

**DANGER
AHEAD**

FOR Organized
LABOR

By
WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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DANGER AHEAD

for Organized Labor

by WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

ORGANIZED labor in the United States is now slipping into a dangerous position which, if uncorrected, will gravely undermine its strength. This is caused by the fact that the old-line conservative and Social Democratic heads of the A. F. of L., C.I.O., Miners, Machinists and Railroad Brotherhoods are supporting the bipartisan, imperialist foreign policy of big business. They are poisoning the labor movement at its heart and have already seriously weakened it ideologically, industrially, politically and organizationally.

American imperialists, in their drive to subjugate the earth, realize that the world democratic forces are the main obstacles to their expansionism. Hence, they are striving to defeat the Soviet Union, the national liberation movements of Asia, the new democracies of Europe, and the Communist parties and trade unions of the world. Allied internationally with big capitalists and landlords, the Vatican, avowed fascists and right-wing Social Democrats, they are driving the world toward fascism and war.

By the same token, big business is carrying on an offensive against democracy in this country. For if the American ruling class is to push its imperialist policy successfully abroad, it must have a reactionary regime at home. Its foreign and domestic policy dovetail. Monopoly capitalism, therefore, with consistency is striving to militarize and

fascize the United States and to plunge it into war against the U.S.S.R.

The present dangerous position of organized labor in the United States develops from the fact that by supporting American imperialism's offensive abroad, the leaders expose the workers to the full force of the monopolists' offensive at home. This surrender has weakened the unions, strengthened the bosses, and seriously increased the danger of fascism and war. Organized labor is the backbone of this nation and in this decisive moment of history the whole position of American democracy is at stake.

LABOR BETRAYED ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT

ONE of the basic tasks of the labor movement in this crucial postwar period is actively to defend world peace and democracy against the forces seeking to destroy them. The whole position of the labor movement depends upon its vigorously carrying out this fundamental and historic task. But, save for a minority of Left and progressive union leaders, the officials of the main national divisions of the American labor movement are grossly betraying this responsibility. Behind this treachery to the working class and to the American people lies a more or less conscious desire of the labor bureaucrats to share in the spoils they foolishly think are to be won by U.S. imperialism in its expansionist push.

Wall Street finds the reactionary trade union officials especially effective in poisoning the workers' minds. These labor imperialists are now busily peddling to the workers the monstrous falsehood that the United States is being attacked by an aggressive Soviet Union; they are ardent champions, too, of the criminal absurdity that the monopoly-dominated Truman government with its fascist allies is fighting everywhere to defend world democracy; and they are shouting

that the Marshall Plan, whose real purpose is to arm Europe for war against the U.S.S.R., is a beneficent program designed to bring about economic recovery. In short, every lie that abets the program of world conquest is being handed out by the servile labor leaders. All this seriously undermines the peace will of the people of the United States and of other countries.

One of the most destructive tasks allotted to the labor imperialists by big business is to weaken and split the progressive labor movement in Europe and elsewhere, which the capitalists recognize as an especially powerful obstacle to their program of conquest. Conservative leaders of the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. have taken on this disgraceful job with gusto. They are striving to ram American imperialism's program down the throat of an unwilling working class in various countries. As a result, the past year has witnessed some of the most outrageous instances of union-wrecking and strike-breaking, engineered by the chief American labor centers, ever known in history.

Acting in the same spirit as the authors of the Taft-Hartley Law, the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. leaders have decided arbitrarily that, so far as they are concerned, Communists cannot be officials of trade unions in Europe or anywhere else in the world. Consequently, during the recent great strikes in France and Italy, American trade union leaders through their overseas agents, Irving Brown of the A. F. of L. and James Carey of the C.I.O., brazenly called upon the workers to disregard the strike calls of their democratically-elected Communist leaders. Openly and unblushingly, they also organized the present split in the French trade unions. The A. F. of L. is similarly busy seeking to smash the Latin American Confederation of Labor in order to advance the cause of U.S. imperialism in Central and South America. And both the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. are maneuvering to disrupt the World Federation of Trade Unions over the question of the Marshall Plan. In their destructive work the conservative and Social Democratic

leaders of the C.I.O. have become practically indistinguishable from the ultra-reactionary jingoists who head the A. F. of L.

How deep these labor leaders have sunk in their subservience to the war plans of big business is graphically illustrated by the activities of Clinton Golden, for many years a high official of the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. Mr. Golden, attached to the U.S. military mission in Greece, calmly sat in Athens while the fascist Royalist government passed laws providing the death penalty for strikers and executed thousands of workers, peasants and intellectuals fighting for the most elementary liberties. The boss press has thanked Mr. Golden.

