Foster Tries to Forget the Past

The New Turn of the Party on Trade Union Policy

By Ben Gitlow

In the October issue of the *Communist*, William Z. Foster rambles thru a long article entitled "The Trade Union Line of Lovestone and Cannon-Muste Auxiliaries." The article is an astounding one for Comrade Foster. It marks a complete break with everything Foster ever stood for. It is a frantic attempt on the part of Foster to wipe out the very trade union policies the championship of which over a long period of time brought him prominently forward in the trade union movement. This article is used by the new Foster to slay the Foster of old, to bury him in an ignoble grave and, after having thrown the last scornful shovelfuls of dirt upon his own past, to recall the ghost of DeLeon in order to embrace it and try to infuse life into its cold barren remains. Imagine Foster trying to revive the spirit of DeLeon and give it life and substance!

In this article Foster directs his fire against all proposals for the building up of a left wing in the existing trade unions, branding them as meaning the liquidation of the Trade Union Unity League and of the revolutionary struggle in the trade unions. The very policy of "dualism" which he attacked, and very correctly, as a sectarian isolationist policy he now cloaks in the terminology of the new trade union line and champions as the only correct trade union policy. This is the message of his article.

What Are Trade Unions?

The fundamental basis of Foster's argument is that *the trade unions*, because of reactionary character of its burocracy, *are today directly capitalist organizations*, that nothing can be accomplished inside of them or thru them. Therefore it has now become the main trade union task of the Communists to build independent "revolutionary unions" and to affiliate them to the new "revolutionary trade union center," the Trade Union Unity League. This is precisely the essence of the sectarian dualism against which Foster fought so vigorously and so correctly for years. Just put the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance in place of the TUUL and you have DeLeonism all over again—typically American trade union sectarianism.

The fight of Foster against "infantile leftist" sectarianism is what brought him to the attention of the Communist International. He was welcomed into Communist ranks because he could best serve to dramatize the imperative necessity of working inside the existing unions for the purpose of revolutionizing the unions and bringing them under the influence and leadership of the Communists. Today Foster appears as the champion of precisely the opposite course.

Is There A Change of Line?

A second important feature of this article is the fact that is is a decisive answer to the persistent rumors that the Party officialdom has made a decided turn in its trade union policy. In Party and trade union circles such rumors have become quite wide-spread—to the effect that the Party officialdom has come to the conclusion that its policy of mechanically creating "revolutionary unions" and of withdrawing left wing workers from the reactionary unions is wrong and that, therefore, the TUUL is now reverting to the old policy of building up a left wing in the reactionary unions. But any such idea is refuted not only by the deeds but even by the words of the Party officialdom. We have already pointed out more than once that the so-called "united fronts" concocted by the Party officials for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, for the ILGU, for the millinery workers union, etc., are no more than cheap manouvers to head off the growth of genuine left wing in the reactionary unions. The manifestations of a genuine left wing tendency in the trade unions have lately become quite apparent. In the reactionary needle trade unions left wing sentiment has already crystallized into organization—entirely outside of the influence of the TUUL and of the official Communist Party. This is naturally viewed as a serious menace to the whole line of the TUUL and the "united fronts" of the TUUL are the answer. There is this fundamental difference: *The TUUL proposes to "work in" the reactionary unions in order to smash them and to "carry over" the workers into the "revolutionary" TUUL unions. The Leninist line proposes to work in the reactionary unions in order to defeat the reactionary burocrats, in order to win influence over the workers, in order to win the unions and convert them into militant fighting organizations against the bosses.* This is a fundamental difference. Foster's article as well as the deeds of the TUUL prove that the old sectarian policy of isolation and division in the trade unions is being carried thru.

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The space allotted to this article does not permit me to answer the brilliant remarks of Comrade Foster about a "union" between us and Cannon and about us being "auxiliaries" of Muste. The method of using labels where arguments fail is an old one but is hardly convincing. But we must recall to Comrade Foster that not only h[illegible] been the traditional [illegible] dualism against Lozovsky himself! He himself notes this fact in his article as follows:

"In this controversy (the struggle of the old leadership of the Party against the beginnings of the new trade union course.—Editor.) my own position was incorrect. I polemized with Comrade Lozovsky on the grounds that his criticism of our past policy was too severe."

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The Record of the Past

But Foster cannot break with his past so readily. In his article he is forced to admit that the trade union line of the Party from 1921 to 1928 (up to the IV Congress of the RILU) was correct. About this he says the following:

"In the main this policy was correct. It enabled us to conduct many effective fights."

