

The Road to Isolation

by Ben Gitlow

The Cleveland convention which changed the name of the Trade Union Educational League to the Trade Union Unity League was a historical event of far-reaching consequence to the Communist movement of the United States. The Cleveland convention was held in September 1929 almost two years ago. The new trade union line of the Communist Party was then and there put into effect. The work in the reactionary unions was abandoned. The T.U.U.L. was launched as a Communist trade union center. The several hundred Party members who were brought to Cleveland as delegates, who represented neither trade unions or masses, were the basis for the claim that the convention was a mass convention and that the movement it launched a mass movement.

The Communist Party leadership glorified the event. They said a new era in the trade union movement was forthcoming, that the T. U. U. L., following the new trade union line, would lead the workers out of the mire of the "social-fascist" organizations (their characterization of the existing trade unions) into the free atmosphere of the new revolutionary industrial unions affiliated with the T. U. U. L. These, they reiterated, would become the dominating and all-embracing trade unions.

The Main Features of the New Line

Let us examine the main features of the new trade union line from which the American working class was to expect such marvelous results.

1. The A. F. of L. and independent unions were "social-fascist" unions, anti-working class organizations which must be destroyed. Hence all work inside of the existing unions was either to be abandoned or, if continued, must be of a destructive not constructive character.

2. A left wing in the trade unions was no longer compatible with the burning needs of the present situation which was estimated as revolutionary, in which there was going on a widespread radicalization of the masses. Hence the T. U. U. L. the center of the left wing, was liquidated, along with the left wing itself.

3. The tactic of the united front, on immediate every day issues, was given up. All who were not yet ready to accept the Communist position in the labor movement—from class-conscious left wingers to the arch-reactionaries like Matthew Wolf—were branded as "social-fascists", as enemies of the working class.

4. The policy of trade union unity was abandoned and in its place was substituted the policy of splitting organizations and launching new "revolutionary industrial unions."

5. A policy of dual unionism embodying the worst features of De Leonist sectarianism was adopted and the T.U.U.L. put up a dual trade union center.

6. The new line narrowed down the new trade union movement to a Communist Party appendage. The program of the T.U.U.L. was based upon the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the organizations subjected to the mechanical manipulations of the Communist Party officialdom, while the leadership was restricted mainly to the members of the Communist Party.

7. The every-day struggle for better conditions was looked upon with contempt. Instead, general abstract revolutionary objectives were put forward as the aim of all strike strategy, attempted organization drives and trade union activity.

8. The fratricidal war caused by the Comintern Address in the Communist Party was taken up in the new unions converting them into virtual units of the Party. All capable experienced trade union leaders who differed with the new line were summarily removed and many excelled from their organizations.

Then And Now

The imposition of the new trade union line characterized above was a sharp and decisive break with the old trade union line of the Party. The Communist International had to recognize that the old trade union line which prevailed during less favorable conditions, at a time of so-called prosperity and high wages, brought results. It stated in 1928 that the American Party was able to initiate and lead fierce class struggles and as a result was on the road of becoming a mass party. We had textile strikes, (Passaic, New Bedford, Gastonia), needle trades strikes (furriers, cloak makers, dress makers), coal miners strikes, and other movements. A big left wing was being developed in the trade unions. Big issues like amalgamation and the 40-hour week were being brought to the fore in the labor movement and the organization of the unorganized was actually taking place.

Now with an economic crisis, wide mass unemployment, wage-cuts, intensified exploitation, a wide, growing discontent among the masses, what has the new trade union line accomplished? What has it to show in the way of accomplishments?

What we predicted would happen, has happened. We raised the alarm two years ago. We said the new trade union line would not work and could not work. We said it would isolate the Communists from the trade union masses, that on the trade union field it would lead not only to isolation but also to demoralization, defeats and chaos.

The flowery phrases of the new trade union line have withered away before the stern reality of time, the compelling facts of history standing out in bold relief as an object lesson to all Communists and to all thinking workers.

