

CIO-AFL Meet Shows Prospects of Unity In Labor Movement

Washington, D. C.—Powerful economic and political forces are driving the leaders of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. in the direction of establishing unity of the labor movement, it was revealed as the so-called peace conference of the two warring groups met here this week.

The C.I.O. had received set-backs in its political campaigns, as shown by the defeats of its endorsed candidates in the municipal elections in middle-western industrial centers. It faces the serious possibility of a real fight with General Motors and U. S. Steel, in seeking renewal of the present contracts.

The C.I.O. will need the entire united strength of the American labor movement to win its battle to organize the huge Ford plants in Detroit.

Feel Business Recession

Above all, and this applies to the A. F. of L. also, the C.I.O. unions are feeling the effects of the current business recession through the lay-offs of thousands of union men in the mass production industries, and the unions are declining in membership and strength. The A. F. of L. leaders are considerably worried about the effects on its membership of the present down-swing in business activity.

The wave of reaction which developed in this country since the defeat of the "Little Steel" strike has gained impetus because the A. F. of L. executive council policy of splitting the labor movement weakened the workers' opposition to and encouraged the reactionary forces.

But this cut both ways. It injured not only the C.I.O., but also the A. F. of L., whose members felt the added pressure of the bosses more strongly than before. It is because the rank and file of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. directly suffer the bad effects of the split that they are pressing so vigorously for unity of the labor movement. Conversely, it is the fact that the labor bureaucrats on both sides feel the blows of the split only indirectly, that they permit many other minor considerations to block the path to unity.

The coming session of Congress accentuates the need for labor unity, and acts as an accelerating force in the progress of peace in labor's ranks. It will be too bad for both the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. if the capitalist politicians play them against one another and thereby avoid passing any legislation which might block the drive towards reaction.

Roosevelt's Position

Roosevelt has publicly stated that he desires labor unity, not, to be sure, because he wants labor solidarity against capitalism, but because he can better put over his own treacherous program, if he receives the united support of the C.I.O. - A. F. of L. lobbies.

Besides, Roosevelt and the entire administration have grown tired of being in the middle during the entire dispute between the two labor factions. And not the least of his reasons is Roosevelt's desire to have a united labor movement behind his pro-war policies which are due to be developed further by huge armament appropriations by Congress.

In other words, the pressure of the economic and political forces,

and the needs of the Roosevelt administration, are currently submerging the differences and pushing forward the common needs of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L.

Quite contrary to the popular impression, the question of industrial vs. craft unionism is not the major stumbling block between the two factions. Every union man recognizes the absolute correctness and success of industrial unionism in the mass production industries.

One of the most bitter opponents of the C.I.O., Wharton, president of the Machinists unions, has been organizing his Local Unions on an industrial basis for a long time. And many of the newly-chartered A. F. of L. federal unions are industrial in character.

Formula Found

A formula has already been found at the peace conference which can serve to settle amicably the industrial union question with sufficient face-saving for both leaderships. It is the resolution on industrial unionism adopted in the 1934 San Francisco national convention of the A. F. of L.

The San Francisco resolution directed the A. F. of L. executive council to issue charters for national industrial unions in the automotive, cement, aluminum and such other mass production and miscellaneous industries as in the judgment of the council might be necessary to meet the situation.

Preliminary discussions between the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. negotiating committees at the conference indicate that serious jurisdictional disputes involving the major C.I.O. unions can be avoided. Harrison of the A. F. of L. committee mentioned directly the auto, rubber, electrical and radio, newspaper, mine and maritime industries where he thought the problem could easily be settled. (The C.I.O. dare not compromise here).

What is important is that the

basic issue of industrial versus craft unionism has been settled by the organizational successes of the C.I.O., and both leaderships know it.

It should be remembered, too, that while John L. Lewis on the C.I.O. side and Hutcheson, of the Carpenters, on the A. F. of L. side, are bitter opponents and can provide stubborn opposition to peace, strong forces exist in both camps for peace.

David Dubinsky, of the Garment Workers, for example, has never agreed with all the C.I.O. policies as outlined by Lewis and has continually sought means to compromise the differences and rejoin the A. F. of L. even though it might have meant giving serious concessions.

Nothing illustrates more clearly that whatever peace is reached will be one favorable first to both trade union bureaucracies than the fact that neither side mentions democracy for the rank and file as a condition for the new united labor movement. John L. Lewis and William Hutcheson see eye to eye on this question.

Unity of the labor movement might not come immediately. There are many possible monkey wrenches that can stop the machinery towards peace, and it is obvious that some of the bureaucrats on both sides will seriously threaten any progress made at the present conference.

Unity Needed

Continued rank and file pressure on both the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. leaders is the best guarantee that the misleaders will be defeated. The present cry for unity with full rights for industrial unionism must swell into a thunderous chorus whose power will prove invincible.

