

The Ford Local Union Election

By John Swift

WHEN THE International Executive Board of the United Auto Workers dictatorially abrogated the rights of the Ford Rouge Local 600, removed its leadership, and imposed an Administrator over its affairs, workers everywhere were concerned. They wanted to know: Would Walter Reuther be able to get away with it? When, finally, after months of struggle, the Ford workers did win the right to a local union election, the big questions were: Would the Ford workers uphold Reuther's actions? Would they permit themselves to be swept into renouncing their own progressive program and their democratically elected leadership?

The Ford Local Union election held in September provided the answer to these questions. It is this which gives this election its *special* significance.

Strangely enough, the result of this test of strength in the Ford Local went unnoticed in the national press. We say "strangely," because it cannot be said that the monopoly controlled newspaper syndicates and chains were indifferent to the outcome of the struggle in Local 600, or unaware of its existence.

On the contrary, when Reuther rode roughshod over the rights of the Ford workers in March, this made front page news throughout the nation. It was even translated into a score of tongues and beamed to the four corners of the earth by the Voice of Wall Street, improperly and cynically called the "Voice of America."

If the results of the Ford election were played down in the Detroit press and entirely omitted from the corporation-controlled press of the nation, this was due to the fact that the news was not to the liking of the millionaire publishers. These are the gentlemen who so zealously guard our much vaunted and yet hard-to-be-found "freedom of the press," and who so ardently and tenderly, and, may we add, so class-consciously, determine what news is and what is not "fit to print."

In other words, when Reuther opened his "anti-Communist" crusade, this was considered as News with a capital "N." But when the Ford workers rejected this Red-baiting and indicated that they loved Reuther's policies in September even less than in March, this was no news whatsoever!

Just as it was important for Com-

munist and progressive trade unionists to understand the reasons for the Reuther seizure and its success in March, so is it important to understand the reasons for the Reuther rebuff of September. For only by carefully analyzing and studying every setback and every gain made by the workers can real headway be made in breaking the hold of the labor bureaucrats over the labor movement and advancing the cause of labor unity.

That Reuther and his International union leadership did receive a rebuff at the hands of the Ford workers is an incontrovertible fact. Nor can all of Reuther's eel-like attempts to squirm out of his predicament change this fact. Let us summarize the results of the election:

1. All four top officers of the local, the very ones removed by Reuther, were re-elected with overwhelming pluralities. So strong was the unity displayed by the Ford workers that the coalition leadership of the local was not even seriously challenged.

Already prior to the local union election, the true relationship of forces in the local union had been made evident by the results of the various unit (building) elections which had taken place during July and August. These conclusively proved that any head-on challenge to the local union leadership would result in humiliating defeat for Reuther's followers. Thus, a brash and boastful Reuther became a coy and cautious Reuther. What he could

not win by strength he hoped to gain by stealth. He decided to permit Carl Stellato, the local union president, to run unopposed.

In this way Reuther hoped to accomplish two ends: First, to cushion the impact of his own defeat, and second, to try to split the local leadership by separating Stellato from the rest. This did not work. The four top officers ran on one common Unity Slate. They openly appealed to the workers to vote down the actions of the International in sending Administrators into the local, and to support the whole progressive program of the united local leadership.

Significantly, even though the other top officers were opposed, the Right-wing pro-Reuther caucus did not dare to challenge them openly. Of great importance was the re-election of William Hood as recording secretary. Hood, the most outstanding Negro leader of the local, and National President of the Negro Labor Council, was opposed in the election by three candidates, all of them white. It was hoped to corral the votes of backward white workers against a Negro in top office, thereby forcing a run-off election. But there was no run-off. Hood received nearly twice as many votes as all the three of his opponents combined! The vote was 12,567 for Hood as against 6,500 votes for his three opponents.

Important also was the re-election of Pat Rice as vice-president. It was Pat Rice, co-Chairman of the Progressive (Left-wing) Caucus who,

together with William Hood, had been made the special target of attack by the House Un-American Committee during its visit to Detroit last March. Rice received 14,509 votes; his opponent 4,648.

2. In addition to the four top officers, the entire Unity Slate was elected. Not a single opponent of this slate even came close to being elected!

3. In the unit (building) elections that preceded the local union election, the Unity forces around the local union leadership swept the field and emerged stronger than before the election.

The tabulation of the results of the building elections was made public on August 26th in a statement issued by Dave Moore, co-chairman of Progressive Caucus. This compilation showed:

In twelve Buildings with a membership of 41,013 or 85 percent of the total Rouge membership, the workers voted into office Building Chairmen united in the Unity Coalition, opposed to the Administrators, supporting the program of Local 600. . . .

