

U. S. Labor and the Soviet Trade Unions

By Rose Wortis

On Dec. 22 organized labor of New York will pay tribute to the workers of the Soviet Union at a banquet sponsored by an all-inclusive committee of outstanding labor leaders from the CIO and AFL under the slogan "For Free Labor in a Free World!"

These leaders represent every trend in the American labor movement.

John J. Brennan and Thomas Murray, secretary and president of the Building and Construction Trades Council; Charles Hanson, president of the Carpenters Union; Alex Rose, of the Millinery Workers; Jacob Potofsky, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; Samuel Shore of the ILGWU; Vincent J. Ferris, of the Allied Printing Trades Council; Saul Mills and Joe Curran, president and secretary of the CIO Council; Ben Gold of the Furriers; Weinstock, of the Painters' Council; and numerous others. The speakers will be Sidney Hillman and Harvey Brown, IAM; Joseph Curran and Paul Tournier, president Montrose Trades and Labor Council.

This is an event of tremendous importance. It is a recognition of the special contribution of the Soviet workers to the common struggle against the deadly enemy whose destructive hand in every conquered country and in Germany itself was first felt by the organized labor movement.

EXPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY

This tribute is an expression of solidarity for comrades in arms who have inspired the workers of the world by their shining example of heroism, self-sacrifice, initiative, and ingenuity on the field of battle and on the production front.

However, this great event which brings closer together the American and Russian workers who for years have been separated by a wall of misrepresentation, systematically cultivated by the enemy, also brings boldly to our attention the harmful position still being taken by the AFL Executive Council on the question of the proposed Anglo - Soviet - American Trade Union Committee.

What are the arguments advanced by Mr. Woll and his social-democratic friends, spokesmen for the opposition to international labor unity?

They say the Russian unions are not free unions, that they are supported, some say controlled, by the government. Jack Tanner, fraternal delegate from the British Trade Union Congress to the last AFL convention, has ably answered this argument when he said:

"To say that the trade unions in the U.S.S.R. are nothing but appendages of the state machinery is to leave out of account the nature of the state and whose interests its activities foster and serve. In our two countries we cannot pretend that it is the workers' interests which will triumph in any issue unless we put up a strong and organized fight—"

WHO ARE THE OBJECTORS?

They have the cooperation of and are supported by the government. Why shouldn't they? Isn't it a worker's government? Don't we, under much different conditions, welcome every trend amongst the more advanced forces in our government to give greater recognition and support to the trade unions as the best instruments for protecting the interests of the workers, and the means for labor to make its greatest contribution to the nation? While we are still fighting for representation in government bodies, the labor movement in the Soviet Union, its elected representatives coming directly from the shops, actually control the government and its policies.

Do we have any objection to labor legislation such as the NLRB, or wage regulation or stabilization such as the ruling of the WLB for union maintenance, safety regulations, etc., which the reactionaries call "coddling"? It is only reactionaries and labor-baiters who raise objections. While we are still fighting for these objectives, they are guaranteed to the Russian organized workers by the Soviet Constitution.

Another argument is that the Russian workers have no right to strike. Again let me refer to Jack Tanner's speech, which explains the difference in approach to strikes in the Soviet Union that has no class divisions, and capitalist countries where a capitalist-worker relationship still exists. The difference is that in the Soviet Union the government is in the hands of the workers who make the laws in their own interests and therefore no need for conflict, whereas in our country the situation is very much the opposite.

The development during our war emergency gives us some inkling as to what exactly is the situation in the Soviet trade unions in relation to strikes. We know that since Pearl Harbor American labor has voluntarily given up the right to strike for the duration. This was done not as a sacrifice for others but dictated by the interests of labor itself despite the class divisions. Labor in the main does not find this situation oppressive and it does not in the least change the fine character of the trade unions. Similarly the no-strike policy of the Soviet trade unions was not imposed on the unions. There is simply no need for such weapons to advance the economic interests of the workers in a country whose main governmental policy is predicated on advancing the interests of the toiling masses.

INCONSISTENT POLICY

How inconsistent and dangerous is the policy of the AFL when they pay tribute to contributions of the Russian workers to the common struggle for freedom and in the same breath say that the Russian workers are in the same position with regard to trade unions as are the enslaved German workers!

Everybody agrees that the Russian people are fighting so determinedly, so heroically because they are fighting to defend and preserve the new freedom which they have found in their Soviet state built through years of struggle and sacrifice.

As a result of its action at the last convention the prestige of the AFL in contrast to the CIO and the railroad brotherhood, has gone down everywhere. The British workers for example cannot understand the adamant attitude of the AFL in relation to the Soviet trade unions when 18 months of bitter struggle and sacrifice have brought the truth of the USSR and its trade unions to the entire world. The workers in the occupied countries view the divisive position of the AFL Council with great concern.

The millions of Russian workers indignantly rejected this makeshift "liaison" proposal of the AFL as a gross insult.

During the past few months when the question was under consideration by the Executive Council and the convention, hundreds of local unions, state federations, central bodies, numbers of international and hundreds of AFL offi-

Decisions on Xmas Bonuses

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17.—In order to speed rulings on bonus payments which are often granted during the Christmas week, the NWLB today announced it had delegated to its regional directors authority to pass on those which require board approval.

Regional directors were given authority to approve the payment of gifts of bonuses not permissible under general order No. 10 only in exceptional cases where non-payment "would be grossly inequitable and would result in a manifest injustice."

The boards general order No. 10 permits bonus payments without WLB approval under certain circumstances. If the bonus is a fixed amount the total paid during the current bonus year must not exceed the total paid employees for like work during the preceding bonus year. If it is computed on a percentage, incentive or similar basis, the rate and method of computation may not be changed during the current bonus year unless they yield no more than they did during the preceding year.

Mayor Appeals To Car Owners Not to Buy Gas

(Continued from Page 1)

any other action, but warned if the situation became more critical, he would exert local and state authority to meet the situation.

"There shall be no pleasure driving of any nature or description," the Mayor said with emphasis.

He expressed the opinion that if car owners of the city would cooperate, the essential services such as bus transportation, fire, police, hospital and sanitation departments and other necessary services would be able to function.

The gasoline crisis has been growing for some time as a result of the U-boat warfare against our oil tankers in Atlantic coastal waters, and because of the refusal of vested interests to permit the early construction of pipelines to the East.

Shortages have been aggravated by the resistance of disrupters in Congress to any plan for centralized planned rationing of gasoline supplies.

Cials have spoken out for relations with the Soviet trade union movement. It is high time for the leadership to reconsider its decision if it is to retain its position of leadership in the international labor movement.

Labor in New York will respond with great enthusiasm, I am sure, to this testimonial dinner to honor the Soviet workers on Dec. 22nd. It will be grateful for the opportunity to demonstrate as a united body its warm sympathy and admiration for the Soviet workers, and for more active participation of labor in the present Thanks-to-Russia month and the activities of the Russian War Relief.

It should also serve as a means for reopening the discussion of International trade union cooperation among the workers in the shops in the unions. For the individual national union to establish contact with the British and Soviet unions in their respective industries, with the central bodies of the important cities, in line with the very excellent decisions of the last CIO conventions.

Such actions will hasten the day when the remaining obstacles to International Labor Solidarity will be eliminated, when the organized workers of the United Nations will march unitedly in battle and victory over fascism.