

FOSTER TELLS HISTORY OF STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION UNITY

Role of TUUL as Leader and Organizer of Most Militant Sections of the Labor Movement Recounted

Following is the text of a letter addressed by William Z. Foster, National Secretary of the Trade Union Unity League, to the TUUL convention now in session in New York.

By William Z. Foster

Inasmuch as the proposals made by the National Committee deal with the analysis of the present situation and the program of the TUUL, and in view of the fact that this convention will doubtless carry through a drastic reorganization of the TUUL, it is fitting that I should confine my remarks to a general summary of the historical role of the TUUL in the class struggle.

The Trade Union Educational League, immediate fore-runner of the TUUL, was organized in Chicago in November 1920. The TUUL was an outgrowth of preceding Left Wing trade union organizations: The Syndicalist League of North America (1912-1914), and the International Trade Union Educational League (1915-1917).

The TUUL, like these predecessors and the I.W.W., was at the date of its foundation a syndicalist organization. But under the influence of the Russian Revolution and the newly formed Communist Parties and the Communist International, it began rapidly to shed its characteristic syndicalist features. In 1921 the TUUL sent delegates to the first congress of the R.I.L.U. in Moscow, and was there recognized as the American Left Wing trade union section. The R.I.L.U. condemned the dualist anti-political policies of the I.W.W.

From this point on, the TUUL worked in close cooperation with, and with the fullest support of the Communist Party. Its general policy was the building of the Left Wing in the trade unions. For the first few years of its history, the TUUL included the Canadian Left Wing trade union organization.

The TUUL was born in the midst of the great post-war drive (1919-1922) of the employers against the trade unions to deprive the workers of such achievements in the way of organization, better wages, shorter hours, etc., that they had gained during the war. Hardly was the organization in the field than the most militant elements in the labor movement generally rallied to its standards. From that time on the TUUL developed rapidly and the I.W.W. with its policy of dual unionism, which had previously been the revolutionary labor movement organization, gradually sank into insignificance.

Began Work for Union Unity

Although still weak, the TUUL plunged immediately into the current tremendous struggles and was able to exert a considerable influence in a number of them, especially the national strike of the packing-house workers, coal miners and railroad shopmen; as well as the Chicago Building Trades and the various New York needle trades strikes. Meanwhile the TUUL rapidly developed its activities within the A. F. of L. and Railroad Brotherhoods, coming into violent collision with the reactionary officialdom. It placed special stress upon three major policies: amalgamation, the Labor Party, and recognition of the Soviet Union. So successful was its campaign around these issues that direct endorsements of them were secured from at least half of the organized workers in the U. S. The top union officialdom, however, by their iron-clad grip on the unions, were successful in preventing amalgamation, the establishment of a mass Labor Party, or official A. F. of L. endorsement of Russian recognition.

At this period the TUUL also carried on an active campaign against the widespread corruption in the unions; for trade union democracy; for defense of the Communists leaders arrested in Bridgewater; for the release of Mooney and Billings; for the relief of the Russian famine sufferers, etc. While vigorously propagating its revolutionary goals, the TUUL based its mass campaigns upon a united front with progressive elements around programs of immediate demands.

The era of the Coolidge "good times," which including the few months of Hoover, lasted without a break from the middle of 1923 until the October crash in 1929, was one of difficult struggle for the TUUL. It was a period of little militancy generally among the working class, the lowest ebb of struggle in the history of the American labor movement, and the TUUL felt the effects of it in loss of mass contacts and mass movement. The basic cause of this great sag in militancy was the huge upswing of American imperialism during this period and the oceans of anti-proletarian propaganda which accompanied it. The TUUL also made some mistakes at this period in the direction of sectarianism, which contributed to its own difficulties.