A striking feature of this whole situation is the cynicism with which American capitalists are accepting as a matter of course the lickspittle attitude of the top labor leadership toward their war plans. In many countries of Western Europe the hard-pressed employers frequently entrust lackey right-wing Social Democratic labor leaders with highly important posts in government and with other "responsibilities" and "honors." But not so here in the United States. American monopolists have only contempt for their labor lieutenants, much as they need and utilize their services. They scornfully ignore the clamors of the aspiring labor bureaucrats for "a share" in administering the Marshall Plan and, of course, they give these workers' leaders little or no recognition on their political election slates. The bosses simply issue orders on foreign policy to the labor conservatives, secure in the knowledge that the latter will dutifully carry them out—with grave injury to the American labor movement, to democracy and world peace.

LABOR BETRAYED ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT

THIS servile support of an imperialist foreign policy necessarily has serious consequences upon the very fiber of the American labor movement. The reactionary trade union leaders are caught in the iron

logic of the situation: in supporting U.S. imperialists abroad they cannot combat its reactionary manifestations at home. Therefore, inexorably, as supporters of big business' international program of world conquest, the labor misleaders are also betraying the most vital interests of the workers and the American people.

The reason for this is clear: the bourgeoisie in driving for world domination finds it necessary to set up a police state in the United States. Hence, the conservative union leaders, corrupted as they are by the support of the monopolists' foreign policy, are making little or no resistance to the systematic building of fascism that is now going on in this country. They are making no serious effort to support the increasingly assailed Negro people, nor to combat the rising wave of anti-Semitism. They are tamely submitting to outrageous "loyalty oaths" for government workers as well as other systems of thought control. They even endorse (as does the A. F. of L.), or refuse to fight with all-out mobilization (as does the C.I.O.), the dangerous activities of the House Un-American Committee. They often out-do even the capitalists themselves in the Hitlerite practice of Red-baiting. They (especially the major leadership of the C.I.O.) are falling more and more under the warping influence of the Catholic hierarchy. And they bestir themselves but feebly as the reactionaries strive to railroad the highly dangerous Mundt Bill through Congress.

At the recent convention of the Textile Workers Union-C.I.O. there occurred an incident, minor in itself, which illuminated the ideological decay widespread among top trade union leaders. Emil Rieve, Social Democratic head of this union, when confronted with resolutions condemning lynching, segregation and the Ku Klux Klan, prevented action on the grounds that they were "controversial" and also because of his expressed concern about the feeling of possible Ku Kluxer's among the delegates themselves.

The conservative upper layer of union leaders, politically enfeebled

by their allegiance to imperialism, are incapable of making a solid fight even against the fascist-like Taft-Hartley Law which strikes at the vitals of the trade union movement. This law could have been killed had the top leadership actively mobilized labor's forces against it at the time it was being considered by Congress. It also could have been nullified if the trade union leaders had resolutely refused to sign its infamous anti-Communist clause as the progressives and Communists proposed. Instead, the A. F. of L. union leaders fell over each other's necks in hastening to put their names to the slave law, and the right-wing C.I.O. chieftains were not far behind. Only the Miners and the left-wing C.I.O. unions have made a determined stand against the law.

As a result of this subservience a veritable rain of Taft-Hartley injunctions is now falling upon the workers, the strike rights of the unions have been seriously impaired, and the unions are more and more falling under the control of the reactionary government. The recent smashing of the Miners' and Railroaders' national strikes by the Truman Administration indicates the dangerous degree of domination that the government now exerts over the unions.

Similar to the situation after World War I, a strong movement for class collaboration, which injures the unions' fighting spirit, is developing among the trade union leadership. Philip Murray, in the June issue of *The American Magazine*, expresses this enervating tendency as follows:

"In fact, we have no classes in this country; that's why the Marxist theory of the class struggle has gained so few adherents. We're *all* workers here. And in the final analysis the interests of farmers, factory hands, business and professional people, and white-collar toilers prove to be the same. Even the division of industrial workers into 'management' and 'labor' turns out to be somewhat artificial. Management, as we've discovered, involves plenty of labor; and labor involves considerable management."

Because of the lack of a fighting policy by labor the employers are making serious inroads into the legal status and organizational position of the trade unions. Under the Taft-Hartley Law they have knocked out the so-called closed shop, and now they are attacking various other forms of the union shop. A particularly sinister development in this respect was the ruling of the National Labor Relations Board upholding the laws within thirteen states which ban the union shop. Since the death of Roosevelt the labor movement has lost much ground in the basic matter of union recognition.