In five buildings with a membership of 4,486 or 9 percent of the total Rouge membership, the workers voted into office Building Chairmen who are in the Reuther Right-wing camp. In none of these Units did the Reuther Right-wing slate identify itself as supporters of Reuther, nor take a position in support of the Administrators over Local 600.

In two Buildings with a membership of 3,050 or 6 percent of the total Rouge membership, the workers voted into of-

fice, Building Chairmen who are Independents—neither adherents of the Reuther Right-wing nor participants in the Unity Coalition.

How does this compare with the relationship of forces in the Ford Rouge Plant before the election? Brother Moore, in behalf of the Progressive Caucus and in the same above-quoted statements, tells us:

Prior to the Administrators, the Reuther Right-wing controlled the Presidency of 5 Buildings with a membership of 11,878 workers. Now they succeeded in electing 5 Chairmen in Units with a membership of 4,486, representing a decline of over 7,000 workers. The Reuther Right-wing suffered its biggest losses in the Foundry with 6,070 workers and Rolling Mill with 2,295 workers. They retained the same number of Building Chairmen (5) by virtue of victories in the Glass Plant with 973 workers and in the newly established Unit, the Specialty Foundry with 700 workers.

Furthermore, before the recent elections two building units had elected Negro chairmen. This was increased to three Negro chairmen in this election. The contrast between the record of Local 600 in the promotion of Negro workers to top leadership and the continued shameful existence of a lily-white International Executive Board is more striking than ever.

4. Brother Moore also tells us: "Within the Unity Coalition, the Progressives (Left-wing) were victorious in 7 Buildings with a mem-

ship of 24,219 or 49 per cent of the total Rouge membership. Center and Conservative Chairmen within the Unity Coalition were victorious in 5 Buildings with a membership of 16,794 or 35 per cent of the total Rouge membership."

5. The newly elected General Council, the highest policy making body of the local, also is composed of an overwhelming majority of Unity Coalition supporters. Among these the percentage of Progressive Caucus supporters is larger than in the previous General Council.

As clear and irrefutable as are the above cited facts, it would appear that the International Executive Board is understandingly reluctant to admit having received a trouncing. (After all, what the Rouge workers did is entirely unfair to the I.E.B. and its Grand Lama, Walter Reuther!) In a statement issued after the Rouge election, and at a time it was compelled to announce the withdrawal of its Administrators, the I.E.B. claimed great achievements for the reign of its Administrators. Having sent the Administrators into the local under the pretext of "cleaning out the Communists," the I.E.B. announces as its greatest achievement—and this with a straight face—"The results of the elections recently concluded in Local 600 show that Communist Party influence in the units, the local union, and the General Council is at its lowest level in the history of the local union."

Now, now, Walter, whom are you trying to kid? If your "house clean-

ing" was so successful why does the IEB statement subtly warn the Ford Local to watch its step? Why does it declare that "our next Convention must devise new and more effective machinery to deal with the problem of any Communists within our ranks?" To borrow a phrase of yours, Walter, whose slip is it that is showing?

Not all of Reuther's followers have so keen a sense of humor and so developed an Achesonian ability to misread failure as success. Some of them can recognize a smack in the nose when they run into one. The official publication of the Michigan Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, *The Wage Earner*, has been wearing sackcloth and ashes over the Right-wing defeat in Local 600. Its September issue carries on the front page the mournful headline, "End of UAW-Reuther Era Seen in Events at 600." The body of the story continues in the same doubtful notes by stating: "Control of the local by anti-Reuther forces (read: pro-unity forces—J.S.) can be interpreted by other UAW locals throughout the country as a serious blow to Mr. Reuther since 600 is in his own city and the much vaunted 'biggest' local."

It continues: "It is all the more significant because the election was delayed since June when Administrators were placed over the controversial local by International officers who charged it was dominated by Communists and C.P. followers."

The A.C.T.U. is worried lest the

progressive victory at the Rouge will make it more difficult for the Ford Corporation to get away with increased speed-up and exploitation, and its heart bleeds for both Ford and Reuther at the same time. "An anti-Reuther slate of officers, and domination of committees and units by Progressive forces," laments *The Wage Earner*, "will undoubtedly affect collective bargaining with the Ford Motor Co." "Why?" one may ask, and *The Wage Earner* replies: "Dissatisfaction over the handling of routine grievances . . . and charges of speed-up can have drastic effects on production, and labor-management relations during the coming year. And none of these will reflect to the credit, deservedly or not, of Mr. Reuther."

Does *The Wage Earner* wish to imply that acquiescence to speed up and grievances on the part of the union would reflect to the credit of Reuther? With whom? The workers or the corporation?

