

TRADE UNION UNITY

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The outbreak of the war presents the whole question of trade union unity in a new light. Fresh problems have arisen, creating not only favorable opportunities for the achievement of labor unity, but also raising serious dangers imperilling it. Fighters for real trade union unity and a strong, progressive labor movement will do well, therefore, to give these new aspects of the situation careful consideration.



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To begin with, unity among the A. F. of L., C.I.O. and independent unions has now become more necessary than ever in order to defeat the threatening reaction which

is stimulated by the war situation. At present labor unity is doubly needed in order to protect the workers' threatened civil liberties, wage standards and social legislation; to defend the W.P.A. and direct relief; to prevent the anti-trust laws from being used against the trade unions; to protect the freedom and independence of the unions from government control; to organize the many millions of unorganized workers; to serve as the backbone of a great political alliance of workers, farmers and other toilers in the vital 1940 elections; and especially to make united labor stand as a powerful barrier against the United States being dragged into war, and to combat the imperialist aims of the capitalists.

Another important development generated by the war situation is that a more militant fighting spirit is being manifested among the workers. They decisively want this country to keep out of the imperialist war; the rising cost of living is filling them with determination to defend their wage scales and to expand their labor unions; they are more alert to fight for their political interests against their many enemies; a good spirit of coop-

eration prevails between the C.I.O. and A. F. of L. membership; and among the rank and file of all trade unions there is an almost unanimous realization of the need for trade union unity. This rising militancy among the workers is full of dynamic possibilities of progress for the whole labor movement.

EMPLOYER NOTIONS OF LABOR UNITY

A further new factor of importance with regard to the problem of labor unity, and one also bred of the war, is the changing attitude of many great business interests towards this general question. The capitalist exploiters, eager to fatten their profits during the war, have embarked upon a policy of active imperialist adventures abroad and of intensified exploitation of their workers in this country. To accomplish these ends they must have a docile labor movement, one whose leaders will chain it to

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their war-mongering, profit-gouging machine, much as Gompers did during the World War.

The present trade union set-up is unsatisfactory to the great employers, as it does not give them enough control over the unions. Although the reactionaries among the A. F. of L. leaders are already subordinating themselves to the imperialists' war program, the C.I.O. goes on organizing the unorganized and otherwise defending the workers' interests, also thereby communicating its own militant spirit to many A. F. of L. organizations. Obviously, therefore, the employers want to put a bridle upon the C.I.O. Seeing that it is impossible for the employers to return to the good old days of the open shop and inasmuch as the United States is not yet in the war, the government cannot crack down on the trade unions generally, as in England, France and Canada—increasing numbers of employers are turning to the idea that the whole trade union movement could be successfully crippled by bringing the C.I.O. unions under reactionary A. F. of L. leadership by means of "trade union unity." This makes it clear why so many Tory newspapers, which recently gloated openly over the split in Labor's ranks, are now blossoming out as champions of "labor unity." It also explains the sharpening attacks upon the C.I.O. by the capitalist stooges of the press, radio, pulpit and politics; the Dies, Lippmanns, Stolbergs, Coughlins, Peglers, Gitlows, and the like.

The A. F. of L. leaders' conception of trade union unity fits right in with the growing opinion of the capitalists on the question. Originally the A. F. of L. nabobs split the labor movement to prevent the organization of the workers in the basic industries and now, if they can have their way, they will slice up the C.I.O. industrial unions in these industries, disperse their new progressive leadership under the false pretense of a "Communist purge," and stamp out their militant policies and fighting spirit. Green, Hutcheson, Woll, Frey and Company demand a complete surrender of the progressive C.I.O. to their reactionary control. That kind of "trade union unity" would mean stagnation and impotence for the labor movement. It would place the trade unions under government control for war purposes. To which "labor unity" an increasingly large number of capitalists and their mouthpieces are shouting a loud "Amen!"

ROOSEVELT'S PROPOSALS FOR TRADE UNION UNITY

This brings us to another new and very important factor in the trade union unity situation, also a product of the war. It is the changed significance of President Roosevelt's advocacy of labor unity. The Roosevelt Administration and the great capitalist interests of the country have come to a general agreement on main policy, both foreign and domestic. That is to say, they have agreed on a policy of "mercenary neutrality" in the war and they are both orientating upon a perspective of industrial prosperity returning to the United States through war orders. This far-reaching agreement is beginning to influence every phase of Roosevelt's labor attitude in a direction favorable to the employers, including a general playing down of trade union militancy and independence; it must also seriously shape his ideas as to what should constitute trade union unity, to the disadvantage of Labor. Hence there is danger in the aggressive demand of Roosevelt for labor unity, exemplified by his letter to the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. conventions, declaring that unity negotiations "must" be resumed, and his summoning of Green and Lewis to the White House. The danger is the greater because in recent months the A. F. of L. leaders have drawn closer to the Roosevelt Administration, while the C.I.O. has become more estranged from it. President Roosevelt's move for labor unity, under slogans of "national unity" and "limited national emergency," therefore take on increasingly the form of pressure against the C.I.O. to compel it to accept pretty much the employer-A. F. of L. conception of "trade union unity," which means curbing the freedom and independence of the trade union movement.

