

Mistakes In Our Trade Union Work

By TOM JOHNSON.

(Continued.)

A classic example of the first method of work was given by the Textile Union in its work in the South, and, as far as I know, its work nationally. Under its former leadership the National Textile Workers' Union followed a policy of building up paper districts of the union all over the country without plan, or, as far as one could see, purpose. The result was that the weak forces of the union were dissipated all over the country and the work in strategic centers suffered accordingly. In Georgia, for instance, an inexperienced comrade was sent into the field, paid a total wage and expense account averaging around \$7 per week and instructed to build up a district of the union taking in the whole state of Georgia. After months of work the net results were some five or six non-functioning mill committees scattered from one end of Georgia to the other. The comrades simply went into a mill town, got some connections with the workers and set up a paper committee in the mill. Then off to another town to repeat. The existing committees were, of course, neglected and promptly fell to pieces while the organizers were engaged in forming new ones in other mills. Naturally enough the workers saw that we

were merely playing with the question of a serious struggle against the stretchout and wage-cuts, and the prestige of the union suffered accordingly.

If, on the other hand, we had concentrated all our forces and energies on one mill, or the mills in one town, where conditions were especially bad, with the definite prospect of building up a strong mill committee with its ramifications extending to every department, and determined to take advantage of the first favorable opportunity, such as a wage-cut or stretch-out or widespread victimization of union men, for a strike, the present situation of the National Textile Workers' Union in Georgia, where today we have absolutely nothing, would have been far different. We have nothing in Georgia today because the workers, who realize as well as we Communists that nothing can be gained except through the strike struggle, saw that we were not seriously and competently organizing and preparing for strike action. These workers came into the union to get better conditions and when they saw we were not preparing in a serious manner to carry on the fight through strike action for better conditions, they left the union. Can we blame them? I think not.

In District 17 we were given this same incorrect theory of building the unions when one of our comrades proposed that in order to fight the A. F. of L. we send forces into new territory where we had nothing and where the A. F. of L. was showing considerable activity. This would have been desirable, but with our weak forces it meant inevitable neglect of work already started. This comrade did not see that the way to smash the A. F. of L. and to destroy its influence over the workers is not to rush helter skelter over the country setting up small, meaningless committees, but to concentrate our forces on building up committees in a few shops to which we can give adequate attention and which therefore will not remain mere agitational organs for a time and then collapse, but which will develop into the leaders of the workers, consciously preparing for strike action and capable of carrying such action through. One strike, if only partially successful, will mean more to us in building the revolutionary unions than a score of still-born organization committees in the shops without any clear prospective of strike, whose only function is the issuance of an occasional leaflet, and which through lack of a concrete program of action are bound to collapse.

We have yet to learn, it seems, the elementary fact that organization committees and the bonafide shop committees, which it is their task to build, are organs of struggle. It is possible to build up an organization committee of a revolutionary union in a shop through propaganda and agitation and a minimum of organization work. It is impossible to keep that committee in existence indefinitely through giving it merely agitational functions to perform. The workers will join that shop organization because our agitation was centered around fighting demands and fighting slogans. They join in order to carry on the fight. If we fail to convince these workers through our organizational activity that we are preparing organizationally for the fight, that we are driving steadily along the path to strike action for definite demands in that particular shop, we will fail to hold them. Some few will remain, but these will be the most class-conscious advanced workers—workers in most cases ready for membership in the Party—while the masses of workers will remain outside of our organization.

It is true that we cannot state arbitrarily our perspective in every shop and industry is for an immediate strike. Ill-prepared strikes, called at the wrong time; strikes that are doomed to defeat from the very start, can do us a tremendous amount of harm. This is another reason for concentrating our best forces on those industries and shops where

has been asleep nearly as long as tip-top Winkie. But it has suddenly shown signs of life. Looking closer we see that the "life" is only maggots crawling over it.

It has published a leaflet for longshotters, in English and Polish, and playing to the backward Catholic elements among the Polish workers who are enough as it is under the influence of fascism and religion, the I.W.W. seeks, instead of enlightening these workers and dispelling the reactionary prejudices which hinder their class consciousness from developing and expressing itself in action, to nourish these prejudices and use them against the class interests of these same Polish workers.

