

Foster Outlines Organizing Tasks In Steel Drive

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

Article IV.

G—A Dauntless Movement

TO CARRY through the 1919 steel organizing campaign in the face of the great shortage of organizers and money, lack of solidarity among the unions, the unfavorable economic and political situation, etc., required imperatively that a high morale be developed among the organizing crew. In such hard conditions, the crew had to have boundless confidence in the organizability of the steel workers and also complete faith in its own ability to unite these masses into the unions. The crew also had to possess great flexibility in its organizing methods, in order to overcome the many difficult problems along the road. Then, as now, the steel industry could not be organized by the faint-hearted nor by men armed only with a blue-print plan.

The 1919 organizing crew managed to develop in high degree this necessary indomitable spirit, burning enthusiasm, and adaptability of methods, and it was these qualities which, in the final analysis, enabled the organization of the great masses of steel workers, notwithstanding the severe obstacles which the campaign faced. At the base of this high morale among the organizers (which they communicated to the masses) was, first of all, a good understanding and appreciation of the tremendous significance not only to the steel workers but to organized labor as a whole of the organization of the steel industry. Their morale was further strengthened by the special organization theory which we advocated. This theory proceeded upon a simple, but very dynamic three-phased analysis, as follows:

Three Point Theory

1. The steel workers (even the best paid) want to improve their living and working conditions, and need but be shown the way to accomplish this in order for them to move in that direction.
2. The task of the steel organizers, therefore, is, first, to make clear to the workers that the only way they can accomplish their desired betterments is through trade union-

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ism, and, second, to provide the organizational means whereby the awakened masses can be enrolled in the unions. If this task of explanation and elementary organization is properly carried out by the organizers, then the steel workers will surely respond and pour into the unions in decisive masses, nor can all the fake concessions, demagoguery, and terrorism of the steel bosses prevent them doing so.

3. If the steel workers do not respond to the work of the organizers, consequently the fault lies not with the masses, but in the wrong methods of agitation and organization used by the organizers. The need in such a situation, therefore, is for the organizers to self-critically review their methods, to eradicate the errors in them and to adopt such new and correct methods as will start the willing masses into motion toward the union.

Self-Critical Approach

The essence of this theory was that it gave the organizers a limitless faith in the organizability of the steel workers and confidence in themselves to do the job. It provided them an invaluable self-critical approach to all their work. The general effect was to liquidate in the organizing crew the self-created pessimism which existed generally, not only among steel workers, but also in labor circles as to the organizability of the steel industry. Hundreds and hundreds of times in our meetings of organizers did we go over and over this simple three-point theory of organization until finally the organizers were literally saturated with it. It infused them with a spirit of invincibility and it was the main factor that enabled them to organize the steel workers. It was only in later years, in my reading of Lenin, that I realized the full political significance of such self-criticism, which we spontaneously developed in response to our fundamental necessity in the steel campaign.

Here is how our organization theory worked in practice. In every steel town that the organizers entered, in addition to all other difficulties that they encountered, they had to face a monumental pessimism on the part of such trade unionists as they found there (building trades, printers, etc.). Universally these local trade unionists would greet the organizers with talk like this: "You can never organize the steel workers in this town. The mills are full of scabs, gathered from all ends of the country. As for the honest workers, they are either afraid of the terrorism, deluded by the company unions, or poisoned by the concessions given by the companies. We have tried to organize them for years, and can do absolutely nothing. You are up against a stone wall," and more in the same pessimistic strain.

But the organizers would brush these croakers aside, telling them that the trouble lay not in the workers, but in their own antiquated methods of organization. Then our organizers would attack the problem on the basis of our new methods of a broad industrial front, a great national movement, flexible organizational approach, etc. If one line of tactics failed in a given situation, our three-point organization theory always led to the adoption of new methods, until finally the correct approach was found. Although our theory was by no means applied 100 per cent in all instances, nevertheless, generally the organizers used it, and to excellent effect.

