

U. S. Capitalists Seek to Transform C. C. C. Recruits Into Shock Troops of Fascism

In the Struggle Against American Workers, Y. C. L. Secretary Says in Report to Plenum

By GIL GREEN

Shortly after the inauguration of Roosevelt, a bill for the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps was carried in the United States Congress. Within a period of a few months, some 250,000 youth were gathered together in camps throughout this nation.

The youth looked upon the camps as a temporary solution to the problem of unemployment and as a vacation with pay. However, before many months had passed, a wave of struggle developed in the newly created C.C.C. camps, a wave of struggle which touched every single camp.

The struggles were in the main of a spontaneous character. They were of various forms. First, mass desertions—from July to September, 1933, from 80,000 to 100,000 deserted the C.C.C. camps. Secondly, they took the form of mass protests and demonstrations within the camps, even reaching the point of physical clashes with the officers. And, thirdly, the most important form was the strike struggle, boys refusing to go to work unless their demands were granted.

Issues of Struggles

The issues around which these struggles developed were, first, the poor food conditions. The boys were forced to live in the main on canned food. Secondly, the housing conditions. The early camps did not have established barracks. The boys did not have a permanent place to rest their heads at night. Thirdly, revolts developed around working conditions. The boys who went to the camps did not expect to work from eight to nine hours a day. They considered it more or less of a spree. From the beginning, the army, which had been placed in charge, attempted to institute severe discipline and to organize the labor of the youth. And in the struggle for discipline in the first year, 1933-34, there developed strong antagonism between the majority of the boys and their officers, and numerous struggles took place.

The struggle against discipline not alone reflected itself in the struggle against labor conditions, but also against the plan to militarize the youth. The boys refused to accept militarization, to accept the authority of the army officers as final and binding upon them. Where clauses were introduced pledging readiness to defend the country, the youth in the camps protested against these and succeeded in defeating them.

The fourth issue was the issue of Negro discrimination which was prevalent in the early camps and which still is prevalent except in a different form. The Negro camps were led and are led today by southern white officers. In the early camps there were Negro and white boys side by side, though they were divided according to companies, but the Negro youth got the worst food and conditions. However, there developed a strong bond of unity between the Negro and the white youth, and many struggles developed around the issue of Negro discrimination.

The youth felt their common unity in the camps and their common antagonism to the officers.

One important struggle that developed in a Negro camp which is symptomatic of other struggles, is the one in Tuscaloosa, where 200 boys went on strike against their Southern white officers, where the militia was called out against them, where they fought with bricks and stones, and where a Y.C.L. and a few others were driven into the woods and threatened with lynching. There were other similar events as for instance in a camp in Gettysburg where the boys applied a torch to the camp and burned it down to the ground.

This wave of struggle which swept the camps in the early months, together with the pressure from the outside, resulted in a change of tactics on the part of the government. They found it impossible to carry through the process of the militarization of the camps at the tempo they had first thought possible. They realized it was necessary to carry it through at a slower pace and, secondly, in order to do that, to give definite concessions to the boys.

This change of policy took the following form. Concessions were given in the nature of better food, and the allotment for food rose to 37 cents a day. The government began to weed out the graft within the individual camps and also began to remove certain officers who didn't apply themselves correctly and brought about the greatest resentment. They began to build recreational facilities for the youth and also to do away with the open talk of militarization.

Government Seeks to Divide Youth

Together with this, the government decided it was necessary to divide the ranks of the youth and the men within the camps. Along this line they developed a labor aristocracy within the camps in a limited sense. Instead of the \$30 a month given to the boys, half of which went home, they selected the best workers, so to speak, the gang leaders, and gave to them an increased wage—5 per cent of the boys received \$45 a month, and 8 per cent of the boys received \$35 a month. The additional amount of money, in the main, the boys were allowed to keep for themselves. This had its effect in utilizing certain groups among the youth against the more militant ones.

Secondly, they developed a gap between the veterans and the youth. There are from 28,000 to 30,000 veterans within the camps. They also decided to completely separate the Negro from the white camps.

Third, they revised the original policy of sending youth to camps close to their home localities and, decided instead, in order to make desertion more difficult, to send them as far away from their homes as possible.

Fourth, is the system of fines which was instituted. These fines come from the \$5 monthly allowance that the boys get.