Fought Class Collaboration of Bureaucracy

The trade union leaders took an effective hand in crippling the fighting force of the trade union movement in these years by developing a system of class collaboration with the bosses far more in-

Reporting to Convention of T. U. U. L., Leader of Great Working Class Battles Says That Unity Can Now Be Realized

COMMUNIST LEADER



William Z. Foster

tense and elaborate than anything the labor movement had known up till that time. They picked up the employers' slogans of rationalization and speed-up, that is, of more production for less cost; they hired efficiency engineers, and practically turned the trade unions into adjuncts of the employers producing organizations, with their B. & O. plans, higher strategy of labor, minimum standards of production, etc. Strikes were declared out of date; the union leaders were determined to make the trade unions more subservient to the bosses than the company unions themselves; the class struggle was declared liquidated; the revolution an idle dream. The way to better conditions now and for eventual emancipation for the workers, said the A. F. of L. and railroad union leaders, was through the closest cooperation with the employers.

Mass Expulsion, Terrorism By A.F.L. Leaders

The trade union leaders backed up this program by instituting a terroristic campaign against all militant elements in the trade unions who dared to raise their voices against class collaboration.

Following the lead of the 1923 A. F. of L. convention, which called for the expulsion of all Communists and TUUL militants, the top leaders of the various unions adopted a policy of wholesale expulsions of fighting elements throughout the A. F. of L. and railroad unions. The TUUL was condemned as a dual union and membership in either it or the Communist Party was sufficient ground for union expulsion and blacklisting from industry. The expulsion campaign covered almost every union and thousands of militants were expelled. Gangster rule in the unions prevailed as never before, and trade union democracy sank to its lowest ebb. In this shameful campaign of disruption and demoralization, the Socialist trade union leaders blazed the way. The expulsion campaign began in the Socialist needle trades and reached its highest point by the expulsion of 35,000 cloak makers and 12,000 furriers in 1927-8.

As a result of such tactics, the trade unions were devitalized and lost the greater portions of their fighting spirit. So low was the morale of the movement in the Coolidge years that for the first time in the American labor history the trade unions did not increase their membership during a period of prosperity. On the contrary, all through the Coolidge period, they steadily declined in numbers, morale, and strategic position in industry.

Led Strikes During "Prosperity" Era

It is to the great credit of the Communist Party and TUUL that they never fell victims to the widespread "prosperity" illusions of this period, which affected the A. F. of L., S. P., Musteites, etc. On the contrary, as Marxist-Leninist bodies they were the only organizations in the country to understand and combat these illusions. They exposed the fallacies of class collaboration and capitalist rationalization, and constantly warned of the inevitable industrial crash which finally came in 1929. They resolutely combated every phase of the class collaboration movement and all its reactionary supporters from Carver and William Green to Norman Thomas and Muste; they spared no effort to educate and mobilize the workers for a policy of class struggle. They were only working class organizations that made any fight whatever against the employers and the government. In the Coolidge period the C.P. and TUUL gave a real demonstration of their truly revolutionary character.

During the Coolidge period, the TUUL forces took an active part in organizing the relatively few strikes that occurred. In the needle trades, the TUUL, among others, led the strikes of 12,000 New York fur workers (1926), and 35,000 cloak makers (1926), etc. In the textile industry it led the big strike of 15,000 Passaic workers (1925), and exercised strong influence in New Bedford during the 1928 strike of 27,000 textile workers. It also led the historically important Gastonia strike early in 1929. In the mining industry, where the TUUL also was especially strong, it played a very active role in the life and death struggles of the U.M.W.A. during this period. In the great national strike of 1927-1928 more than 100,000 coal miners were represented at the TUUL "Save the Union" Conference in Pittsburgh on April 1st, 1928, to extend and strengthen the strike.

While few of the TUUL strikes were completely victorious, as a whole, they put a substantial barrier against the steadily worsening of conditions that was taking place in the industries involved. In the strike of the fur workers, the TUUL forces established the 40-hour week for the first time in the needle trades.