So much for who won the election at the Rouge.

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What were the factors that made the progressive victory at the Ford Rouge possible?

The first factor was the mass indignation of the workers at the usurpation of their democratic union rights by the imposition of Administrators. This opposition to the Reuther seizure was so widespread that it crosses all caucus lines. It included

large numbers of workers who on other questions normally support Reuther's policies. This is why even those candidates who supported Reuther's dictatorial actions, in the main, did not dare publicly to proclaim this support, but remained silent on the matter of the Administrators.

Correctly understanding this, the progressives refused to fall into the trap of making "Communism" the issue. Instead they made the issue what it really was, that of union democracy. For the first period after the Administrators took over the local the simple slogan which united nearly all Ford workers was the demand for a prompt local union election.

This hostility to International interference in the internal affairs of U.A.W. locals is quite widespread throughout the union and confirms the view that the Reuther machine has far from succeeded in cowing the rank and file of this great union.

The second factor was the growing dissatisfaction of the workers with their economic position under the five-year-do-nothing contract. Many workers realized that the Reuther seizure, made on the pretext of fighting so-called Communist influence, was meant to stifle the snowballing rank-and-file pressure for a do-something policy, for a reopening of the contract. This movement for a reopening of contract was not only strong among the Ford workers, but was one of the key issues of difference between the Flint General Motors' workers and the Inter-

national leadership.

Walter Reuther, himself, has attested since to the vitality of this issue. As soon as he saw which way things were going in the Ford struggle, Reuther proceeded to modify his own position on the five-year contract. Giving another example of his agility in double-jointed gymnastics, Reuther has turned himself inside out on this issue. He now pleads that he never thought the five-year contract was sacrosanct and untouchable. He now argues that conditions have changed since it was written. He now favors "adjustments" in the present G.M. and Ford contracts to: 1) add the main part of the cost of living increases to the base pay; 2) increase the annual improvement factor from 4 to 5 cents, and 3) increase pension payments in line with the rise in the cost of living.

As inadequate as are these demands for "adjustment," Reuther's change of face on this issue is of great importance and constitutes an important victory for the rank and file of the U.A.W. For once "adjustments" and "amendments" to the contract are considered permissible, the workers have the means to influence the character and scope of these "adjustments."

The Ford workers, by their struggle and by their unity, have contributed greatly to this development. This does not yet mean victory, even on Reuther's limited demands, but it does open the door to winning concessions and improvements and to putting an end to the obnoxious sys-

tem of long term do-nothing contracts.

The third important factor in the progressive victory is that the Unity Coalition remained united despite varied and frequently sharp differences in its ranks and despite all efforts of Reuther and his machine to break this unity. The Left-wing forces learned something from their previous errors. They did not hesitate to take issue with Stellato and other more conservative elements in the united front coalition. This was done within the framework of over-all unity and in order to strengthen this unity. In many ways, this correct struggle for unity was the decisive factor in the victory, for without this, the popular sentiment against the seizure and for improved economic conditions would have been dissipated instead of harnessed in constructive channels.

The only hope Reuther had of winning was by splitting the coalition and by trying to break the more conservative forces away from the more progressive and Left-wing forces. That is why he tried to make Communism the main issue and centered his attack on the leaders of the Progressive Caucus, while treating Stellato as a stooge. As *The Wage Earner* admits, the leaders of the Right-wing caucus were speculating on a rift within the Unity Coalition. They hoped to provoke the Progressive Caucus into putting forward its own full slate for local union officers as against Stellato.

"Were a complete Progressive slate

to be tossed in," writes *The Wage Earner*, in September, "the Right-wing planned to stay in the race hoping that in a three-way vote they might win." When these hopes of a split turned to ashes, the Right-wing jig was up, at least for the time being. Failing to split the united front, the Right-wing caucus itself began to split up. This is so because of its heterogeneous and unprincipled character. This same tendency will occur everywhere that correct united front policies are pursued by progressives.

The fourth important factor in the victory was the ability of the progressives to exercise self-control and to keep from being provoked into wild factionalism which would be tantamount to an unprincipled cat and dog fight in the eyes of the workers.

In the main it can be said that the progressives stuck to the issues. They saw the Ford Corporation as the main enemy, and took up the grievances of the workers such as speed up, the demand for a 28½ cent wage increase for the skilled workers, etc.

