The League's Labor Party Referendum

By Earl R. Browder

LABOR wants a political party of its own. The truth of this statement has been decidedly shown in the past few months, especially from the referendum that went forth from the Trade Union Educational League. The response has been overwhelmingly "Yes" to the resolution: "That we endorse the formation of a Labor Party by the whole trade union movement, to be based upon direct representation from the local unions, and to include as affiliated organizations all existing working-class political parties."

Last month we reported the scope of the referendum ballots were taking. Since that time every mail adds volume to the overwhelming decision. The unions now on record in the League vote extend over 40 States and 47 International Unions. In the thousands of locals in which the issue has been raised, we have been informed of less than a dozen which failed to approve of a Labor Party.

The opposition comes generally from officials. It has been in effect in but one way—that of suppressing the issue and withholding the ballot. The following letter is typical of many which we have received:

In regard to the referendum you sent this Local, will say that we did not read it, and as you had sent me one at the same time I took it up at the next meeting. We had quite a time, but after all the discussion no soul voted against it. Before it was put to a vote, the secretary said; "I have orders from . . . that this letter be sent."

Accompanying hundreds of the ballots have been letters, many of great interest. They voice the rank and file. Brief, and sometimes illogical, they express Organized Labor better than all the official journals. Here, for example, is one from Oklahoma:

I herewith enclose the resolution adopted by Local . . . Maintenance of Way, at our regular meeting today. We long for the time when Organized Labor will control our country.

From a central body in West Virginia, near the scene of the bitter struggle of the miners, comes this:

I have been instructed to convey to you that the trade unions in this valley are practically unanimous in favor of a Labor Party; the few opposed only question as to whether we are ready. God knows that the time is here and passed, and the sooner something is done the better. More power to your movement.

The following letter is typical of many which we have received:... It has been unanimously adopted and was forwarded as a recommendation to the Joint Board. We have received information that it has been adopted by the Joint Board and is now in the hands of the locals for approval. Also it was decided to send a communication to the General Executive Board of the International urging them to participate in the July 3rd Conference called by the Farmer-Labor Party and act along the lines of our recommendation.

In cities where the Farmer-Labor Party is established, the interest in the referendum was so strong because the unions already feel that a beginning has been made. Many resolutions, however, were received from such centers, emphasizing the need for bringing all other political parties of the workers into an inclusive Labor Party.

Many unions, after discussing the resolution in one meeting, postponed action until the following meeting in order to send out a special call for all members to be present. Most of these also ordered from 100 to 500 copies of the League leaflet, "A Political Party for Labor," to place in the members' homes before voting. The attitude of these unions is well stated by the letter from the Machinists of San Francisco, who write:

Kindly send by return mail 200 copies of the leaflet, "A Political Party for Labor," to place in the hands of all members. I think very strongly that we should change the resolution proposed. That one was the Bakery Wagon Drivers of San Francisco, who were in favor of a Labor Party but did not feel they were strong enough to go alone, for the inclusion of "all existing working-class parties."

After discussion, the next step is action. As a sample of the manner in which the League Referendum stimulated this process, we quote a letter from Local No. 81 of the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, of Chicago:

It has been unanimously adopted and was forwarded as a recommendation to the Joint Board. We have received information that it has been adopted by the Joint Board and is now in the hands of the locals for approval. Also it was decided to send a communication to the General Executive Board of the International urging them to participate in the July 3rd Conference called by the Farmer-Labor Party and act along the lines of our recommendation.

ON THE INDEPENDENT UNIONS

In The Labor Herald for March there appeared an article on the Second Congress of the R. I. L. U., written by Arne Swabek, T. U. E. L. delegate to that Congress, and dealing in part with the attitude to be assumed regarding independent unions in this country. This was an individual, not the official statement of the League regarding the matter.

In his article Brother Swabek made a statement contrary to the policy of the R. I. L. U. and the League, as follows: "The American independent unions which adhere to the Red International were told to strike an organized campaign for re-entry into the A. F. of L. as organized groups." This inaccuracy he corrected in the May Labor Herald.

The policy of the T. U. E. L. toward the independents was fully stated in the April Labor Herald, which is, briefly: (1) That where the independent unions are weak in numbers and consist simply of groups of isolated militants, this shall be urged to rejoin the mass organizations, either as groups or individuals, and (2) where the independents are mass organizations every effort be made to bring about temporary agreements between them and other unions in their jurisdictions, and to eventually amalgamate all of them into industrial organizations—National Committee, T. U. E. L.