UNION LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

Some Problems Facing the Auto Convention

By JAY LOVESTONE

A NUMBER of problems stand out in bold relief before the auto workers and their organization. Essentially these are questions of the most vital import not only to the membership of the United Automobile Workers but also to the entire organized labor movement.

Problem Of Leadership

The automobile industry is a young industry. The workers engaged in the motor industry are younger people. The leadership of the union reflects this. In many ways it is the good fortune of the U.A.W.A. to have a leadership which is not really bound by a pack of sterile traditions, which is not oppressed by memories that are at best of doubtful value. Here we have a leadership which lives in the present, looks forward to the future, banks on achievements of the day, counts on them a few years hence and constantly develops a larger social vision. This is certainly to be placed on the asset side of the ledger. It is all for the good of the union that its leadership, now being developed, has its heart and soul and body and mind rooted and growing in the soil of this land.

It would have been an irreparable mistake if some people who had been seeking the leadership of this union by hook or crook, by cabled instructions or telegraphed manipulations, had succeeded in their nefarious objective of getting a stranglehold on the union. These manipulators, parading under the banner of a so-called more "experienced" leadership, revealed consumate skill in political chicanery and "revolutionary" charlatanism. I know of nothing that would have been as fatal to the union as a victory for this type of leadership.

It would have been especially costly in the first and difficult days when the union was winning its big battle against General Motors, when the union was winning the right to organize in mass production industries—actually securing the legalization of unionism in the auto industry.

Marionettes, regardless of the claims made for them or even by themselves, could not have lent that genuineness, that spontaneity, that fervor and energy which, especially in the early days, meant so much for the union. Not only was, therefore, the auto union lucky in having been able to avoid falling into the hands of a pernicious agency, wrapping itself in big claims and hiding itself behind glowing promises, but the entire labor movement has every reason to be thankful for the fact that it has begun to crystalize a stable and serious, a dynamic and progressive leadership around Homer Martin and Richard Frankensteen.

Here's precisely the kind of leadership that the auto workers union has begun to develop and which is most effective in facing the motor magnates. It must not be forgotten that the auto kings are the last of the so-called self-made men in the ranks of our captains of finance and industry. The automobile industry is new; it is a dominating force in the economic life of the country and it is run by domineering personalities, proud of their rule over a new industry which has played so vital a role in American economy. To these motor kings the belt is God. To them the continuity of efficient production as a guarantee of dividends is religion. To challenge such a type of vigorous capitalist overlords, labor needs not only a strong union but must have its union led by vigorous, youthful individuals unpoisoned by the factional and clique struggles of the past, unharnassed and unharassed by forces subject to mechanical and arbitrary control coming from sources facing totally different problems. To match the vigorous and skillful motor manufacturers, the union has been developing a leadership with growing capacity for initiative, with unquestioned dynamic energy, with increasing self-confidence, with imagination and capacity for making policies.

When we speak of the leadership of the union we, of course, deal with the problem of leadership not merely on top but thruout the ranks. Particularly do we have in mind the officer class. The importance of this group in a modern army is obvious, whether this army be the military-industrial machine or the industrial union operating in the mass production industries and engaged in struggles which assume military characteristics and dimensions. In such a situation, the officer class, in the broadest sense of the word, is decisive. The union deserves only the greatest praise for taking steps to improve and extend the possibility for the further development of this officer class in the ranks of the United Auto Workers of America. The shop stewards, the bargaining committees, the grievance committees, the negotiation committees drawing in hundreds of workers thruout the union give these workers inestimable experience in self-rule and real democracy. This experience is of transcendental significance not merely for today but also for the future of the labor movement.

Social Composition of Auto Workers

The speed-up system, as we have seen, dictates the hiring of generally younger people. Add to this the fact that the overwhelming majority of those employed in the auto industry are native-born and that a large proportion of the latter hail from the Southern tier of the country, and you have a force of potentially vast social consequences. It is this peculiar social composition of the auto workers and the auto union that assigns to the United Automobile Workers of America new tasks. These tasks the union will learn to meet as the consciousness of its membership develops.