Fifth, the policy of mass expulsions of all so-called radicals and agitators. Here, comrades, it is interesting to note that in the period of the first year the camp expelled more than 16,000 agitators and radicals.

The perspective in the next months is for a tremendous development of struggle within the camps. Why? Because, first of all, the Roosevelt government has achieved its first objective, establishing the camps as a permanent institution. Now the government, in line with its second offensive against the working class as a whole, is beginning to follow a policy of definite retrenchment and is stopping the giving of further concessions to the youth. Firstly, the 37 cents a day for food is constantly meaning less and less for the youth, as prices rise. Secondly, we find that there is talk of a wage cut—a cut of wages from \$30 to \$25 a month, not yet instituted, but which seems to be the definite policy in Washington once the present wages for relief work become established. Then we can see definitely a growing trend in Washington for the open militarization of the camps in a very short period of time.

Y.C.L. Work in Camps

Now as to our work within the camps. We can state that many of the struggles within the camps were either led by us or influenced by us. There were hundreds of strikes that the Y.C.L.ers participated in and led. However, it must be clear that with 1,600 camps in existence and 2,600 camps to be in existence by the end of 1935, that it is impossible for the Y.C.L. with its forces to be in every one of the camps, and in most places the struggles were not so much led by Y.C.L.ers as influenced by the general policy and tactics of the revolutionary movement. Many of the youth in the camps have had contact with the Unemployment Councils; many of the youth in the camps have had contact with the farm movement led by us; many have had contact with the school movements, and the result was that even large masses of youth who were not in our ranks, at least were ready to follow our line within the camps. In many cases we had the examples of youth, with whom we had no contact who carried through our policy because of previous experiences with our movement.

From the beginning of the organization of the camps, we had a line for developing a mass movement of youth in the form first, of a union—an economic organization of the youth; and secondly, in the form of elected committees of the youth within each camp. We have not succeeded in either one of these objectives to any extent.

At most we were able to build groups in a few camps, some of which exist today. But these groups never assumed the character of mass organizations of the youth in the camps. Thus, despite the issuance of leaflets, of camp papers in four states, and of work in a number of concentrated areas, we can state, in the main, we have been isolated from the majority of the youth in the camps. What are the main reasons for the isolation on our part?

Right and Wrong Slogans

First, we must state that there was political unclarity in the ranks of the Y.C.L. on

what our attitude should be toward the camps. In the period up to the League Convention, that is June 1934, we put forward as our main slogan, a slogan of "smash" or "abolish the camps." In the early period this slogan had some basis in reality. The fact that thousands of youth were leaving the camp. But even then this slogan was wrong. But in the period of the consolidation of the camps this became doubly wrong because it isolated us from the majority of the youth, and set up a wall between us and them. This slogan to the youth meant that they would have to go back to the bread-line, that they would have no means of existence, and to them at least the camps were something. And secondly, it encouraged all kinds of "leftist" errors among our Y.C.L. comrades and encouraged certain tendencies among the other youth. We had some comrades who thought their best work was to see how fast they could get out of the camp after they got in, to organize some small action and get out.

With the aid of Comrade Browder and the Polburo we decided to change this slogan and to recognize the fact that the camps were accepted as a lesser evil by the youth, better than the bread-line, and we changed our slogan from "abolish" to replace the camps with unemployment insurance or jobs with regular wages.

Today, however, in discussing practically the building of a broad movement, it is our opinion that we even have to change the slogan to "replace the camps" so that we put forward only positive slogans. To the youth outside the camps—the slogan must be unemployment insurance, and to the youth in the camp, instead of the slogan to "replace the camps," we must put forward concrete demands that they are ready to fight for, and which, if granted and carried, will change the entire nature and character of the camps. The main demands we put forward are: (1) to increase the base pay to \$45 a month. This is a big demand in the camp, as the youth want to get the wage of the present foremen; also trade union wages for skilled men such as chauffeurs, plumbers, electricians, etc.; (2) a 50 per cent increase in the food allotment; (3) to keep the camps out of army control; no military drill formation, etc.; (4) the right to organize and recognition of all elected men's committees; (5) no discrimination against Negro youth; (6) protection against accident, adequate compensation for injury; pension to the family in case of death.

Part of Fascization Program

Around these immediate demands, we feel that we can develop the broadest mass movement. However, not alone have we had political unclarity. We find that the main mistake of our League was not so much that of commission, but of omission—the fact that there was very little work developed among the youth in the C.C.C. camps. When I say "League" I do not mean the Y.C.L. alone; I mean the Party and the League, but the League has the main responsibility for work there.