The Balance Sheet

The following is the black, dismal balance sheet of the past two years. One

cannot avoid them either in ostrich like fashion by burying one's head in the sand, or blaming the poor execution of the line by lower trade union functionaries. Browder, Foster, Bedacht, Hathaway, Dunne, Bittlemen, Johnstone, with Stalin, Molotov and Losovsky to boot can not make the new line work. It is a wrong line leading to defeat and disaster. It is leftism with a vengeance bringing with it all the fruits of such a policy.

1. The new unions, the all-embracing "revolutionary industrial unions" of the T.U.U.L. (miners, marine, textile, needle metal, food, shoe and leather, printing, etc.) have all combined less than 15,000 members. This startling fact is admitted by the Political Committee of the Party in an official statement published in the Daily Worker.

2. The left wing has been definitely liquidated.

3. The few strike movements under Communist and T.U.U.L. leadership have ended in defeats. Illinois miners, Lawrence and Southern textile strikes, shoe workers strikes in New York, and the dressmakers strike in New York are the outstanding debacles of the new trade union line.

4. Organization of the unorganized has ceased altogether.

5. The Communists have lost strike leadership and all strike movements taking place against wage-cuts, speed-up, for organization of the unorganized are under A. F. of L. or independent trade union leadership.

6. No movement for the unemployed has been developed in the trade unions.

7. Developing left movements were fought as "social-fascist" manifestations and the opportunity for developing a left wing was lost; thus the Illinois miners revolt and the anthracite outlaw strikes are the outstanding examples of a suicidal sectarian attitude to left developments in the labor movement.

8. The unemployment campaign of the T.U.U.L. started with the March 6th demonstrations, has dwindled down and petered out.

The R. I. L. U. Speaks!

Why add to the dismal picture? The Red International of Labor Unions in Moscow to which the T.U.U.L. is affiliated, could no longer shut its eyes to the devastation wrought by the new line. This is clear from its resolution on the T. U. U. L. published in the Daily Worker of May 18, 1931.

"Nevertheless, the revolutionary unions and the T. U. U. L. have been declining in numbers, and have lost considerable positions in the ranks of the working class during recent months, as a direct consequence of a number of defects and mistakes in their work (Philadelphia marine workers' strike, the extreme weakening of the textile organization in the South, indifference to A. F. L. workers militancy in Reading, the Illinois miners

strike, the situation in the metal and shoe industries, etc.)

Black enough! Let us proceed!

The resolution states further:

"The fundamental weakness of the T. U. U. L. is the fact, that at a time so favorable for revolutionary work, it is still failing to organize the workers in struggle for their daily demands and needs. As a result, it has found itself to a considerable extent detached from the wide masses because it has been unable to establish itself as the leader of the daily struggle."

This bears out precisely what we have always charged. The resolution goes on:

"As a result of these mistakes, the revolutionary unions can rarely record an increase of membership and influence after strikes, and numerous strikes take place without the participation and over the head of the revolutionary unions."

For pointing this out vituperation and abuse were heaped against us. But let us proceed with the resolution of the Profintern; it is very instructive:

"A very weak spot in the work of the T. U. U. L. is the organization of oppositions in the reformist unions—a branch of work which has almost completely disappeared."

These proofs of the effects of the new trade union line cannot be denied. Even Losovsky and the Profintern are forced to recognize them and deal with them.

The Way Out

The way out is for the Party members and left wingers to recognize that a complete decisive break with the new line is necessary. Such a break can only come with a frank recognition that the line is sectarian, adventurist, dual unionist and wrong.

The Party members must fight against the wrong line and demand why those who were capable of foreseeing its results and had the courage to fight the new trade union line two years ago were expelled from the Party.

The Profintern resolution, however, suggests no fundamental change. It proposes maneuvers about "united fronts" and work in the reactionary unions that create illusions but no fundamental change in line. It adheres to a "social-fascist" interpretation of the trade unions. Its refusal for all united front action with leftward developing movements in the A. F. of L. and independent unions is characteristic. Its insistence on building up of "revolutionary unions" as laid down by the congress of the Profintern continues the disastrous line.

