

ON THE QUESTION OF PARTIAL DEMANDS

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THE principal achievement of the recent C. C. Plenum was the clarification made on the question of the role of partial demands. The discussion, based upon the excellent resolution of the Comintern, was greatly needed by our Party, there having previously existed much confusion on this vital matter.

The Plenum discussion demonstrated beyond doubt that there has been a widespread tendency to underestimate the importance of partial demands. There has been too much reliance on broad political slogans and too little concentration upon questions of the most immediate interest to the workers. The Party has failed to clearly understand that the politicalization of the workers' struggle must be based upon and part from the fight over the most immediate and bitter questions of wages, hours, working conditions, unemployment relief, etc. There has been consequently a tendency for our mass work to remain rather in the sphere of general agitation than of actual struggle.

This tendency has been especially harmful to the development of the revolutionary unions of the TUUL. Their practice is packed full of incidents where they have ignored the questions of the smaller more urgent demands and have tried to develop the workers' struggles singly around major demands.

The general effect of this has been to reduce our unions largely to skeleton revolutionary propaganda organizations and to hinder their growth into broad mass trade unions fighting the every day battles of the working class, as well as preparing the workers for their greater poli-

tical tasks in the revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism.

But the underestimation of the importance of the partial demands has had even more far-reaching effects than this. It has led to a serious underestimation of trade union work altogether. For it is clear that if one does not clearly see the basic role of trade unions as organizations fighting for the every day demands of the workers, he does not see any real reason for their existence in general. If their tasks are only those of agitation, why build them at all, for the Party can do that work itself, and a skeleton union organization is unnecessary and a burden.

Ever since our Party was organized, it has been afflicted with a deep going underestimation of trade unionism, both in the A. F. of L. and T. U. U. L. Even yet, only about 35 per cent of our members belong to labor unions and only a third of these are active. We have repeatedly attacked this passivity, but without real success. It is only with the recent question of the partial demands, that we are at last beginning to effectively solve the problem. Passivity towards trade union struggle also has roots in a right wing underestimation of the radicalization of the workers, but most of it comes from an underestimation of the partial demands.

The recent Plenum is one that will stand out in the history of our Party. With its clarification of the question of partial demands and elaboration of the new methods of work generally, it is a milestone on the way to transferring our Party from an agitational organization into a mass Party leading the working class.