THE ROAD TO LABOR UNITY

The major new features of the labor unity question, all produced by the war situation, are, therefore: (a) an increased need for labor solidarity based upon the intensified threat from organized capitalist reaction; (b) the growing militancy of the workers and their sharpened determination to fight for their economic and political demands; (c) the spreading conviction among employers that the best way under present circumstances of "neutrality" to hamstring Labor and to prevent its interference with their war-profit orgy would be by forcing the C.I.O. unions under control of the reactionary A.

F. of L. bureaucracy; (d) the tendency of the Roosevelt government to endorse trade union unity of an employer-A. F. of L. character.

On the basis of these facts, the following offers the most practical approach for the achievement of labor unity:

A) Organize the Unorganized: A broad campaign to organize the unorganized, on the basis of an active defense of the workers' wage demands, is fundamental in advancing the cause of labor unity. The opportunity for such organizing work now is exceptionally favorable, in view of the rising index of production, the increase in the cost of living, and the growth of militancy among the workers. This organizing campaign would mean, above all, to build the CIO unions in the mass production and other unorganized industries. The stronger the CIO becomes the better will be its prospects to insist upon a sound trade union unity. Organization work should also be pushed by A. F. of L. unions in their legitimate spheres. The question of organizing the unorganized, vital to the welfare of the workers generally and to the advancement of labor unity in particular, should be made an urgent order of business throughout the entire labor movement.

B) United Labor Action: Another broad avenue to the eventual achievement of a unified labor movement lies along the way of active cooperation between A. F. of L., CIO, and independent unions in support of the workers' immediate economic and political demands and against the imperialist designs of big business. The workers are definitely ready for such united action by all branches of Organized Labor, and it should be cultivated on a local, city, state and national scale, around such issues as the high cost of living, organizing campaigns, the defense of social security legislation, resistance to the machinations of Dies and other labor baiters, and the questions of keeping the United States out of the imperialist war and of re-establishing world peace. Especially this united labor action should be developed for the 1940 national elections. The more such joint activities are carried on among the great groups of unions and the more these bodies engage in policies of militant struggle together, the smoother and broader will become the road to a healthy consolidation of all of Labor's trade union forces.

C) Trade Union Unity: Fresh negotiations may soon be held to try to re-unite the forces of the A. F. of L. and the CIO into one body. Here it is not our task to make a blue-print of proposals for such a conference, should it take place; but it is timely that at least a few key propositions be indicated:

First, Green and his cronies must not be allowed to whittle the CIO unions into crafts. As John L. Lewis has so well said, the CIO must not be turned into a Czechoslovakia. The principle of industrial unionism must be clearly recognized by the A. F. of L. in the mass production industries. Only if this is done can labor unity provide a basis for solid unionism in these spheres. By all means the A. F. of L. must be budged from its obsolete and disastrous policy of craft unionism.

Second, the A. F. of L. leaders (who are supported by the bosses and reactionary politicians) must be prevented from accomplishing their announced task of destroying the progressive leadership of the C. I. O., whether by means of a so-called Communist purge, by gerrymandering the respective unions, or by other devices. A sound trade union unity demands that the progressive leadership of the CIO be maintained and that it shall serve to give new life to the whole re-united labor movement. It will be no labor unity of the merger of the two organizations should result in craft splits or in throwing new masses of workers under the divisive control of the reactionary A. F. of L. clique of bureaucrats.

Third, in the probable trade union negotiations another most important question that must be borne carefully in mind is that of the policy of the unified movement. With the employers trying to hamstring the trade unions and destroy their militancy, to cut to pieces the Wagner Act, and to make Labor a tail to its war machine, and with the Green bureaucrats giving them all possible assistance in these efforts, it becomes a prime necessity for the progressive union forces of both the C. I. O. and A. F. of L. to insist upon a policy of active defense of the workers' interests and demands. Trade union unity must result in an awakened, more militant labor movement, and not one tied up with a class collaboration policy that will paralyze its effectiveness and prevent its growth.

Fourth, in view of the great need to preserve the progressive structure, leadership and policies of the C. I. O. in any unity arrangement which may be arrived at, and in consideration of the de-