If this is so, a great deal of credit is due the Left-wing militants. When the local union officers became somewhat paralyzed by the brazen seizure of the local by Reuther, the Left-wing progressives did not wait for them to snap out of it. They went directly to the workers themselves. They issued leaflets clarifying the issues. They organized struggles over grievances. In most buildings they began movements for Unit Membership Meet-

ings, so that the rank and file could air its shop grievances and its opposition to the Administrators. They helped organize the resistance to the growing arrogance and speed-up squeeze of the company. Stoppages over such questions as wash-up time and speed-up took place in the Tool and Die, Plastic, and Gear and Axle Units. The mounting struggle against economic grievances also produced mounting pressure upon the local union officers for a convening of the General Council of the local *despite* the Administrator's taboo. More than two-thirds of the members of the General Council signed a petition asking for such a meeting and Stellato finally set a date after which the "gloves will be off." Also, over a hundred elected Negro leaders in the local met under the leadership of William Hood to undertake a united fight in behalf of Negro leadership in the Union. At the same time the Progressive Caucus held well attended and enthusiastic meetings in a number of buildings.

It was this splendid initiative, it was these united-front struggles and activities *from below*, which also forced a change of tactics on the part of Reuther's Administrators. They saw that they were unable to provoke the Unity Coalition into wild counter charges, and that their own campaign was missing fire, in fact, backfiring. Therefore, they abruptly changed their tactics in the middle of the fight and began to compete with the progressives over the handling of grievances.

This change occurred after one issue of *Ford Facts*, edited by the Administrators, made an especially scurrilous attack on the Unity Coalition and particularly on the Left-wing. In a screaming headline across the front page, *Ford Facts* charged that the progressives had been forging a union printing label on their literature in order to conceal their use of non-union scab printing. So irresponsible was this charge, so simple and complete was its refutation by the progressives, that it blew up in the face of its perpetrators. It was at this point that Reuther must have called in his boys and told them to check their over-zealousness because their tactics were boomeranging.

The next issues of *Ford Facts* became very "objective" and took on an "above the struggle" tone. From that point on, and especially as the votes began to come in from the various unit elections, the Administrators grew more and more civil and restrained. Red-baiting visibly declined, and Reuther's policy became one of avoiding head-on collision in order to save face and what else he could from the mess.

It is this which led some of the A.C.T.U. leaders of the Ford Right-wing caucus to accuse Reuther and his Social-Democratic followers of double-crossing them. Apparently he had promised them a fight to the finish with no holds barred. Instead, in the middle of the scrap, Reuther decided that discretion was the better part of valor. But on his part he could

reply to his A.C.T.U. cronies in the Rouge and with some justice, that they had misled him. They had exaggerated their strength and underestimated the strength of the Unity Coalition and the intelligence of the Ford workers.

The change of tactics on the part of the Administrators, plus Reuther's decision not to have a candidate in opposition to Stellato, has led to considerable speculation as to whether a deal had not been consummated between Reuther and Stellato. After all, the unprincipled Reuther has shown great versatility in the art of bribing and buying off the opposition, thereby destroying ever more effectively new, promising and militant young leaders.

On our part we refuse to engage in the time-wasting pastime of mind reading, soul searching or crystal ball gazing. We do not know what Brother Stellato has in mind. All we can do is to stick to the facts. These are, that even though Stellato ran unopposed, he ran as part of, in fact, the leader of, the Unity Coalition.

This coalition, in its appeal to the workers for votes, made no bones about where it stood on the issue of the Administrators. A four-page platform issued just before the local elections declares that "the placing of Administrators over the membership of Local 600 will forever be a blot upon the history of the International union." It comes out strongly for the rights of the five building unit leaders who had been barred

from the right to hold office by the International on the charge of membership in or "subservience" to the Communist Party. In italic bold face type it declared: "We will fight to restore these members to full membership privileges within our Union..." Nor did the Unity Coalition headed by Stellato backtrack on any of its program. In the main it stuck by its guns.

From all this it cannot be shown that there was connivance between Stellato and Reuther. Nor would such back door deals prove very wise for the prestige and influence of Stellato as a leader of the union. He has proven that, when a leader really has the rank and file solidly behind him, not even a machine as strong as Reuther's can topple him.

Reuther's challenge to the Ford Local and his subsequent defeat at the hands of the Ford workers has strengthened the position of the Ford Local leadership, in fact, made it stronger than ever before. The only way this greater strength can be dissipated and weakened is if the leaders of the coalition violate the trust placed in them by the workers and become tempted by the siren call of soft jobs in plush covered swivel chairs.

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In its successful fight to regain its rights under the U.A.W. Constitution, the Ford Local also has won an important battle in its campaign for a better and more progressive union. But only a battle. That is why the

Ford progressives dare not rest on their laurels. They must not exaggerate their victory, nor read into it license for cockiness or factionalism. The workers in the Rouge supported them because they expect militant advanced leadership. They will continue to support them only so long as they get this kind of leadership.