Varied Methods

The consequence of this self-critical approach to the organizational problem was that the word failure was not in the vocabulary of the 1919 steel organizers. Varying methods of organization were applied in the various districts where different obstacles presented themselves. Thus in the Chicago district the workers were organized by a series of great mass meetings. In McKeesport, where extreme terrorism prevailed, the great mass of workers were, on the other hand, unionized without open meetings but by semi-underground methods. In Johnstown, the workers were brought into the unions practically 100 per cent in a complicated struggle against the company union. In Bethlehem, the workers captured the company union and transformed it directly into trade unions. In Homestead and several other places, the workers were organized in the midst of big open fights on the streets for the right of assembly. Everywhere, with the flexibility and resolution, bred of self-criticism, the organizers adapted their methods of work to the peculiarities of each situation.

Take the great Youngstown district of some 50,000 steel workers, as an illustration of the 1919 flexible and determined methods of organization. When the organizers went into this great center, they found an extremely difficult situation existing among the workers in addition to the usual obstacles of suppressed civic rights, discharge of workers, company unions, etc. Two years before there had been a fierce strike in which the town of East Youngstown had been burned down, the strike lost, and the union broken up. To complete the chaos, the steel union secretary at the time was charged with having accepted a bribe to smash the strike and had fled the city. The A. F. of L. was completely discredited.

Difficulties in Youngstown

Here was a tough spot indeed, but the organizers, armed with our powerful three-point theory—the theory that the workers were organizable under any circumstances if proper methods were used—tackled the difficult Youngstown situation. They began in the usual way by holding a widely advertised mass meeting in the one hall open to the workers in Youngstown. But only a handful of steel workers came to the meeting, and the same thing occurred for three or four weeks at succeeding "mass" meetings. Clearly the workers were disgusted with the A. F. of L. and would have nothing to do with it. On all sides the organizers encountered derogatory remarks and even open hostility.

What to do in this crisis? Youngstown we had to win or the whole national campaign would be a failure. Ordinarily, A. F. of L. organizers, using their antiquated blueprint methods, would have folded up their tents and departed in the face of these difficulties, putting the blame for their failure upon the prevailing terrorism and the workers' hostility and general passivity. But our working three-point theory saved the 1919 organizers from any such retreat. According to this theory, even the Youngstown workers, hostile though they were to the A. F. of L., nevertheless wanted to improve their conditions, and if the organizers could not win them for the Union, eventually the fault was that of the organizers, not the workers. Hence,

Crops Burn, Cattle Die In Kansas

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Hot winds sweep the corn crop night and day. For miles around you it is the same. The Dakotas are a waste land; Nebraska is little better. The water-hole where your cattle drank is a muddy puddle that the sun eats away day by day. Many of the farmers are already hauling.

The noon-day sun bites into your neck and bathes your body in salty sweat that tortures your galled body. Why not quit? Farmers and their families are taking to the road. Two hundred of them quit in Oklahoma. But somehow you can't. You move around the barn yard, refusing to look at your stock, doing tasks that don't need doing.

You go in to dinner. The heat, the dust, the warm drinking water, keep you perpetually sick at your stomach. Besides, a meal of creamed potatoes, bread and coffee isn't anything to get excited over. And it hurts you more to look at your kids than it does your stock. They are running around half naked with their faces pinched and their bellies bloated from eating too many spuds. The junky old radio is tuned in. Milk in Kansas City is going up. Wheat and corn prices skyrocket on the market. Beef and pork prices climb.

The Landon Legislature

The State legislature isn't going to take up the farm problem. Why? Politics, politics, cries your wife bitterly. Governor Landon wants to be president. In North Dakota, the radio informs you, Governor Welford is setting aside Sunday as a day to be spent in praying for rain.

Towards evening a few clouds bank in the West. But the hot evening wind springs up suddenly and scatters them like confetti. Couldn't help you. The wind dies couldn't help you. The winds dies and not a blade of dry grass rustles. An occasional bird darts through the sky. Most of them have left to seek water. Everything is leaving; only men remain.

