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The Coming Struggle

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MANY indications are at hand to show that the position of influence and leadership won during the past couple of years by the left-wing elements in many sections of the trade union movement is about to be sorely tried and tested. We may look, during the oncoming months, for a great sharpening of the struggle between the reactionary and revolutionary forces, and forever greater demands being made upon the left-wing's claim to leadership.

The Economic Crisis

The basic cause of these developments will be the business depression now looming on the industrial horizon. Signs of this multiply on all sides. Industry is gradually slowing down. Already several large lines of work have been heavily hit. Unemployment is steadily on the increase. It may be several months before the full force of the crisis hits us, but that it is developing only the most optimistic will deny. Events in Europe are hastening the American industrial breakdown. Germany, ever a great customer of the United States, is now in a state of collapse and totally incapable of absorbing any considerable show of products from this country. England and France are also gradually drifting towards similar economic chaos. This is eloquently demonstrated by the recent spectacular decline in the value of the pound sterling and the franc. Stripped of such great customers as Germany, England and France, the United States cannot hope to go along for any considerable length of time. Inevitably the breakdown must come.

The impending crisis will without fail engender a bitter attack by the capitalists against the organizations and standards of living of the workers. This great "open shop" drive will be fought out under conditions particularly favorable to the capitalists and disadvantageous to the workers. On the one hand, the capitalists have gained tremendously in organized strength and self-confidence in the past few years. Having beaten the trade unions time and again, they have lost all respect for the latter's fighting ability and they will start the offensive with the

avowed intention of crushing them altogether. On the other hand, the workers, dispirited from their many defeats and with little confidence in their leaders and organizations, will go into the fight half whipped. Faced by the aggressive employers, who are driven on by their own militant spirit and the force of economic necessity to cut wages, lengthen hours, and worsen working conditions, the workers, harassed on all sides by the army of unemployed, will be confronted by a desperate situation. When it develops, the coming "open shop" drive will create a life and death struggle for the entire labor movement.

Betrayal by Yellow Leaders

In this critical situation absolutely no reliance may be placed in the yellow bureaucracy now so generally controlling the labor movement. Although their policy of class collaboration has proved such a failure in the past, they will cling to it more desperately than ever in the industrial crisis. Just when the workers most need to make a determined stand, is exactly when the yellow leaders will be most bitterly opposed to a fight and most decided in favor of compromise and yielding. When the pressure is put upon them they will accept drastic wage cuts, give up the eight hour day, allow the reintroduction of piece work, and generally abandon the hard-won conquests of the trade unions. In short, they will still further intensify the cowardice, timidity, stupidity and shortsightedness, which have brought the labor movement to its present sorry pass. If they have their way in carrying out such a policy of surrender, the workers will become still further demoralized and disheartened and will quit the labor organizations in great flocks. One of the worst factors the workers will have to contend with in the coming struggle is their own weak-kneed leaders. In times of industrial prosperity, when the battle of the workers is easier, the policy of conciliation is bad enough; but in times of industrial depression it is a disaster.

Such leadership as will be displayed in the advancing crisis must come from the left-wing. It is up to the militant revolutionaries to promulgate

the necessary policies of resistance and to see to it that they are adopted. We must hearten the workers, unorganized as well as organized, to make a stand for their rights and to desperately resist all attempts to further enslave them. If we fail to go at this task clear-headedly and determinedly then we fail in our mission as the advance guard of the proletariat. Such a militant policy upon our part will bring us into most drastic conflict with the bureaucrats now heading the unions. Eager to put across their policy of class collaboration and thus to curry favor with the employers, they will ruthlessly try to crush all opposition among the rank and file.

This is the real explanation of the great struggle now going on between the "rights" and "lefts" in the needle trades. In that industry the industrial crisis is much further advanced than in other industries. Work is scarce and unemployment bears down upon the workers like a plague. The employers are militant and on the offensive. Already the yellow leaders are prepared to surrender to them many of the most precious conquests of the workers. To this the left-wing is unshakably opposed. Hence, the growth of the struggle. Similar situations may be looked for in other industries where the left-wing is strong enough to raise its voice against the fatal policy of class collaboration. But these, with all their attendant hardships and persecutions against the militants, must be accepted as a matter of course in our general effort to rejuvenate the labor movement. Those who, through ignorance or design, consider the struggle between the "rights" and "lefts" merely a quarrel over personalities and abstract ideas utterly falsify the situation. The great question is, shall the struggle of the workers be carried upon the basis of class collaboration, as the reactionaries want it, or upon the basis of the class struggle, as the revolutionaries advocate. This difference in viewpoint brings the two groups into conflict all along the line, and no amount of sooth-saying can prevent the struggle.

Reviewing the League's Policies

In view of the threatening situation it will be well for us to re-value the policies of the Trade Union Educational League, especially with regard to their availability in the event of an industrial depression and a strong offensive by the employers. There are some militants who say that in such a crisis the slogan of amalgamation will be useless. Indeed, they even declare that this slogan has already lost most of its value. But such militants are entirely wrong. Industrial unionism is a basic need of the working class in good times and bad. The campaign for amalga-

mation is not a thing that may be advocated or dropped at will. It must go ahead increasingly until either industrial unionism is achieved, or there is some method devised to bring it about other than by consolidating the existing unions. It is exactly in periods of industrial depression, when the unions are on the retreat, that the workers can see most clearly the necessity for solidifying their ranks. In the oncoming crisis, therefore, we must not give up our amalgamation campaign, but intensify it.

