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THE SOCIAL CRISIS IN THE U.S. AND THE
GENERAL STRIKE

A Criticism of Party Policy in the Coal
Crisis

The Political Committee has invited "Comrade Johnson to present his slogan of a general strike for the Party Bulletin so that it may be discussed in the branches." I do so at this time with reluctance and after much reflection I express my views only because not to do so would be worse. My reason is as follows:

I am more than ever opposed to the line of the Political Committee. Nor is this a theoretical question. In my view the lack not of abstract growth but of growth corresponding to our responsibilities and opportunities, our incapacity to hold the workers whom we win, are to be traced directly to the kind of paper Labor Action is and the political line of which it is a result. This has been made as clear as it is humanly possible in the discussion preceding the convention. However, these views were decisively defeated. I believe that it is my duty not only to accept this but to do everything possible to assist the leadership to carry out its line, to avoid obstructions or irritations of any kind, not only in the leadership but more important, in the ranks. The Minority faction has been dissolved not only in theory but in practice and all influence that I have been able to wield has been directed to trying to get the comrades to act in the spirit I have outlined. The SWP, I am informed, has made open declaration in their party that the Majority in the WP has forced the Minority to dissolve its faction. This is absolutely untrue. If the Minority has dissolved its faction and strives to act as is admitted on all sides not only as disciplined but as loyal party members, it is because the Minority of its own free will decided to do so.

It must not be thought, however, that this is a simple matter. The course that is followed at the Political Committee by Comrade Freddie Forest and myself is as follows: We discuss constructively and try to carry out and even vote for as many of the political proposals of the Majority as possible although it is understood that some of the proposals that we accept are to be regarded as not involving any conflict with the fundamental views which we have expressed and not repudiated. We freely bring in proposals we think can be worked out within the party line. We scrupulously avoid those which would "begin the convention discussion all over again." The picture would be incomplete if I did not state also that both on the Labor Action staff and at the Political Committee all this is borne in mind and acted upon by the Majority, and on the Labor Action staff in particular, there is an excellent collaboration. But there are times when developments in the class struggle pose serious questions before the party and it becomes a problem if and when and how to bring forward views which have been defeated. Such a situation, in the opinion of Comrade Forest and myself arose

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after the failure of price control many many weeks ago, if I am not mistaken at the beginning of November. Obviously the struggle in the United States had entered a new stage. The discussion at the Political Committee revolved around the escalator clause as a propaganda means of meeting the new situation. With this I agreed, but I gave notice to the Committee that I proposed to bring before it in a memorandum (for the Committee only) some of the views which I held upon one way of meeting the new stage. When the Committee heard that it was concerned with "the general strike", it dismissed the matter, and said that it would await the memorandum. It is obvious that this is not a question of a mere "slogan." After much hesitation and long discussions with Comrade Forest, we finally decided that I present the memorandum at the November plenum.

The memorandum can be summarized as follows:

1) The party propaganda and agitation, in bringing before the masses the conception of workers, factory and consumer's committees, represent progress since the convention, although lack of theoretical preparation in the party for this new departure has effected its effectiveness.

2) The clash between the government and the railroad workers was merely a preliminary to what is now being repeated on a higher plane between the government and the UMW. Such questions as escalator clauses are "for us" minor questions. The great question before the American working class inherent in the whole situation is the question of united mass action against the government acting as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie.

I then quoted two pages from the American resolution by Johnson presented to the Convention.

I ended by pointing out that had the course that I outlined in the resolution been followed, the party would today be mobilized for the present crisis. In the last two lines of the memorandum I reminded the Committee, and this is very important, that I had given notice of this before the present coal crisis appeared. I shall have to refer to this last section again because in it I raised the question of recruitment. I may mention and I want to emphasize this, that in the memorandum as presented to the Plenum, I stated clearly that I brought this question once more not before the membership but before the National Committee only.

