

Unity in the Struggle for Social Insurance

By I. AMTER

NEVER before was the need of unity of the working class and of social insurance greater than at the present moment. The situation of the working class, with 17,000,000 unemployed, with almost a like number of part-time workers toiling at miserable wages; the frightful speed-up which has no limit; the increasing attacks on the rights of the workers—all demand the greatest unity.

The promises and actions of the Roosevelt government have not solved the situation. On the contrary, the situation of the workers progressively has worsened. Relief cuts, refusal to accept new applicants, wholesale evictions, growing discrimination against Negro and foreign-born workers, wage-cuts, murder and deportation of working class militants have increased.

This has not stopped the struggles of the workers. Strike struggles are growing. Militant battles of the unemployed have shown that the workers will not accept the capitalist program of further degradation of the working class. In recent months, there have been splendid struggles led in the main by the Unemployed Councils for relief; against forced labor (Washington, Oregon, New Jersey, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Ohio, etc.); against evictions (Pittsburgh, New York); for relief of single workers (Chicago, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles); against Negro discrimination; against high rents (Norfolk, New York); against the commissary plan (Pennsylvania, Washington); for relief from the big capitalists (Ford hunger march); demonstrations at relief bureaus, local demonstrations, county and state marches; cooperation with the striking dairy farmers (Iowa and Wisconsin); presentation of State social insurance bills in many States.

The Roosevelt government now steps forward with the Industrial Recovery Act as the cure-all of all evils in the system. This act is creating illusions, and, being accompanied by tremendous propaganda by the capitalist press and all capitalist agencies, raises false hopes in the minds of masses of workers. Even before it was put into operation, the ballyhoo machine spread false reports of "1,629,000 men having returned to work in April and May," and that "we hope that 5,000,000 men will be back at work by October 1." The purpose of this is to *disarm* the workers and keep them unprepared for the onslaught on their conditions that is in store.

The workers must await *attacks on their living conditions such as they have never experienced before.*

The Industrial Recovery Act compels the capitalists to organize into associations and trade groups. Thus they will be unified in their assaults on the workers under "governmental sanctions and supervision." Not only is the bulk of the workers unorganized in this country, but the capitalists supported by the reformist leaders have done, and will continue to do, everything in their power to divide the employed and unemployed workers, Negro and white workers. To meet these attacks, *unity* of the working class on the basis of a militant program of struggle is imperative.

This unity must embrace all sections of the working class, employed and unemployed, organized and unorganized, white and Negro, native and foreign-born. It must unite the workers irrespective of political or religious opinions or affiliation. Basic to this unity is not the question of the political party the worker belongs to, or a demand that he sever his relations with any political party. The united front clearly implies *unity in struggle on the basis of a program of immediate aims.* In the struggle against hunger and worsening conditions, in the struggle against the Roosevelt program, we can and must unite the broadest sections of the working class and lead the counter-offensive.

This means reaching the workers in the shops and unions, in the neighborhoods and mass organizations. It means the penetration of the most backward as well as the advanced workers and rousing them to carry on a fight for their very existence. It means the most rapid mobilization and organization of the fighting front of the workers against the bosses' program, which leads to worse hunger and to war. This is a challenge to our Party, which the Party will carry out.

The workers are looking for leadership and for unity. They feel their helplessness, being broken into so many groups. The united front under the leadership of the Party establishes that form of struggle that will furnish the weapon and inspire the workers to greater militancy than ever.

The workers demand *security*. In the shop today there is no protection for the worker. Facing the masses outside the mill, the employed workers fear the lowering of wages, the loss of their jobs. Compelled to speed up, they fear their inability to make the pace. Faced with old age, they fear being thrown into the streets. The result today is that workers submit to the most *heart-breaking* conditions in the shops in order to hold their jobs. Accidents, industrial diseases, old age, maternity are throwing hundreds of thousands out of work. This is in addition to the millions who are out of the shops today and will not return to work.

Millions of young workers have not seen the inside of a factory; millions graduating from the schools and colleges each year face the same situation. No matter how much increase in production will take place on the basis of speculation, of taking advantage of present price scales, and for war purposes, there will come an even *greater collapse*, against which the workers demand protection.

