

Reuther's Seizure of the Ford Local

By John Swift

THE LESSONS of the Walter Reuther seizure of Local 600, United Automobile workers are of the greatest importance for the labor movement, as it is for every progressive and Communist trade unionist.

Local 600 is not just another local union. It is the biggest single local union in the country. It is situated in the largest and, in many respects, the most turbulent of the trade unions in trustified industry. What happens here is bound to have direct reverberations in the U.A.W. and an effect on all unions.

In recent years Local 600 has been the scene of some of the most important advances made by the progressive forces. These advances have been unique in many respects, demonstrating anew that it is possible to establish progressive united front coalitions within Right-led unions. These achievements, which culminated in the early part of 1951 in the formation of a united front progressive administration in the local, were due to the application of the following correct policies by the Left-wing and progressive forces:

1. The tactic of the united front from below was correctly seen as the main and decisive lever to help unite the ranks of the Ford workers in struggle around one or more immediate issues. This was achieved around such issues as the struggle against speed-up, lay-offs, the five-year contract and for Negro rights. The very struggle for unity of action around concrete issues helped to break up, and later, to dissolve, old encrusted factional divisions, and to create and cement unity on a departmental, unit-wide (building) and then plant-wide (local union) basis.

2. The Left-wing and progressive workers recognized that unity had to be forged first of all between the progressive white workers and the great mass of the Negro workers. This was achieved by developing the struggle around the special demands of the Negro workers for upgrading on the job and for full representation in the top posts of union leadership. The Negro workers, while participating in the various caucuses, represented an independent force

united on the propositions of Negro rights and Negro leadership within the union. The alliance established with this grouping greatly facilitated the progressive development of the local and the Negro-white unity which became one of its hall-marks.

3. While basing themselves primarily on the united front from below, on the unity of the rank-and-file, the Left-wing and progressive forces followed a broad united front policy to achieve unity on *every* level, so long as this unity was based on principle and took as its starting point the interests of the workers. Thus, when the surge of the rank-and-file for unity around progressive policies expressed itself in the election of many progressives in the various units, as well as on a local union scale, rifts began to appear in the Right-wing pro-Reuther caucus. The result, a united local union administration, representing a coalition of three main trends: the American Unionists, including conservatives and middle-of-the-road workers; the Progressives, embracing progressive and Left-wing workers; and the independent force of Negro workers of varied political views.

4. The experiences in Local 600 showed that, while unity must start with those issues to which the workers are most responsive, this does not mean that Left-wing and progressive unionists can limit themselves to those issues. They are duty-bound also to deal with such ques-

tions as foreign policy and Red-baiting. In the Ford Local the progressives did deal with those issues, at the same time emphasizing that disagreements need not lead to disunity or division. By showing the workers why they had a real stake in peace, by demonstrating to them the tie-up between the war program and their economic conditions — unemployment, speed-up, five-year contract wage-freeze, high taxes and high prices—the progressives succeeded in convincing thousands of workers of the need for a positive peace program, as against the war drive and war economy. In fact, Hogan, the candidate of the Progressive Caucus for local president in 1951, barely missed election (by only 420 votes) after making peace a central issue in his campaign. His advocacy of peace influenced the thinking of some of the more conservative leaders of the local.

It is these important developments which are the background for the action of the Reuther machine in violating union democracy and imposing an administratorship over the affairs of Local 600. The unity forged by the workers of this local no doubt alarmed Reuther. He found himself suddenly becoming isolated from the Ford Local. Those who had headed his caucus in the local only a year before, joined a united front essentially opposed to his policies. This did not yet constitute an immediate threat to Reuther's control

over the international union; but it certainly represented an important base of opposition and, more than that, an object lesson to other sections of the union as his policies became further exposed.

Furthermore, the example of Local 600 had received national and world publicity. It proved to be a challenge, not alone to Reuther, but to the whole Right-wing pro-war leadership of the C.I.O. Everywhere, the outspoken position of Local 600 on the issue of peace had become a harbinger and a promise of the great potential peace force that is awakening in American Labor. Likewise, the role of Local 600, particularly of its outstanding Negro leaders, in the formation of the Negro Labor Council, was seen by the Right-wing labor officialdom as a thrust at their own lily-white executive boards and at all other white-supremacist trade-union practices.