What else can one make of the following:

"The I.W.W. is against any politicians' attempt to organize Labor Unions to war against Churches and Governments, and this is the hidden program of the Communists."

This is a perfect example of social-fascism. Fish, for example, makes no pretense of covering his counter-revolutionary attack on the working class. He is openly a fascist. Openly speaks for the capitalists.

The I.W.W. does the same work as fascist Fish. Only it tries to cover it with a veneer of "labor unionism," it tries to rally the capitalist ideology, the religious and patriotic backwardness remaining among the workers, for the same fascist purposes.

The I.W.W. thus seeks a social base for fascism among the working class, the class which fascism means to attack, is attacking. The I.W.W. is thus controlled by social fascists.

Perhaps, since it has become a sort of counter-revolutionary church, it feels that it is in the same position as the Pope, who has given them the lead on defending the church against the Communist "peril."

And isn't it funny, too, how worried the Wobblies are getting for fear somebody will take their precious government out and choke it to death.

The Centralia prisoners must be proud that the G.E.B. is going to prevent the wicked Communists from overthrowing the dear, good, kind government and breaking down the doors of the Walla Walla penitentiary.

The objective conditions for strike action are most favorable. At the same time our general agitation and propaganda must not only suffer from this, but must be greatly increased.

The third mistake consists in our unpardonable organizational looseness and laxness. As well as one can judge from the field the national offices of the various unions are tightening up considerably organizationally and are establishing more responsible methods of work. However, it is in the field that this organizational laxness does us most harm.

The question of dues payment enters here. We often seem afraid to ask the workers to pay dues. We organize a small group in a shop or mine and meet with them for weeks without insisting that they either all pay dues and become bonafide members of the union or else drop out. No worker has respect for an organization which functions on a charity basis. He has no feeling of responsibility toward an organization which does not demand a minimum of financial and other support from him.

We fail to maintain any kind of discipline in our union locals. Meetings are held on different days of succeeding weeks. The meetings do not start on time. No action is taken against members who consistently fail to attend meetings. The meetings often drag out interminably due to inefficient organization of the meeting and the work. No regular minutes of union meetings are kept in most instances. No uniform method of book-keeping is in effect in most, if not all, of our industrial unions and leagues. Our whole organization is loose and inefficient.

Until we change all this and put into effect a general tightening up organizationally in our work, until the local unions enforce working-class discipline in the ranks of their members and learn to conduct their meetings on a formal enough basis to insure a possibility of efficient functioning, we will be unable to stabilize our unions.

those workers already in the T.U.U.L. take the task seriously. If they realize the collective organizational value of Labor Unity, its strength in enlightening those workers under the influence of the capitalist and reformist press, they will lose no time in building up the circulation of Labor Unity.

If the members of the Communist Party are sincere in their turn to trade union work they will themselves read and spread Labor Unity. This organ, of all the revolutionary press, must be foremost in reaching the masses.

It must be sold at street meetings; shop gate meetings; to fellow workers in the shop; in the home neighborhood.

For Labor Unity appeals especially to the unorganized workers, who have not yet come across the revolutionary labor movement, who do not know of the Communist Party.

If the minds of the working class are to be liberated from capitalism, Labor Unity must be built up, at once, to a powerful organ reaching hundreds of thousands of workers.

It has a powerful historical role. It cuts into the darkness of capitalist misinformation and lies; and concretely teaches the workers how to organize.

The basis of Labor Unity's strength lies of course in the strength of the T.U.U.L. But it must run ahead—reach thousands of workers not yet in the T.U.U.L. Its advance need not be parallel with that of the T.U.U.L.—it must precede—be in the vanguard, scout ahead among the backward masses.

To do this we must have the following:

1. Actively functioning Labor Unity agents.

2. Responsibility of T.U.U.L. affiliations in selling and reading Labor Unity.

3. Organization of shock-troops in all unions, leagues, and all workers available for the mass sales of Labor Unity.

4. It must be sold at all mass meetings, street meetings, shop gate meetings, unit meetings.

5. It must help the foreign born workers in the T.U.U.L. who cannot express themselves in English to organize American born workers into the T.U.U.L.

6. It must be read by all members of the Communist Party and all affiliated organizations.

If these points are followed up, Labor Unity will be a powerful force against the Hearsts, the Scripps Howards, the A. P. U. P. and other members of the agitprop department of the capitalist system.