

Union Election Lessons

Teamsters', Musicians' Grievances Piled Up

[This is the concluding article of a series by Rose Wortis on recent local elections in Cafeteria Employees, Local 302; Musicians, 802, and Teamsters, Local 807, all of the AFL.]

By Rose Wortis

IV

Now as to the musicians union. Here too the progressives fought for many years against corrupt leaders who dominated that organization which was a discredit to the labor movement. As a result of the united struggle of the rank and file, the corrupt machine was defeated. This marked a new era for the musi-

cians in New York which had its effect on the union nationally. The union achieved outstanding results in improving the conditions of the workers, especially the thousands of unemployed. However, the leaders became dizzy with success and careless of the support they had received from the rank and file representing various tendencies in the union. It became less sensitive to the needs of the unemployed. They broke the united front with the left progressive forces and Communists and later alinated other forces so that with every election the opposition forces grew in numbers and strength. Here, too, some of the disruptive elements found their way into the leadership of the opposition (Christian Fronters), exploiting the division in the union to their own advantage. Had it not been for the support of the Communists and their followers as well as the left progressive forces who, though getting no representation at all on the slate, gave their whole-hearted support to the administration, it would have been defeated.

JUST RESOLUTIONS

How was it possible for the opposition in this union to gather such strength, to win the support of hundreds of honest workers? The answer is the same. They exploited the justified grievances of workers left unsolved by the Administration. A good example of this was the case of Negro musicians. Here we saw a group of close to 900 workers, at one time the most ardent supporters of the Administration. Now a large number were campaigning against the Administration. Why? Because the Administration contented itself with the passing general resolutions supporting the war, the anti-poll tax bill, anti-discrimination measures, etc., but did little to solve the daily grievances of the Negro musicians, the question of job discrimination of the Negroes. It adopted a contemptuous attitude toward the grievances of the unemployed who at one time were the main base of the Administration. They became complacent and high-tone, began to take the workers for granted.

The elections are over, but unless the Administration of Local 802 takes this lesson to heart, it is doomed to defeat. What is necessary is for the leaders, without any delay, to effect unity of all the constructive forces, especially with the left wing and the Negro group irrespective of their position in the recent elections, to give serious thought to forms of action in solving some of the aggravated problems of the workers.

These include retraining large number of the unemployed musicians for war industry through the efforts of the union, instead of continuing the useless struggle for jobs which will never be secured on a permanent basis because of the mechanization of the industry. The Administration should back up its very good resolutions with activities that will involve the masses of the workers and also assert itself more effectively in the life of the union nationally.

UNION IN DANGER

The experiences in Local 807 of the teamsters, although the union is of a very different type, fall in line with the general problems I have raised. Thomas Hickey, the leader of the union was elected in 1936 as a result of a mass revolt against racketeers who for years dominated the union. All shades of workers grouped around him. The progressive rank and file forces where an integral part of these groupings and among their best fighters. Hickey's election roused

great hopes among the workers, but shortly after the election Hickey began to shy away from the most advanced workers who helped elect him, thus weakening his own base. By separating himself from these workers and surrounding himself with careerist elements, he did not give the best leadership in fighting for the conditions of the workers. The very elements who terrorized him into breaking with the left and thus weakened his administration, in the current election exploited the very grievances of the workers against Hickey in an effort to bring racketeers back to power. It was the vote of the left wing given to Hickey, despite his weaknesses, that saved him from defeat.

He was elected by 60 votes (the partial slate of the left polled some 300 votes) and at the same time at least temporarily saved the union from the racketeers. Although defeated for the post of Secretary, the recalcitrants made some headway. They elected their president. The union is in great danger. Unless Hickey is made aware of this situation, the work of the past six years will be nullified and Hickey discredited and thrown out of the union. Honesty is a very basic virtue in a trade union leader and there is no question that Hickey is an honest man. But honesty is not enough. Real decisive leadership is what the labor movement needs, especially in a union of the teamster type. The progressive forces must leave nothing undone to arouse the workers to the seriousness of the situation confronting them. They must find ways and means of weaning away the honest, misled teamsters who in their desperation supported the racketeers. They must help work out a practical program of dealing with the problems of the workers.

These common problems encountered in the above unions are not peculiar New York problems. Similar developments are to be seen other unions. These experiences bring more sharply to our attention the correctness and the wisdom of Comrade Browder's report on the new tasks and problems confronting unions under conditions of war and the great responsibilities of Communists in thinking deeply about these problems so as to give a new type of leadership to the masses. In mastering the teachings of Comrade Browder and learning how to apply them in our respective unions, we will strengthen the trade unions and by labor's example give a lead to the rest of the people in meeting the urgent war needs of the nation.

END.

Cut Consumers' Goods in '43

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1 (UP).—Civilians face a 15 per cent cut in supplies of consumers' goods for personal or household use in 1943 compared with 1942, according to government reports.

It is estimated that approximately 50 per cent of consumer expenditures goes for food and rent, and costs of these items will remain comparatively stable. Curtailment will fall mainly on the other half of consumer expenditures with an estimated 30 per cent cut in civilian budgets for clothing, household furnishings and personal services.

Further simplification and standardization of products to conserve materials and labor, under study by the WPB, is being tied in with price controls and the new point rationing programs to be instituted by the Office of Price Administration this year. Some rationing of apparel is a possibility for 1943.