It's a two-mile walk to the church. The young preacher greets you and cracks a joke. Hell can't be any hotter, he says. He delivers a brief sermon. He is a young man and looks facts in the face.

Not Act of God

This is not all an act of God, he explains. Much of this misery is man-made but not by the farmers. He quotes figures. Sixty per cent of you are tenant farmers. Your landlord demands you secure the maximum profit from the land by raising nothing but wheat. Nothing is allowed to lay in pasture and year after year the land is broken for the wheat crop. Pulverized by such regular cultivation your land blows away when the drought comes.

the lack of success indicated that the organization methods were wrong and had to be changed.

So the whole approach to the organization work in Youngstown was revamped. The so-called mass meetings were abandoned altogether, and there was adopted a policy of single-jack work. The organizers frequented saloons, workers' homes, fraternal societies, clubs, hung about street corners, etc., wherever the workers were to be found, and not announcing themselves in the meantime as A. F. of L. organizers. Carefully and systematically, the campaign was explained to the workers in this manner. They even organized boxing matches, smokers and other social events under various auspices to reach the workers with their message.

Break Down Suspicions

After a few weeks of this kind of work, the organizers gradually broke down the workers' suspicions and hostility, and soon the men began to trickle into the unions. The campaign gaining more and more the confidence of the workers, it was not long until this trickle became a stream, and deeming the situation ripe for a new change in tactics, the organizers opened up huge mass meetings and the stream of workers into the unions became a great flood. The vast armies of steel workers in the Youngstown district were soon ours. And our organizers, fed by such victories as that of Youngstown, became all the more invincible in their attack upon the remaining steel trust strongholds.

In my book on the steel strike, I say, page 41:

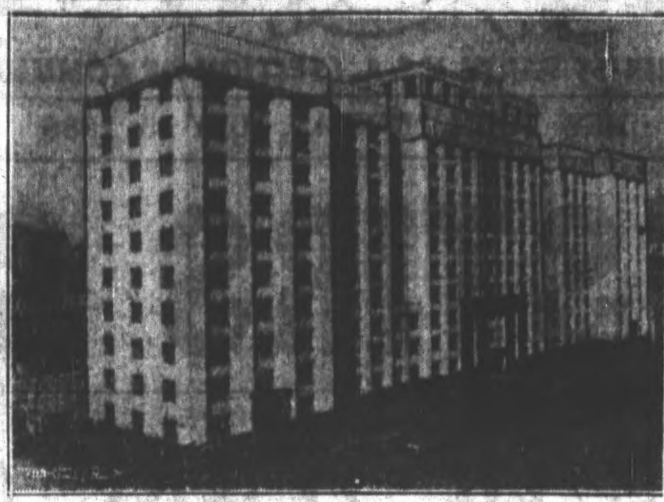
"The National Committee can boast the proud record of never having set up its organization machinery in a steel town without ultimately putting substantial unions among the employees. It made little difference what the obstacles were; the chronic lack of funds; suppression of free speech and free assembly; raises in wages, multiplicity of races; mass picketing by bosses, wholesale discharge of union men, company unions, discouraging traditions of lost strikes; or what not—in every case, whether the employers were indifferent or bitterly hostile, the result was the same, a healthy and rapid growth of the unions. The National Committee proved beyond peradventure of a doubt that the steel industry could be organized in spite of all the steel trust could do to prevent it."

In calling to the attention of the C.I.O. organizers and other militants in the steel campaign the lessons of self-criticism of the 1919 movement, there is no need for me to belabor the point. The implications are clear enough. Ahead of the present organizers stands a very bitter struggle. True, these organizers have more resources and backing than we had and should find the job of organization much easier, but the need for a high morale among them, a self-confidence bred of self-criticism, is perhaps just as acute as it was in 1919. The importance of this lesson of 1919 should be clear to all.