The prestige of the Ford Local has been enhanced throughout the U.A.W. Other local unions will be watching Local 600 to see how it uses this victory. In this connection the progressives constantly must bear in mind that even the victory scored in their local union is jeopardized. At best it can be only a partial victory so long as the unity they have built in Local 600 finds no expression throughout the U.A.W. Certainly the united strength of the workers in Local 600, pillar that it is, is insufficient by itself to win the many progressive demands contained within the Local 600 unity program.

This was borne out once again at the recent conference of the Ford National Council which met to draft the united demands of the Ford workers throughout the country. Here, on many questions, Local 600 was in a minority. Yet without the support of the other Ford locals throughout the country, it will be more difficult for Local 600 to win its fight against the Ford corporation in the Rouge.

It must be said, however, that following this conference, Local 600's leaders did not creep into their tent and sulk. The *Ford Facts* of October 4th carries a footnote to its story

on this conference which states that Local 600 delegates "are not completely satisfied with the decisions of the majority of the Ford Locals." At the same time, it goes on to say, "Local 600 will continue its fight for the complete 600 program."

Bravo! This is responsible leadership which will be greeted and respected in the entire U.A.W. If Local 600 wants other local unions to march with it, it, too, must march with them!

Even the fight to restore the rights of the five union leaders who were dictatorially barred from holding office—a fight which must not be surrendered—cannot be won by Local 600 alone. It can be won only in the arena of the larger fight for a more democratic U.A.W. This is evident in the announcement of the I.E.B. that it intends to ask the coming U.A.W. Convention for even more stringent infringements upon the democratic rights of members.

Therefore, the struggle for unity of action, while it must grow even stronger within the Ford Local, must find its expression in a consistent policy of the outstretched hand to the entire labor movement and, in the first place, to the whole U.A.W. Without this, Local 600's inspiring slogan, "*The Salvation of America's Workers Lies Within the Unity of Labor*," becomes mere rhetoric.

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During the course of the six-month struggle which ended with the local union election in September, the pro-

gressives in the Ford Local had a number of golden opportunities to give practical life and meaning to their slogan for labor unity. These opportunities, or would it not be better to say, responsibilities, frequently were neither seen nor seized. Had they been, Local 600 would have participated in the Michigan State Convention of the C.I.O. It did not.

If we are to believe the statement of the Administrators as it appeared on the front page of *Ford Facts* during their regime, the reason for this absence was a decision of the General Council of the Local, *before the administrators took over*, to stay away from this convention. It is difficult to square this action with the slogan for labor unity.

How at least one other local union in the U.A.W. felt about this action of Local 600 was expressed in an article in the Buick Local 599 section of the *Flint Weekly News*. The writer summarizes what occurred at the State C.I.O. Convention and states that one of the reasons why the Schoiles-Hopkins machine was not successfully challenged at the convention was that "Local 600, the largest in the C.I.O. in Michigan, sent no delegates." The writer adds, "Whether it was a boycott of the convention or not we will never know but it is a matter of record that Local 600, almost consistently votes pro-Unionism which is sometimes anti-machine." But in order to vote "pro-Unionism," it at least had to be present!

It is time for progressives generally to learn that the boycott is the least suitable of all tactics for breaking isolation and building unity in the labor movement. It should be a challenge and duty to progressives to take advantage of *every* opportunity no matter how small, to discuss problems with the delegates of other local unions, to air differences with them, and to join hands with them whenever this is possible. Pet theories, which say that attendance at Right-wing dominated union gatherings is a waste of time and that all the delegates at these conferences are hand-picked stooges, are false and dangerous doctrines. They are only "Left-sounding" clap-trap for running away from a possible fight. One may, like Greta Garbo, "want to be alone," but not in the name of labor unity!

Another example of this general aloofness and lack of awareness of what is happening in the rest of the U.A.W. and the Detroit labor movement can be seen by what occurred at the height of the recent steel struggle. It should be noted, in passing, that during the steel struggle, more than at any other time in recent years, the trade union movement as a whole was swept by a shudder of fear of what the reactionaries had in store for it. When the new Smith Bill was introduced in Congress, even the most upholstered bureaucrats indicated signs of uneasiness.

It was at this time that militant unions such as the United Electrical Workers and the Fur Workers were

making pleas for unity behind the steel workers, and when John L. Lewis made his dramatic proposal and offer in support of the steel strikers.