The pressure upon Reuther to wipe out this important bridgehead of progressive unionism, stemmed not alone from his inner-union considerations, but from the fear of the whole war camp aroused by the Ford development.

Reuther was embarrassed by the situation in Local 600, because it hurt his "prestige" with Washington and Wall Street and threatened his insatiable opportunist careerism. For Walter Reuther views his U.A.W. presidency only as a stepping-stone to "bigger things"—to the C.I.O.

presidency and, who can tell, perhaps, some day, to the U.S. presidency, as a home-grown American Attlee. For such things one must prove to be a reliable and worthy lackey, capable of acting with cynical and ruthless disregard of the union's constitutional guarantees to its members, especially where the rights of progressives and peace advocates are concerned. Reuther proved himself worthy of this dishonor. His dictatorial blow at Local 600 was meant to be the first in a new series of attacks upon the Left-wing and progressive-led forces in the labor movement.

WEAKNESSES IN UNITED-FRONT COALITION

If, as we have shown, Reuther acted from fear and weakness, not from strength, he was able to impose an administratorship on the local, and to get away with it, at least temporarily, because of a number of weaknesses which had developed in the work of the united-front coalition.

It is necessary to speak frankly of these weaknesses and errors, because only by analyzing and exposing them, can Communist, Left-wing and progressive workers learn from them, guard against their repetition, and transform Reuther's temporary victory into a lasting defeat.

Further, unless the errors and weaknesses in Local 600 are under-

stood, the erroneous inference may be drawn that nothing could have been done to prevent the Reuther seizure, that the attempt and its success were both inevitable. Hence, it could be falsely concluded that advances in Right-led unions are possible only up to a point, because the entrenched bureaucratic machines have the power to snuff out the progressive forces at will and to prevent a consolidation of progressive positions. Any such conclusion drawn today would be exceedingly harmful, dangerous, and defeatist.

Before entering into an examination of these errors and weaknesses, a word of caution is in order. Our criticisms should constantly be viewed against the background of the rich and positive achievements in this Local. Let us bear in mind that Right-wing officialdom can try to take over progressive-led locals only where the progressives have first achieved leadership. Therefore, the errors committed in Local 600 occurred at a higher stage of struggle than what progressives find in other Right-led unions. If, however, we deal at greater length with criticisms, it is not to deprecate the achievements, but, on the contrary, to help consolidate and expand them.

The united front coalition in Local 600 was completely unprepared for Reuther's sudden assault. As the *Michigan Party Forum* correctly observes: "The setting up of the Reuther administratorship over Local 600

was unexpected, a surprise to all including Party members and leaders." Nobody believed Reuther would dare go so far.

This proved to be a costly error. It meant that the Ford workers were completely unprepared for the new turn of events. The leadership of the local was shocked by the attack, so that for a number of days it was in a state of near paralysis. This meant that at the most critical moment, when the attack could still have been repulsed by a solid mass front of opposition, the Ford workers found themselves essentially on their own, without guidance or leadership.

The fact that the Party leadership held this false estimate meant that the Party members were unprepared for the new eventuality, and thus were unable to fulfill their vanguard role. The Reuther coup was thus carried through with relative ease, even though the Reuther administrators were in great fear of the workers.

While the resentment and opposition of the workers have since found continuous expression in many forms, the failure to meet the assault in a united and determined way undoubtedly created some momentary demoralization and defeatism among certain groups of workers. Had prompt effective mass action been organized, involving thousands of workers, Reuther could have burnt his fingers so badly that he would

never attempt such a venture again.

That this error in judgment was made by all forces in the coalition, as well as the Party State leadership, requires careful examination. For this error was not accidental; it was a logical sequence to a series of other errors.

In the first place, it exposed gross illusions that reaction rampant in the country would by-pass Local 600 and do nothing to halt the progressive development among the Ford workers. That such illusions could affect the thinking of conservative-minded local leaders like Stellato, can be understood. Why they were also part of the thinking of the Michigan Communists, is, indeed, difficult to comprehend.

