

BROWDER ON NATIONAL SERVICE

LABOR CAN WELL GIVE its unconditional support to President Roosevelt's proposal for the mobilization of all citizens for national war service.

When the President made the same proposal last year, Congress refused to take up the question, and the labor movement was divided, with many of the outstanding leaders opposing such a law as unnecessary. It would be unfortunate if again this question should be met with the old positions frozen. The time has come to settle it, and it is obvious that the only sense in which it can be settled is positively. Labor should take the lead in proposing what immediate steps can be taken under existing legislation and executive orders to solve the manpower problems and in formulating the concrete measures of additional legislation which may be needed and in supporting its enactment.

It is argued, in some labor circles, that such a law is unnecessary because there is plenty of manpower if it were not misused by individual employers. Such persons point out that official demands for a certain number of workers of particular skills have been made for certain plants, and that inquiry has shown that the same plants had just discharged a larger number of the same category of workers; obviously, much of the outcry of manpower shortage is falsely raised by individual employers as a cover-up for their own mishandling of the question, and that the War and Navy Departments, having no means of checking up on the question, automatically echo these false claims.

But no matter how widespread such conditions may be, they constitute an argument for the national service law, and not an argument against it. Such a law is the precondition the government requires for regulating the employers' use of manpower, much more than it is needed for directing labor where it might not otherwise wish to go. For labor is ready to work anywhere it is really needed, and only demands that it be used rationally and efficiently under nationally established trade union and governmental standards. It is an obvious fact that we will not have rational utilization of manpower so long as decisions are left to private employers, with all their special interests.

There is further a gigantic psychological problem involved. The great mass of men in our armed forces will never understand any

stubborn opposition from labor ranks to a national service law, and if such an opposition should develop it will enormously strengthen the influence of anti-labor and reactionary agitation among them. On the other hand, nothing would so thoroughly cement the unity of the front-line fighters with the workers back home as precisely the *complete* mobilization of the nation's manpower for active and planned participation in the national war effort. This equalization of service of home and battle fronts exists in fact, and it will tremendously strengthen national unity psychologically, if that fact is registered in law.

There is the further and decisive fact, that the prompt adoption of a national service law, formulated with the whole-hearted participation of labor, and not as has been the practice, in disregard of labor's views, will be a tremendous blow against our enemies; it will be a notification to them that their last hope of a weakening on our home front is gone. It will be a tremendous stimulant to our Allies, the chief of whom have long had similar legislation and some of whom have been critical of our laxness in this matter. It will help cement the Coalition in which we must wage and win the war, and will help disintegrate the enemy.

In the face of these indisputable facts, all other arguments fall to the ground as irrelevant and immaterial.

Full support to the Commander-in-Chief without hesitation, in the careful but quick formulation and adoption of a national service act! This is the supreme issue of the day for the labor movement, if it would fully rise to its position as backbone and main reliance of the nation in its supreme crisis.