What were the reasons for the fact that

work was not developed in most places? First, certain organizational difficulties that confronted our Party and League, and still confront us. We further have difficulty in giving leadership to our people within the camps. In most places where there are camps, the Party and League are very weak.

Significance of C.C.C.

What is the significance of the camp movement in America? (1) It establishes a precedent for low wages. The low wages declared for relief work can be traced back to the precedent first established by Roosevelt in connection with the C.C.C. camps.

(2) The government definitely wishes to establish the camps as a permanent army reserve. By 1936 the camps will include nearly 700,000 youth. The government policy is to then once more propose an enlargement to at least one million.

The government also hopes to develop the youth within the camps as shock troops of fascism to be used against the working class. It is from this important view that we must judge the actions of the government in isolating these youth from the industrial centers. This explains the actions in Boston, where C.C.C. boys were used as scabs. This explains the fact that outside the camps, the government is working to create ex-C.C.C. boys' organizations. In New Jersey, through the Y.M.C.A., there was organized what is called the Green Legion, an organization which has as its main aim to propagate the views and ideals of the C.C.C. among the youth generally.

Two Main Tasks

What are our tasks? I want to divide our tasks into two main sections: One—the development of the broadest mass movement within the camps; and secondly, the mobilization of the whole working class and of all progressive elements in behalf of the demands of the youth in the camps and against the militarization of these camps.

What is necessary to develop a broad movement around these demands? (1) the sending of hundreds of young comrades and veterans into the camps during the next months. From now until October, the camps will enroll some 300,000 additional men so as to increase their size to 700,000. We must get our young comrades and the veterans that we have influence over, to enter the camps and work from within them. In every district, the Party must work together with the League to select comrades who will go into these camps—organize a class with them, discuss the problems within the camps, the methods of work to be used so that when they go into these camps they will know how to proceed to work in the broadest possible manner.

(2) We must follow a policy of concentration. It is obvious that we cannot work in all of the 2,600 camps. First, we must have certain districts of concentration; and in turn, in these districts, various sections and camps of concentration. However, this

doesn't mean that the other districts are to neglect this work.

In the points of concentration, we must work for the development of the mass movement and for the building of League units. Where there are veterans, we must work to create Party and League units within the camps.

Nationally, we are proposing to help publish a mass paper for the camps. This paper will deal with the daily problems, will be the organ of united front struggle within the camps. This paper must get the support of the districts. It will come out once a month. The districts must organize an apparatus for the distribution of the paper, must see that correspondence comes in for it, so that the paper can become a real weapon in our hands, a real competitor to "Happy Days," the organ of the administration.

In these districts of concentration, it is necessary to select certain cadres who will devote most of their time to work within the camps. I am not speaking now of people who will go into the camps themselves, but of leading cadres who will guide the work in these camps from the outside. It is necessary to assign two or three people from the Party and League who will really become specialists in C.C.C. work, visiting the camps and giving real help to those within them.

Arouse Working Class

Now as to the second section: the mobilization of the working class as a whole. We must realize, comrades, that a very important factor in making the militarization of the camps impossible is the rousing of the whole working class. Here we have two tasks: (1) to develop a broad movement within the A. F. of L., a movement which will first of all raise opposition to the low wages within the camps, and the fact that the youth are more and more replacing skilled labor on various jobs. We can make it very hot for Fechner, who is head of the C.C.C. camps, and is also vice-president of the International Association of Machinists. Together with this, the Unemployment Councils must develop activities among the parents of the boys in the city, and among the working class generally, to educate them as to the character of the C.C.C. camps and to mobilize them for the demands of the youth in the camps. (2) We must, through the Youth Congress and the American League Against War and Fascism, develop a mass campaign in the working class against the process of militarization, which is going on in the camps. We can, around this one issue, develop mass support through the Youth Congress movement, in all the youth organizations in the country.

We must utilize the American Youth Congress as well as the American League Against War and Fascism to organize broad sections of workers, liberals, progressives, etc., to visit the camps, to investigate the conditions there, to investigate the relation of the army to the boys, the process of militarization, and to mobilize the working class as a whole to defeat this militarization of the C.C.C. boys.

The full text of the speech will appear in the July number of The Communist.