At the Plenum during the discussion on PAC I spoke briefly but fully enough on the ideas contained in the memorandum. I was ignored. Completely. To use one of Comrade Shachtman's most telling expressions, "not one leading comrade" thought it necessary to say a word about this memorandum and the ideas contained in it. That, of course, is the privilege not only of leaders but of every party member.

I now quote the sections in the memorandum from the convention resolution.

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(From American Resolution by Johnson, pp. 29-30)

Owing to the world-wide phenomenon of statification of production, all economic struggle today tends to become involved immediately with the state, i.e., to become political in the deepest sense of the term. In the face of the pressure of the masses the bourgeoisie makes innumerable legislative proposals (Smith-Connally, fact-finding, etc.) which for the most part end in impotence. The responsibility and power of the bourgeoisie in dealing with labor is thrust into the hands of the chief executive thus constituting in essence the elements of the Bonapartist regime.

But the process is not one-sided.

Every important strike by the workers against an individual capitalist or corporation has hanging over it the intervention of the government on the side of the capitalist class. Unification of bourgeois power draws in its wake unification of proletarian struggle. The immediate period now opening therefore has as its ultimate stage the recognition by the workers of the necessity for organized action as a class against the bourgeois state for the achievement of economic ends. The whole course of development indicates that the political break with the Democratic Party will either directly or indirectly be closely associated with the government's incapacity to satisfy or sponsor labor's economic demands. In the United States precisely because of the absence of a political party of labor, the general strategic orientation of the Workers Party as a political organization must be based on the economic struggles of the American workers which, owing to the statification of production continually tend to telescope the corresponding political and social development.

The Party therefore must henceforth make its main propagandistic orientation the propaganda for unified action by the working classes as a whole, directed against the government for the achievement of its economic as well as its social and political demands.

The Party does not anarchistically, recklessly, and adventuristically raise slogans for a general strike. It points out to the workers, however, the inevitability of the widening of the present scissors between wages and prices and the incapacity of the dishonest, bungling government to solve the problem. It points out that whereas in 1936 and again in 1945-6, the government was compelled to pretend to maintain a balance between capital and workers, it is absolutely impossible for it to continue to maintain that position in the future. The Party points out that only the unified actions of the decisive sections of the workers on a national scale can mobilize the full power of the proletariat and all its allies against the bourgeoisie and the deceptive role that has hitherto been played by the state

its executive committee. The Party points out to the working class that such unified action can range from a nation-wide stoppage of a few hours to a sit-down on a national scale. It warns the workers that a general strike which is anything more than a token demonstration against the government can pose immediately the problem of power in the nation, forcing upon the workers either preparation for the social revolution or a demoralizing and disastrous retreat. Without hysteria, by basing this propaganda upon its analysis of the next stage which faces the American working class, the Party not only attracts to itself those far seeing workers who instinctively draw this conclusion. It lays a basis for its future development in the minds of those workers who are taught to associate this ultimate stage of the development of the workers' struggle with the Party of the Fourth International.

With that conviction which can come only from thoroughly understood theory and confidence in the inevitability of socialism the Party does not wait until the workers have acted and then proceed belatedly to explain the event. It boldly takes the lead, and proclaims the next stage. When this unified action will take place, how and under what circumstances it is impossible to foretell and ridiculous to ask. To wait to see before propagandizing is to fulfill the role not of a vanguard, but of a rear guard.

The Struggle Against the Labor Bureaucracy

such an orientation, however, demands a clear recognition of the role of the labor bureaucrats as agents of capital in the stratified production. The Party must therefore propagandize in close coordination with the idea of unified action on a national scale the idea of factory committees. These, as the 1935 CIO strikes showed, are likely to spring out of the situation with startling suddenness and power. The workers must be warned that any serious action on a national scale which is not jealously overlooked and safeguarded by factory committees or other rank and file organizations is doomed to disastrous failure. It is by means of the factory committees that the workers can be prepared to take the concrete steps vigilantly to supervise the sabotaging bureaucracy and in time to overthrow it.

