



the Trade Unions

I THE OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNIST WORK

A The objective of communist work in the trade union movement is to win the trade unions to the side of communism. This objective will be achieved when the trade unions endorse the trade union program of the future communist party and communists are elected to leading positions within the trade unions.

B The trade unions arose in early capitalist society as the workers' response to their brutal oppression and exploitation. The collective strength of the union enabled workers to resist and moderate capitalist exploitation. Although the majority of U.S. workers are still unorganized, workers have unionized the most important and decisive industries. The trade union movement has become a powerful force within society and its victories have won tremendous benefits for working people. The trade unions are an essential weapon for maintaining the standard of living of the working class.

Nonetheless, the purpose of trade unions is quite limited. Trade unionism assumes that capitalism is permanent and does not challenge the wage system. Trade unions aim for the improvement of the workers' lot within the framework of capitalism. The tremendous power of the trade union movement is not directed towards the complete emancipation of labor, but rather is channelled along lines compatible with the continuation of wage-slavery.

C The complete emancipation of labor can come about only when capitalist relations of production are abolished, which requires, above all else, the expropriation and revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist ruling class. Only the working class has the power to lead society in making this revolution, but as yet it lacks socialist consciousness, and thus the will to do so.

It is the task of the communist movement to impart socialist consciousness to the workers' movement. Only by communists becoming the actual leaders of the workers' movement can this task be achieved. A working class led by a communist party is alone a truly class conscious workers' movement that is in a position to fight for its complete emancipation.

D The struggle of the working class creates organizations of many types corresponding to all the issues, class and national, political and economic, that it confronts as a class. The trade union is the form of working class organization that corresponds with the economic struggles at the workplace. It remains the basic, biggest and broadest mass workers' organization and comprises the main component of the labor movement. To lead the working class, communists must lead the trade unions. Communist leadership of the trade unions means leadership that

is elected, open and accepted by the workers.

Of course, every trade union will not be a communist organization and trade union members will not all be communists. However, the rank and file must be convinced to vote for communists (open communists) in trade union elections and trade unions must endorse the political campaigns of the communist party and the communist program for the trade union movement. When the trade unions are thus won to the side of communism, socialism will be merged with and guide the workers' movements. This merger depends entirely on winning broad rank and file support for the socialist viewpoint and a great popular respect for the policies and practice of communists.

E Historical experience has demonstrated that communist leadership in the trade unions will only partially be achieved when conditions necessary for the revolutionary proletariat to seize state power have ripened. The final and complete achievement of communist leadership is the job of the new proletarian government. However, for the revolution to succeed and survive, a great many workers' organizations, including the most important ones, the trade unions, must either actively support the revolution or maintain neutrality.

II THE LEFT-CENTER COALITION

A American conditions have made successful communist work inside (and outside) the trade unions quite difficult. The American working class has rarely broken out of the confines of trade union struggle. While it is true that in the past certain trade unions for a time sided with socialism, today the reactionary representatives of capitalism hold sway. Communists today have little influence within the trade unions. Anti-communism, fostered by employers,

trade union bureaucrats, and the government, is widespread. It is hardly possible for open communists to be elected to leadership anywhere in the trade union movement at this time. A long term plan is necessary to create the conditions where communist influence and authority can be developed.

BThe overall plan for the development of communist influence and authority is to pursue a consistent and broad united front policy within the labor movement. Historically, the U.S. communist application of the united front policy within the labor movement has been termed "the left-center alliance". As a general approach, it remains valid today. The left-center alliance policy arose in opposition to the policy of "left initiative only". The left initiative only policy has never permitted the communist movement to break out of its isolation from the broad masses of workers. Only the left-center alliance has opened the door to communist ties with the great mass of workers.

CThe main assumption of the left-center alliance policy is that in all areas of trade union activity, the active forces vying for leadership can be roughly and relatively divided into three parts: the advanced, militant (if not revolutionary) left wing; the vacillating liberal-reformist center; and the reactionary, anti-communist die-hards. To improve the conditions for communist work, as well as generally advance the immediate struggle of the workers, it is necessary to isolate the reactionary, anti-communist influence of the right wing. The left must develop a program that, at the same time, splits the right from the center and firmly establishes the unity between the left and the center.

The main, immediate base of the communists

is the more advanced left wing forces. Communists must become the force at the core of the left wing and lead it toward a united front with the center. Communists should oppose the left's inevitably strong tendency to "go it alone". Only in special circumstances will the left, through its own initiative, lead the great bulk of workers and be able to isolate both the right wing and the center leadership. Most often, such a policy is suicidal for the left, and will result in setbacks for the whole labor movement. The policy of always "aiming the main blow at the liberals" is an example of this suicidal tendency. In the main, unity must be sought with the liberal center to defeat the right.