The coming to Detroit of the House Un-American Committee had made the objective of reaction quite clear. Yet no one expected the Reuther action. Thus, the first illusion was shown to be closely associated with still another, namely, that Reuther, the reactionary Social-Democrat, ready helpmate of the imperialist war crowd, would limit his attack on the Ford Local merely to verbal missiles, that he would act only in a "legal," "constitutional," way. This indicates that the very forces who best understood that Reuther's most potent weapon was his artful use of demagoguery, had themselves fallen victims to this demagoguery. They could not conceive that Reuther would stoop so low as actu-

ally to cooperate with the vile, anti-labor, anti-Negro, pro-fascist House Un-American Committee.

As is frequently the case, when one set of illusions is destroyed, an opposite set replaces them. Illusions arise from a one-sided, false conception of objective reality. When the underlying premise for the given illusions is found to be false, but when the reasons for their rejection are not fully understood, the tendency may well be to shift abruptly to opposite ground. This is the danger now among certain Michigan Party leaders. Yesterday, they underestimated the danger of war and fascism and the despicable role of Social-Democracy as reflected upon their own scene. Today, they tend to hold either that fascism is already here or that war and fascism can no longer be stopped. Yesterday, they did not believe Reuther would cooperate with poll-tax Congressman Woods of the House un-American Committee; today, some of them no longer see any difference between Reuther and an outright fascist.

Such gyrations from extreme to extreme reflect failure to make an all-around estimate of the situation in the country and internationally. The danger present in such gyrations is clear.

For, if fascism is already here and if the enemy is so all-powerful, then what chance is there of maintaining a progressive leadership in the Ford Local, or in any local?

WHY DID REUTHER "SUCCEED"?

Let us ask ourselves: How was it possible for Reuther to get away with his high-handed seizure in a union in which the rank-and-file has over the years zealously fought for and guarded inner-union democracy? After all, the U.A.W. was not established from above. Its history certainly is not that of a hot-house product. Nor was it brought into being by mere Labor Board elections. It arose from the ranks of the workers themselves, through bitter conflict with the giant auto trusts and with their paid agents inside the union. Nor has the U.A.W. membership been cowed into submission by the Reuther bureaucracy.

What then explains the fact that, when Reuther's well-oiled machine moved in on Local 600, there was no wave of protest sweeping through the ranks of this great union? In the answer to this question lies the basic source of Reuther's strength and the basic source of Local 600's weakness.

From the outset of the progressive victory in the Ford Local, Reuther's basic strategy has been to try to isolate and seal off this local from its brother locals in the International. For this purpose he employed an old tactic. He set out to twist things about so that every proposal put forward by the progressives and every action on their part could be made

to appear as motivated by factional anti-leadership considerations. He realized that if this could be achieved, it would no longer be necessary to debate an issue on its merits; it could just be discounted as "factional" and "anti-leadership." He also knew that, once this objective was achieved, it would not be too difficult to make it appear as though every *inner-union disagreement* was in reality an *anti-union opposition*.

It must be said that in this effort to isolate the Ford Local by a clever distortion of its position, Reuther was quite successful. But all the diabolical cunning of which Reuther is so capable would not have sufficed had not the coalition leadership of the local unwittingly come to his assistance by playing into his hands.

Instead of consciously fighting to prevent isolation from the rest of the union, the Ford Local leadership inadvertently assisted it. How else, for example, can one explain the failure of the Ford Local to participate fully and actively in the life of the Wayne County Council of the C.I.O.?

Of course, the Ford Local did distribute its local paper to other plants. But the question has to be posed: How did it unite with other locals? How did it support the plans other locals initiated? Did it not, rather, frequently leave the impression of seeking close contact only with locals whose leaders shared its general outlook?

Unity in the Ford Local had been forged around issues involving the interests of the workers. It is these issues which proved to be the battering rams that broke down the walls of factionalism. By keeping their eyes strictly on the workers' interests, the various forces of the Local 600 coalition found a common basis for working together. But this lesson from their own experiences was not applied consistently and firmly by the progressives when it came to fighting for unity in the union as a whole.

Let us take, for example, the issue of unemployment. It is to the credit of the Ford Local leadership that it was among the very first to recognize the serious consequences of this problem in the industry, took measures in its own local to safeguard the interests of the laid-off workers, and raised sharply the demand for immediate attention to the problem by the International. In fact, it was the insistent demand of the Ford Local for a national conference of the union on this matter, and the indication that it would take the initiative and call such a conference itself if the International did not act, which finally resulted in the national conference held in Washington in January.