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I have now to analyze this section in the light of what has taken place. Involved here is one important aspect (there are many others, equally important) in the fundamental question of our day - stratification of production. Merely to say that the government intervenes in all strikes is to say nothing. What is decisive today is that the strike of every group of workers can end in a direct clash with the government. With mass strikes over a period, it is inevitably borne home to increasing strata of the workers that their main enemy is not any individual capitalist or corporation but the government as representative of the capitalist class. This is a tremendous stage in objective

development. It means that the question of the united action of all the workers against the state is inherent in the whole situation. This is where I begin and the point from which I draw tactics. The party leadership speculate perpetually on the "consciousness" of the workers. But it is the "objective situation" which in a period like ours and in such a social milieu which rapidly develops the consciousness of the workers. And that is precisely what has emerged in the present crisis. For the first time since the formation of the CIO we have had the movement forward to united action of the CIO, the AFL and the Railway Brotherhoods. As was pointed out in the quoted section, in 1936 and again in the winter of 1945-6, by apparently taking the side of the workers or mediating between them and the capitalists, the government did not unite them against it. But as I insisted so many months ago, it was perfectly obvious that the time would come (and soon) when the government would have to strike savagely against one group of workers and by so doing, unloose the movement toward united action by all of them.

From such an analysis, however, follows certain political conclusions for the party. If in the objective situation, there is inherent united action by the workers as a whole, then it is the business of the party to anticipate in propaganda this objective movement. The resolution therefore stated very carefully that the party "must make its main propagandistic orientation the propaganda for united action by the workers as a whole..."

Note that it does not say that the main propagandistic orientation must be so sharp an orientation as the general strike. It carefully avoids saying that. This is not a slogan but an orientation, an idea which should permeate every word written or spoken until the situation changes. The statement says "unified action." The resolution then goes on to pillory any anarchistic or adventuristic raisings of a slogan for a general strike. But after pointing out the antagonistic features which would lead the workers inevitably in the next period to work together "under the whip of the counter-revolutionary" government, it then goes on to warn of the dangers and the difficulties of the united action which the objective situation would inevitably lead them to. It says that unified action can range from a nationwide stoppage of a "few hours" to a sitdown on a national scale. It warns, warns, mind you, that any general strike which is anything more than a "token" demonstration against the government, can pose before the workers either preparation for social revolution or a "demoralizing and disastrous retreat." In other words, the resolution considered it the function of the party to educate the workers well in advance and to show them the difficulties, the dangers and the possibilities attendant upon the situation. Not only was this written nearly a year ago. It was the specific passages which I selected to bring before the Committee. In the last section of my memorandum I regretted that this procedure has not been "judiciously followed." It is perfectly obvious therefore that what was proposed (and what is still proposed) is no mere "slogan" but a long hard serious preparation and an all-sided consistent education of the advanced workers who read our press, in the necessities of the objective situation. At a certain stage this can pass into open agitation.

Now, if when this question was originally posed, many people could not see it, that is to be understood. When I presented it again there was less excuse. But still, such things can be. But weeks afterward when millions of workers would have come out at the slightest encouragement from their leaders, my ideas met with the same reception as a year ago. It is possible that a sober discussion in the branches might help to clarify why. We are dealing with the greatest political event in the post-war United States, and the problems posed are still before us. This is not a post-mortem. The coal crisis was not the decisive clash. That is still before us. Everything depends on what the "Big Three" of the CIO will do. That is why we must clear up the past.

THE UMW STRIKE

The projected attack upon the railroad workers by Truman was sufficient notice of what was on the way. Truman made an attempt to use the maritime strike for an offensive against the workers. He failed. The tremendous offensive mobilized against the UMW could therefore have come as no surprise. Truman, unlike us, carefully planned every step. Lewis declared the contract broken, and the whole press announced to the workers and to the nation as a whole that this was the showdown.

