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CONTENTS

| | PAGE | | PAGE |
|--|------|--|------|
| Unemployment..... <i>J. P. Collins</i> | 1 | Women and the Communist International..... | 12 |
| Proclamation of the Communist Party..... | 5 | The Party and Negro Struggle.... <i>R. Bruce and J. P. Collins</i> | 15 |
| Dual Unionism..... <i>J. Dixon</i> | 6 | Review of the Month..... | 17 |
| The Socialist Party and Revolution..... <i>James A. Marshall</i> | 7 | Our Agrarian Problem <i>H. R. Harrow</i> | 20 |
| What is a Party of Action?..... <i>Roger B. Nelson</i> | 9 | An American Hinterland..... <i>Henry Allen</i> | 22 |
| Lessons of the Russian Revolution..... <i>James Brown</i> | 11 | The Organization of Communist Parties..... | 24 |

Unemployment: Our Tactics and Our Program

By J. P. COLLINS

The unemployment issue is one which must be faced. Unemployment of to-day is a symptom of the breakdown of capitalist production. It is not a passing phase which can be ignored by the capitalist state. The United States Government has been unwillingly forced to give official political recognition to the problem, not, of course, to find a solution, but to make a pretence at one, offering promises and hope in order to prevent action by the masses. The real attitude of the capitalists is expressed in their determination to take advantage of the situation in order to ensure cheap labor in abundance.

The tactics of the capitalists are to make use of the unemployed and part-time workers to break the resistance of those who are still working, and, through charities, to prevent serious outbreaks. Thus are the workers to be faced with the alternatives of surrender or defeat. Then, when the workers are down and out, the capitalists will be willing to resume industry. All this is to be accomplished without any tonic from the Federal Treasury. The reasons for this are obvious. The workers are to be made to produce more and more cheaply. For these reasons the soldier bonus was refused, bringing on destitution and suicides. The capitalists want to squeeze out billions from the workers. They will not defeat this aim by burdening the national treasury to aid the workers or increase taxes. The soldier bonus

would have cost billions of dollars and government unemployment doles would be equally expensive. These items added to the increased expenditures for the army and the navy would have made taxes so high as to hamper production for a competitive world market. The purchasing power of the dollar would decrease still further from its pre-war standard. The weakening of the national treasury would have a serious effect on post-war capitalism, national and international, which seeks to revive.

It is a pity that the party did not take up the soldiers' bonus fight. It would have been a means of lining up the soldies against the government and a means of bringing them nearer to us. It can yet be done and should be done as a part of our unemployment agitation. As it is, the ex-soldiers are still quite sore. Their fight can be revived as a means of broadening our general drive.

Also we must agitate for unemployment compensation by the Federal Government. Everything that will strain the Federal Treasury must be encouraged. "Work or compensation" should be our slogan. The case we present may run thus: The workers who were virtually drafted during the war to produce are surely entitled to compensation by the government now, at least sufficient to keep them from starving, especially those with families. The idea of having men humiliate themselves by going through red tape

procedures in order to receive pauperizing charity is unworthy of any worker. The buncombe of charities encouraged by the government should be exposed and the government denounced in the strongest terms for its attitude. The unemployment bureaus authorized by the government should be denounced as scab agencies. Demands should be made through the unions to set up bureaus under the control of the unions, or to place existing bureaus under union control so that they cannot continue as open shop agencies. When the bureaus have been thoroughly exposed and denounced the cry may be raised "Down with government scab agencies."

Public Works

Also we must demand the initiation of public works under union conditions, not under open shop conditions. Every such scheme which is initiated to take advantage of cheap labor must be exposed. The part time work arrangement must be resisted by all means. The formation of tenants' leagues must be encouraged, and the demand to exempt unemployed families from paying rent must be pressed. Also demands must be made on city, state and federal governments to prohibit the eviction of unemployed families. Organized tenants should resist eviction, and if evicted their league should take up the matter in propaganda and if possible as the basis for a rent strike. The unions should be roused and, in co-operation with the leagues, demonstrations should be made.