In the midst of all this, the Briggs Local 212, in Detroit, held a special membership meeting and adopted one of the most advanced and strongly worded resolutions calling for united labor action. This resolution, as reported in the columns of the *Voice of 212*, declared that "unless this political reactionary sweep on the part of the enemies of labor is stopped in its tracks, unions in the United States will end up in a legal net of labor-curbing laws." It concluded by "urging the International U.A.W.-C.I.O. to take the initiative in calling upon the C.I.O., the A. F. of L. and Railroad Brotherhoods and Independent unions to plan a conference to evaluate the situation and take what action they believe the times call for to protect labor and free, democratic collective bargaining."

This resolution hit the nail on the head. It deserved the immediate and unconditional support of every honest worker and every U.A.W. local. The fact that it came from Local 212, led by Ken Morris, Social-Democratic side-kick of Reuther and sharp critic of the Ford Local leadership, did not lessen its importance. If anything, it heightened it. This was an opportunity for the Ford Local leadership to have said: "Brother Morris, we disagree on many things, but on this proposition you have our full support. We are glad to be able to

join with you in urging our International union to take the initiative for the calling of such a unity conference of all labor." That would have been true labor leadership.

There are those, of course, who say that Ken Morris engineered this display of militancy because he found himself hard pressed in his local union election and needed a chest-thumping, fighting line to get votes. Suppose this were true. Did it change the importance of the plea for unity? If it was meant as mere bluff and bluster on the part of Brother Morris, it was all the more necessary to call his hand. One thing is sure, it was not meant as such by the membership of Local 212.

The Ford Local leadership was either unaware of, or indifferent to, the Local 212 resolution. We prefer to believe the former. But a policy of closer contact with other local unions would change this lapse. This is all the more imperative now, because the Republican victory in the November election endangers every right and gain won by organized labor in the past two decades. What Local 212 called for last summer is a thousand times more urgent and necessary today.

Because criticism, like charity, should begin at home, let us also note that the Communists of Michigan paid no attention to this important resolution. They did not even take the trouble of reporting it in the columns of the *Daily Worker*.

The last example we would like to cite of this same tendency is the

failure of the progressives in the Ford Local, and in Michigan generally, to take a positive and *active* position towards the statewide referendum on reapportionment. This referendum, initiated by the Michigan C.I.O., received the backing also of the Michigan A. F. of L. It was put on the ballot by the C.I.O. going out and getting 270,000 signatures on petitions. The referendum itself aims at ending a situation in the state in which the rural and small town areas are given majority representation in the State Legislature, although they constitute a minority of the population of the state.

The fight for such referendums is a positive, progressive fight. It arises precisely in those places where the labor movement begins to become more politically conscious and realizes that the election laws of the state are weighted against the working class. The progressives in Michigan did not pitch in behind this fight. They took a say-nothing, do-nothing attitude.

Here was an opportunity for progressives to work together with the whole labor movement. This was an opportunity to do some real education of the workers on the class structure of government. It also was an opportunity to discuss independent political action. The workers could be shown that, in a state like Michigan, where they and their families are a majority, the labor movement could, if united, step forward into the leadership of a party of its own.

The "go-it-alone" tendencies on

the part of the Ford Local can and should be overcome in the immediate struggle ahead to win a maximum of improvements during the contract reopening struggle. *Ford Facts* is correct when it warns: "Past experience shows that corporations only give in under pressure. . . . How many changes are made and how good these changes are, depends on the united pressure exerted by the membership."

The Ford Local should be an example in rallying its own membership to exert this united pressure and in working to bring about the united pressure of the whole union. It must be remembered that the difference between progressive and reactionary trade union policies is not merely a difference in programmatic demands, but in the approach to how these demands are won. The labor bureaucrat relies on negotiations; the progressive labor leader on the united and militant action of the rank and file. It is this which makes the difference in what demands can or cannot be realized.

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In critically evaluating the election in Local 600, it is necessary to point out that the peace issue, which stood forth plainly and visibly in the 1951 local election, was either soft-pedaled or entirely lost sight of in the recent election. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, the issue of union democracy predominated. This issue itself was closely tied to that of war or peace. For Reuther's seizure of the Ford

Local occurred within the context of the war drive and war hysteria. It can be argued, therefore, and with merit, that when the workers upheld their local leadership against the un-American witch-hunt committee and against the Red-baiting attack of Reuther, they also were taking a position against the war hysteria and for peace.

This does not, however, explain why the peace issue as such was played down. The reason is to be found elsewhere. In 1951, the big issue before the Ford workers was that of mounting unemployment. They realized that this was one of the bitter consequences of the change from peace-time to armament production. In the summer of 1952, the issue of unemployment was not as acute. The slack in civilian production was being taken in by increasing war production orders. Under these circumstances the question of war or peace did not appear to have the same urgency, in terms of bread and butter for the workers.