This presents the *whole* working class with the clearest demand for security of life, irrespective of whether they obtain work or not. Unemployment relief is totally insufficient, and now is being cut down on the demand of the bankers and landlords. Discrimination against large sections persists. Barest hunger rations have been handed out to the workers, which hardly suffice to keep alive. The worst degradation of the working class is the perspective unless the workers fight. The task of rallying the workers against this situation is clear.

This security is to be found in *Social Insurance* for all workers—a *central* and *immediate* need and demand of the *whole* working class. The struggle for it becomes a *main* task of the Party, and around this demand the broadest united front must be mobilized.

The Party and the Unemployed Councils have succeeded in broadening the united front on a local, State and national scale. The organization at the convention in Chicago of the National Federation of the unemployed organizations was a step in this direction. This convention set up a federation of all unemployed organizations, with the objective of forming neighborhood, city, county and State federations on the same basis. This convention was conceived of by the leaders of the Socialist Party as a means of building a national unemployed organization under Socialist leadership in opposition to the Unemployed Councils. Defeated in this purpose, the Socialists split the convention. A further step was taken at the Pennsylvania convention of the Unemployed Citizens League, from which again the Socialists split. This splitting, strikebreaking activity they repeated in a different form in New York City. Further united front steps will be taken at the Ohio State and national conventions of the Unemployed Citizens League in July. In building these united front federations, the Party and the Unemployed Councils played an outstandingly leading part.

These united fronts, however, embrace only a *fraction* of the working class. If the aim of security is to be achieved, a broader front must be established. The error must be corrected of conceiving that the united front of the unemployed organizations is an aim in itself (New York). The aim of *the united front* is to *forge a weapon that will enable us to reach ever broader strata of the working class*, which is yearning for unity and will support it.

The various conventions went on record not only for the united

front in action, but also for *merging* the unemployed organizations in the country. This is a goal to be reached through intensified united front struggle. It is an immediate need of the workers particularly in the struggle for Social Insurance.

The main issue of the last election campaign and of the Democratic Party was unemployment insurance. Since March 4, this has been a forgotten slogan of the government, owing to the slackening of *our* struggle for social insurance. The last convention of the American Federation of Labor, reversing the position of the previous convention, went on record endorsing unemployment insurance. But since the convention, the A. F. of L. leaders have dropped the demand in their full support of the Roosevelt program. The Socialist Party put forward a bogus program of unemployment insurance, but now supports the unemployment reserves plans that were proposed in several States, and since have been shelved.

None of these bills would provide insurance for the millions now out of work. These bills are supposed to be a provision against future unemployment, but eliminate from protection large sections of the workers, farm, domestic and white collar workers; workers who have not been employed a specified time within the State; locked out and striking workers; workers who have been discharged for "misconduct." The worker would be compelled to make a contribution to the unemployment reserves fund and accept a waiting period before getting insurance. In some instances, the system is not obligatory on the employers, who may establish a system of their own. The amount of insurance and its duration indicate the "sincere" desire of these disciples of Roosevelt to help the workers. They provide a maximum of 15 weeks of insurance and of \$180 in any year—or \$3.70 a week throughout the year! This is the type of unemployment insurance promised by the Democratic Party and supported by the leaders of the A. F. of L. and Socialist Party!

The Communist Party declares that the workers are not responsible for the crisis or for unemployment. The workers are fighting against hunger and against the starvation wages, long hours, speed-up, accidents and diseases acquired in the shops. The workers who have toiled long years at the bench want security when superannuated. Working mothers want protection when giving birth to a child. The millions of the permanent army of unemployed want the right to live. This must be a *first charge* on industry and the government—and the employers and the State must be compelled to furnish it.

This demand must be made of the Federal government which has the obligation to care for the welfare of all the workers. Although the demand should also be placed before the State governments, it must be realized that this splits up the forces of the work-

ers in the 48 states, and means delays and constitutional provisions that would only retard the fight. Therefore, although fighting also for State social insurance, the main target of attack should be the Federal government. We must also demand that the employers and the government alone bear the expense of the insurance, and that the workers be exempt from any contributions. Proposals such as that the employers contribute a certain percentage of the payroll are merely a recommendation for a wage cut (California).