From the very beginning it was perfectly clear that the only thing that would stop Truman was the organized opposition of the working class. The particular forms that the organized opposition would take was something that could not in general be predicted. A Labor Action that had followed the course that I had outlined in February, and which I once again brought before the Committee in November, would have been in a position to pose immediately to its readers the question of unified action, to discuss the possibilities of a general strike, without necessarily raising the concrete actual slogan. In other words, under any circumstances it would have been*patiently and judiciously following preferably out not by any means entirely in the inner pages of Labor Action as at present constituted. It is even conceivable that although unified action of this kind was abstractly necessary, yet the situation at a particular time, e.g. demoralization, defeat, consciousness of weakness, might place the revolutionary party in the situation where it could only bring the question of a general strike forward negatively. That is to say, by pointing out that though this was what would save the situation, unfortunately the working class was in no condition to even think of such a thing. That, as I say, I will admit for the sake of argument, was remotely possible.

The fact however, is that the truth of the concrete case was the exact opposite.

From the very beginning, every organ of the bourgeois press made it clear that the only reason why the government did not

*in a position, without seeming in any way adventuristic, to draw to a head the general line of analysis and propaganda which it would have been...

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push Lewis into fall was the fear of a spontaneous general strike on the part of the working class. We did not even have to pose the question. It was posed for us. The bourgeoisie recognized the objective situation. Nor did any journalist say that this belief on the part of the government was fantastic. Every one took it for granted that the government's fears were perfectly justified. Some even feared that the general strike might take place without Lewis being put into jail. Interviews with workers were printed about the general strike. Workers, including party members, reported that in the factories, there was talk of a general strike. One labor journalist spent column after column discussing the general strike, and so far did the talk about general strike go that after Lewis sent the miners back to work, the New York Times printed a full length article entitled "The Anatomy of the General Strike," an obvious response to the fears of the bourgeoisie over the fact that in this serious clash with the workers, the question of the general strike was in the air. Everybody knew this, that is everybody except the Fourth International in the United States.

THE CALCULATED TREASON OF THE LABOR LEADERSHIP

Every labor leader of any status in the country knew the tension. This explains their conduct. It was only after Lewis had been fined, and when the matter was definitively legalized in the appeal to the Supreme Court, it was only then that Philip Murray issued his public letter calling for unified action. The timing of this letter was no accident at all. The whole temper of the CIO resolution at the Convention and the whole convention showed the timidity of the CIO leadership. In addition to the numerous intrigues which these leaders and Lewis were undoubtedly carrying on behind the scene, Murray's call was such as to enable him to concentrate the main fight on the legal issues. In this letter there was not a single word about the Truman administration. Here as elsewhere the labor bureaucracy remained true to the general pattern it has repeatedly shown us in Europe whenever the working class is in really serious danger. It is dyed in treachery and it is dyed in treachery because it fears the revolutionary mobilization of the masses particularly on a national scale.

To understand Murray and Green, we cannot do better than observe that great leader of the workers, President Walter P. Reuther. The United Automobile Worker of December 1946 tells us that on December 7, President Reuther spoke at a UAW-CIO (Founders and Smelters Conference in Milwaukee). This is at the very height of the struggle. The UAW has been fined a monstrous sum, the amount being named by the government. Murray had issued his letter on December 6, a letter in which he had claimed that the "Whole labor movement" stood in imminent danger from "the forces of reaction. With a fine of 3 1/2 million dollars hanging over the UAW, Reuther proposed 1) a labor conference such as Murray had outlined the day before, 2) that labor and management call a national conference to work out a joint program to overcome the economic and production difficulties confronting the nation, 3) that after this conference a series of joint labor-management conferences by industry be called to carry out the program worked out at the national conference. Not a word against the Truman government. This is the Reuther who had called for a 24-hour general strike to

protest against the scrapping of price control by Congress, and had actually led the Detroit workers on such a demonstration. The same Reuther had called for a consumers' general strike. We do not need to know that such a speech at such a time aimed at nothing else but keeping the workers quiet and deflecting them from the sentiments of a general strike which were constantly being referred to in the bourgeois press, in the factories and in the lower ranks of the leadership. At this very time, in Detroit, Reuther's own stronghold, the AFL and the CIO were working out a joint agreement for a 24 hour general strike to let the government know the sentiments of labor against the crucifixion of the UMW today as a preparation for an attack on the whole labor movement tomorrow. At the same time on the other side of the country, the Oakland workers broke out in an almost spontaneous general strike against their leaders because the police, that is to say, the state, had lined up with capital in an apparently not very important dispute.