In Conclusion

The campaign in 1919 showed that the steel industry can be organized. This fact places a great weapon of confidence in the hands of the present day organizers and masses. What has been done once can be done again and better with the greater forces and riper experience now available. Especially will this be the case if serious attention is paid to the lessons of the 1919 movement, most of which are very pertinent to the present situation. Breaking all traditions of top union officials, the C.I.O. leadership has shown that it is capable of learning from the 1919 experiences. They understand that the movement must be conducted upon an industrial union basis, that it must be carried out more or less simultaneously all over the country, that it is the historical task of the progressives and left-

NEW SOVIET OFFICES



This new office building, located in the heart of Moscow, now houses the Council of People's Commissars, representatives of the Soviet peoples.

Steel Trust Is Big Donor To Millions for Anti-Labor Liberty League Campaign

By Alan Max

(Daily Worker Washington Bureau)
WASHINGTON, July 12.—American Iron and Steel Institute circles are well represented among those who have given \$1,084,604.62 to the American Liberty League and thirteen of its satellite organizations during the past year and a half.

This sum is not by any means the entire amount poured out by America's leading industrialists into such organizations as the Liberty League, the Sentinels of the Republic and the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution. It represents only the contributions of which the Senate Lobby Investigating Committee has records and which were published in full today.

Morgan Partners Aided
Associates of the House of Morgan, which controls United States Steel, are credited with gifts of \$68,226.00 to the various reactionary and semi-fascist organizations. Contributions of other leading financial groups are listed as follows: du Pont family, \$202,045.00; du Pont associates, \$152,622.66; the Pitcairn family (of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, etc.) \$100,250.00; Mellon associates, \$60,752.55; Rockefeller associates, \$440,671.28.

Individual contributions from steel corporation officials include: E. T. Weir, chairman of National Steel Corporation, \$30,626.28 to the American Liberty League, the Crusaders and the National Economy League; Arthur Sewell, director, Midvale Steel Company, \$2,500 to the anti-Semitic Sentinels of the Republic;

George F. Baker, director United States Steel, \$1,230 to the National Economy League.

Other Officials

Among other steel officials on the contributor's list are: George E. Scott, president, American Steel Foundries; S. T. McCall, vice president and treasurer, American Manganese Steel Corporation; Thomas W. Lamont, partner of J. P. Morgan and Co. and director of U. S. Steel; G. H. Jones, director, Inland Steel; O. G. Jennings, director, Bethlehem Steel Corporation; George A. Houston, president, Standard Steel Works; Alex Glass, chairman, Wheeling Steel; George Genebach, president, United Steel and Wire; E. R. Crawford, McKeesport Tinsplate Co.; and Thomas R. Akin, president, Leclade Steel and director, Southern States Steel.

Boston Central Union Appeals for Unity In Ranks of Labor

BOSTON, Mass., July 12.—A resolution calling for unity in the American Federation of Labor and expressing opposition to suspension of any union affiliated to the Committee for Industrial Organization is in the hands of the Boston Central Labor Union and will be voted upon next Friday.

The resolutions committee has reported full agreement with the resolution and made only one change in it.

Foster Refutes Green Charge On 1919 Strike

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Labor," Foster stated emphatically, "but was upon the instance of the Chicago Federation of Labor, and originally upon a resolution that I presented to that body. The A. F. of L. had let the whole war-time situation slip by without any effort to organize steel, which should surprise nobody."

Gompers Had No Plan
"When, on August 1, 1919, the twenty-four cooperating organizations (in accordance with Resolution 29 introduced by the Chicago Federation of Labor at the St. Paul A. F. of L. convention) held their first meeting in the Morrison Hotel, Chicago, under the presidency of Gompers (with myself elected as secretary), Gompers had no plan whatsoever."

"All that Gompers was interested in at that meeting," Foster continues, "was to keep the movement tied to the Woodrow Wilson program. When the meeting had gotten under way, he turned to me and said: 'Well, Brother Foster, you called us together. Now what do you propose that we should do?'"

