

The Line Is Correct—To Realize It Organizationally Is the Central Problem

(*Pre-Convention Discussion Article.*)

By J. A. ZACK

AT the time of our last Party Convention (1930), but a few months after the Wall Street crash, when capitalism had just received its first major blow of its present general crisis, we were still in the process of talking the Party and its followers out of the "exceptionalism" and "prosperity" theories of Lovestone, Cannon & Co.

What a change since then! Things are moving fast. There is tempo in politics, a general fluidity in the thoughts of the masses in the economic and political maneuverings of the bourgeoisie. The masses are pressing for "changes", for "new ways"; and the bourgeoisie, in order to switch the natural revolutionary mood of the masses into reactionary channels, is also talking against the things of old—capitalism must "change", must be "reformed"; there is the "new deal".

Mr. Hoover stuck to the "methods" of the forefathers too much to suit the present needs of the bourgeoisie. There had to be new methods of deception to stop the Leftward trend of the masses at least for a while, to confuse and disorientate it, to switch it into the *new way out* for the bourgeoisie, into the path towards fascization. Comrades Browder, Bittelman and others have ably analyzed the "new deal". There is no need for me to add to the analysis.

In order to consider the problems of the working class at the Party's Eighth Convention, it is necessary to do so against this background of great economic and political fluidity.

SELF-CRITICISM

If we are to be self critical, then let us examine our work in the light of this new situation. Have we become a Party capable enough to react politically and organizationally to these rapidly changing situations without being thrown off our track to the "Right" and to the "Left"? Of course not. Have we even strengthened our mobility and political alertness in any way to measure up to the situation? Again we have not.

The Polburo Resolution correctly points out our "Right" ten-

dency on the question of the united front in the form of *top politics*, our weaknesses in combatting the "red scare", in allowing the bourgeoisie to outlaw us ideologically (a far more dangerous way of being outlawed than by law) without seriously combatting it. Then there are the opportunist errors in connection with the anti-Japanese campaign and our paralysis at the time of the bank crash. Generally it may be said that the rapidly changing situation and maneuvers of the bourgeoisie take our breath away for weeks at a time until we find our bearings. We hold on to old formulas, interpretations and methods when they no longer serve the purpose. Have we not all, more or less to the "Right" or to the "Left", participated in these errors, including the writer? Of course, we have.

Thus, with this general introduction as a background, I want to come down to things more specifically.

NEW EVENTS AMONGST THE WORKING CLASS

That the working class has lost much of its old "contentment" or sheepishness since 1929 one only needs to note last year's strike wave and the militant large-scale actions prior to it on the part of the unemployed. Right now there is brewing an even much larger strike wave and forebodings of large-scale struggles of the unemployed with the perspective of a fusion of these struggles of employed and unemployed on a colossal scale for the first time.

There is a far larger section of the working class organized now into a great variety of organizations than was the case at our last Party Congress, much of this mass is under Communist and "semi-radical" working class leadership. A part of the counter-revolutionary role and degeneracy of the renegades is to underestimate precisely this fact; and although the Party is nearly four times as large as in 1930 and of better social composition, it registered a slower growth by far than is warranted by the tempestuous growth of the working class movement. This precisely is the danger point.

The greatest event in my opinion (expressing the new moods of the masses) of the last year is the growth of Independent Trade Union organization outside the A. F. of L., comprising about 300,000 workers. The force of this development, if centralized, as proposed, into an *Independent Federation of Labor*, will be accentuated manifold, considering that this movement (most of which is outside the T.U.U.L.) got under way with very little organization apparatus to start with, while the A. F. of L. had not only an established large-scale apparatus but government patronage and financial support. This event is of great historical importance.

Another event of enormous significance and equal importance is the militancy displayed by the masses organized into the A. F. of L., particularly the new masses organized in basic industry, who, although held down by the official apparatus of the labor fakers, are *jumping the traces and going over to independent rank-and-file action.*

To gain leadership of this movement in spite of the A. F. of L. and to unite and merge it in various ways with the movement outside of the A. F. of L.—this is our great task of the moment, and surely all the emphasis of the Central Committee on the work inside the A. F. of L. is more than well justified. Let me then add what I can to emphasize its importance as never before.

The spearhead of the class struggle industrial union movement of the rank and file in and outside the A. F. of L. is, of course, the class struggle unions led by us, whose ideological influence goes far beyond the organizational confines of our own apparatus. To bring it more directly under our organizational influence and control is our great problem.