THE CALCULATED TREACHERY OF THE STALINISTS

Exactly the same treacherous policy characterized the course of the Communist Party. The Stalinists however, are quick and slick. They knew what was happening, and what should be done, but apart from their organic rottenness they were at this particular time in mortal fear of antagonizing Murray. Mark well their procedure. On November 19, the Daily Worker in an editorial, stated that "a number of labor leaders have suggested the advisability of an immediate joint conference of AFL, CIO and Railroad Unions to protect the miners' interests."* the Daily Worker welcomed the CIO convention resolution condemning the government injunction. (It is to be remembered, however, that van Bittner stated to the press that the CIO, while condemning the injunction, was not expressing any attitude to the question in dispute. Under other circumstances, the Communist Party would have torn the hide off him for this but they let it pass.) On November 26, the Daily Worker said: "The entire labor movement should rise to the occasion. Far too much is at stake to leave the decision in the hands of one man." etc. etc. They "hope" (note that word, please), they "hope" that progressives everywhere will initiate community-wide action through conferences or other forms." (Note, "other forms") "to bring forward the real issues and defeat the objectives of reaction." In other words, the same deliberate avoidance of any clear directives to the workers characterizes the gaudy phrasology of the Daily Worker as has already distinguished van Bittner and the CIO resolution. By December 9, the Daily Worker is able to point out that it "called for" united action to meet the emergency as far back as November 19. Everything is fixed for the record. On December 10 they are praising that traitor, Murray, for the letter that he issued after Lewis had been fined. They say: "Had Murray's proposal been accepted in time, the miners would not be going back to the pits empty-handed." The whole procedure is fakery from first to last. If they had wanted to propose any kind of action, they had at least two weeks before the court fined Lewis. Two whole weeks at a time when every hour counted.

* The Daily Worker welcomed the idea. On November 21....

THE UNCALCULATING BLINDNESS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Thus for a line, a lead, even a little education, everything depended on the Fourth International. It will need only a few paragraphs to show how magnificently the WP and the SWP fell from the occasion.

What was the response of our own party, the Workers Party, to this crisis? On November 25, Garrett writes an article in Labor Action. He says that if Truman gets away with this strike-breaking union-breaking action, every union in the country will be menaced. Then comes this revealing passage: "The miners are therefore carrying the ball as they have many times in the past, for the entire labor movement. It is to be expected that a considerable section of the labor movement will rally to the miners defense. Unofficial reports from the CIO convention now in session say that the CIO will back the miners." Isn't this wonderful? The Stalinists "hope." Garrett goes one better. "It is to be expected." (The editorials in that issue deal with Budenz and Chiang-kai-shek.) This much is clear. Garrett (and I speak of him not personally but as a characteristic representative of the party line) has no conception of the issues at stake, and what has been building up during the past months. He has no lead to give. (All this is Johnson's stratospheric nonsense.) He has no conception of the fundamental duty of the revolutionary party to call the workers immediately to note that the labor bureaucracy is ready, as always, to betray the struggle.

On December 2, Labor Action announces (on page 1). "Leaders of the CIO and AFL have announced that they are backing the mine workers to the hilt against the government's injunction procedure. Whatever the disputes between the union leaders and inside the unions the whole labor movement stands united with the mine workers in a solid front against the government's attack on the right of unions to strike. Union leaders, known for their strong opposition to Lewis, have been compelled by the necessity of defending unionism to announce their support of Lewis..." etc., etc. These terrible illusions need no comment. They speak for themselves. On page 2, Labor Action comes to the following conclusion. "Increasingly every wage struggle, every strike battle involves the government.. Good. And therefore what? "It is the elementary duty of every working man and woman to take his side with the miners" So that is what statification of production means to Garrett. The workers were with the miners. They didn't need us to tell them that. The question was what to do. But having given to the bureaucrats the prestige of "supporting" Lewis, obviously there is nothing Garrett can tell the workers to do. We have seen already how Walter Reuther that left-wing labor leader, is supporting the miners. The conclusion is as follows: "Regardless of what happens in the court, the issue will be joined in the coal fields and there, backed by the labor movement, the miners are certain to emerge victoriously." Wrong from top to bottom. If anything was certain, it was that the issue would not be settled in the mines.