The Workers Social Insurance Bill alone embodies security for all workers. The Bill provides social insurance for all workers, irrespective of category, white and Negro, native and foreign-born, men and women, without any discrimination, for the full period of unemployment or disability—accident, sickness, old age, maternity. It provides insurance equivalent to the average wages in the respective industries and localities, but at no time to be less than \$10 a week for adult workers and \$3 for each dependent. It demands that part-time workers shall receive the difference between their wages and the unemployment insurance benefit. The fund shall be raised by graduated taxation of all incomes above \$5,000, and by the use of all war funds for the unemployed. The social insurance fund shall be administered not by government institutions, but by commissions of workers elected through their organizations.

Who should get insurance? Clearly every worker, without discrimination, who is forced into idleness through no fault of his own. The crisis has thrown 17,000,000 out of the shops and factories. These workers and their families have gone through the torture of hell. Many millions of them have received no aid whatever either from public or private institutions. The result has been Rooseveltburgs, jungles, suicides, and insanity on an unprecedented scale. Millions of workers tramp up and down the country in search of a crust of bread. Millions more have obtained relief from the municipalities and State, but this has not only been real starvation relief, but now is being seriously reduced. It is obvious therefore that only through insurance will the unemployed worker be secured in his livelihood.

The dropping of the older men in industry is a curse to the working class. In the shops, on the railroads, in the mines, the older workers are being discarded. The speed-up in the shops is terrific; the older workers, possessing skill and experience, no longer are needed, for the machine not only works faster, but has taken away a large part of the skill of the workers—not only in the shops, but even in the offices. The terrible speed-up and rationalization is leading to a multiplication of cases of industrial and occupational diseases. It is leading to increasing accidents. Facing the danger of unemployment, workers not only do not report accidents, but

return to work long before they are cured. Working women have been known to bear their children in the shops of this country. The working mother has no protection either before or after childbirth. This increases the anxiety of the working class family, especially at a time of childbirth.

It is clear, therefore, that provision must be made for all such situations, if the workers are to obtain security—and the demand for security is one of the deepest and furthest-reaching in the working class.

Part-time workers today frequently receive less in wages than workers obtaining relief—and at the same time they are being denied relief to make up for the loss. This is an intolerable situation, and leads to the degradation of the working class family. The Workers Unemployment Insurance Bill provides that part-time workers shall be entitled to the difference between their wages and the amount of relief to which a worker of the same category is entitled. Even more—full time workers today in many industries, especially the sweated industries, working like mad for long hours, receive less in wages than the relief recipients. Thus unemployment insurance, as one phase of social insurance, affects all sections of the workers.

What shall be the amount of the social insurance benefit? Shall we demand only sufficient to maintain bare existence? This raises the whole question of capitalism and the workers' hire. Shall the workers propose their own degradation, or shall they not as the victims of the capitalist system demand that 1) they receive decent wages for reasonable hours in the shops, so that they may bring up their families properly; and 2) if denied the right to work or to earn enough part-time, that the employers and the government provide them with the necessary assured income? Unquestionably the workers recognize their right to this demand.

In the performance of their work, the workers are injured in the factory; they are the victims of occupational diseases—thereby being deprived of their earning power. It is not correct to accept a mere pittance: this means to accept the capitalist charity position.

A worker deprived of the possibility of working, if through no fault of his own, has the right to his previous earning power. This should be determined on the basis of the average wages in the industry and territory. With wages down to the starvation level we cannot consent, for instance, that a textile worker earning \$4 to \$6 a week shall receive only the same amount in insurance. The United States Department of Labor declared only a short while ago that a working class family needs for food alone between \$7.50

to \$10.25 a week. Other investigators demand a minimum of \$1,800 for the workers' family. A minimum, therefore, for the working class family must be established in the insurance plan. This is provided in the demand for a minimum of \$10 for each unemployed worker, plus \$3 for each dependent.

The objection is raised that this is above the average of wages earned in the shop. Such objections are raised by those who, together with the rest of the workers, have submitted to the hunger budget provided by the municipal relief bureaus. This has led to a demoralization of the workers, and therefore the Unemployed Councils were correct in raising the question of the *Workers Relief Budget* around which the workers should and can be rallied for struggle.