Our main strategic line is the organization of the unorganized into the industrial unions based on working class principles as against the capitalist-minded A. F. of L.-led unions. This is sufficiently established by tradition and reemphasized as our main strategic aim in the newly formulated Industrial Union resolutions, such as the mining, textile and other resolutions. The point is that in a whole number of industries, as pointed out in the Draft Resolutions of the C.C., we cannot reach this strategic aim without putting the main emphasis upon work in the newly organized A. F. of L. unions of those industries. The Resolution on the tactical approach towards the formation of independent unions or masses that are radicalized to the point of moving out of the A. F. of L. but not yet coming to the T.U.U.L., greatly clarifies our perspective in this respect.

I have made the error of suspecting the main intention of the C.C. from the "left" and letting myself be provoked by incidental opportunist interpretations of this line here and there on the part of some of the leading comrades. It is clear, however, that the genuine intention of the C.C. is not to run our trade union work into the opportunist channels of reforming the A. F. of L. or of serving as a reactionary influence to drive the masses into or keep the masses in the A. F. of L., but to give the necessary and proper emphasis warranted by the situation to A. F. of L. work in order to swing the Party decisively towards this important work, *an aim with which I am and always was in full agreement, as I can abundantly prove by my practical work.*

THE A. F. OF L. AS THE MAIN DANGER

A great deal has to be done indeed as yet to make our Party fully conscious of the role of the A. F. of L. as the main danger in the camp of the working class, as the brake upon the militancy of the masses, as the force that acts as a paralysis upon the moods of the masses.

Too often our comrades consider the A. F. of L. question as a pure and simple trade union question, not realizing that the A. F. of L., due to the peculiar background of the American development, is the *great political instrument of the bourgeoisie* in the ranks of the working class. The role ascribed by the bourgeoisie in Europe to social-democracy is performed in the U.S. by the A. F. of L., supplemented by the Socialist Party and the "left" variety of social-fascists, Muste, Lovestone, Cannon, etc. The outstanding fact necessary to understand, however, is that the A. F. of L. and the R.R. Brotherhoods are the main political force of Wall Street amongst the working class. Many new forms of "left" social demagoguery are coming out lately, and are based upon it, including Labor Party tendencies. I suppose that if the labor fakers would blossom forth in European forms politically in the form of a Labor Party, many of our comrades would sooner recognize its true character. Indeed we have just begun to fight this, the main perverter of the working class ideology in the U.S. The sooner we are through with any polemics on this matter and go over full blast to organizing this fight seriously, the greater will our progress be all around.

THE PARTY'S SOREST SPOT

I cannot deal here with a great many problems that confront the Party Convention and that have not yet been really touched upon. It seems that many comrades are utilizing the discussion just to write additional articles boosting their or our achievements here and there. The fact is, *our Party is really not a good working organization*. To bring out these essential weaknesses and show how to overcome them should, in my opinion, be the achievement of the discussion and the Party Convention.

I have shown how the fluidity in economics and politics which is the outgrowth of the crisis requires of us to be capable and alert strategists of the working class. If not, we shall be tail-ending forever. As the main Draft Resolution points out, our Party cannot become mobile if the political work is confined to the top organizers and top committees. Our central problem is *how to make the unit of the Party and Party fraction do its own leading* on the basis of the general line of the Party. The sooner we center our main attention

on this the better; and why can we not do so now that we have a united Party?

The Draft Resolution does not do justice to this problem. The working class is becoming "organization-minded" more than ever before. Not only do they constantly turn over in their mind the problem as to how to get out of the hole capitalism has put them in, but there is one central thought running through the mass mind, that *organization is the way out*. They don't distinguish often between what organization, but organize they must. This is becoming the *mass idea* and unless we put our Party in working order and make every Party member a mass organizer, we shall miss the chance. Our good program will remain high and dry, our enemies will marshal the Leftward moving masses and divert them onto the rails of the bourgeoisie once more. This is taking place right now, and this danger grows every minute. Therefore, good organization becomes our central political problem. Only through it can we seize the organizing mood of the masses and lead it into class struggle channels.

If we examine our Party from this point of view we have, I say, a sorry mess. Our units do not hook up with mass work. They lead a sterile life, apart and on the sideways of the problems of the masses. The bulk of our members are neither members nor active in the unions or unemployed councils.