"Whereupon I outlined a program of organization based on Resolution 29 of the St. Paul convention, calling for a great national drive to organize the entire steel industry. In addition to providing for national and local organizing committees and for building a crew of organizers, my proposals also provided a financial plan."

Shows Original Plan
Foster brought out the original (typewritten copy of the memorandum covering this program, worn with age, and referred to it.

"The three principal features of this proposed financial plan were: (a) Assistance from the A. F. of L.; (b) Assistance from the cooperating international unions through an assessment; (c) An appeal to the labor movement generally.

"In accordance with this plan, I proposed the levying of an assessment of 25 cents per member by the twenty-four international unions. As there were about 2,000,000 members affiliated to our committee, this would have brought in from \$250,000 to \$500,000 to finance the campaign.

Gompers Opposed
"Mr. Gompers was so obviously opposed to this proposition, as I made it, that there was not a second to my proposal. It was not even discussed. And so far as the proposal for A. F. of L. financial assistance was concerned, nothing at all was done about it. The whole matter was ignored. The A. F. of L. had no proposal of any kind to make financially and made no pledges, as the

wing forces to do the work of organization. They will also find it valuable to pay heed to the other lessons of the 1919 movement that I have touched upon in these articles.

I was never one of those who considered the organization of workers such a huge task. The decisive thing is to go about the work with the necessary resources, determination and flexibility of tactics. The American Federation of Labor could have organized the steel industry many years ago if it had just wanted to do so, and the same is true of every other industry. In my book "The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons," pages 38 and 39, I explain my conception of trade union organization under specific American conditions, as follows:

"The organization of working men into trade unions is a comparatively simple matter when it is properly handled. It depends almost entirely upon the honesty, intelligence, power and persistence of the organization forces. . . .

"In view of its great wealth and latent power, it may be truthfully said that there isn't an industry in the country which the trade union movement cannot organize any time it sees fit. The problem in any case is merely to develop the proper organization crews and systems, and the freedom-hungry workers, skilled and unskilled, men or women, black or white, will react almost as naturally and inevitably as water runs down hill."

Problems for C.I.O.

The experiences of 1919 and the line-up in the present campaign would go to show that the C.I.O. organizers, notwithstanding the A. F. of L. Executive Council sabotage, should be able to readily organize the mass of steel workers. The C.I.O. seems to have the necessary funds, skill and determination. The real problem will come, as it did in 1919, in the great strike which practically certainly must take place before the steel barons will sit down around the table and do business with the trade unions. We may be sure that these autocrats will never give up the open shop until they are compelled to do so by the militant mass pressure of the workers. While, of course, the workers would desire a favorable settlement without the necessity of a strike, they will have little choice in the matter, but will have to fight. The C.I.O. should, therefore, lay the basis for the greatest mobilization of labor's forces—steel workers, coal miners, automobile workers, rubber workers, and especially railroad workers, in preparation for a hard-fought strike against the biggest capitalists in America.

Every effort also should be put forth to prevent the threatening split in the A. F. of L. and to develop a united front of the whole working class and its sympathizers, among the general public. When the strike comes, it should be made the greatest and most successful strike in the history of the country.

Victory can be won in the steel industry, and victory in the steel industry means to shatter the central anti-union fortress of the open shop. In 1919 we planned that with success in the steel industry we would launch a great organizing campaign throughout all the principal unorganized industries. Essentially this same perspective opens up before the C.I.O. If it wins in the steel campaign, and win it can if it proceeds systematically to mobilize the forces of labor upon a fighting basis, the final outcome should result not only in the organization of the 500,000 steel workers, but also millions of workers in many other industries. The steel campaign can be developed into the greatest victory ever won by American labor, and thereby throw the doors open for a whole new era of progress industrially and politically for the toiling masses.

(This is the concluding article of this series.)