Who should pay for the insurance? The government and the capitalists who are the beneficiaries of the present system. Social insurance should be considered as a first demand on capitalism—the right of the worker to security. The funds can be raised by taxes, the use of war funds and by means of a capital levy. Every worker will see the reasonableness of taking away a portion of the 60 billion dollars of wealth controlled by Morgan for the security of the millions of working class families during the entire period of idleness.

Nor should the worker consent to take strikebreaking jobs, or work below the standard of his trade. This would act against the whole spirit and need of unity of the working class.

The fund must be administered and controlled by commissions composed of workers. The graft and favoritism inevitably practiced by public institutions and politicians make it impossible for the workers to get a square deal in their suffering.

The struggle for social insurance must involve not only the unemployed workers. It affects the whole working class. The employed workers are equally affected: social insurance would afford them greater security against strikebreaking, thus encouraging them to put forward demands in the shops and to strike; it furnishes them with the necessary security in case of enforced idleness from the shop.

We have been negligent in the proposal of social insurance, in that we have brought forward only the unemployment phase of it, and have appealed mainly, if not solely, to the unemployed workers. This is an error, and the demand must now be taken into every shop, union and mass organization, and both the employed and unemployed workers be mobilized for it.

We must dissipate the idea that social insurance is only a slogan.

In the minds of many comrades it is a demand realizable only at the time of the revolution. This is a fallacy. Social insurance is an immediate demand, its realization depending on the degree to which we are able to mobilize the masses to struggle for it. Social insurance has been won through struggle in Europe. The form of it is not satisfactory, nor the amount of benefit. In many countries of Europe where unemployment insurance is in operation, the number of beneficiaries is being mercilessly reduced, the amount of benefit being slashed (Means Test in England, etc.). This the governments are putting through on the grounds of economy and with the aid of the social-democrats. A system of full social insurance such as in the Soviet Union will be possible only after the proletarian revolution, when working class lives and not profits will come first.

The struggle for social insurance therefore becomes a central task of the Party in the mobilization of the working class and all its sections for an immediate demand and in building up the forces for struggle against capitalism. Social insurance is a *unifying* slogan, uniting the employed and unemployed on an immediate need.

A campaign will be launched that must penetrate every shop, union, neighborhood and mass organization. In the form of petitions, referendums in the unions and mass organizations, through deputations to State and national institutions, demonstrations, etc., it must be made the central issue of the working class, particularly in face of the effects of the Industrial Recovery Act on the workers. It must be made a central demand of the election campaign and through it we should be able to penetrate sections of the working population that we have not reached before. Although more than 1,000 locals of the A. F. of L. have gone on record in support of the bill, this is hardly a beginning. The multitudinous fraternal organizations, reactionary in character but containing masses of workers, must be drawn in. The bill must be discussed in light of the Roosevelt promises, and the unemployment reserve bills proposed, and the treacherous action of the A. F. of L. and Socialist leaders be brought out. This will put the Party again into the leadership of the fight for social insurance, which, during the past year was challenged by the various other organizations that proposed fake bills.

To inaugurate this campaign, the notion and practice widespread among some of the lower functionaries and rank and file of the Party must be uprooted: the "distinction" between "Party" and "mass" work. *Mass work is Party work*, and there is no Party work which is not mass work. The whole Party membership must be mobilized; the Party fractions in the mass organizations must

draw the workers into participation. In the process of the struggle the Unemployed Councils must be built up, and the united front in the neighborhoods and lower mass organizations be extended. The Party will have to learn that unity depends in part of the development of the broadest democracy in the mass organizations, with the freest, democratic expression of opinion, making of decisions and carrying out of elections. In this process, the leading forces which are so badly needed for carrying on the struggle will come to the front. They must be cultivated and developed and the best elements be drawn into the Party and Y.C.L.

Unity cannot be established by resolutions and manifestoes. It will come only through struggle. The unified struggle of the masses, drawing ever larger sections of the workers into swing, will produce the mass pressure that will force the government to provide social insurance.