The same is true of the labor party campaign. That, too, must be gone ahead with more vigorously than ever. American history (not to speak of that of other countries) shows that the working class is most active politically during industrial crises. At such times the workers, losing faith in the weakened unions, tend to turn their attention towards winning their demands on the political field. In "good" times the unions attract the workers' support; in "bad" times it goes to the political parties of Labor. This cycle has regularly occurred for more than half a century with the rising and falling of industrial activity. Hence, during the approaching depression the workers will be particularly susceptible to political movements. We must take advantage of this favorable situation by redoubling our efforts to launch the great Labor Party of workers and exploited farmers. But, in so doing, we must not fall into the common error of the masses and neglect the unions. These must be preserved and stimulated at all costs. To allow them to weaken would be merely to play the game of the employers.

Organization Campaigns Essential

Some militants declare, with the utmost feeling of conviction, that our slogan of "Organize the Unorganized" will be useless during the industrial crisis and should be discarded. But this is a dangerous illusion. Such a move on our part would be a great mistake. The need to organize the workers, like the need to amalgamate the unions, is a constant need in good times and bad. It must be emphasized always. It is true that during periods of depression the unions cannot ordinarily be made to grow. But we should not give up our organization campaign on that account. Quite the contrary. During industrial depressions it serves the purpose, not so much of bringing new workers into the unions, as of holding in them those workers who are already organized. Every practical trade unionist knows the tremendous value of a vigorous insistence upon the necessity for organization just at the time when the morale of the workers, under the constant pounding of the employers, is lowest

and when the unions tend to disintegrate. In "good" times the "Organize the Unorganized" campaign extends the unions; in "bad" times it preserves them. At no time may we give it up.

Other leading policies of the League, such as the propagation of the ideal of a Workers' and Farmers' Government, affiliation to the Red International of Labor Unions, recognition of Soviet Russia, protection of the foreign-born workers, defense of political prisoners, etc., must, of course, be carried on in industrial depressions as well as at other times. No argument is necessary to demonstrate this.

Some New Policies

Although none of the central policies now being advocated by the League may be dropped during the threatened industrial crisis, certain new ones must be adopted. One of these is a militant campaign against wage cuts, lengthening of the workday, re-establishment of piece work, etc. The left-wing movement must put itself at the very head of the workers, unorganized and organized, in their battles to preserve their standards of living against the assaults of the employers. To the full extent of our resources we must sound the slogans of resistance throughout the industries and labor movement of the United States and Canada. As the crisis intensifies our slogans must be, "No Reductions in Wages," "No Lengthening of the Workday," "No Reintroduction of Piece Work," "No Slackening of Union Standards." Wherever workers congregate in shops, local unions, city central bodies, state federations, international conventions, etc., we must raise our voices and rouse the workers to repel the enemy. We must show them that the left-wing alone has a real program, one capable of defending their interests. The development of a great "open shop" drive will throw a big burden of leadership on the left-wing; it will also give it a splendid opportunity to increase its hold upon the masses of workers.

In the struggles that will come between the workers and the employers, another policy that the League must put into effect, already outlined at the Second General Conference, is militant resistance to the injunction. For many years this judicial usurpation has been a menace to Organized Labor, and it may be depended upon that the employers will use it to the limit in the coming "open shop" drive. If so, it will be a supreme duty of the League militants to counter it by stirring the workers to mass disobedience of all injunctions restrictive of the workers' rights. In 1921 when the railroad shopmen struck, the injunction was used against them

with tremendous effect. Unfortunately at that time the League was too young and weak to organize a real fight against it. But in the coming crisis the League will be ready. We must break the next great injunction, which will probably come during the approaching crisis. In organizing the workers against the injunction lies one of the best ways for the left-wing to gain leadership over the masses. "Mass Disobedience of Injunctions" must be one of our most important slogans in the intense labor struggles ahead.

Finally, when the crisis develops, we must meet squarely the problem of unemployment. We must point out to the workers how this curse is the inevitable offspring of the capitalist system and how it can never be done away with until that system is abolished and succeeded by a new workers' society. We must also fight resolutely for the adoption of meliorative measures, industrial and political, such as the shortening of the workday, division of work amongst all the workers in each industry, insistence that the employers be compelled to furnish out-of-work pay to the unemployed workers, federal relief and maintenance for the unemployed, etc. Finally, we must organize the unemployed into demonstrations, councils, and in such other ways as practical experience may prove expedient. In carrying out this program, however, premature action will injure our cause. We must be sure that the evils are malignant before we treat them as such.

The Everyday Struggle

In the coming crisis, even as in its ordinary work, the aim of the League must be to plunge directly into the actual struggles of the workers and to, so far as possible, take the practical leadership of them. To stand aloof from the battling workers and to bombard them with theories and slogans is vain and futile, no matter how beautiful such theories and slogans may be. The very breath of life of the left-wing movement is to take the most active part possible in all the efforts of the workers against their masters. We must not rest in the field of abstraction, but go into that of reality. Trade questions, the immediate issues which the workers are interested in, are meat and drink for us. We must take advantage of the movements naturally developing around them and, by winning the confidence of the workers through our practical leadership, get them to accept our whole revolutionary program. Not fine spun theorizing, but actual leadership in the struggle, must be the goal of all militants in the stormy days ahead for the labor movement.