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National Hunger March and the Next Steps

THE National Hunger March aimed to broaden the united front struggle for federal unemployment relief and for the Workers Unemployment Insurance Bill; to involve large sections of the working class in local struggles; to dramatize the struggle in a manner that would rouse the masses throughout the country; to present the demands to the U. S. Congress. These aims in the main were achieved.

It is necessary, however, to clear up some ideas that exist in the minds of Party members.

1) Was the hunger march necessary? There were those who argued against the march, *not understanding* or *underestimating* the political significance of the march: the opening of the United States Congress, which had no intention whatever of considering unemployment relief and the fact that it was a *Democratic* Congress, which in view of the election of Roosevelt, was to be compelled to make good some of Roosevelt's promises. This could be done at no more *impressive* time than at the very opening of Congress. Therefore the march was correct.

2) There were ideas that the National Hunger March would dampen the development of local struggles.

3) There are ideas prevalent that since only a delegation of 10 each were allowed to present the demands to the House of Representatives and Senate, these workers could have been selected in the various localities and from the different industries, and have accomplished the same task. This is the position of the liberals, Socialists, etc.—that the march was a “futile gesture”. This means to underestimate the entire role of *mass* mobilization, *mass* organization and *mass* pressure.

What has made the country ring with the question of *starvation* is just the National Hunger March, and with it the question of federal relief and insurance. But the march alone did not accomplish this. The intensified local activities and struggles leading up to the hunger march, the open hearings and trials, disclosed the mass hunger as never before. The mobilization of the workers at these hearings, struggles and demonstrations, the hundreds of thousands of workers who greeted the hunger marchers passing through towns; and, as was revealed through the actions in Washington, the splendid response of the workers everywhere against the imprisonment of the marchers, helped to deepen the class-consciousness, helped to revolutionize the workers throughout the country.

Achievements and Weaknesses of the Hunger March

The strong points of the march must be pointed out: 1) More struggles in the cities and towns in preparations for the march. 2) All the marchers were elected by definite bodies of workers. 3) Good composition: a high percentage of Negro workers, men and women, especially from the South; nearly 1,000 young workers, including some homeless youth; a high percentage of native-born workers. 4) Only about 30 per cent of marchers were Party and Y.C.L. members (the check-up is not yet complete). 5) Better participation of the revolutionary unions (295 marine workers) and of some outstanding union leaders—marine, mining, textile, needle. 6) Splendid working class discipline and militancy, and good division and column leadership.

The shortcomings were: 1) An *insufficiently broad* united front. Only *few new* A. F. of L. and other reformist locals and mass organizations were reached that have not as yet participated in our struggles. (About 250 A. F. of L. members were present.) The opponent unemployed organizations were weakly represented. 2) Weak political preparation for the march. 3) Inadequate organization of the Party press, with the exception of the *Freiheit*. 4) Totally inadequate exposure of the enemies and splitters of the movement (A. F. of L. bureaucrats, S. P., Musteites, etc.). 5) Insufficient preparations in Washington itself, where, for weeks, a barrage of propaganda against the march, along the lines of Hoover's "discouraging" tactics, was being conducted. 6) Totally insufficient preparations for the return march, as a result of which there were some serious losses from exposure and needless struggles. 7) Failure to organize broad demonstrations in all the districts on December 6, the time of the presentation of the demands in Washington. 8) Failure to energetically recruit into the Party and Y.C.L. from among the militant marchers.

Our Present Tasks

The struggle must be intensified not only for adequate local relief but to force action by the U. S. Congress.

1) Local struggles for relief, against evictions, for shelter, for food and clothing for the children, for veteran's relief. This can be amplified by struggles for the immediate concrete needs, *no matter how little they may be*, of the workers in the blocks and neighborhoods, which will rally the workers for struggle. This means the establishment of the broadest united front in action.

2) County and state conferences and marches, drawing in the farmers.

3) Setting up of committees in all the red unions and mass organizations of every character, to carry on the fight for relief of their members, and to draw the membership, through dele-

gates to the neighborhood unemployed councils into the general struggles of the unemployed.

4) Penetration of the locals of the A. F. of L., Railway Brotherhoods and independent unions, on the basis of the decisions of the Cincinnati Conference of the A. F. of L. Rank and File Committee for Unemployment Insurance; to intensify the struggle for relief and insurance along the lines laid down by this committee. Drawing of these locals into the Unemployed Councils through delegates and into joint activities. At the same time they must intensify their struggles against the bureaucrats, against expulsion for non-payment of dues, for relief from union funds, cuts in salaries, etc.

5) Continual exposure of local conditions through investigations, open hearings, trials, etc.

6) Persistent exposure of the splitters of the unemployed movement—the various fake insurance schemes being put forward by politicians, A. F. of L. leaders, the Socialist Party—Borders outfit, Musteites—Unemployed Citizens Leagues, and other local organizations.

7) A struggle against the right opportunist errors in the united front—a capitulation to the treacherous policies and practices of the reformists, on the ground that this is “against the policy of the united front”, that the “reformists will expose themselves”, etc. (This has been excellently exposed in the article by Comrade John Williamson in the December issue of *The Communist*.)

8) Building of the Unemployed Councils, especially in the towns reached by the hunger march. Building of block committees as the *basic* units of the Unemployed Council, but with greater flexibility when the workers themselves desire a more compact form of organization. Building of language organizations among foreign-born workers, who can be better reached through their own language.

9) Recruiting of the unemployed into the revolutionary unions of their trades and systematic recruiting for the Party and Y. C. L.

10) The Party territorial units must a) Build up block committees in their territory in the name and with the knowledge of the Unemployed Council. b) Fractions must be built in the block committees (and unemployed councils) of all Party and Y.C.L. members. The unit must direct the work of the Party fraction in the block committee. c) The districts and sections must work through the corresponding fractions, and not through decisions handed directly to the councils, through so-called representatives in the block committees and councils.

The building of the unemployed councils and the active struggle for local relief is the surest road to forcing the United States Government to grant federal relief and unemployment insurance.

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