

WORKERS PARTY
114 West 14 Street
New York, 11, N.Y.

April 13, 1946

TO BE READ BY ALL PARTY MEMBERS AND DISCUSSED IN BRANCHES

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE PARTY
Dear Comrades:

It is important for every party member to understand the policy of the party at the present time in the trade union field in order that the contacting and recruiting activities of every party member may be smoothly meshed with the propaganda and agitational campaign that has been and will continue to be conducted in the pages of LABOR ACTION and THE NEW INTERNATIONAL.

The end of the war has unleashed a powerful movement of the workers which was successfully restrained and even suppressed during the war by the bourgeoisie acting through its labor lieutenants, the trade union bureaucracy. This movement is manifested in the series of strikes that has swept some of the most important basic industries of the country. It is more clearly manifested in the demands that the workers are making and most clearly manifested in the demands that were made in the strike against the General Motors Corporation. Outside of the "vanguard of the vanguard", that is, the organized revolutionary Marxists, the auto workers may be considered as the most advanced section of the American working class. What they think and say and do today the rest of the working class will think and say and do in due time; hence, the enormous political significance of what our press has designated as the GM program. Our task is to take the GM program, not in the literal way in which it was presented by Reuther, but in the most radical interpretation that we can give it and utilize it as a bridge over which to bring the workers to an ever clearer understanding of the situation, of their tasks and of the revolutionary method we propose for accomplishing these tasks. That means that we must become the most consistent and radical champions of the GM program.

What is this program. The fact that it was presented by a certain individual trade union official, in this case Reuther, is of entirely minor importance. We do not have to bother ourselves very much with an investigation of why it was Reuther and not some other trade union official who presented the program. What is important to us is the fact that this program gripped the imagination of tens and probably hundreds of thousands of workers, perhaps even of millions, and the fact that the bourgeoisie recognized its importance to such an extent that it found it necessary to launch a nation-wide ideological campaign against it as a threat to the very foundations of the system of "free enterprise", that is, of capitalism itself. By this program the GM workers demanded that they should have an important voice in establishing not only the scale of wages but the scale of prices and of profits. Looked at

from the purely formal standpoint, these demands could be placed in the category of "class collaboration", the idea that side by side and on an "equal" footing labor and capital would decide these fundamental questions. But looked at from the standpoint of the movement of the working class, the demands have revolutionary implications. It is precisely these implications that we must make clear to the workers to the point where we succeed in ridding them of all ideas of class collaboration and moving them to think in terms of workers power. Apart from ourselves, only the big bourgeoisie understood this clearly; hence, their desperate counter-campaign.

If the purely formal aspects of the demands are set aside, the GM workers declared in effect: The industry can give us a decent wage (30 cents an hour increase). The question of a decent wage can no longer be settled by looking at the problem of wages alone. Wages are inseparably connected with prices and profits. We declare that we can get a decent wage and you, the corporation, can draw a "decent profit" without prices being raised to the consumer.

At one and the same time this signified a vote of non-confidence in the "managers" of "free enterprise", a demand for direct intervention by labor in the running of the economy as a whole for only the direct control of the economy can make possible the regulation of wages and prices and profits. From this demand to the demand for a government which will control wages, prices and profits in the interests of labor or of the "consumer", is only one step, regardless of how long it may take the working class to take this step.

There can be no question but that the workers realize, to one degree or another, that with this program which insisted not only on a decent wage for the workers and a "fair profit" to the employers but on protecting the consumers by the demand for low prices, the labor movement received the support of the general public (i.e. of the middle classes) to a far greater and more significant extent than at any time in recent history. This cannot but have the effect in the long run of encouraging the workers to persist in this course.

Accordingly, this makes it possible for us to concretize our propaganda work of pointing out that when labor makes a bold effort to assume the responsibility for the nation as a whole, it does not need to worry about the middle classes but can be assured of their sympathy and even of their outright support. It is an excellent argument against all those in the labor movement who oppose a labor party and propose instead a third party because, they argue, the "public" will not follow the leadership of a class party.

In our agitation in the press we seized upon the GM program from the very beginning and gave it the most radical possible interpretation. We said that in making these demands the GM workers were not only correct but were placing themselves at the head of the entire labor movement. Some comrades may ask how it was possible for us to associate ourselves with a program put forth by a reformist labor leader. The answer to this question is very important for the education of our comrades in the politics and methods

we employ for winning the masses of workers away from reformism and towards a revolutionary program and leadership. It is true that Reuther, a reformist, a centrist, put forward this program. But Reuther did not, and, being what he is, could not, conduct a consistent struggle for this program. That would require unleashing such class forces against the bourgeoisie and its state as could not so easily be controlled. Our task in combatting the reformist leaders consisted in taking up these progressive demands, giving them the most radical interpretations and pointing out those concrete class struggle steps that must be taken by labor in order best and most speedily to realize this program. That is why our agitation ran something like this:

You, the workers, say that the industry, while paying a fair profit to the corporations, can still pay a decent wage to the workers without charging monopolistic prices to the consumers. In this you are absolutely right. The monopolists, however, hold a contrary position. Then why not get rid of the monopolists? Your demands on GM are not only a challenge to the corporation; they are a challenge to the labor movement. If you say that industry can do these things and the monopolists say that industry cannot, then it is perfectly logical for you to take over industry and prove in practice that your demands are realizable. By their position, the monopolists have proved that they are social bankrupts. Remove these bankrupts from control of industry by demanding the nationalization of the industry under workers' control, that is under the control of those who have committed themselves in public to the declaration that industry can provide the things they demand. Will the Truman administration consent to this? No. Why not? Because at bottom it is the government of these monopolists. But that only means that you need a government of your own. The first step in getting such a government is to organize a political machine of your own, acting independently in the political field. And just as firmly as you have declared publicly your program, this party, the labor party, should declare firmly that its aim is the establishment of a workers' government that will realize this program.

By this line of agitation we have sought and will continue to seek to direct the attention and activities of the workers to the highest possible plane, namely, the plane of political action directed to the establishment of a workers government. This conception, revolutionary through and through, we are now able to put forward under the most favorable circumstances, that is, in direct connection with demands initiated and made by the masses of workers themselves, in connection with immediate interests that they themselves feel and realize.

Take another aspect of the question, the Reuther demand for opening the books. This is an old slogan of our transitional program. We advanced it vigorously in the course of the GM strike. Some comrades were of the opinion that we should make this the central slogan. Under the circumstances, this would have been a mistake. No popular slogan has an independent value or significance. This applies also to the slogan of open the books. In Reuther's hands, the slogan by itself could easily be a trap. Not only the bourgeois journalists and ideologists but many of the labor leaders themselves posed the question to Reuther. They asked: Suppose the

books show that the company is losing money. Does that mean that you would advocate or that we would have to take a wage cut? The best that Reuther could do in reply was to say that in that case he would scale his demands down to zero. That is all that Reuther could say. It was worse than no answer at all, it was a reactionary answer. Naturally, Reuther went on the assumption that the books would show such a profit that the necessity for scaling his demands down to zero would not arise. But, again, that is at best the answer of the reformist. Our answer, contained in our agitation, takes as its point of departure our primary interest in the standard of living, the conditions, the progress of the workers. This made it possible to cut through all these "technical arguments" and to say that the solution to this "threatened" problem is nationalize the industries under workers control. Under such circumstances will the books not only be opened to the workers, but the workers will be able to establish standards of production in their own interests.

The whole political significance of the GM program was missed by the SWP. The comrades will find very interesting the contrast between our analysis and position and that of the SWP by reading the criticism of the SWP line written by Comrade Morrow for the SWP Bulletin, a copy of which is being sent to you for your study.

But it is not enough for us to have been correct during the GM strike. On the basis of our analysis of the coming developments we have decided in favor of a continuing campaign in our press around the GM program. As said above, the contacting and recruiting work of our comrades in the factories and unions must take advantage of this campaign in the press and be synchronized with it. That means that every one of our militants in the unions must see to it that every worker whom he can reach has the articles in LABOR ACTION dealing with this question pointed out to him week in and week out. In a campaign it is necessary to concentrate and to avoid diffusion. The attention of all comrades should be drawn specifically, every week, to those articles which deal with this question in particular. Every effort should be made to draw the contacts into a discussion of the articles. It is precisely in these discussions that our comrades should point out all the social and political implications of the GM program. It is precisely in these discussions that they should point out, as concretely as possible, the shortcomings of the Reuthers and the need of building up a revolutionary party which fights for this program consistently and which makes all of its implications clear.

The question of the GM program is only at its beginning, so to say. In a fundamental sense the battle at the UAW convention at Atlantic City revolved around this program. This battle shows every sign of continuing in the leadership and in the ranks of the UAW after the convention. To one extent or another Reuther will be compelled to appeal for rank and file support against the Thomas-Ades-Stalinist majority in the Executive Board which is stacked against him. We must at every stage try to mobilize support for Reuther but on the basis of our program, of our interpretation of the GM program, of our critical attitude towards Reuther himself.

It is inconceivable that this should remain a UAW question. In one form or another it must spread to other sections of the working class. Indeed, we must take the initiative in spreading the GM program, in our sense, to be sure. In all the other unions among all the other workers we must call weekly and daily attention to the campaign in LABOR ACTION, to the articles which are especially devoted to the subject, always seeking to engage workers in discussion about the profound social and political significance of the program and about the need of organizing in the revolutionary movement.

It will be of the greatest value to all of us to have the most thorough discussions on this question in all the branches. It will be very valuable if the comrades exchange opinions on this through the party Bulletin; it will be extremely valuable if the comrades are able to send in reports to the center, for publication in the Bulletin, about the practical experiences and practical results that they have in conducting this campaign among their contacts in the shops and in the unions.

The splendid forward movement of the American workers, which is sure to go still further and much further, and the line taken by our press, give us a perfect opportunity for recruitment to the party. Let us not neglect it but, on the contrary, centralize and concentrate all our efforts into utilizing this opportunity to the maximum.

With best Party greetings,

Max Shachtman
National Secretary