And yet, when this conference did convene, Reuther was able to put the Local 600 leadership on the defensive and to make it appear as if it were raising this issue only to

"do a job" on the International leadership. Reuther launched his main attack upon Local 600's proposal to make the 30-hour week slogan a demand for immediate action. At a conference in which the overwhelming majority of the delegates were from locals in which there was no acute unemployment problem, Reuther was demagogically able to make it appear that the 30-hour-week demand at this time would jeopardize the earnings of those working full time and over-time.

Of course, behind this debate, a more fundamental issue was involved; namely, whether the unemployment in the industry was due merely to temporary dislocations resulting from conversion to war production, as Reuther insisted, or to more basic economic factors related to growing over-production in the consumer goods industries and the mounting signs of an approaching economic crisis.

But important as was this debate, far more important was the need to come out of this conference with a common program of action to alleviate the hardships caused by the unemployment which everybody admitted existed in large numbers. Local 600 put forth the blanket demand for an increase in unemployment insurance benefits to \$60 a week. Reuther, on the other hand, came out in support of the Moody-Dingell Bill which called for a substantial increase in unemployment insurance

benefits but fell short of the Local 600 demand.

Now, of course, the demand for \$60 a week is a superior demand and more adequately meets the needs of the unemployed. But under the concrete circumstances, especially when it became obvious that the majority was ready to go along with the Moody-Dingell Bill for the time being, the most important and decisive task was to organize a truly mass fight that would enact the Moody-Dingell Bill in this session. This did not happen. The delegates of Local 600 to this conference defended their local program, but did not call for the unity of all locals around that on which they could all agree.

Instead, the conference ended with no program of action which the delegates could bring back to their membership. Reuther was able to appear as a champion of the needs of the unemployed by mere talk. Nothing really was done, neither by the Reuther leadership nor by the Ford leadership, to organize the kind of mass movement that could have brought about the adoption of the Moody-Dingell Bill this year. The result? The Bill quietly died in committee. Feeble, indeed, was the voice raised for the bill by this powerful union of over a million workers.

Had the Ford Local leadership really gone all-out in the fight for this measure, a number of positive

results could have ensued: 1) There is the possibility that the Moody-Dingell Bill could have been enacted and unemployment insurance raised by some 50 per cent; 2) Reuther's charge of factionalism would have been demolished, because the local would have been acting in behalf of a measure sponsored by Reuther; 3) real unity of action could have been developed through the union, because once again this would have been in behalf of a measure which had the endorsement of the whole union; 4) the attempt to isolate Local 600 would have failed; 5) either Reuther would have been forced to go along with a program of real action in the union, or, he would have exposed himself as a do-nothing talk-artist; and, last but not least, the needs of the unemployed would have been defended in deeds and not merely in words. And under such circumstances it is highly doubtful whether even the brazen Reuther would have dared do violence to the Ford Local.

It must be frankly admitted that in the heat of the inner-union struggle, Reuther was able to maneuver the Ford Local leadership into forgetting the importance of a program of action as against mere words. After all, the question was not whether the unemployed would get the Moody-Dingell Bill or the \$60 a week advocated by Local 600. Reuther could no more deliver the Moody-Dingell Bill on a silver platter than could the Ford Local lead-

ership deliver the \$60. If *either* was to be won, the masses had to be put into motion; for *only* through mass united and militant struggle could the needs of the unemployed be alleviated.

Thus, those in the Ford Local leadership who feared that by militant support to the Moody-Dingell Bill they would only add to the prestige of Reuther, forgot two simple things: first, the pressing needs of the unemployed workers; and second, that workers judge leadership on the basis, not of who *demand*s more, but of who helps them to *get* more. To have worked out a concrete program of struggle to *get* the lesser Moody-Dingell Bill was more important than sulkily to hold on to the "better" \$60 proposal. This would have served the interests of the workers best and also would have exposed Reuther best.

There were many other issues around which considerable gains could have been made for the workers, either with Reuther or without him, and issues around which unity of action could have been forged. Let us cite but one more example. The Reuther machine finds itself on the defensive on the issue of Negro rights—and well it should—for this union has scores of experienced, courageous and talented Negro leaders in its ranks, and yet not a single Negro is among its top officers or on its Executive Board.