The younger Southerners, coming North and finding employment in the auto industry, getting their conditions improved thru unionization, frequently, during the lay-off season, pay visits to their relatives in the South. During these visits, these younger workers bring back to the South new ideas, new conceptions of life and labor and unionism, a recognition of new wants, a new standard of life and work. For the South, these ideas are extremely radical. To the Southerners these ideas are being brought, not by Russians or Hungarians or Italians or Jews, but by their own kin, men of their own blood whose American origin and background none can challenge.

Especially because the union is of such social composition is it vital for the organization to take steps to infuse its ranks with progressive ideas. Success in this respect will prove a decisive factor in remolding the heart and mind of the hitherto solid reactionary South. What such work means to the working class as a whole needs no description or analysis.

Union Responsibility as a Problem

The bosses thruout the country are raising a hullabaloo over the question of the unions being responsible. This is their fundamental challenge to the growing trade union movement. The drive led by Girdler against written contracts is an organic phase of the campaign for the incorporation of unions waged by the National Association of Manufacturers, by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce and other open-shoppers of their ilk.

In reality this drive does not seek to enhance union responsibility and authority. Just the opposite is the case, for the objective of this drive is to make unions, particularly if they are strong, liable for damages, liable to the employers. This drive aims to place a sort of first mortgage on all union treasuries, a sort of first mortgage which can be called in at will by the employers in the event of a successful strike.

The Auto Workers Union has a chance here to give a vital lead to all labor in meeting this defiance of the open-shoppers. Unions must make themselves responsible in contractual relations, if the responsibility is to be genuine and effective. We are confident that in its negotiations with General Motors for a renewal of the agreement, the United Automobile Workers of America will make a basic contribution to all organized labor in handling this question of union responsibility.

It is entirely unnecessary for us to advise the union to try to lend emphasis to the importance of getting a better contract from General Motors and of insuring a successful Ford organization campaign. It would be very difficult, to say the least, to maintain decent union conditions in the motor industry if Ford were to maintain his open-shop empire for any length of time. The headway made by the U.A.W.A. in both of these fields is, therefore, most encouraging.

Union Consolidation And Structure

Recent months have witnessed a marked trend towards union consolidation, towards unification of the ranks around the leadership of Martin and Frankensteen and in support of their progressive policies. We cannot stress too strongly that policies are inseparable from persons and persons from policies. Particularly does this hold true in so far as the inner situation of the U.A.W.A. goes. The unprincipled disruptionists over whom the C.P. has hegemony have tried with sinister cunning and reckless cynicism to give the impression that they can be for Martin and Frankensteen as the outstanding leaders of the union and yet at the same time be against the policies of these leaders. This is the cheapest poppycock that has been peddled for a mighty long time in the ranks of organized labor.

Unity and democracy within a union, whether it be the U.A.W.A. or any other organization, can be achieved only thru the development of an authoritative, responsible leadership, a leadership responsible to the membership only and not to any outside agency. Here comes the question of union structure. The basic sub-division of the union should be such as will increasingly give the rank and file members the maximum possibility for self-expression and development.

Tremendous forces have been let loose by the mass awakening symbolized in the unionization of the auto workers. These forces are constructive. These forces will determine the fate of hundreds of thousands of workers and these forces must be utilized. Without doubt there are hundreds of rank and filers in the U.A.W.A. in whose knapsacks lie potential marshal's batons. That this is so, has already been proven, in a measure, by the fact that the leadership of the union has had to learn and un learn in recent months what it took many of us years to master in the days of slower tempo. Here is cause for encouragement and inspiration to all labor.

Auto Convention Opens; Martin Stands For Union Stability and Discipline

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stitution Committee is chairmaned by David Dow of Flint and the Credential Committee by Stuart Strachan of Detroit.