But the progressives, if they are really to be progressives, cannot permit temporary shifts in employment status to determine what in their opinion constitutes the key to the best welfare of the workers, both today and tomorrow. The failure to treat the peace issue was a mistake. Continued failure in this direction on the part of the progressive coalition can only undermine the very foundation of their victory.

All the weathervanes point toward a rapidly approaching economic gale.

Production for war is not halting, and cannot halt, this approaching crisis. Not increasing war production, but increasing production for peace is what the workers want and need. This means that what the Ford Local, and the auto workers generally, need, is an economic program for peace. When the present period of relative high employment ends, the workers will want more than increased unemployment insurance as important as that is. They will want work, and work without war. While the demand of the local for a six hour day is one plank of such a program, it does not answer how the Rouge and the rest of the auto-aircraft industry can avoid shutdown when a crash comes. An economic program for peace such as that recently drawn up by the Mine Mill Union is part of the answer. At the same time, such problems as that of trade with China and with other Communist-led countries may make all the difference in the world in determining whether the workers in the Rouge have jobs or not.

Doing a little more advance thinking in terms of what is shaping up for the American workers also will bring the progressives in Local 600 to see the need for beginning to broaden their program in respect to other questions, such as housing, education, etc. In the last analysis, only a progressive and advanced legislative program *added* to the economic demands directed at the Ford Corporation, and together with a positive peace program, can help meet

the vexing problems of the period ahead.

Already taxes are eating away a large chunk of the workers' paycheck. A progressive union, therefore, must do something about this if it is to safeguard the economic position of its workers. And tomorrow, with mass unemployment, only immense government expenditures for housing, slum clearance, schools, hospitals and other domestic projects, plus increased world trade, can even approach the problem of providing jobs and limited security.

Therefore, a progressive union today also must be a union with an advanced program for social legislation, with a positive peace program for increased trade, and with an *active* program of political action to achieve these objectives. Furthermore, a program for peace, a program based on welfare and not warfare, is a program which must be fought for by labor in a *new* way. The results of the November elections, the great danger of increased domestic reaction, prove that labor's policy of tailing after the Democratic Party's reactionary politicians and policies has led it into a blind alley. To get out of this there must be true *independent* political action on the part of labor, both within and upon the Democratic Party, as well as in the direction of a new party of the common people led by labor.

In raising these questions, it may appear to some that we are advocating a narrowing down of the broad unity which has characterized the

progressive coalition in Local 600. This is not so. We favor the maximum of unity. But such maximum unity does not exclude, but includes, the need for raising new questions, for forward movement to keep abreast of new, ever changing and ever more challenging problems. To stand still is to move backward. To fail to think ahead is to lag behind.

We realize that the task of broadening and deepening the progressive program of the Unity Coalition at the Rouge will take time and perseverance. At this stage the most important thing is that the Communist workers, and the Left-wing generally, begin to understand the need for winning the workers, *from below*, for more advanced positions. Only if this is done, only if the level of understanding of the workers is raised, can changes and additions be made to the unity program without endangering existing unity, while in fact, at the same time cementing that unity. Unless the Communists, through their Party organization, play such a vanguard role, they cannot serve best the unity of the Ford workers. We are convinced that the Communist workers at the Rouge, who worked so well to make the progressive victory of their local union possible, will now learn again from their new experiences and strengthen further the Party organization and its influence among the workers.

It is in the spirit of these remarks that we also wish to criticize what

may appear to some to be a mere trivial editorial matter, but which may be much more than that. We refer to the recent insertion of the innocent word "Christian" before the word peace in the Local 600 program. Now, who can be opposed to a "Christian peace," one may ask. But when we stop to think that our country today is engaged in a war on the Korean peninsula, and that the people of Korea, China and Asia are not "Christians," a call for a "Christian peace" could be interpreted to mean a white-imperialist peace dictated to the "non-Christian" colored peoples of Asia.

We do not say this is what was meant. We only say this formulation could lead to such an unfortunate conclusion. What is wanted in Korea is not a Christian peace or a Mohammedan peace, but just plain *peace* based on an immediate cessation of all hostilities and the ironing out of all pending issues by the Security Council of the United Nations.

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In conclusion, what is the main lesson which Communists and trade union progressives can learn from the Local 600 experiences? It is this: That it is possible to establish and consolidate progressive-led coalitions within Right-wing led unions despite all attempts of the reactionary officialdom to dislodge or destroy them.