If the government gives in to some of these demands the workers will be encouraged by their victory, and will be willing to make the further demands which we suggest. Pressure for the demands will be by demonstrations. If permits for demonstrations are refused, the agitation for constitutional and labor's rights must be pressed in all labor unions. The government must be condemned as being hostile to the people. Agitation for the permit may be successful. If strong enough a demonstration should be held without a permit. At least a section of the labor unions must participate, and their determination expressed in advance may yield a permit. In a forced demonstration if the police interfere and kill or wound any of those parading, sympathetic strikes must be attempted as evidence of solidarity with the victimized workers. The idea of the sympathetic strike is sound and should be put into practice whenever possible.

Other Demands

Other demands may be put up as the struggle develops or in accordance with local problems. The demands must always be of a nature which will cause the masses to struggle. What we must produce is revolutionary action. It is the action which must be revolutionary. It is useless to print our theories as an unemployed program with no one actively willing to strive for its realization step by step. The masses must be guided and lead into action. The masses do not follow theories. They only act for concrete demands. Direct action by the masses themselves is the key to the intensification of the struggle. Finally, this leads to the revo-

lutionary mass action for the destruction of the capitalist state.

In proportion as the support of our program grows and becomes more intense, our demands will become more outspoken and will change in accordance with the willingness of the masses to fight for them. We must not lose (or fail to gain) contact with the masses by being unrealistic. Our tactics must be to harass the government by making the unemployed problem a constant conflict, rousing more and more workers against capitalism.

Centers for Unemployed

For this purpose a suitable program is not sufficient. We must adopt the tactics necessary to organize the unemployed and keep in touch with them. For the sake of this absolutely essential contact we must engage in work which otherwise would be rightly regarded as unfruitful and to be left alone. The humanitarian appeal is a powerful means of reaching people. Bearing that in mind we must establish unemployed centers wherever workers may come for relief in the form, say, of a sandwich and milk. For this work appeals for funds could be made to all unions and workers' organizations. It should be made a labor affair as much as possible, and absolutely free from all bourgeois pauperizing charities. The rebel element among the unemployed should be taken care of particularly, thus saving them from being forced into the demoralizing atmosphere of the scab charities. We should use all our headquarters, union halls and other places as unemployed centers. Where possible we shall give even shelter, especially to rebel workers upon whom we rely. Thus, if we surround ourselves with unemployed we shall be able to urge them into action, the rebel element leading the larger mass, and an even larger force being placed under our leadership in order to carry on the fight.

Those in charge of this part of the work should especially get the union nuclei to find ways and means of establishing stations in localities where the unemployed are most numerous. The foodworkers should be used for the actual handling of the foods. Committees selected from the unemployed should assist. Local unions can donate their headquarters for this work.

If possible foodworkers' committees should estimate the actual amount of money necessary to start an undertaking. The unemployed should be persuaded to collect funds in street cars, subways, elevated trains, restaurants, offices streets and shops in order to defray initial expenses. A spirit of co-operation and fellowship can be developed among them so that collections will be honestly turned over to a reliable committee. In addition these men will learn to invade "sacred" places and demand help. They must be filled with the idea that they are not demanding charity but that they are entitled to subsistence. As soon as a few places are actually opened under the name of a certain union, affiliated with the unemployment organization, this body shall solicit funds for more kitchens and shelters.

When the unemployed gather at these places they must

be propagandized by means of leaflets and speakers. One particular point should be stressed at a time until the men are aroused to activity along that particular line. For instance, for some weeks the idea of a mass demonstration at the City Hall and a demand for the throwing open of public buildings and armories for shelters might be spread. During other weeks the unemployed could be urged to demand the initiation of public works to give employment under union conditions. At another time a drive could be developed to call upon all union locals in order to rouse them to take part in the relief of unemployed and the agitation for their demands. At another time a mass of jobless workers might be persuaded to present themselves at some large idle factory and demand work. The drive may be for the unemployed to occupy public places as sleeping quarters. The conditions and circumstances will serve as a guide in the selection of ideas to be put forth for action, and the results obtained will serve as a guide in future activities.

Such are the tactics. In order that they may be widely applied we must have a program. The program must be one upon which all revolutionary, radical and progressive forces can unite. At the same time, we must strive to retain the position of leadership in order to carry out the program for the furthering of the class struggle. Bearing that in mind, the following program at the present time will form an effective basis for our work if supplemented by local demands as conditions require.

UNEMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

A program of immediate demands must deal with the problem of unemployment from two points of view. First, it must include adequate provision for the maintenance of the unemployed and part employed. Secondly, it must include proposals for the decrease of unemployment.

We must demand that the Government prevent conditions of poverty which inevitably impair the health and vitality of the whole working class population and lower the morale of the workers.

To stand aside from active measures for the resumption of production by the opening up of industries and the initiation of works is to acquiesce deliberately and meekly in the prolongation of unemployment.

We should emphasize the fundamental importance of throwing all our energies into these tasks. Personal considerations must be swept aside in a great effort to overcome the enemy. The proposals here put forward are made on the assumption that the workers of the country are prepared to take a broad view of the present situation and to support a comprehensive policy. Nothing short of this will be adequate to prevent the degradation of great masses of workers and their families. Such is the purpose of this program.

Immediate Measures

The recommendations are all emergency proposals. We make two kinds of demands:

(1) The maintenance of the unemployed and under-employed.

(2) The provision of work.

Organized labor must consistently demand the alternatives of work or maintenance. We place maintenance first because workers and their families at the present moment are starving. Maintenance is an immediate necessity. But we make it clear that the labor movement must demand maintenance as an alternative to work. Its demand is that employment should be provided, and that failing such provision there should be adequate maintenance.

I. Maintenance

(A) *Unemployment Grants.* The purpose made at the Hoover Conference for the relief of the unemployed cannot be taken seriously. It leaves the whole matter to the whims and bias of those in control of the various local charities. It is a complete evasion of the problem of supporting the unemployed by the Government. It is an insult to American labor because it does not recognize that unemployed workers are entitled to compensation, but puts these workers in the position of paupers and beggars seeking charity.

If such an attitude towards the duty of providing relief is allowed to stand, the unemployed workers and their families must sink into semi-starvation or worse, whilst production dwindling still further increase the numbers unemployed and under-employed. Clearly the first need is a substantial payment of unemployment compensation.

Such a payment can only be made from a grant by the Federal Government.

The out-of-work compensation scheme, which was instituted in Great Britain after the Armistice as a temporary measure provides a precedent. In addition to a flat rate, unemployed workers receive *an additional allowance for dependents*. This scheme should be adopted here in the present crisis. It is obvious that the unemployment compensation should be paid to all workers, for whom no work is available through free employment bureaus or through his (or her) Trade Union. Employment bureaus should be instituted by the Government to work in conjunction with the labor unions, no fees being charged to applicants.

The rate of maintenance should be higher for married workers than for the single. The payment of compensation should continue as long as the person is unemployed.

(b) *Under-Employments Grants...* It is essential that adequate provision should be made to prevent semi-starvation. The only practicable method is to adopt the same procedure as that here put forward for the unemployment compensation, namely, to *put the burden on the State...* The under-employment pay should be sufficient to supplement part-time wages in order to aggregate weekly income equal to the unemployment rates stated above.

(c) *Soldiers' Bonus* Victims of imperialism, the ex-soldiers, form a large part of the unemployed. Their misery is a tragic condemnation of the capitalist control of the United States Government. The soldiers have been betrayed

shamelessly and the Bonus which they were promised as an alleviation of their condition has been side tracked in the most inconsiderate manner. The American Legion, controlled by the monied people mostly through former army officers, into which many of the ex-soldiers have been misled, has shirked the fight for the Bonus. Energetic leadership and action could have won that fight. The fight can still be won if the exsoldiers and unemployed get together to demand the Bonus as the right of the ex-soldier and as a means of relieving the unemployment amongst them.

II. Work to be Provided

Unemployment and under-employment compensation can only relieve immediate distress by maintaining to some extent the purchasing power of the workers. What is wanted is work. The Government should provide necessary work of a useful nature. The resumption of production will necessarily only proceed as effective pressure is brought upon the capitalists aside from foreign markets like Russia. At home there is much which could be done immediately.

(a) *Provision to Provide for Work.* It is inevitable that any measures which are to be effective in relieving the present situation must involve a considerable immediate outlay of Government funds. The insensate policy of the Government has brought the workers to the point at which wholesale relief is the only alternative to wholesale starvation. Those who suffer from this policy must be provided for directly out of the pockets of those responsible who have amassed and are amassing fortunes through the exploitation of labor.

