

The C.P.L.A. in Paterson Strike

by Ben Gitlow

The Conference for Progressive Labor Action (Musteites) was represented in Paterson during the strike of the silk workers by its chairman, A. J. Muste, and by its secretary and editor, Louis F. Budenz. In addition L. F. Budenz was the actual head and leader of this strike. From its role in Paterson a good estimate of the Muste movement can be made.

There is an outstanding characteristic of the Muste movement. That is vacillation. It is neither fish nor flesh. It proclaims itself both as a political organization and a trade union group. At the time of the Paterson strike it was neither. At that time it was like a horse with its head where its tail should be and its tail where its head should be. Off galloped the young steed in the direction in which the tail pointed at a particular moment. The Musteites were as dependable as a ruderless ship in a storm. Their line, if any, was one of continuous vacillation.

If one has to generalize on the policy of the Musteites one would have to say that they love to hear themselves talk as radicals, on the one hand, but prefer, on the other hand, to rely upon the conservative trade union officialdom for actions of decision.

In other words they consider their program good, ideal, but they haven't any confidence in it. The masses may support the program but they themselves have no faith in the masses and lay their trust in the conservative officials. They have no particular enthusiasm for the building up

of a progressive rank and file opposition movement in the trade unions. Their actions in Paterson prove this.

When the question of what should be done in Paterson was considered, it was stressed that what was needed was to build up an organization committee representative of all elements in the labor movement, to organize the workers and call the strike.

The Musteites, who were in a position to make this possible, agreed with the officialdom to organize a Joint Action Committee representative of the officials of the various unions plus Muste, Budenz and Gitlow. They sought to have no issue made on Eli Keller's membership on the Joint Action Committee. Eli Keller represented the left wing elements among the Paterson textile workers. After a fight on the question, Eli Keller was given a voice but no vote on the Joint Action Committee.

On the question of advancing the strike date so that the unity of all the textile strikers could be achieved in one strike, the Musteites first resigned on this issue—both the chairman and secretary of the Joint Action Committee (Muste, chairman; Budenz, secretary). But when they saw that the strike of the National Textile Workers Union was a failure, that the workers did not answer this strike call, they reconsidered their withdrawal, stated they had been wrong in their estimation of the situation and the union officials had been right. Before that meeting I took up with Muste and Budenz the

necessity of continuing the fight to advance the strike date. They agreed with me but in the presence of the union officials their opposition melted away like a snow ball on a hot stove. I insisted upon my motion to advance the date. Muste and Budenz voted against the motion. I withdrew on the grounds that to keep the workers in the shops longer while the National Textile Workers Union was conducting the strike was demoralizing the whole situation and dividing the workers. Nevertheless, after my withdrawal and the publication of my statement, on the same day the committee changed its action and advanced the strike date.

The power to appoint sub-committees was placed in Budenz's hands to a very large extent. His appointments were always of the conservative officials. He almost never took in the left wing workers into the sub-committees.

When the General Strike Committee was selected the Musteites, together with the union officials, decided to make it a committee secondary to the Joint Action Committee. It took considerable time to maintain the General Strike Committee and finally to have it reorganized as the authoritative committee of the strike.

The Musteites agreed secretly with MacMahon to have a sub-committee of union officials during the course of the strike work out the basis of amalgamation. The result was that our proposals for utilizing the Paterson strike to tie up with Allentown and to build the national silk workers federation in the heat of struggle thru the participation of the masses of silk workers, was ignored and actual amalgamation and the building of a national silk workers federation delayed months after the strike. During the heat of the Paterson strike, A. J. Muste, heading a committee from Paterson, without any authority from the Paterson workers, was instrumental in settling the Allentown strike. No report, tho it was requested, was made to the General Strike Committee. The settlement was no settlement at all. The Allentown strike was called off and the workers sent back to get what terms they could. This was a terrific blow to the Paterson strike at its most critical period.

Muste's leadership in the strike was characterized by the exertion of pressure continually upon the General Strike Committee to move for settlements. He pressed for one compromise after another. Whenever Zimmerman, Keller and myself would confer with Muste and Budenz, we would come to an agreement upon a policy of militant strike action and resistance to yielding to continuous compromises. But no sooner did Muste and Budenz face the General Strike Committee then they yielded to the compromisers and became advocates of compromise.

Before the general strike was over, Muste and Budenz pressed for the abolition of the General Strike Committee and, during the strike, for turning strike action over to a small committee made up mainly of the union officials.

After the end of the strike the

The Menace Of Fascism In Germany

FOR A UNITED ANTI-FASCIST FRONT

Open Letter Of The German Opposition

We print below the general section of the Open Letter sent by the Reichsleitung (national leadership) of the Communist Party of Germany (Opposition) to the Central Committee of the C.P.G., and published in the Arbeiterpolitik of February 20, 1932. The second section of the Letter, outlining a concrete program of united front anti-Fascist action, will be published next week.

