
Our Next Step.

by Jay Lovestone

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The call for a conference of progressive labor bodies to be held in Chicago, February 20, should offer to the Workers Party an opportunity of joining with large sections of the workers in the immediate struggle.

In this conference there will be represented the railway workers, the machinists, the Farmer-Laborites, the Non-Partisan Leaguers, the Forty-Eighters, the Socialist Party, and various progressive Labor Unions.

The proposed object of this gathering is the working out of an agreement for joint action on various pressing issues now confronting the American workers.

How does this conference come to be called? What are the political and economic conditions? What of our labor movement? What is the outlook for the conference? Shall the Workers Party seek representation? And if so, what should be its policy?

Throughout the world the capitalists are carrying the fight to the limit in their efforts to reduce wages, impose degrading working conditions, smash the unions, and deprive the workers of even their most elemental political rights in shops, rob them of all their hard-won gains of years of struggle. The economic crisis is becoming more acute.

Despite our active prosperity-drummers, there is no prosperity in sight. Our unemployment is becoming worse. Our foreign trade is shrinking to new low levels.

Everywhere the employers are taking advan-

tage of the conditions to increase their power of exploitation and oppression. Here we have wage cuts and lockouts; there we have anti-strike laws and injunctions.

In the ranks of organized labor there is a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the reactionary leadership. The discontent is as yet vague and inarticulated.

Because of the increasing pressure of the capitalist offensive, there is growing amongst the workers a strong demand for unity of action.

In the European countries the revolutionists have taken the lead in this move for unity. But in America, the situation is different. On account of the weakness of our revolutionary movement, various leaders are dissatisfied with the existing AF of L administration and some progressive labor men are assuming the lead in this move.

The Chicago conference is only an indication of the strong pressure the masses are bringing to bear upon their leaders for a united front against the common enemy.

The conference was called by labor leaders primarily hostile to the Gompers machine. In their hatred of the Grand Old Man, these leaders are ready to take all steps which can help them win. This is natural.

We all fight this way when we fight and fight to win. These progressives and pseudo-progressives are ready to utilize any and every opportunity.

We should not, therefore, be surprised to see them taking steps far out of line with their past activities. Undoubtedly, their militancy, if it takes

on concrete form, will in large measure be due to reasons best known to themselves and not at all to a change of heart or aim. Hence these fellows are now getting on the job to capitalize the strong trend toward unity of action in the ranks of the laboring masses.

This need not dismay us. At no time should revolutionists judge mass movements by the desires or motives animating the individuals who for a multitude of reasons happen to be the mouth-pieces of the movement at a particular moment. We need concern ourselves only with the underlying basic social and economic forces giving rise to the movements.

Our economic and political conditions are giving rise to a strong movement for unity in the ranks of the workers. The first concrete expression of our tread toward unity of action is the increasing unification of the left elements in the trade unions and political organizations. The Workers Party itself is the first workers political organization in America that has grown out of a union of forces and not out of a split. Besides, the old poison of dualism and "pure," "ideal," unionism is on the rapid decline amongst the militants. We see, then, that regardless of the fact that many of the leaders at the Chicago conference are men who have not done much for working class unity, still the conference itself is a serious, live manifestation of organic forces stirring American labor toward decisive and aggressive action.

Viewing the conference from the above point of view what shall the Workers Party do? The writer is of the opinion that the Workers Party should make every effort possible to be represented at the conference. There are numerous advantages to participation in the conference by the Workers Party. But before dealing with the advantages, let us consider some of the objections.

First of all, we have not been invited. Well, this does not matter a straw. There are reasons aplenty for our not being invited. The prime movers of the conference do not have much use for

the aims of the Workers Party. Whatever plans they have which cannot stand open examination are much more secure when the Workers Party is excluded. The very fact that we have not been invited indicates the need for our presence. We should not stand on ceremony and refuse to participate in any conference where representatives of the workers are found.

Should our request for representation be turned down we would then be in a position to expose the tactics of the pseudo-progressive labor leaders who cry unity; if our delegates are seated then we will be in a position to help mould the conference and at least put forward our program.

Others may argue that this conference is a gathering of liberals and labor-fakirs and that it cannot possibly bear advantages for the labor movement. This argument does not hold water. Merely charging someone with being a scoundrel does not make him a scoundrel. And the mere fact that one is an accuser does not make him holy. First of all don't let us condemn any movement in advance. Besides, condemnation based on actual conditions is far more powerful. Then again, let us put our case before the workers of America on the basis of positive movements. It is only under such conditions that we will be able to speak to the workers in concrete terms, in language of act and not of fancy or desire.

The revolutionists must give conscious and deliberate direction to the class struggle. To give conscious and deliberate direction to the class struggle means to participate actively in the class struggle. And to participate actively in the class struggle means to take all steps which will draw the largest masses possible into the struggle. But merely to recognize this need in the abstract will not get us anywhere. We must take steps which will remove the hindrances to the class struggle. We must take steps which will outline the proper course of action. The Workers Party should do all in its power to come to the conference, to present plans which will outline a policy of aggressive ac-

tivity.

What shall be our behavior at the conference? What shall we propose?

Our representatives at the conference should come with a plan calculated to bring about unity of action. This can be done only through reaching an agreement to cooperate on the broad, fundamental points of issue in the class struggle.

We should choose such points as will make it hard for those opposing our participation to turn [them down]. The proposals made by us must be of such a nature as to put our opponents on record beyond a doubt.

Pursuing this policy we would perhaps put forward such slogans as: "Defend the Unemployed," "Defend the Labor Unions and the Right to Strike and Picket," "Organized Industrial and Political Opposition to the Open Shop and Wage Cuts," "Relief to Farmers and Ex-Soldiers," etc.

These demands are practical and urgent. We can cooperate within working class bodies for their reorganization. No one who pretends to stand for the workers or for unity of action by the workers can reject them without betraying his refusal to line up in the fight. Besides, [some] of these are issues about which [laboring] masses can be rallied for struggle and the fight for which will seriously interfere with the workings of capitalism.

But we must not rest content with a cooperation for these special purposes. As revolution-

ists we should be the driving force in the movement for unity of all workers who desire to fight against capitalism. Our representatives should therefore propose that there be organized a genuine Labor Party along federative lines and modelled after the British Labour Party. Here there are two conditions which we must put down as absolute. First, each of the constituent bodies must have complete organizational autonomy. Secondly, we must under no condition renounce our right to and possibility of expressing out opinions. We [are] to maintain our right of full criticism and our own platform. [By] being guaranteed these two conditions we have all to gain and nothing to lose from such a union.

The revolutionists of every country are leading the move for unity of action. The Chicago conference offers the revolutionists of America a chance to advance considerably this demand for unity seen in the ranks of the masses. It is true that the godfathers of the conference have announced their plan not to organize a Labor Party. This should only serve to strengthen our efforts for such a Party. The Bolshevists of Russia, the Communists of Germany, France, and Italy have shown us of what a great advantage such policies can be to the workers.

Let us drive the wavering forward. Let us take the lead in the organization of a united front against the common enemy.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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