Besides supporting this strike policy, which could only be done in the face of powerful and disruptive opposition from the top leadership, saturated with class collaboration policies, and which expelled many thousands of militant fighters from the various unions, the TUUL forces carried on a number of struggles inside the old unions. Among these were several inner-union election fights. Twice in the U.M.W.A. (1924-25) elections the Left Wing carried a majority of the votes, the election in each case being

Towards the close of the Coolidge period a number of factors combined to make necessary a fundamental change in policy on the part of the TUUL in the direction of building independent unions. Because of their officials, intense class collaboration policies, backed up by gangster rule, mass expulsions and complete suppression of union rights, the workers could use effectively in defense of their interests. As I have stated before, the A. F. of L. and railroad unions constantly declined in membership throughout these years, falling from over four million in 1922 to less than two and a half million in 1928, and their fighting morale and strategic position in industry declined even more so. The trade unions had been vastly weakened in the basic industries, being completely wiped out in steel, meat, packing, automobile, metal mining, etc., and seriously weakened in coal mining, railroad, textile, etc. Meanwhile important sections of the masses of unorganized workers began to show signs of wanting to organize, a demand which the devitalized, crippled A. F. of L. unions, with the best elements everywhere being expelled, could not satisfy. From the time of its formation, the TUUL had been sharply opposed to the establishment of dual unions, as tending to isolate the militants from the masses, even leaning backwards to some extent in its opposition to independent unions. But in the latter days of the Coolidge period, because of the general decadence of the conservative unions and the new surge for organization among the masses, it began to realize that in many instances it would have to be necessary to organize independent unions.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

Unquestionably this basic change of policy on the part of the TUUL was fundamentally correct. It was made necessary, as I have stated, by the decadent, class collaborationist, gangster controlled condition of the unions, the wholesale expulsion of militants and by the pressure of discontented masses for trade union organization. It must be noted, however, that during the few years following, there was a considerable tendency to abandon work in the old trade unions, in spite of the warnings of the 4th National Conference that this should not be done. Such a tendency, of course, could only work out to the advantage of the reactionaries by weakening the opposition to them in the existing unions.

At this juncture, in March 1928, A. Lozovsky, general secretary of the R.I.L.U., pointed out the growing reactionary spirit of the A. F. of L., S. P., Musteites, etc. On the contrary, as Marxist-Leninist bodies they were the only organizations in the country to understand and combat these illusions. They exposed the fallacies of class collaboration and capitalist rationalization, and constantly warned of the inevitable industrial crash which finally came in 1929. They resolutely combated every phase of the class collaboration movement and all its reactionary supporters from Carver and William Green to Norman Thomas and Muste; they spared no effort to educate and mobilize the workers for a policy of class struggle. They were only working class organizations that made any fight whatever against the employers and the government. In the Coolidge period the C.P. and TUUL gave a real demonstration of their truly revolutionary character.

Policy of Independent Unions

At this juncture, in March 1928,

several new industrial unions were formed. Among these, the principal unions were the Agricultural Workers Industrial League, Marine Workers Industrial Union, Steel & Metal Workers Industrial Union and unions of Auto Workers, Food Workers, Shoe Workers, Lumber Workers, Tobacco Workers, and Furniture Workers, etc.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

Unquestionably this basic change of policy on the part of the TUUL was fundamentally correct. It was made necessary, as I have stated, by the decadent, class collaborationist, gangster controlled condition of the unions, the wholesale expulsion of militants and by the pressure of discontented masses for trade union organization. It must be noted, however, that during the few years following, there was a considerable tendency to abandon work in the old trade unions, in spite of the warnings of the 4th National Conference that this should not be done. Such a tendency, of course, could only work out to the advantage of the reactionaries by weakening the opposition to them in the existing unions.

When the 1929 industrial crash came, carrying down in a smash all the prosperity illusions that the capitalists, A. F. of L. officials and Socialist leaders had been so diligently propagating among the workers, the trade unions were in such a devitalized and weakened condition that they could make little resistance to the wholesale lay-offs and general worsening of conditions which set in almost immediately. The A. F. of L. leaders promptly fell in step with the Hoover government, in its cold-blooded strategy to reduce the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the action of the workers.

Independent Policy Historically Correct

In the Automobile industry, the Auto Workers Union also conducted several important strikes including Flint, 1931, and a whole group of strikes in Detroit early in 1933, which tied up such plants as Motors Products Co., Briggs Body Co., Hudson Motors Company, etc.; the latter strike, by cutting off the supply of auto bodies, brought the great Ford plants to a complete standstill for several days, the first time in their history that they had been stopped by the