There are no unions in which progressives cannot work and get results in the direction of building the unity

of the workers and in making these unions *better* class instruments of the workers in the defense of their living standards and rights. This conclusion must be blazoned into the consciousness of every Communist and militant trade unionist. This does not mean that the results can be the same everywhere. It does not deny great difficulties and even humiliating ones. But the trade union is the most elementary and most basic mass organization of the working class. If Communists and progressives cannot learn to work in these, yes, despite the labor fakers, where can they work?

In order to make headway in this work, it is necessary to probe deeply into the reasons for every progressive setback and every advance, for every victory and every defeat. For these are not fortuitous products of a cruel fate. They are the products of causes which must be understood if they are to be controlled.

Such digging and probing has not yet become a *style of work* on our part. Too frequently great struggles take place requiring a great exertion of effort and yet when they are over, little attention is given to learn the lessons of the struggle. Thus, often, incorrect conclusions are drawn. Defeats are written off as either fluke accidents or as due to objective conditions beyond control. Victories are taken in their stride as natural products of correct policies and good work. But how superficial this is can be seen in the reluctance to apply the same yardstick to setbacks and de-

feats. These are never, or hardly ever, treated as natural products of incorrect policies and bad work. And if and when they are, they are usually kept as state-secrets for the select, and rarely brought out publicly, and self-critically, so that all advanced workers can learn from them.

As Marxists, as historical-materialists, we know that objective conditions are primary, and that to fly in their face is the utmost folly. We also know that not infrequently objective conditions are the prime factor in the defeat of progressive forces. But even where this is so, the question still arises: Was the real objective picture, and not a fanciful one, taken into account at the outset of the struggle. Were the goals set in harmony with what was practical of attainment? If they were not, for sometimes this can only be gauged accurately by putting it to the test, were they taken into account from then on?

It is impossible to pursue correct policy where there is no correct general appraisal of what can and what can not be attained under concrete given, objective conditions.

Thus, frequently, where objective conditions seem to rise up to smite progressives down, like some strange force from the nether-world, it is because they have not taken into account the totality of the objective events. They have not understood the probable course of development and its tempo and, therefore, have been unable to utilize the objective conditions, but instead, become their

blind victims. Like sailors who do not know how to trim their sails to the prevailing winds, the very winds which can bring them closer to port, shipwreck them. And because the class struggle under capitalism never ceases, regardless of what the objective conditions may be, whether that of ebb or flow, there are winds which can be made use of, which can move the working class ship forward, even if an inch at a time.

This dangerous tendency to blame objective conditions for setbacks which are avoidable, was what made us so concerned over the position initially taken by some Michigan Communist leaders that the Reuther seizure represented the victory of fascism itself, no less. For this was an "easy" way of writing off the defeat without setting a fighting, realistic perspective for victory. And we are glad to note that the holders of this view soon threw it aside, learned the lessons of previous errors, and helped make the victory of the progressive forces at the Rouge possible.

Events have confirmed the realistic nature of the estimation in the July *Political Affairs* which said that given correct leadership and a learning of the real lessons of the defeat, there could be confidence "in the courage and good judgment of the Ford workers."

Confidence in the workers, their basic integrity and their readiness to defend their rights as they see them, is more important today than ever, precisely because of the Republican victory and the new position

of the Tafts and McCarthys in American life. But this confidence in the workers can only grow out of understanding them, their conditions of life and struggle, what they are ready to fight for and what they are not, and why.

Any confidence which is not so grounded is only a petty-bourgeois romantic idealization of the workers. It arises from an idealistic and not materialist point of view. Because it is based on wishful thinking and not fact, it soon turns into its opposite, into a complete loss of confidence in the working class and even a contempt for it. In our own ranks there are examples of both this abstract confidence and this arrogant contempt.

The Left-wing and progressive militants in the Ford Local did not have an abstract confidence in the Ford workers, nor did they exaggerate their level of understanding. That is why they refused to allow Reuther to get away with making "Communism" the issue. They knew that while the workers were not ready to defend Communism as such, they were ready to defend their own rights to elect their own local leadership, to determine their own policies and to work for a united local without Red-baiting or witch-hunts.

These experiences have general validity. The November elections showed that a large percentage of the American people are taken in by anti-Communism. But it is still true that the American people do not want war or fascism. In this we must have

the utmost confidence.

It is likewise true that the very reactionary sweep which now threatens the most elementary rights of labor and the people is also an objective factor which can be utilized to raise high the banner of united labor action and militant defense of labor, democratic and civil rights.

If this "opportunity" is seen, then the reactionary Republican victory of November can also be transformed in time into a greater labor and people's unity and a setback for the forces of reaction, fascism and war. Toward this end, the experiences of the workers of the Ford Local may prove useful.