Reuther tries to make up for this

by printing pictures of himself shaking hands with Walter White or A. Phillip Randolph. He covers all local unions with N.A.A.C.P. literature and encourages the N.A.A.C.P. to recruit U.A.W. members. In return for this favor, the Detroit N.A.A.C.P. circulates literature attacking the Communist Party. In mid-March, *at the very same time* that Reuther seized the Ford Local from its membership, a State F.E.P.C. measure was defeated in the Michigan House of Representatives by the vote of 46 to 45—*by only one vote!* But what did Detroit and Michigan labor do to compel favorable action on this measure? Little indeed. And what about Local 600? It, too, sat this one out.

Had a real struggle been organized for this measure the following could have resulted: 1) in all probability the extra vote could have been obtained and a victory registered for Negro rights; 2) real unity of action could have been forged between labor and the Negro people's movement; 3) the Ford Local could not have been isolated; and 4) Reuther would have had to think twice before launching an assault upon a local engaged in a mass struggle of this kind.

LESSONS FROM THE SET-BACK

What are the lessons to be learned from all this? The first lesson to

remember is that Karl Marx was right when he said that "shouting and doing are irreconcilable opposites." In the last analysis the workers will judge individual leaders, groups and parties by what they do. The progressives can never compete successfully with the shouters. They can only expose them through deeds, through action, through struggle.

The second lesson to be learned is, that workers' unity is not just a catchword. Working-class unity, like Negro-white unity, is a principle which must be fought for day in and day out, despite all obstacles. In the first place, this means unity from below. In the second place, this means unity around every and any proposal or issue that corresponds to the interests of the workers, *regardless of who initiated it* or for what reasons. In the third place, it means unity with everyone who is ready to fight for the same demand, regardless of why and regardless of other differences.

It must be remembered that the struggle for working-class unity presupposes the existence of differences, for if there were no differences, there would be no need for waging that struggle. This is sometimes forgotten by people who seek some kind of non-existent "pure" unity, which can only be a unity with oneself, or no unity at all. Communists particularly must remember that the leap to mass class consciousness, to socialist consciousness, can be made

only from the springboard of growing unity of action of the working class. That is why labor bureaucrats fear such unity like the plague.

A third lesson to be learned is that the progressives must never confuse the bureaucrats with the union. They must never say or do anything that can be twisted into seeming to be anti-union. For it is the fighters for progressive policies, for working-class unity, who are the true defenders and the best advocates and champions of the union.

If the Local 600 leadership had not forgotten these things, Reuther would not have succeeded in violating the union constitution. This can be seen by the contortions through which some of his local union apologists had to go in order to explain his action against Local 600. For example, one of his leading Social-Democratic ideologists is Ken Morris, President of Briggs (Amalgamated) Local 212. In his "President's Column" in the March issue of the *Voice of Local* 212, Morris writes:

A basic democratic right within the U.A.W.-C.I.O. is the right to disagree with and criticize the leadership of our union . . . BUT WHEN THAT CRITICISM TAKES THE FORM OF BEING ANTI-UNION . . . THEN IT IS GOING TOO FAR. Then the union has a right to defend itself. (All emphasis as in the original article.)

Note how this apologist for Reuther dares not challenge the right of

the membership or of local unions to disagree with and criticize the leadership. He must falsify the facts to sell his membership on the notion that the Ford Local leadership's criticisms were "anti-union."

In this same column, Ken Morris raises another question. He says that a union cannot be held together unless everyone involved **"IS WILLING TO ACCEPT THE DECISIONS OF THE MAJORITY, DEMOCRATICALLY ARRIVED AT. Everyone can have his say, but when the decision has been made democratically, everyone is obligated to accept the will of the majority."**

Once again, Morris seeks to confuse the issue. No one denies the need for union discipline based on majority rule. Every unionist knows that, when his union has voted to strike, he must walk out, too, regardless of whether he personally favored or opposed the strike. Otherwise he would be a scab.

But how does this apply to Local 600? Where and when did it break a union decision democratically arrived at? Does Ken Morris wish to infer that once a decision is arrived at, no union member, or union local, has a right to criticize it? What then about the right to criticize in which Morris and the union leadership profess to believe?