Victory For Martin

Questioned at a press conference this week, President Martin agreed that the Board ruling on the composition of the convention committees represents a victory for his supporters in the union and a severe setback for the opposition. He vigorously denied however any interpretation that holds this decision to be a blow at "communism." Communism was not under consideration, Mr. Martin stated. The fight in the union, Mr. Martin continued, was not over political issues or directed against any political group or party. The policies at issue revolve around the need of greater authority and responsibility in the union, doing away with unauthorized actions by local unions, living up to agreements with corporations, abolition of wild-cat strikes, unity of purpose and policy in the leadership. The introduction of such union policies, Mr. Martin concluded, **"will make the U.A.W.'s word as good as its bond and its bond as good as gold."**

That President Martin touched the very heart of the issue in the present conflict is borne out by the official organ of Local 2 Detroit which supports the Mortimer-Hall opposition. On every one of the issues touched on by the President, that local has introduced resolutions standing for the very opposite of responsibility and centralization of authority.

Opposition Against Stabilization

In an organization suffering from an excess of democracy bordering almost on rank-and-filism run mad, the opposition caucus resolution says that **"centralized control takes away the responsibility of the membership and thereby undermines their interest in union affairs."** Insisting on greater autonomy for the local union, the resolution provides that where a local union is better than 50% organized **"no representative of the International can be sent into this local or its jurisdiction without the consent of the Auto District Council . . ."** and that **"no International representative or organizer can be sent into any field covered by a District Council without the consent of that Council. . . ."**

Having finished making of the locals and District Councils practically separate International Unions, these people then proceed to cut down on the present powers of the G.E.B. In a resolution on that subject, Local 2 resolves **"that all proceedings of all meetings of the General Executive Board shall be reported by a regular court stenographer, mimeographed and sent to every local."** The minutes, we presume, will then be considered seriatim and the decisions will go into effect only if approved by a majority of the local unions. The latter is implied if not provided in the resolution. No leader, understanding the situation and the requirements of the union, could possibly propose such a resolution except if he holds his clique interests above that of his union.

"Lefts" For Wildcat Strikes

One more example will suffice to prove the correctness of Mr. Martin's claim: the resolution on strikes. In the light of the Toledo caucus' lip-service to the fight against outlaw strikes, which have plagued the union and endangered its very existence, one might expect Local 2 of which General Executive Board member Lloyd Jones is president, to say something about this menace and provide against such recurrence. But nothing of the sort is to be found in Mr. Jones's resolution, proving once again that the Toledo caucus headed by Mortimer and Hall did not mean what it said against wild-cat strikes.

Beginning with the fallacious arguments that the members of one local union **"are closest to a given situation"** and are **"the best judges of whether immediate strike action is necessary,"** the resolution bewails the delay which would result if the General Executive Board approval had to be secured, and resolves that **"a local union more than 70 per cent organized shall have power to call a strike by a two-thirds vote of its membership and will have the official sanction of the International officers, providing it first obtains the sanction of the District Council."**

Analyzing the sleight-of-hand methods used in the last part of this resolution we discover the following: (1) The initiative for calling a strike is vested in the local; (2) if it obtains the endorsement of the District Council then the General Executive Board must automatically grant its approval of such a strike. This is hardly a resolution tending to curb outlaw strikes! In fact it will legitimize outlaw strikes and make them the rule. How a national leadership can secure signed national contracts with a firm if it has nothing to say about strikes during the lifetime of the contract, the resolution does not say. Nor does Local 2 state how long the U.A.W. could be held together if such resolutions as it proposed were to be adopted by this convention.

Progressive Triumph Assured

But of that there appears to be very little danger. Of the approximately 1800 delegates expected at the convention responsible spokesmen of the Martin-Frankensteen caucus claim 75% and report new converts every day from among the delegations which in the past had supported the Mortimer-Hall opposition.

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