DIn pursuit of this united front, the communist led left wing should propose a general program for the advance of the workers' immediate struggle that can serve as the basis for a united front with the center. While striving to base this united front on a high level of militancy and class consciousness, such a program must accord with the possibilities at hand. If the basis is set too high, and the left refuses to compromise, left-center unity will be impossible. Until the left has sufficient independent strength among the rank and file, the basis of unity between the left and the center is bound to be set at a low level. In the course of time, as the left establishes its own strength and as objective conditions mature, the basis for left-center unity can be pushed to higher levels.

Certain objective, as well as subjective, conditions are necessary for a successful united front between the left and the center. In the past, when U.S. capitalism experienced long periods of economic boom and prosperity, the potential for left-center unity was considerably lowered. The capitalists, focusing on overseas ex-

pansion, were willing to make certain concessions to American labor demands. Consequently, the anti-capitalist consciousness of the masses waned and the reactionary right wing was strengthened. The liberal center vacillated to the right. Conversely, during periods of depression and crisis, the masses shifted leftward, causing the vacillating liberal center to shift as well. In the times of depression, the left-center coalition was most successful, and the labor movement, as well as the communist movement, advanced. The depression of the 1930's set the stage for the greatest of all left-center coalitions, a coalition that was the backbone of the CIO organizing campaigns of the period. It was during this campaign that the millions of workers in the trustified industries, the basic proletariat of the U.S., were organized. Objective factors, then, play an important part in the success of the left-center coalition.

At the same time, the subjective factor, the left forces, must actively and skillfully pursue the united front. The left must discard all ultra-"left" notions of "going it alone". If the correct subjective conditions are not created, favorable objective conditions cannot be exploited. It is a fact of American life that the left can gain the strength necessary to lead the working class only through the pursuit of the united front.

E In the past, when the communist forces had much more influence among the American workers, it was possible for a practical left-center alliance to be formed on a national scale. Today, communists do not have the strength to create such an alliance. The objective conditions have yet to mature nationally to cause the center forces to split from the right. However, the right is increasingly exposing itself to the masses as failing to march down a road of working

class progress, and a new mood is arising among workers to oppose the reactionary grip on the trade unions. In the future, left-center alliances will be more possible.

On a local level, communists are gaining strength, and the vacillation among the center forces is very evident. Already, communists are applying the policy of the left-center alliance in the local areas with marked success. As conditions mature, as crisis deepens for the imperialists, and as communists gain more experience among the workers, opportunities are bound to arise for left-center alliances on bigger and greater scales. The national Sadlowski campaign for the presidency of the Steel Workers could have provided such an opportunity if the communist forces had greater strength among the workers and had more communists not mistakenly followed the "left initiative only" policy, attacking Sadlowski as "the main social prop of imperialism".

In the vast majority of instances, on both a local and national scale, the only correct Marxist-Leninist approach to communist work in the trade unions is the policy of left-center alliance. The "left initiative only" policy will not work.

III COMMUNIST INDEPENDENCE

A The objective of our work in the trade unions is to win them to communism, not merely to build an alliance with the liberal-progressive or center forces. Therefore, in the final analysis we are competing with the center forces for leadership of the united front. For this reason our alliance is always conditional and never absolute. Unity must always be accompanied by struggle. To forget this is to abandon communism.

In building united fronts, the danger always exists that the communists, or the left in general, will fail to develop their independent authority and tail after the liberal-progressives. In effect, communist work will be reduced to the level of aiding the liberals. This approach will never lead to the accomplishment of our objectives. Close attention must always be paid to the development of the independent authority of communism among the workers.

BThe left forces today, aside from the communists, are those often referred to as the advanced workers. These workers are the more class conscious (i.e. more aware of the overall position and requirements of the workers' movement) and in general demonstrate a greater political awareness.* Because of this, they display a greater enthusiasm for the struggle, are among the most militant, and can to one degree or another see through the subterfuge, vacillations and hypocrisy of the liberal-progressives. It is imperative for the success of communist work in the trade unions that these advanced or left forces be won to communism (i.e., that they be recruited into communist organizations) or at least come to work very closely with the communists. From the outset, communists must work to establish and expand communist branch organizations in each area by recruiting the advanced workers. A united front without a united left cannot avoid placing the left at the mercy of the center.

CIt is not correct, however, to assume that the building of the united front need wait until the left is fully formed and united (i.e., the advanced are won to communism). In life, there is a close connection between the

*Again, as mentioned earlier, this is a relative and not an absolute definition.

task of building the united front and the task of building communist organization.