Speaking of not accepting union decisions democratically arrived at, the shoe is on the other foot. It is Reuther and his henchmen who have

consciously, deliberately and with malice aforethought, refused to "accept the decision of the majority" of the Ford Local membership, because they do not like the officials and policies which were "democratically arrived at."

Reuther and his clique further violated the constitution of the union by removing the five unit officers on the trumped-up charge of Communism, despite the fact that these men had previously stood trial in their own local and had then been exonerated by the General Council of Local 600—the highest body in the local and the highest authority on matters of this kind.

Who then is refusing to accept the decisions of the majority? The real reason the axe fell on Local 600 is that it did disagree with and did criticize Reuther and his policies. It criticized the five-year-do-nothing contract. It called for its re-opening. And it had that right. For there is no provision in the U.A.W. constitution which says that everyone in the union must view the Reuther brothers as God's gift to the auto workers. Nor can there be. The right to criticize, to disagree, and, if you please, even to condemn, is an inherent right which the members of the U.A.W. must never relinquish. This is the real issue which Ken Morris seeks to conceal.

WEAKNESSES IN
PARTY WORK

If Reuther succeeded in isolating the Local 600 leadership from the rest of the union, by putting it into a position of appearing to be factional and anti-union, it cannot be said that this danger was not foreseen. Quite a few Ford workers recognized this danger, as did the Communist Party in Michigan. Reuther spread the lie that the leadership of the Local was subservient to the Communist Party. But actually the Communists felt so keenly the need for supporting the progressive coalition, that they actually remained silent on points of disagreement, remaining silent, in particular, on the danger of factionalism.

If the struggle for unity presupposes the existence of differences, as we have previously shown, this front of unity, if it is to continue and grow, must carry with it the right and duty to voice disagreement *within the coalition*. Such criticism if conducted honestly and frankly, if conducted within the framework of acknowledged agreement, is most beneficial to help carry the unity forward, to help collectively surmount new obstacles and difficulties, to help educate the masses in the course of the struggle.

To keep silent when errors are being made, to refrain from criticism where and when criticism is due, is not to serve the interests of unity but to undermine and destroy it. That this was not understood, that the Party was actually being made

subservient to the united front coalition, can be seen in the fact that precisely during the period of the progressive administration in the local, less attention was given by Detroit Communists to the Party organization among the Ford workers than heretofore. In fact, Party shop clubs did not meet regularly and the bureaucratic habit developed of working with and through a few individuals but not with and through the Party organization.

The Communists of Michigan were also wrong when they did not speak up against the dissolution of the Progressive Caucus as an independent grouping within the local coalition. This dissolution, while not formal, was nonetheless real, reflecting the false view that the interests of unity required a general leveling of all to one common floor.

If, however, the more advanced workers, the Left-wing workers, accept an agreed-upon program of immediate action as the common bond which unites them with the more conservative workers in the united front, this does not and cannot mean that they should surrender their own more advanced opinions. In fact, by giving up their more advanced independent views and their independent organization, by surrendering their right to criticize, they lose, by default, their chance to influence the united front in an ever more progressive direction. They thereby endanger the existence of the united front itself.

This is so, because once the Left-wing ceases to exert pressure and to win larger masses for its more advanced policies, the pressure upon the united front becomes solely that generated by the Right-wing, a pressure aimed at the destruction of the united front.

As can be seen by the Local 600 example, the failure of the Left to take an independent position and to partake openly in constructive criticism, only created the illusion that Stellato and the more conservative forces around him saw eye to eye with the Left. Thus it became easier for the unprincipled Reuther to make the fantastic charge that the Stellato leadership was being "subservient" to the Communists. And in order to "prove" that this was not true, Stellato and his closest followers tended to make concessions to the reactionary pressure. In this way the liquidation of the Progressive Caucus in the name of greater unity, only endangered unity.

It is necessary at this point to call attention to a major weakness of the Communist Party in Michigan which made for dulling its sensitivity to what was happening. A few years ago, the Michigan Communists, in order to help build a great unity movement among the Ford workers, decided upon a policy of industrial concentration. Their campaign for *Worker* readers was centered among Ford workers. Through leaflets and literature, the Party in Michigan ex-

plained to the Ford workers every important issue. Not only economic issues, such as speed-up and run-away shops were dealt with, but also political issues related to war and peace, to Negro-white unity, to labor unity, to political action, etc. All of this sustained activity served to educate a substantial mass of workers who were thus equipped to resist the poison of Red-baiting. This undoubtedly helped create the conditions for progressive policies to become the policies of the Ford workers.