The present intense drive of the imperialists to super-militarize the United States is also meeting with but a feeble and dying resistance from the A. F. of L., C.I.O., Miners and Railroad Brotherhood leaders. The brass hats are taking over key government posts by the score, gigantic military appropriations are following one another rapidly in Congress, the country's youth is being mobilized as never before in peace time and a wild warmongering rages throughout the land. Yet the conservative labor leaders are constantly yielding to, when not actually supporting, these dangerous developments. And this is logical, for since they are ardent backers of Wall Street's foreign program how can they oppose its war preparations at home?

THESE labor leaders are also incapable of effectively defending the workers' interests within industry. Despite the prevailing "boom" economic conditions, the workers' real wages and living standards are declining while prices and profits soar to record heights. Confused and vacillating, the labor betrayers offer no united front against the employers. Each union fights its wage battles alone. The reactionary leaders condemn with Red-baiting every sign of the workers' militancy.

Meanwhile the employers, contemptuous of their labor lackeys, quickly take advantage of the situation. They are encouraged to stick the knife ever deeper into the body of organized labor. Although their

own profits are sky-high the employers, following the arrogant leadership of U.S. Steel, are stiffening their resistance to demands for wage increases. The Ford Company even demanded that its workers accept reductions. The 100,000 packinghouse workers, notwithstanding a two-months' strike, were unable to break the opposition of the big packers to an adequate wage increase. Increasingly, also, the employers are fighting the unions with their traditional weapons of court injunctions, police violence, strike-breaking, open shopism, company unionism and the like while A. F. of L. and C.I.O. leaders moan about the bosses' "unfairness." The workers are paying in lowered living standards and in weakened unions for their leaders' support of imperialism.

One of the most dangerous current features of the labor movement is the practice of "raiding." A. F. of L. and C.I.O. unions raid each other to the detriment of all workers concerned. Within the C.I.O. itself raiding is prevalent especially against Left and progressive unions. Murray is doing nothing to halt this suicidal practice. One of the worst aspects of the current raiding was that carried out by unions that had signed the Taft-Hartley anti-Communist clause against those that had not signed. Thus the raiding unions betrayed the whole fight against this vicious measure. Today's union raiding is much worse than traditional jurisdictional quarrels between the unions, and unless it is halted soon it can create the most serious damage for the entire labor movement.

On the political field, the conservative leaders of the labor movement are displaying a similar bankruptcy. Although both old parties are manifestly dominated from stem to gudgeon by big business, these labor leaders are trying to keep the workers tied to the Democratic Party in the coming Presidential elections. They are obviously prepared to support, directly or indirectly, even the unspeakable Truman should he be nominated—a man who has broken several national strikes, who was largely responsible for the passage of the Taft-Hartley Law, who

has long sabotaged the workers' fight against the rising cost of living, who is going along with reaction in its systematic building of fascism in this and other countries, who is one of the most jingoistic warmongers in the United States, and who has betrayed every plank in the Roosevelt platform upon which he was elected. The policy now being followed by the conservative labor leaders, if there were no counteracting mass influences, could lead to no other result than a resounding defeat for labor and a sweeping victory for fascist-minded reaction in the November elections.

THE RESISTANCE OF THE RANK AND FILE

THE surrender by the top labor leadership to the war program of U.S. imperialism, in both its foreign and domestic aspects, is making the position of the trade union movement increasingly precarious.

This, however, is only one side of the picture. There are broad rank-and-file currents resisting the betrayal of their leaders. Although undoubtedly large masses of the workers have been contaminated by the intense war propaganda, and many confused workers honestly believe in the Marshall Plan, nevertheless huge sections of the trade union membership are definitely taking a stand against the surrender-to-Wall Street line of their leaders. In this developing rank-and-file upsurge lies the hope of the trade union movement.

The fighting mood of the workers is being shown on a variety of fronts—by their resistance to the growing militarism, by their active participation in the developing struggles of the Negro people, and especially by their many big strikes and wage movements in the coal, meat-packing, auto, communications, railroad, maritime, printing, fur and leather, farm equipment and other industries.

The most significant political expression of this widespread mass discontent is the new party. The Wallace movement represents not

only the lining up of a large section of the American people generally against the bipartisan Wall Street bloc in Congress and the Truman Administration, but it is also a far-reaching movement of the more progressive-minded labor leaders and rank-and-file workers against the present betrayal policies of the higher labor officials in their dealings with big business.

At present the trade union support for Wallace officially comes from some fifteen Left and progressive C.I.O. unions, totalling about 1,250,000 members, plus a wide but as yet not clearly tabulated scattering of unions and members in the more conservative A. F. of L., C.I.O., Miners, Machinists and Railroad unions. Undoubtedly a very large section of the membership of organized labor would by now have put their unions officially on record for Mr. Wallace had they a democratic opportunity to do so.