It is not so easy to forget the glorious pages of the history of the left wing in the trade unions with the amalgamation movement, the Labor Party campaign, the miners struggle, the Russian recognition campaign, the furriers strike, Passaic, New Bedford, the needle trades, and so on. The old line of trade union policy made labor history in this country at a time when we did not have such favorable objective conditions as we have today. It is no accident that Foster is unable to register concrete positive achievements such as these for the new line, the Losovskyan line for trade union work. No one can deny that there are wonderful opportunities. But the policy of withdrawing left wingers from the mass organizations and of building new ideal so-called "revolutionary" organizations does not bring any positive results but on the contrary brings demoralization, defeat and isolation.

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What Is the New Line,

Let Foster explain what this new line of the Party officialdom is. His words give a definite answer to every anxious left wing worker who wants to know whether the Party is or is not considering a change of its trade union policy. And the answer is an emphatic NO! Here is what Foster has to say:

"But since the 4th RILU Congress our policy has taken a sharp turn. Now our line is to build independent, revolutionary unions and to combine these into a new national trade union center . . . The work of our organized groups in the reformist unions based on the tactic of the united front from below, is subordinated to the building of the revolutionary unions. It is orientated upon drawing these trade union workers under the ideological leadership of the TUUL, and, as speedily as practicable, into mass affiliation with it."

What is the substance of this new line? (1) To build independent revolutionary unions all along the line. (2) To build up the TUUL not as a left wing center but as a dual center (to the A F of L) of "revolutionary" unions. (3) Work in the reactionary unions is not for the purpose of building a left wing but is subordinated to the building of revolutionary unions. (4) The left wingers in the mass reactionary unions are as speedily as possible to be withdrawn from their unions and affiliated to the TUUL "revolutionary" unions.

This is clearly the policy of sectarian dualism, the policy of abandoning the mass unions and chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of ideal "revolutionary" unions. The same will-o'-the-wisp was chased by DeLeon thirty years ago. Today, much less convincingly because with much less conviction, it is being advocated by Foster as the new line, the line of the RILU, for the "third period of capitalism." In this country we have almost a half a century of costly experience with this policy. It was thru the activities of Lenin and Comintern that such suicidal trade union tactics were finally rejected and discredited in the revolutionary movement. Now the leadership of the Communist International and of the RILU are trying to bring them back. This is the real meaning of the new trade union line.

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In the next issue of the Revolutionary Age *Comrade Gitlow will consider the problem of the progressives (in particular of the Muste movement) in relation to the trade unions tasks of the Communists. Watch for this article.*

THE FIGHT IN THE MARINE UNION

By LARRY MURPHY

Where did this fight among the marine workers spring from? For the last year and a half or two years a fight has been waged by the rank and file of our union against the phoney policies and tactics of the burocracy. Up to the present this has only expressed itself in individual actions, in workers leaving the union, in non-payment of dues and so forth. However, the latest fiascoes of the burocracy in Philadelphia and New Orleans were too much. The rank and file could no longer tolerate these phoney and ruinous policies of those who unfortunately have control of our union today, that is to say, Mink, Inc. Much discussion and hot arguments followed these disastrous affairs. An appeal was made to the Communist Party thru the fraction. However the Party took its usual stand and in order to curry favor with Lozovsky branded the appeal of the rank and file as counter-revolutionary and threw it into the waste-basket. Unable to get any justice from the iron-bound Party burocracy the rank and file elected a committee and instructed them to draw up an appeal to the membership.

The tactics of Mink and Company have nearly killed our union and in some places it actually has killed it. Mink and Company destroyed the strike machine of the union built up under terrific hardships. Harvey sent out a fake report to the effect that the union had won a 20% wage increase in New Orleans when in reality we suffered a miserable defeat. The union was turned into a step-child of the Party, in an appendix of the Party. In our union there is reckless extravagance and the utter disregard of the most elementary ideas and rights of trade unionism. In Philadelphia the union called a fake strike by having ten *seamen* Party members vote for the *longshoremen* to go out on strike without even consulting the longshoremen! All this has given our union a reputation of fakery and burocracy among the workers of the Gulf coast and the Philly waterfront.

We are determined to fight for the following:

1. To replace the present burocracy with a proletarian leadership.
2. To build left wing groups in all unions and to win over the rank and file to our working class program.
3. To carry on a campaign for the building of one union in the marine industry.
4. To intensify our work among the unorganized workers, especially the unemployed.

EXPULSION POLICY IN THE TUUL-UNIONS

The expulsion policy which aroused so much indignation on the part of the workers when it was practised by the reactionary union leaders against militants has now been taken over by the officials of the Trade Union Unity League unions to be used against all workers who happen to disagree with their policies or tactics.

The Pittston, Wilkes Barre and Ashley locals of the (former) National Miners Union were led by supporters of the CP-Majority Group. Thereupon the burocrats of the NMU simply cut off all connections with these locals and refused to have anything to do with them. Naturally these locals could not continue to function in such circumstances.

In the Marine Workers Industrial Union there has recently arisen a strong rank and file opposition movement against the policies and method

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