On December 6, the PC discusses the question. Johnson, still

apologetic, raises the question again, beginning his speech thus: "I have reserved what I have to say (i.e. waiting until the others had spoken) because I believe that here it is necessary to do what I hate to do - bring up a point of view that is definitively rejected by a convention. In my opinion, this situation is not being approached correctly by the Committee at all."

I painfully go all over ^{it} again. I read from the memorandum, I read from the resolution. I show the line - organic to Bolshevism - which must be taken with the bureaucracy and without which, as I have categorically stated, it is impossible to educate the workers as to the need for a revolutionary party and all that this implies. At the Plenum I was ignored. This time while all the proprieties were observed, I was ignored positively. I obviously bored the Committee. On December 9, Labor Action came out with a headline of which we refuse to say one single word. We will not even mention it. This headline, to be buried, henceforth, we hope in oblivion, introduced the article which stated that on December 4, the UMW had been fined 3 1/2 million dollars - the greatest labor fine in history.

Who chooses to think that such things as that headline are merely "little mistakes" can continue to bury his head in the sand. They occur too often and too flagrantly to be other than the consequences of a whole political method. In that same issue, an article by Mike Stevens established the criminality of the government without a shadow of a doubt. It also established that the demands of the miners were perfectly justified. It was a poor thing but unfortunately not his own. It was the party approach. The lead article gave the facts of the case, referred to Samuel Gompers, Debs, and then informed our readers that "one thing, however, is certain; not an ounce of coal will be mined if Lewis or other UMW officials are jailed, nor will an ounce of coal be mined while the injunction order stands."

Thoughtful readers of the discussions during the last convention will now perhaps realize what the minority meant when it stated that the call for nationalization with workers control tacked on to it is not of necessity revolutionary. They will remember also the attack of the Minority upon the party's general political line as being always ready to show the crimes of capitalism but being unable to understand, far less to call upon the workers in great crises to play the role by which the proletariat, stage by stage, in bitter struggle, fights for its place at the head of the nation. Here is everything we said perfectly exemplified.

Now comes the preordained climax. The issue of December 16 has an article entitled "A Balance Sheet of the Coal Strike," written by the National Chairman of the party. Suddenly a paragraph leaps to the eye. "Could Lewis or the miners have acted differently? Yes, most certainly. Could they have appealed to the rest of the working class to walk out in solidarity with them against the infamy of government by injunction which threatens the interests and very life of the labor movement? Certainly. There is no question but that hundreds of thousands and millions of workers in this country stood poised in readiness to respond in such a cause,"

We rub our eyes. Millions of workers, then, according to this

were not only ready but stood "poised in readiness." This, then, is the question of a walk-out of millions, a general strike. But not one single word about this had appeared in the paper for the previous three weeks. If the workers were ready and the bourgeois press was talking about it, then perhaps we should have warned the workers "poised in readiness" against this provocation! Not only not a word but buckets of cold water had been poured on the very idea. This "in the Balance Sheet" is the first mention of a general strike in the paper. An accountant checking such a balance sheet would ask some very inconvenient questions about this entry. But more surprises would await him.

"If, instead of mere rhetorical talk, the leaders of the other labor organizations in this country, had immediately called a representative general conference of all the organized workers and proclaimed their readiness to stand by the miners in this strike, regardless of what action was necessary to gain a victory, the whole capitalist class, its government and the courts included, would have been compelled to retreat from their autocratic arrogance."

So only a proclamation of readiness was needed! This seems like rhetorical talk if ever there was. (and how did Labor Action distinguish itself from the others during the crisis when all "the rhetorical talk" was going on?)

