

Mistakes In Our Trade Union Work

By TOM JOHNSON.

Without question the weakest sector of our Party work is the trade union field. The totally unsatisfactory position of the T. U. U. L. and the revolutionary unions, without one exception, are all too apparent. This has been admitted in countless resolutions and in an equal number of resolutions the basic line for our activity in altering the present very dangerous situation has been laid down. The fact remains that despite these directives, the basic correctness of which no one questions, the situation does not improve or improves but very slowly. It is clear that our failure in this most important sphere of work is due primarily to our inability to correctly apply the Party line in T. U. work.

The line of the Party in trade union work is the organization and independent leadership of mass struggles. This is expressed concretely in the present situation by the slogan of the T. U. U. L., "Organize and Strike Against Wage Cuts." This is a slogan of action to be put into effect now and not in some dim and distant future. The workers are ready and if this slogan is properly advanced and correctly applied to the given situation the workers will respond and will put it into action under our leadership. What are the chief mistakes which have prevented us from realizing this slogan in practice?

The first mistake we have made in District 17, and I think nationally, consists of our too general and agitational approach to the problems of the workers. The masses of workers in any industry are not yet self-sacrificing revolutionists and on the other hand they are not fools. The workers come into the

unions for one reason, and taken by and large, for one reason only, to better their conditions and to prevent further attacks on conditions by the boss. Unless we can show them a concrete program of struggle leading to that end they will not follow us.

It won't do to talk only in generalities of the struggle against wage-cuts, the fight for work or wages, etc. What the workers are most interested in is the concrete issues arising in their particular industry and shop. It is with these issues that we must deal first of all. This does not mean that we narrow down the activities of the unions to the problems of the particular shop or even industry. It does mean that we approach the worker with a program for the solution of the immediate burning problems which he feels most keenly as he comes in contact with them every day. The starting point for all our union activity must therefore be from the shop and the problems facing the workers there. In the same way when framing demands, we must raise concrete definite demands based on the conditions in the particular shop and industry we are dealing with. From these shop demands must flow our broader and more comprehensive demands and slogans.

A part of this same general abstract approach to the question is our failure in many instances to give real independent life and vitality to the various industrial unions and leagues. In my opinion, we talk altogether too much in generalities about the T. U. U. L. and its program of struggle to all workers, and not enough by far about the Miners' Union to miners and the Metal Workers' Industrial League to steel workers. When we

miners then the question is settled, the question of building sports clubs with the Finnish children of whom there are about 600 throughout the country. We found that they readily joined the Young Pioneers but then they had too many meetings and dropped out of the Young Pioneers when it interfered with their sports work. But when the sports club to which they belong is part of this broad Young Pioneers of America we will be able to hold on to the children. That is, provided we build up a leadership.

We need leaders for our children's sports clubs. The League must give a part of those whom they give as leaders for the present

talk Miners' Union and miners' demands to a coal miner he is immediately interested, while general propaganda of the T. U. U. L. leaves him cold. Again this does not mean capitulation before the narrow craft interests of any section of the workers, but it does mean getting away from abstract propaganda and down to something the most backward worker can understand.

This same general abstract approach colors much of our organizational work as well. We must put an end to the theory that we can organize the masses of workers through general T. U. U. L. mass meetings in halls miles removed from the shops. On the contrary the various unions must learn to concentrate all their activity in and around the shops and mines making up their particular industry.

The second mistake consists in our failure to establish in each industry and each shop a clear prospective for our work and a concrete program of activity which will enable us to achieve that prospective.

Our general prospective is one of strike struggles, but this is not enough. To merely shout the slogan of Strike Against Wage Cuts means nothing. To bring this slogan to life we must answer in each industry and in each shop where we are working the questions, when, where and how is this strike to be con-

ducted in this industry, this shop. It is not enough to state in our resolutions that the revolutionary unions can and will be built only through the strike struggle. What is necessary is to prepare and carry through these strikes. To talk today of a national strike on a fixed date in any industry is pure nonsense. We are altogether too weak to prepare for and successfully carry through such an action, the organizational base of our unions is too narrow, our connections with the masses of workers entirely too inadequate. This was proved in the mining industry, where the prospective for a general strike in the industry was advanced a year ago, and as the date of the proposed strike drew closer (September of this year) it became clear to everyone that a national strike was out of the question.

Our prospective must be for the development of strikes embracing whole industries, not from above, but through the carrying through of countless smaller preparatory actions, and broadening these strike actions to include ever wider sections of the workers. This means that our present unplanned method of work, consisting of more or less futile attempts to build up small locals and shop committees in the shops or mines nearest at hand without any clear program of action for these

locals, must give way to a careful plan of campaign for each industry and each locality. A plan of campaign which will lead us daily toward definite strike action in definite shops or mines.

(To Be Continued.)

consider assuming additional burdens." It seems that Bolivia, under the "assistance of American experts," has borrowed some \$70,000,000, most of it in New York, while its revenues total \$15,000,000 a year and it only met the interest on its debt lately by selling the monopoly rights to charge Bolivians five times as much for matches as necessary, to the Swedish match trust.

Some of these days these Bolivian Indians are going to use those Swedish matches to burn up all the fancy "agreements" and "contracts," treaties and constitutions meant to enslave them.

Workers! Join the Party of Your Class!

Communist Party U. S. A.

43 East 125th Street,
New York City.

I, the undersigned, want to join the Communist Party. Send me more information.

Name

Address City.....

Occupation Age.....

Mail this to the Central Office, Communist Party, 43 East 125th St., New York, N. Y.

(To Be Continued.)