The leaders of the conservative unions are fighting the new party movement almost with desperation. They are spending money as never before in support of old party candidates, and they are literally deluging their own organizations with Red-baiting. In this respect the C.I.O. leaders are not a whit behind those of the A. F. of L. Indeed, Philip Murray is going to the unheard-of lengths of actually threatening Left unions with expulsion from the C.I.O. if they continue to oppose Wall Street's Marshall Plan and its reactionary political candidates. The recent Boston convention of the Steel Workers' union, of which Mr. Murray is the head, was a menacing example of control by a bureaucratic machine thoroughly saturated with imperialist policies and dominated by the Catholic hierarchy. The slugging of Nick Migas, a protesting delegate, was a dastardly action and a danger signal of a declining trade union democracy.

In order for organized labor to counteract its present drift into a critical situation and to exert its tremendous potential progressive strength, drastic changes in policy must be made along at least three major channels.

First, the Wallace new party must be built by mobilizing widespread support from the trade unions. Organized labor in this country has now reached the point when continued backing of the Democratic and Republican parties can only be disastrous. The workers must finally break the shackles that are now holding them to the two old parties. It is of the greatest significance that just as the conservative trade union leadership has surrendered to the foreign and domestic program of U.S. imperialism, the Wallace movement, by a corresponding logic in the opposite direction, is challenging the policies of Wall Street on both the international and home fronts. The new party is, therefore, a tremendous force for the revitalization of the labor movement.

Second, the trade unions, in addition to developing a new political line, have a most urgent need for more militant and co-ordinated policies among themselves on the industrial field. The present practice, in the C.I.O. as well as in the A. F. of L. and Railroad unions and other independent unions, to go it alone on wage and other demands is abysmally stupid and can only lead to serious defeats. In the face of the tremendous financial resources of the employers, their high degree of monopolization and their new spirit of truculence, and also in view of the current wave of warlike reaction in this country (for which organized labor itself is largely responsible), there is the urgent need for united labor action by the unions in defense of the workers' interests. Especially the present insanity of intra-union raiding must be stopped. An end, too, must be put to the developing dangerous tendency to suppress democracy in the unions, and a halt should also be called to the deadly practice of Red-baiting.

Organized labor, in short, must understand that the easy-going days of the Roosevelt regime are over. Now it must dig in and fight. The workers are facing a ruthless capitalist class determined to establish its world rule at any cost, and determined, too, to build a reactionary regime in the United States. Trade unionists have to realize that they must develop a fighting movement, or else. Unless it corrects its present

industrial tactics, labor is in for some costly lessons from the hands of employers. Let the deplorable condition of the trade union movement in the late Twenties be a warning of where the lickspittle, class-collaboration policies of the top leadership will lead if not corrected by progressive rank-and-file resistance.

Third, in addition to better political and industrial policies, there must be an ideological renaissance in the trade union movement. The present dangerous situation, with the decisive leadership of labor tailing after the big capitalists and following them tamely in policies that lead to fascism and war, is the inevitable result of our having a conservative upper trade union officialdom. Organized labor must have a strong core of leaders with a Marxist-Leninist outlook. It must begin to break with lingering N.A.M. theories of "free enterprise"; to discard Keynesian notions of a "progressive capitalism"; and to rid itself of the influences of the hypocritical "socialism" of such Social Democrats as Dubinsky and Reuther. A strong body of leaders who understand the general principles of Marxism-Leninism is necessary in order successfully to lead the working class in these days when innumerable complex problems are increasingly being cast up by the decaying and declining world capitalist system.

THE American trade union movement, with its 15,000,000 members, has tremendous potential strength. But its vast numbers are not, of themselves, final guarantees of the progressive health and strength of the movement. The German trade union movement was proportionately even stronger than ours, but Hitler easily conquered it because of the betrayal policies of its right-wing Social Democratic leaders. The progressives in the trade unions should be warned, therefore, of the present dangerous tendencies in the labor movement. They have a special responsibility and an urgent need for clear-headedness and concerted action. They must not fall victims to the illusion of mere

numbers, to the notion that the great size of the trade unions renders them invulnerable to the attacks of the reactionaries. There must be a revitalized, re-invigorated labor movement. Otherwise, in spite of its numbers and strategic position, organized labor can, through wrong policies, suffer serious degeneration and weakening in the general direction of a spineless, state-controlled, boss-dominated trade unionism. The unions must stop their retreat and resume their advance. The present reactionary, imperialist policies of the top trade union leaders spell danger ahead for American organized labor.

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