

INTO THE LABOR COUNCIL

By Bertram D. Wolfe

AT this moment, when the Party is engaged in bringing its entire membership into the unions, it is opportune to raise the slogan "Into the Labor Councils."

In New York, for example, where over 50 per cent of the Party membership already belong to unions, and where, within the next few weeks, it is expected to raise that percentage to well over 90 by the intensive campaign that has now been started by the Organization Department, the Industrial Department and the Agitprop Department, the question of the Central Trades and Labor Council is a sorely neglected one.

Time was when the New York Central Trades and Labor Council was a standard bearer of militancy for the American Labor movement and when it was a definitely "socialist" council under the ideological influence of the socialist labor party. But times have changed and our left wing unions for years have neglected the Central Trades and Labor Council; have, sometimes by accident and sometimes by the design of yellow socialist bureaucrats, made their meeting nights conflict with the nights on which the Council meets and have permitted it to become a tool in the hands of the Tammany bureaucracy in the labor unions of the City of New York. Thus, in place of being, as it should be, the co-ordinating body which unites all the New York local unions into a combined force for the defending of those common interests of the city's workers which transcend the narrow interests

of each particular craft and local union, it has become an instrument of ham-stringing the workers of New York City and tying them to the political chariot of Tammany Hall. This has become all the more a menace to New York City's workers since Smith has gotten control of the New York City "democracy" and thus delivered the Democratic Party directly into the hands of the House of Morgan and with it the New York trade union bureaucracy. Smith himself is the direction of the Electric Transport Co., which thru interlocking directorates is tied up with the Interboro Rapid Transit Co., the New York Central and most of the other leading railroads of this country, the United States Steel, the International Harvester, the Bankers' Trust, the Guarantee Trust Co., and the House of J. P. Morgan & Co.

In these days of injunctions, of governor's "impartial arbitration commissions" and governmental interference at every turn on behalf of big business against the workers, only the centralization of all of labor's forces thru the central labor council and thru the development of a political party of their own can enable the workers to resist the centralized big business of our day and the governmental machinery which is used against the workers.

THE members of the local unions in general and many members of our Party are inclined to underestimate the importance of central labor councils because of the fact that the constitution of the American Federation of Labor definitely limits their powers

and makes them very largely advisory bodies. This, however, has not prevented the central labor councils from playing a tremendous role in the history of American labor struggles and a role which is bound to increase in importance as the workers try to develop new forms of struggle to meet the new conditions of trustification and governmental interference.

Without the labor council of Seattle, the Seattle general strike would have been an impossibility. Without the manifold endorsements of labor councils, the labor party movement of 1922-23 would have been immeasurably weakened. Without the utilization of central labor councils, the formation of a labor party will be indefinitely postponed.

Every active unionist, who has ever been a labor council delegate, can testify to the manifold uses of activity in the central labor body. In Chicago, for example, the Central Labor Council was used as a lever for the initiation of the big organizing campaign in the steel industry which led to the steel strike, and the organizing campaign in the packing house industry which led to the packing house strike and the forming of Packing House Councils.

In San Francisco, where I was a delegate to the Central Labor Council, our fraction was able to utilize the council as a weapon in the fight against the "American plan" open shop drive; to bring the labor movement of San Francisco to the verge of a general strike which was only prevented thru a mistaken secessionist policy on the part of some of the

leaders in the building trade unions of the city; to develop a campaign of great intensity for the recognition of and trade with Soviet Russia; to build up a local left wing newspaper, and a powerful sentiment for a labor party; the fraction has other achievements to show for its activity there. All this in spite of the fact that the Central Labor Bodies of San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago, like all others, have constitutions which definitely limit their powers to an "advisory" capacity.

WHILE it is true that the voting power of the central labor bodies in national A. F. of L. conventions is insignificant, and while it is also true that the constitutional limitations described above prevail, nevertheless the central labor bodies remain the natural instrument for the uniting of the various craft local unions on a class scale for the undertaking of organization campaigns in basic industries, for the co-ordination and conducting of local general strikes, for the building up of a local militant labor press and a labor party movement, and for the carrying out of all general working class campaigns among the organized workers of the American Federation of Labor, even in locals whose national and international unions are not under the control of the left wing.

In view of these simple elementary facts that every trade unionist should know, the attitude of the Party comrades in the left wing unions in New York is little short of criminal. It has repeatedly been our experience that whole locals, which are under

our ideological control, have refused to send delegates to the Central Trades and Labor Council, and that Party and left wing comrades, when nominated as delegates, have refused to "waste their time." Thus we have abandoned the central labor body of New York City to the "labor lieutenants" of the capitalist class and they have shown that these bodies are very useful by using them as instruments of class collaboration and of capitalist politics.

It is time that every union fraction and every TUEL unit set on the order of the day the question of affiliation or re-affiliation with the Central Trades and Labor Council and of election of militant left wing delegates to that body. If we do that, almost overnight we will find ourselves with a delegation comprising from one-third to one-half of the present attendance at the Central Trades and Labor Council and with a little persistent work we can make that Council once more a center of militancy, the base for a labor party, a means for terminating the unholy alliance of New York's labor bureaucracy with Tammany and the House of Morgan, and a fighting instrument for co-ordinating the forces of the New York organized workers for any campaign that concerns them as a whole, whether it be such as the protection of the foreign-born workers or such as the building of a labor party.

Therefore, at this time when the Party is raising the slogan, "Every member into the unions," I add the slogan, "Every union into the Labor Council."