All Communists and left wing forces must unite and fight for a return to a trade union policy that will unite the trade union progressive and militant forces, build the left wing, organize the unorganized and make possible effective struggle against the reactionary trade union bureaucracy and capitalism.

RANK AND FILE REVOLT IN A. C. W.

The Struggle of the Unemployed in Local 4

Cutters Local Big 4 of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America is the scene today of a bitter internal struggle between the rank and file, especially the unemployed workers, and one of the most notoriously corrupt and vicious trade union administrations, the administration of Philip Orlofsky, the business manager of the Local.

The fight in Local 4 flared up as the result of the spontaneous action of the unemployed cutters. Fully one-third of the entire union membership is out of work. Unable to bear these conditions, the unemployed members of Local 4 banded together and began to make insistent demands at their union meetings and thru mass meetings of their own that something be done for the unemployed. Nothing however was done.

Philip Orlofsky took steps to terrorize and crush this movement of the unemployed. So far he has failed to do so. He used the most foul means for this purpose. Charges of "dual unionism" and threats of violence have been made against the unemployed and others who have dared to raise any opposition to the administration at the meetings of the local union. One cutter, Max Lesser, an old member in the union, has already been suspended from the organization on trumped-up charges. Besides such outrageous decisions, suspensions, expulsions, etc., the Orlofsky administration is using the unemployment relief fund of the local union for its own clique purposes. Workers who do not appear favorably in the eyes of Philip Orlofsky have been deprived of relief while his cronies and hangers-on have been paid out hundreds of dollars. The fund is administered solely by Philip Orlofsky. There is no check up or control over the manner in which he administers this fund. Recently Philip Orlofsky has been calling unemployed workers into his office and has been telling them openly that if they attend meetings of the unemployed or if they continue to oppose him in the local union, they will not get one cent of unemployment relief. At a union meeting recently, he also stated that as far as he was concerned anyone who did not support him in the local union would not get a job if he could help it!

The protests of the unemployed have the backing of the workers who are employed in the industry because the regime of Philip Orlofsky is also responsible for the most corrupt relations with the em-

ployers at the expense of union conditions and the welfare of the workers.

A committee of unemployed cutters recently visited Sidney Hillman, the president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, for the purpose of presenting to him the situation in Local 4. They demanded that he step in and change the conditions which prevail there. This committee also demanded that the decision of the last three conventions of the Amalgamated for a 40-hour week with 44-hours pay be immediately enforced as a measure to bring some relief to the unemployed. Sidney Hillman in his interview with this committee stated that it was impossible to put forward the 40-hour week proposal now, that they could have a 40-hour week if they agreed to accept 40-hours pay. As far as the 36-hour week proposal to provide four hours work for the unemployed that could be established only by accepting the standards of production which would mean the speed-up and piece-work in the cutting rooms. As far as matters pertaining to the officials of the Local 4 are concerned, he only made vague "promises." So far he has done absolutely nothing.

The unemployed workers are demanding the abolition of a system of temporary cards which makes practically every worker only a temporary worker in the industry who can be discharged by the boss if he desires to do so or removed from the job by the union business manager if he does not like the position of the workers in the local union. The unemployed workers are demanding the abolition of the 10% assessment for the unemployed relief and in its place, the establishment of a system whereby the employed cutters work four hours less a day in order to provide four hours work for the unemployed. Also the unemployed are demanding the strict carrying out of the provisions of the local union for equal distribution of work. They also demand, as a measure to provide work for the unemployed cutters, the replacement by union cutters of the manufacturers who work at the tables. The movement of the unemployed cutters in Local 4 has been gaining such momentum and has gained such wide support among the employed cutters that it presents a distinct threat to the dominance of the Orlofsky and his administration over the affairs of the local union.

This movement is bound to become