The language organizations are reverting to Federationism, living a sectarian, nationalistic life, apart from the general class struggle problems and work of the Party. In short, the Communists are tied up into a knot, doing in the main, many and sundry activities except the most important, that is, to organize the factory masses and the unemployed. A mass movement is growing up around them, but the Communists are connected with it only with the tiniest of apron strings.

The problem is: Are we capable of marshalling our own forces to work for the realization of our main strategic line? Thus far we have shown little ability to do so, but there are signs that we see the problem and begin to grapple with it. The Draft Resolution indicates the way by the concentration method of each unit having a specific group of factory workers to concentrate upon. The whole significance of this, however, and the organizational problem as a whole are the least part of the Resolution.

HOW IT ALL WORKS OUT

To illustrate how this type of Party organization works even under the best of circumstances, I will illustrate from last year's strike

wave. The Party in the Ohio district had done very little trade union work since its existence. During the last strike wave a few dozen Communists got busy and in six months recruited 5,400 workers into the industrial unions of the T.U.U.L., but it was impossible to recruit more than 10 per cent of our own Party members into the unions. Of course, we were not able to hold more than one-third of the recruitment! Had we had a moderately well working Party, the story would be different. The type of Party we have in the U.S. works in a manner that only one out of twenty full-time functionaries concentrates on factory work or mass work among the unemployed; and as to money spent, I dare say that the proportion is not more than 5 cents to each dollar. If concentration means anything it means that the bulk of forces and means are to be concentrated to achieve the main objectives. We cannot win the respect of the masses as organizers when they see us incapable of mobilizing our own forces.

SOME PROPOSALS

I have pictured rather strongly the negative sides in our Party organization. Is it a wonder that we grew as slowly as we have? How much faster will we grow if we overhaul basically our whole methods of work! How should we do it? *Organization is applied politics*. This is an old axiom. If we aim to organize the decisive sections of the proletariat then let us 1) take our best forces—support them with means to concentrate on the decisive production units (factories, mines or terminals) of the country. Probably 200 or so, but let us start at least with a few dozen. 2) Let us assign forces at least equivalent to a first class section organizer to each point, (large plant, etc.), and make the neighboring Party units (one or more), to concentrate upon that plant under the leadership of one capable comrade. 3) There is to be no Party unit without specific tasks in the form of concentrating either upon a factory or the unemployed in its neighborhood. 4) Each language organization to concentrate upon organizing its nationals in the same factory as the Party unit. The same with all the other auxiliary organizations instead of roaming all about and around the decisive points of monopoly capitalism. Let them concentrate their activities at these decisive points. It will be hard and difficult to start with but fruitful and decisive in the long run. 5) All Party members to join the unions. To start with the units that concentrate to join the union of the industry they concentrate on, thus forming a base for a recruiting local, creating the necessary organization apparatus for the union work. (The workers will recognize and accept them gladly if they are active in their behalf.) 6) A goodly percentage of the various

money raising campaigns of the Party and auxiliary organizations to go for factory work in the decisive industries and plants.

Space forbids to go at length into all the implications of this basic reorganization of our methods of work. I suggested some of these two years ago. Unfortunately very little was done practically to put them into effect. The Party Convention must deal with this basic question. This is not a mere organizational stratagem. It is a way of putting the Party onto the rails of mass work. It is the path to mobilize for the fulfilment of our Resolutions, giving every unit a concrete task and thus changing its own inner political life, every member having something specific to fulfil in the main task of the Party. It is a method of hooking our machinery to the basic sections of the working class and making the necessary *transition* from street to factory units and factory methods of work.

It is a way of mobilizing our entire forces against the main enemy in the camp of the working class—the whole variety of social fascists and particularly the A. F. of L. It is the way for the Party, not only to become a better mass agitator, but above all to make the necessary transition towards becoming a mass organizer and merging with the masses and their problems. It is the way of mobilizing the Party against war, learning the illegal methods characteristic of factory work and avoiding isolation in the event of war. The time left for the fulfillment of this is short indeed. I feel confident that the Party Convention will rise to the occasion and that, as a result, we shall have the necessary basic changes in the methods of work of the Party and a strengthened leadership qualified to help make these changes, assuring tempestuous growth of the movement as corresponds to the needs and possibilities of the working class under the conditions of today.