Combined with a struggle for democracy within the unions (A. F. of L. and C.I.O.) and the adoption of militant class struggle policies against the bosses, the fight for unity can serve as a tremendous step forward in preparing the workers for their ultimate struggle—the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Push The Appeal

It is a sad commentary on the American comrades and sympathizers that letters like the following do not come from them—but must come from outside the country. Toronto is coming through. Not only do the comrades there send in contributions—but their subscriptions are increasing and their bundle orders are paid for promptly. Toronto alone cannot keep the Appeal going. The following letter is typical of what should be coming from American comrades:

"Dear Comrades:
Greetings to the Socialist Appeal as you step out to defend revolutionary Marxism. It is indeed a pleasure to see once again

a revolutionary organ of the American working class. The Appeal is meeting with such a fine response in Toronto and we are certainly pleased with its contents and calibre of its articles.

"Enclosed you will find a slight contribution of \$13.50, a gesture of solidarity to your movement in the U. S. from a group of Toronto 4th Internationalists.

"With comradely greetings, A Group of Toronto Trotskyists."
Now is the time to start subscription drives. If the Appeal could realize its increase in subscriptions it would not be necessary to make these weekly appeals for contributions.

Pleading With Fur Bosses Is Fatal to Labor

When the Stalinists wrested control of the apparatus of the Furriers Union, it became apparent that in their march to People's Frontism away from the class struggle they would stop at nothing to establish collaboration with the bosses. We can best understand the depth of this class collaboration policy by investigating the course of the administration in serving the stipulations of the agreement.

Mass Action Ended

According to the agreement signed with the bosses, overtime and contracting out of town is strictly forbidden. Since the beginning of 1937 only one employer was to be permitted to work in a shop. No floor boy was to engage in productive work. Further, old time furriers who could not keep up with the speed-up system were to be placed on jobs. Concerning overtime, instead of organizing workers' committees to patrol the furriers shops to guarantee that there would be no extra labor, especially on Saturday and Sunday, the union officials were deliberately indifferent.

By preventing the widespread overtime the administration could have created jobs for its unemployed workers. Now and then the union did pay men to visit shops and stop overtime but by no means did they cover the multitude of overtime factories. The refusal of the C. P. officials to organize large, effective furriers committees against overtime is explained when we realize how anxious they are to gain the good will and friendship of the bosses. The fact is that since the Stalinists gained control of the administration there has been no real mass action whatsoever. Everything is conducted with an eye to "law and order."

Instead of carefully fulfilling the terms of the union agreement, which entitles only one boss to work in a shop, the furrier officials have so compromised the union that today in all shops two bosses are permitted to work.

This part of the agreement was to be enforced in January 1937. At that time the Stalinists conducted a series of conferences with the association which were stretched into months. Finally, a shady agreement was made which gives two bosses the right to work and at the same time provides two extra months of equal division of work in the year for the furriers. The big gainers from this deal are the bosses. Thanks to this arrangement the unemployed unionists who had hoped to secure work remain standing in the streets of the fur market.

It is indeed ironical that the Stalinists have found the gall to tell furriers that this state of affairs is a victory of the workers. This is the fruit of class collaboration.

In the last few years, the problem of the floor boys replacing regular furriers spread to a majority of shops particularly in the cheap line. The chief victims of this were the nailers. Semi-skilled floor boys were given union books by the Stalinists and permitted to do the work of skilled men—literally rendering large sections of nailers jobless. To protect their reactionary machine in the union from the growing ranks of dis-

contented furriers, the Stalinists imported large numbers of YCL-ers who serve as "floor boys."

The union has virtually done nothing to rid the industry of large-scale contracting which takes the bread from the mouths of furriers. No effort is made to secure work for the old furriers as provided in the agreement.

Another critical problem has developed in the industry. Despite the expectations of the furriers for a good season in 1937, it was already clear in July, normally the height of the season, that there was a sharp lull. By the end of August, 10,000 of the 14,000 furriers were unemployed and condemned to go without work until May 1938. At the same time the furriers must face a new conference with the association for a new agreement which may necessitate a general strike and a further loss of work.

The Stalinists, understanding the seriousness of the present crisis, and to quiet the dissatisfied furriers, called a conference of all shop chairmen to discuss the situation. At the conference, Ben Gold and Manager Potash did their utmost to prove that the responsibility of the present crisis rests with the capitalist system. Therefore, the furriers should not expect too much. However, explained Gold, the union will hold a conference with the bosses to get whatever they can to improve their conditions.

Such arguments poison the minds of workers and educate them to be satisfied with the crumbs that capitalism hands them. Is it not a fact that because of capitalism and its repressions workers organized into unions? Is it not also true that whatever gains the workers made were won despite the boss system and in struggle against it by the organized force of the unions?

From the above mentioned arguments of the Stalinists and their supporters the furriers could see the lack of integrity with which they would go to negotiate with bosses.

The Four Points

The chairmen's meeting adopted the following four points which were recommended by Ben Gold and the Manager of the union.

1. That the discharged workers shall be reinstated.
2. That the work be distributed in 20-hour a week periods.
3. That bosses shall not be allowed to work in the shops.
4. To maintain the level of seasonal wages.

The result of the reformist policy of the Stalinists of begging the bosses to concede these four points, brought them a nose thumbing as an answer.

In place of taking action against the bosses, the Stalinists turned over the whole problem to the so-called impartial chairman of the fur trade. Meanwhile thousands of furriers are unemployed and the Stalinists adopted a policy of waiting.

The furriers can expect no more. Even if the bosses accept the agreement offered, the season is over.