To the Central Committee of
Communist Party of Germany:

Dear Comrades:

On January 10, the *Rote Fahne* published the appeal of the Central Committee on the presidential elections. The attitude of the Social-democratic party and the A.D.G.B. (the German A. F. of L.—Editor) brings with it the necessity of the Communist Party putting up its own candidate. But therefore it is all the more necessary to push into the background the question of person. On the contrary, what is necessary is rather a definite anti-Fascist program of action, on the basis of which there could take place the concentration of the broadest masses for extra-parliamentary anti-Fascist struggle.

With such a program of action it would be possible for the C.P.G. to penetrate the S.P.D., the S.A.P.D., the A.D.G.B., and all proletarian mass organizations. This would serve as a counter-action to the betrayal activities of the strategists of the "iron front", while the presidential election campaign would not be simply parliamentary noise-making but would be really a source of strength for the anti-Fascist front at the expense of the reformists.

The presidential campaign hitherto, as conducted by the C.P.G., only confirms our statement.

Whereas for the Fascist wire-pullers the election campaign is simply a curtain behind which they are laying the actual foundation of the Fascist dictatorship (cooperation of the Fascist powers with the executive organs of the State, Reichwehr, police, justice), the Communist Party, according to its press, is conducting the campaign as an election maneuver, pushing the question of person (Thaelmann.—Editor) to the forefront.

This attitude is all the more dangerous because the critical moment which will decide whether Fascism will rule Germany is approaching. Now, if the Communist Party fulfills its role as the leader of the proletariat, the proletarian united front can be built up and Fascism beaten back and destroyed. But this is unfortu-

nately being hindered by your policy. A concentration of masses against Fascism is impossible if the Communist Party rejects the building up of united front bodies with other proletarian organizations and the creation of really non-party anti-Fascist defense organizations, if, thru the R. G.O. tactics, a mobilization of the organized workers is made impossible. That today, in a situation in which the crisis of capitalism is much deeper than in 1918 or 1923, the Communist Party, in spite of numerical growth, is weaker in the factories and in the unions and in strikes than it has been in years, is the fault of the ultra-left policy of the C.P.G. This ultra-left course has helped the growth of Fascism and has aided the reformists to retain their influence over the decisive sections of the working class in spite of their unparalleled betrayal. On these facts all empty slanders and "ideological campaigns" with which you try to meet the criticism of the C.P.G.—O. must shatter. In spite of our differences on the life-and-death questions of tactics, we are ready to fight side by side with you.

In the interests of the Communist movement and of the organization of a serious anti-Fascist, extra-parliamentary struggle, we therefore officially appeal to you even now to approach the above-named organizations on the basis of an anti-Fascist program of action. We make this proposal to you because the organizational strength of the C.P.G. will give it extraordinary weight and effectiveness among the reformist workers and will greatly strengthen the revolutionary front.

In favor of this proposal we present the experiences of the presidential elections of 1925. In the pamphlet issued officially by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany (at the head of which Ernst Thaelmann already stood) on May 20, 1925 under the title "The Monarchist Danger and the Tactics of the C.P.G.", there are quoted the following paragraphs of the speech of the representative of the Communist International to the Central Council of the C.P.G., held on May 9-10, 1925:

"Since October 1923 great advances have been made by the Party and we have heralded our achievements with pride. But I believe that we have not measured up to the first difficult test that faced us practically, the Hindenburg elections, and that today we must correct the mistakes we have made.

"After two weeks of powerful agitation, whether a few days before or a few days after the (first) elections, we should have appealed to the S.P.D. and the A. D.G.B. as follows: 'We are ready to withdraw our candidate if the

MAKE EVERY READER A SUBSCRIBER TO WORKERS AGE

Musteites upheld the constitutional provision which eliminated the outstanding progressives and militants from running for the executive board in the elections of the Associated. At first membership meeting they supported the conservative elements and officials against the left wing.

When the officials refused to continue Budenz as a paid organizer, they broke with the officials and constituted an opposition.

The Musteites, the C.P.L.A., reached the height of their development in the Paterson strike. The pressure and constant direction of the Communist Party (Majority Group) prevented them from making gross mistakes, pushed them in a large measure towards militancy and was responsible for the militancy and spirit which characterized the strike. But the Musteites have, since Paterson, decided to be more of a political organization, to organize a so-called third left party and to be militantly anti-Communist and against the united front.

So they, from the right, are reaching the same sectarian conclusions as the leadership of the Communist Party reaches from the left. But the C. P. L. A. has no organization, no masses. It has the desire but not the potency. The tail swing but the head—well, we leave it to the reader's imagination!

week

bleak. Interest payments will likewise fall because of heavy de-