The decision to concentrate was therefore a wise decision, even if it led temporarily to a certain weakening of Party work on other fronts and in other places. For the very concept of concentration is in direct contradiction to the concept of trying to be equally strong everywhere. To be strong at the decisive places establishes the guarantee that qualitative changes will take place which will bring with them a growth of influence and strength all along the line.

In the recent period, however, there took place a fundamental departure from this policy of concentration. The fact is, that the Party organization was neglected, the number of *Worker* subscribers and readers declined, and the Party's propaganda and mass educational work also suffered. This led to a serious weakening of Party organization and of the ties between the Party leadership and the shop workers. Thus, days and even weeks passed before the largest por-

tion of our Party membership was even reached for a discussion on the new situation in the plant and the Local.

What are the main reasons for this departure from a concentration policy? First, one must, of course, take into account the exceptionally difficult conditions in which the Party has had to operate this past year. But this is by no means the sole explanation.

A second reason for a weakening of Party concentration was the concept that we must not "spoon-feed" our shop comrades. But no spoon-feeding does not mean no concentration, does not mean leaving our shop comrades on their own without the necessary daily help and guidance.

A third reason for the weakening of the Party's concentration activity was the conception that work elsewhere was being neglected and that the Party could no longer afford the "luxury." But was there concentration elsewhere? Was there an improvement in the work elsewhere? There was not. The fact is that despite all talk about the importance of concentration nationally on the auto industry, there was no concentration even in Detroit, the heart of the industry.

It also must be said that the whole question of the way in which the Party full-time leadership actually gives guidance to the Party's shop workers is something that needs review, not only in Detroit, but

throughout the Party. We are of the opinion that there is something wrong with our present methods of leadership, for many of them are bureaucratic obstacles to real mass work and to the proper training and education of the whole Party membership.

The leadership of the Michigan Party organization is by no means the worst example of this. In fact, it is one of the better districts in respect to the attention it pays to shop and trade union work. But there is something wrong when there are so many Party leaders in charge of this department or that department of state-wide work, mapping out this campaign or that campaign, while the basic organizations of the Party, the shop organizations, often barely breathe and live, face complicated problems, and are unable to play their full role as the Party in the shops.

What the Party needs today more than anything else, are concrete living examples of how to work, how to bring the Party's program to the workers, how to win masses for progressive policies, and how to consolidate the Party shop organizations in the course of struggle. What we need is to make the most concrete and painstaking evaluation of every victory and every set-back experienced by the workers, and to bring these lessons to the Party membership and the working class as a whole. And our best Party leaders must be those that have the closest links with the

workers, Party and non-party; those who constantly check and recheck the concrete application of Party policies and tactics on the basis of concrete living experience.

UNITY FOR VICTORY

The workers of Local 600 have now entered a new phase of the struggle for a progressive union and for control of their own local. And the lessons dealt with in the earlier sections of this article must find their application to the immediate struggle ahead.

In this new phase of the struggle, Reuther's basic strategy is simple. While continuing to maneuver to keep Local 600 isolated, he has now added two additional tactics to his strategy. The first is to do all in his power to keep the democratically elected local leadership off balance; to keep it from reacting to the daily needs of the workers, from fighting the growing speed-up in the plant, and from taking up the many other issues affecting the Ford workers. He wants the struggle to degenerate into a cat and dog fight, into the kind of struggle that appears to the average worker as merely unprincipled "power politics." He has everything to gain and the progressive coalition everything to lose from that kind of fight.

The second and most important part of Reuther's strategy is to disunite the united front, to break up

and split the progressive coalition. This he intends to do by hook or crook. Why is this so important for him? Because he knows full well that he cannot maintain his administratorship indefinitely. The demand of the workers for local elections is overwhelming. In fact, at this writing, he already has partly bowed to this demand by setting dates for the first of a series of unit elections, after which he promises to announce a date for a local election.