Each side depends on the other and the two must grow together. It is most often the case that the advanced workers require experience with the communists in building the united front, (in addition to their introduction to communist theory) before they can fully grasp their responsibility to be a communist. Likewise, the communists themselves require experience in building the united front in order for them to master the forms of educating the advanced to communism. As a general rule, the success of building the communist organization (i.e., party building) is directly connected to the pursuit of correct policies in the united front.*

DBranch communist organizations must be formed in coordination with and under the guidance of the leading bodies of the communist organization. They must, in addition to working hard for the united front, also develop and carry out independent communist work (i.e., independent from the united front). They must develop independent communist commentary on, and forms of participation in, the general united front activities. They must develop communist shop and union papers, sell and distribute literature from the parent organization, and develop propaganda and agitational materials of their own. Together with the leading bodies they should organize study classes and initiate both economic and political campaigns. The aim must be to estab-

*This is not to imply that the actual formation of a M-L vanguard party is dependent on any given level of actual leadership among the masses or a given level of development of the united front. The formation of a M-L vanguard depends principally on the development of a correct political line.

lish: first, the independent, open and authoritative presence of communist organization within and alongside the united front; secondly, the leadership of their branch organization over the united front; and ultimately, the leadership of their branch over the whole union. Such an objective can be achieved only by developing independent communist work in the course of building the united front.

IV COMMUNIST POLITICS AND TRADE UNION POLITICS

A Independent communist activity and ultimately communist leadership in the trade unions requires that at all times communists engage in communist politics, and do not reduce communist politics to the level of trade union politics.

B Trade union politics are those areas of political activity that all trade union organizations are forced to engage in as a requirement of their economic struggle. Labor takes its first steps into the political life of society when a court slaps an injunction on a picket line and the cops are called out; when, in order to influence social legislation that affects the conditions of labor, a labor lobby is established; or when labor goes to the courts, the legislature and the executive to render decisions against the employers. In other countries and also at certain times in this country, the labor movement has gone so far as to spawn its own political party to engage more broadly in the political life of society. As a general rule, however, without the intervention of communists the political activity of labor gravitates towards the narrow limits of what concerns the trade unions. Unless actively diverted, the labor politics is reduced to trade union politics.

C Communist politics is much different than trade union politics. Based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, communist politics responds to all issues, to the conditions of all classes, and to contradictions in all social spheres, cultural, political, economic, etc. Drawing the connections between these things and demonstrating the total reactionary nature of the capitalist system, communist politics consciously aims at the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

D As a transitional form, to aid in the development of the workers' consciousness, the communists may at times advocate the formation of a broad labor party, a political workers' movement, or some other form intermediate between the trade union and the party. However, the communists must never allow their politics to sink to the level of trade union politics or in any way gravitate toward it. In building the independence of communists, the difference between communist and trade union politics must always be kept in mind.

E Communist presence, or communist leadership among the masses, requires that those who call themselves communists are actually communists and actively engage in communist work. If communist politics are reduced to trade union politics, if agitation tends to be reduced to economic agitation alone, or only to trade union political agitation, then communist presence will exist in name only and not in fact.

Should such so-called communists gain leadership of a trade union, this would not constitute communist leadership and they will not have won the trade union to the side of communism. They will have emasculated the word communism. Such persons are known as revisionists (i.e. communists in name, liberal-reformists in deeds).

A requirement of successful communist work in the trade unions is that such work be closely connected with on-going communist work around all issues of society, among all classes and strata of the population and in all spheres of social activity. Work that is not so connected cannot avoid gravitating toward the level of trade union politics.

V THE ART OF COMMUNIST MASS WORK

A Correct communist mass work requires the combining of unity and struggle, that is, the combination of united front with independent communist work. It requires that communists be good at determining the correct level of unity necessary at each moment and the proper means of safeguarding communist independence. Through the united front, leadership must ultimately be won by the communists; but, in gaining independent influence, the communists must not allow their politics to be reduced toward trade unionism. These are difficult tasks and many objective factors as well as subjective factors in the life of U.S. society at present make these tasks even more difficult. Though conditions are clearly growing more favorable for us, in general, advances today are bound to be slow. Beyond the general confines of our tasks outlined above, communist mass work is an art that must be mastered. Knowing when to advance and when to retreat, when to attack and when to defend, how much to emphasize unity and how much to emphasize independence, and how to develop all sides of our work in a good way; all this requires that today's communists gain much more experience. Theory can provide only a general guide for our work. The actual work requires capable and talented communists. Mistakes are bound to be plentiful and a proper balance between bold initiative and caution must be found. Experimentation is essential.