

More Leadership in the Struggle for Unemployment Insurance

THE capitalist class led by the Roosevelt government is trying to create the impression that employment is on the upgrade and that unemployment is passing away. Continual reports in the capitalist papers about the hiring of new men and of wage increases (published with the clear intention of having the workers forget the starvation wages they have received in the past three years and of keeping them from struggle cannot offset the fact that relief agencies point out the increasing number of those on the relief rolls and the diminishing amount of relief. The relief directors also admit that *the situation during the coming winter will be more severe than before.*

The industrial "recovery" bill, which will have been enacted into law before this is published, involving an expenditure of \$3,300,000,000 over a period of two years, also aims to blind the workers to the actual situation. *Wages, hours and conditions of work will be determined by a control board—which means forced labor on a large scale.*

While the capitalists are ballyhooing about returning prosperity, let us not forget what Roosevelt said a few months ago: "If we should return to the peak production of 1929, from 5 to 10 million workers will not go back to work." While the capitalist point to the increased production in the steel industry, let us quote the N. Y. Times of May 25, 1933: *"The producers themselves are in a somewhat incredulous frame of mind; they do not know whether the*

upturn has behind it the force needed for a permanent improvement."

With steel production up to 38 per cent; with auto production and building construction mounting; with power output increasing, one would be blind to state that there is no change. But is this production for *use*? A glance at the car loadings will show clearly that it is not,—*it is for stock*. Taking advantage of the low prices and fear the rising prices, the manufacturers are turning out material for stock. Some more workers have gone back to work at miserable wages: soon again the stocks will be built up and these workers will be fired. There are no markets for production, neither domestic or foreign—and therefore the basis for the renewed production is the laying in of stock.

In this situation, with diminishing funds for relief; with complaints of the big taxpayers against the rates; with the bankers demanding "economy" and dictating terms; with the U. S. government appropriating a measly \$500,000,000 for unemployment relief, on the basis of \$250,000,000 being available to the states and cities provided they raise \$2 for each dollar they obtain from the federal government; with the number of applicants (not recipients) for relief increasing; what is doing in the unemployed movement?

Everywhere there is a cut in relief. Everywhere they are trying to substitute food tickets and commissary for cash relief. A wave of evictions is crossing the country. There were sentimental and economical reasons for not carrying on wholesale evictions during the winter months, but now they are beginning on a very large scale, as for instance in New York, where the city administration is refusing to pay any rents.

In face of this situation, with an admitted 17,000,000 unemployed, with conditions progressively becoming worse for the masses of unemployed and part-time workers—and for large sections of the full time workers—it must be stated that our Party work is *very deficient*. The main shortcomings are:

1. Failure of the Districts to explain the situation and lack of belief of the Party members in the Party position that *large-scale unemployment is a permanent phenomenon*; that conditions are not improving; that the municipalities *can* be compelled to furnish more adequate relief—that real Unemployment Insurance can be secured.

2. Consequently, inability of our Party members to explain to and convince the workers of the possibility of obtaining proper relief and unemployment insurance. A consequent acceptance of

vast masses of the workers of the conditions of pauperism in which they are living.

3. Lack of attention of the Districts to the proper orientation of the Party fraction in the Unemployed Councils; little heed to organizational problems; little effort to put the Unemployed Councils on the *committee* basis (block, neighborhood, ward, flophouse, forced labor project, etc.) Building up neighborhood councils, as delegated bodies.

4. No effort made to penetrate the A. F. of L. unions (leaving this task to the A. F. of L. Committee for Unemployment Insurance).

5. Not even a start in raising the question in the mass American fraternal and mutual aid organizations, which have a membership of 26,000,000, which are losing their members because of unemployment, and in which the question of unemployment relief and insurance can be made live issues. Work only in "our" organizations.

6. Failure to make the revolutionary unions the initiators of unemployed work, although every Party member in the unions accepts the Prague resolution. (In Youngstown a correct theory, but wrong application—the Union to organize the employed, the Unemployed Council the unemployed!)

7. Little attention to the young workers, and relief for single workers. (In St. Louis, the organizer of a branch, in which there are some live Italian boys, wished to throw them out for their "monkey business," because they also wanted sports!)

8. No struggle around the special grievances of the Negro workers: discrimination in relief, work relief, etc. Failure in Chicago to note that on the Southside, the Negro and white workers were compelled to line up separately at the relief buros, with the result that there is a serious weakening of support among the Negro workers.

9. The Districts appoint and remove functionaries of the Unemployed Councils, without any regard to the democratic rights of the workers. (If a Party member is needed for other work, he is simply instructed to resign from the Unemployed Council and another comrade is put in his place, even if he has not participated in the unemployed work.)

10. Little effort to develop new forces, and to put non-party elements into leadership that have come out of the struggle and have the confidence of the workers.

11. No systematic education of the workers; little or no social and cultural life in the blocks and councils.

12. A tendency to demonstrative actions, instead of steady, hard

work in the neighborhoods, building up organization and conducting concrete struggle.

13. Finally and *most important of all*, the units of the Party in few instances are responsible for unemployed work, but assign a few members to do unemployed work in a most haphazard manner.

Of few of the Districts covered in my recent tour can it be said that the District Committees are giving proper attention to the unemployed work. During the recent hunger march in Illinois—a tremendous undertaking—the District left the matter to the Unemployed Council, with the result that there were outstanding weaknesses. In Ohio, the Unemployed work is very weak, the District paying attention because of the contemplated state hunger march. In Detroit, the District Committee has allowed the work to slump—even in Detroit itself, with little outside. In Pittsburgh, the situation is much better, but with the metal workers union only now getting a proper position on its role in unemployed work. Surely it has taken a long time! In Buffalo, little attention, with our influence among the Negroes quite low. In Boston, only now a slight awakening to the needs of the situation.

Altogether, it is imperative that the Districts put unemployed work on the order of business and that it be made a matter of *regular discussion, review and check-up*. The situation of the workers demands it. The moves of the united front and for unity make it imperative. But above all, our Party must become conscious of the fact that unemployment is a permanent phenomenon today and no zigzag course of industrial production will eliminate it. The struggle for Unemployment Insurance is the immediate issue. It must be made clear to the Party members first of all. The workers are willing to fight, as the innumerable struggles led by all Unemployed Councils testify. We have only a small fraction of the unemployed and part-time workers involved in struggle. We are not building the unions on the basis also of the unemployed struggles. The Prague and Central Committee resolutions must be read and studied again, and be popularized among the membership and the workers at large.

I. AMTER