If the elected local leaders stay united, if they keep their eyes on the ball, that is, if they remember that the main enemy is the company and that their first responsibility is to defend the immediate needs of the workers, the progressives can give Reuther a trouncing. That is why he is taking no chances. That is why he has removed and disqualified some of the most militant and most popular unit officers and will probably disqualify more. That is why the election machinery is safely in his hands, in violation of the Local 600 By-Laws which call for the setting up of an election committee "democratically arrived at" by the vote of the membership. Let us repeat: Having gone so far, Reuther is taking no chances.

But the only assurance he has of winning an election in the Local is by splitting the unity of the progressive coalition. This he hopes to accomplish by keeping the false issue of Communism in the forefront, by

centering his fire on the Left and treating Stellato and his followers as "stooges." At the same time he is engaged in back-door horse-trading in an endeavor to buy off unprincipled careerist elements.

It should be quite evident, therefore, that the central conditions for the victory of the united front progressive coalition are unity, *unity*, and *unity*. A recent leaflet issued by the five of the removed unit officers, correctly declares:

Unless the Coalition is maintained, there is a GREAT DANGER OF DIVISION AND DISUNITY AND A REUTHER VICTORY.

WHOEVER SPLITS THIS UNITY FOR PORK CHOP DEALS, WILL STAND EXPOSED AND BRANDED FOREVER WITH THE HATRED AND DISGUST OF THE FORD WORKERS.

That the danger of disunity in the coalition and a victory for the Reuther forces is quite real, can be seen by the fact that here and there certain individuals have become frightened by the false issue of Communism and have drawn the wrong conclusions from the temporary victory of Reuther. This is reflected in the content of a recent leaflet issued by Stellato, in which he pledges not to make a deal with Reuther. The headline of this leaflet reads: "**LOCAL 600 BELONGS TO THE MEMBERSHIP—NOT REUTHER—NOT FORD—NOT THE COM-**

MUNIST PARTY."

Now, we have no disagreement with Stellato when he states that Local 600 belongs to the membership and ONLY to the membership. We who are Communists have not sought and do not seek to have Local 600 or any other labor union "belong" to the Communist Party. Stellato should know this. He should know that the Communists have all along fought for a democratic union. We do not want Local 600 to belong to the Communist Party; we want the right of Communists to belong to Local 600. We want Communists to work for the union and to fight for it, on an equal basis with those of other political persuasions. We have fought for the right of Communists to hold office in unions and for the right of the membership to elect Communists to office. For in the last analysis, it is only the rank and file which has the right to elect or reject.

But apparently Stellato feels it necessary to "prove" he is neither a Communist nor "subservient" to the Communists, by doing a "little bit" of Red-baiting on his own. This is borne out by the contents of his leaflet which refers to "rotten politics . . . played by some people, both on the left and the right." We do not know to whom, if anyone, Stellato is referring. If, perchance, Stellato is referring to the phony "left," namely the Trotskyites, we can readily agree with him, but then the designation "left" is false, for these disrupters

are decidedly not on the Left. But we are more inclined to believe that this reference to the "left" was thrown in for good measure on the assumption that it can do no harm and may do some good.

But Stellato is dead wrong. It can do a great deal of harm. For it falls right into Reuther's trap. Reuther wants to make Communism an issue in order to confuse and divide the workers and to split the coalition. When Stellato also makes Communism an issue and when he also speaks of the Communist Party as if it were some kind of a sinister menace, he actually is bringing grist to Reuther's mill. And no matter what Stellato says or does now, he cannot prove to be a better anti-Communist than Reuther. This is where a "little bit" of Red-baiting leads. It is the surest way to make it easy for Reuther. It will only demoralize the rank and file and split the unity which has been and is the most precious possession of the Ford

Local coalition.

The Ford workers have faced Red-baiting in the past. They faced it when they tried to organize the plant in the '30s, Harry Bennett's goons being only auxiliary storm-troopers. They faced it again when they discovered that Homer Martin, their International president, was a traitor in their ranks. They faced it in every local union election in recent years. As a result of these experiences they have learned to discern the hand of the company in every attempt to break up their unity by Red-baiting.

We are confident that, if the leaders of the progressive coalition stick together and work together, if they refuse to be distracted from the real issues and from the defense of the daily needs of the workers, if they learn the real lessons of the past period, they can have faith in the courage and good judgment of the Ford workers.

Having emerged victorious before, they can and will do so again.