows both the Republican and Democratic kites. The C.P. and S.P. also have their little tails attach-

ed to the ALP's double tail. That makes quite a procession of tails.

The ALP can't understand why labor-loving Senator Wagner should take the stump for labor-hating Judge Mahoney. Despite the fact that the Senator has been severely taken to task for this indiscretion, it seems almost certain that the ALP will support him when he runs for re-election next year.

Senator Wagner blasted the "insinuating whisper" that relief might be cut if Mahoney were elected. Said the Senator, "That fiction is inconceivable to anyone who knows—as I know—how Jeremiah Mahoney's heart beats in sympathy with the needy, how it quickens at the thought of civic improvement." That ought to bring in the votes.

For the first time in history the Citizens Union, an influential capitalist "good government" outfit, gave its qualification to a CP candidate. The individual in question is Isidore Begun whom the Citizens' Union praised as "a man of moderation." That shows a keen political insight of which we didn't think the CU capable.

The S.P. certainly drove a hard bargain with the ALP. In exchange for withdrawing the S.P. candidate for Mayor and for Borough President of the Bronx as well as several assembly candidates (to say nothing of giving up its very soul), the ALP merely "endorsed" one or two S.P. candidates for City Council. Since Councilmen are elected by a preferential vote and the ALP has its own candidates, the endorsement mean practically nothing.

Bill's Column

N. Y. Election Campaign

"It's the same old issue—Good Government vs. Bad"—LaGuardia's campaign slogan. Yes, the same old—but in larger buckets. "Laidler has gathered around him a group of progressive and forward looking men"—Socialist Call, Election Issue. Heading the "progressive" and "forward-looking" group are Paul Blanchard, a renegade who deserted the S.P. for the flesh pots of City Hall four years ago and John Haynes Holmes, who was expelled from the S.P. for attacking the Debs Column in the capitalist press and for an "inform-er's" letter to the State Department in Washington. Laidler, "the distinguished graduate of an undistinguished college," is certainly in good company! John D. Rockefeller donates \$1,000, stained with the blood of Ludlow, to LaGuardia's campaign fund. People's Front, yes, and such fine pipples—it's a pleasure!

'Counter-revolutionists'

Bela Kun joins the long list. "Stalin," Trotsky predicts, "will yet be shot as a Trotskyist." Antonov-Ovseyenko recalled from Spain to head the Commissariat of Justice found that commissariat ready to behead him... Trotsky is "happy to be back in America." You're telling me!

"If you hear of a communist advocating force and violence, mark him down as a stool pigeon"—Browder. Well, well! What a lot of stool pigeons were knocking around in the "Third Period" days of "battling for the streets."

"Oh say can you see by Browder's new light, "What so proudly we hailed, "In the third period's last gleaming."

Antidotes for Reformism

The best antidote for Alfred Baker Lewis' and Browder's belly-crawling testimony before the Massachusetts Legislative Committee, can be found in Gene Debs Canton, Ohio, speech delivered in the midst of the 1918 war hysteria. Said Debs, "It is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make the world free for democracy... I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than a sycophant and coward in the streets... They tell us that we live in a free, great republic; that our institutions are democratic; that we are a free self-governing people. That is too much even for a joke." But not too much for such jokers as Browder and Lewis.

Questions

To Al Hamilton, Secretary of the Thomas-Tyler Youth: "Is the YCL a 'rival' organization to the Yipsels or to the American Legion?"

To Norman Thomas: "Do you think that 'my good friend Dr. Laidler' plus renegade Blanchard plus informer Holmes will build Socialism in our time?"

To F.D.R.: "Do you recall your campaign speech on 'returning prosperity'?" "We planned it just like this." Did you also plan the present Hooverish days?

Contrast

"Thru democracy to socialism—communist election campaign slogan. "The road to socialism lies thru the proletarian dictatorship"—Lenin's slogan.