The efforts of the Government must be directed to restoring production so as to absorb those out of work. In this direction nothing can be done without an abandonment of the Government policy of inaction.

We must force the Government to take steps to curb the capitalists (trusts and corporations) from sabotaging industry by the deliberate shutting down of big productive units, forcing of lock-outs and strikes as part of the drive to smash organized labor. Where work is provided by the Government or by public effort it should be regular wage-earning employment carried out by workers belonging to their respective trade unions.

(b) *Government Reduction of Working Hours.* As already shown, part-time work is not a remedy but an aggravation of the evil; a shortening of the working week is different. We therefore demand the immediate enactment of a Federal law on the lines of the British Trades Union Congress Bill fixing the legal hours of work at a maximum of 44 per week, without reduction in wages, and drastically regulating overtime, so as to limit it in each industry to the indispensable minimum which the employers and trade unions shall agree to be necessary.

(c) *Child Labor.* Steps should be taken to withdraw from industry all children at present employed and to provide for their education and for their maintenance directly or by work allowances to their parents.

d) *Government Work.* The Government itself should initiate public works.

The probable requirements of the Government for the next ten years should be estimated and work should immediately begin on such jobs.

Roads should be made and repaired on a larger scale than heretofore; they are needed for motor transport service. Afforestation and reclamation should be speeded up. Waterways and harbors need repairing.

(e) *Housing.* The Government should institute a housing program, giving contracts only to those capitalists who compose their differences with the Building Trades Unions. Such a program is necessary in order to make good the shortage in working class houses caused by the let-up in building during the war.

(f) *Other Public Work.* It is not only Government Departments which could assist in the provision of work by undertaking work which is long overdue. There is an enormous amount of railway work which ought to be no longer postponed—the building and repair of locomotives, coaches, freight cars, the repair of the permanent way, the renovation of railway stations, sheds, warehouses, and similar work, for which the necessary means are available in the fund allowed by the Government to the railroad companies for guaranteed profits. This work would provide employment for skilled and unskilled workers in many industries in addition to the railroad workers directly affected.

(g) *Trade With Russia.* There must be an immediate resumption of trade with Russia, and of normal political relations with the Soviet Republic. The Russian Government is prepared to supply large quantities of timber, hides, flax, platinum, and gold in payment of extensive orders to make good the wastage of the years of war and blockade, and to re-establish the economic life of the country. Russia needs railway equipment, means of transport, agricultural machinery and implements of all kinds, clothing, including boots, and a thousand and one other commodities which could be supplied by American labor. The effects of placing orders for these requirements in this country would be cumulative. The reaction upon industries not directly concerned with the fulfillment of Russian contracts would be far-reaching.

Imperialism

The United States Government aims to serve American profiteers in their ambition to build a Commercial Empire. This ambition can only be achieved by reducing American workers to the status of industrial coolies, thus making it possible for the insatiable profiteers to flood the world market with products cheap enough to compete with the products of cheap European labor. The profiteers' rush for markets will result in another conflict before the prating about disarmament and peace has ceased.

It is the results of the last war and the preparation for the next—economically and politically—that have brought about the disastrous situation of today.

(Continued on page 32.)

Centers for Unemployed

(Continued from page 4)

The first need of the world is peace. But peace cannot be secured by imperialists.

We demand, therefore, a stop to the enormous expenditures for the army and navy. The money is now required for the relief of the starving unemployed. The present enemy is within the country; it is capitalism which cannot be defeated except by a change in the control of the government from the capitalists to the workers.

We condemn the wanton acts of economic and military imperialism, by which the sorely needed resources of the country are frittered away month by month. Immense damage has been caused by reckless military expenditure in Murmansk and Siberia, and the support given to the intrigues of the enemies of Soviet Russia. Labor demand that there be no more of such military adventures, and that the policy of fomenting international discord shall cease.

The demands contained in the above program are immediate and practical. Around them a struggle will develop. The Government in refusing to do its part by spending billions of dollars and standing by the workers will clearly show to the masses that it is not interested in their needs. The struggle for these demands will also expose the yellows and fakers in the labor movement who *will oppose any action by the masses*. Thus they will show themselves as unwilling to fight even for the immediate needs of the workers, much less the emancipation of labor.

This is our program. We must carry it to the masses.