It is a commonplace in our movement that an opportunist line ultimately seeks compensation in adventurism. We are leading up to something.

"Even now it is not too late to organize a powerful national network of united councils of action representing every branch of the trade union movement to stamp out the viper of government by injunction before it poisons the labor movement."

"Even now it is not too late." So "it is not too late to organize a powerful, national network...to stamp out...before it poisons the labor movement." So that the labor movement will be poisoned. On December 16th it is not too late, not for a mere declaration but for a network of councils. Do we advocate this? Is this our line to stop the poisoning? If it is, why don't we plaster, why didn't we plaster Labor Action with it? If so, why is it buried away in this article? Why isn't the whole paper, or half of it devoted to this? Compare this paragraph to the sober, careful phrasing of the Johnson resolution.

But the question remains. Are we for this action or are we not? Remember the millions of workers who are "poised in readiness." And it is not "too late!" We read on:

"It is worthwhile pointing out that even if, let us say, a general strike had been called in support of the miners under the direction of the present labor leadership that would only have raised more acutely - far more acutely - the decisive question raised by the strike of the miners themselves, namely, who is master in this house... Are the American workers ready to answer this question?"

More acutely - far more acutely - the profound political confusion of the article is here exhibited. Note the phrasing. "It is worthwhile," "even if," "let us say."

2) If the strike had been called under the direction of the present labor leadership, they then would have been incapable of answering the question, who is master.

3) Then, as the present labor leadership is no good, what would have been any good?

"What is required is a working class political party which aims at establishing a workers government and ~~will~~ represent and defend the best interests of all the people against the monopoly capitalist class."

So that millions of poised workers must resign themselves to the poisoning of the labor movement because there is no party which represents the best interests of all the people. But this leadership to come will not consist of the present labor leadership. For the labor bureaucracy, unionist or politicians are organically the same. We know what they did in the General strike in Britain in 1926. We know that they will never in such circumstances claim to be masters. So that what the article is saying is that what we need is a revolutionary party. There is none in sight. So do nothing. "What hit the miners yesterday will hit every other worker tomorrow." So the article tells us. "Trade Unionism is not sufficient." This in large print. So the proposal for a general strategy committee which will consist of the present bureaucrats, all this in reality means nothing. They may meet. They will utter "mere rhetorical words."

It can now be seen that as far as this Labor Action article is concerned, the mere "proclamation of readiness to resist" is not rhetoric at all. It is the limit of what can be proposed from such a political basis. For if by any chance, the bourgeoisie should fail to be intimidated by the mere proclamation of the labor leaders, then, even without a general strike, the question of who is master would be posed. But these leaders, being what they are, and there being no revolutionary party, the American working class is not ready to answer this question. And since the American workers are not ready to answer this question, then the whole declaration of readiness would be seen for what it is, a mere empty threat, a mere rhetoric. We attempt to frighten the bourgeois and if it is not frightened, then we go backhome again until a party is formed which etc., etc.

That is the party line. The above is the party policy. (It was the policy and still is the policy in Europe.) Some of the party leaders say pointblank that the workers are backward. Shachtman says that too but is always ready to say that millions are ready but there is no party. Between these two positions the party vacillates.

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN THEORY

I omit here two things.

1) The theoretical question of the "general strike" and the stratification of production should fill our theoretical journal and should be constantly brought before our readers. Here I can barely indicate the treatment. The general political strike and the Soviets appeared in 1905 owing to the stage of development of production. In 1936 in France and in the U.S. appeared a new stage, the general strike for economic demands (increase in wages, holidays with pay, etc). Today as I have explained in outline, particularly in the US, the whole economic development and the

social forms it engenders, poses before the workers the general strike and the formation of committees for their economic demands. This is the social structure, the mould which gives form to the exploding wrath of the workers. The workers in the Commune behaved as they did because of the social structure determined by the stage of development of production. The same applies to 1905. The same applies to the U.S. in 1946. It is within this framework that a party functions. That is why the US bourgeoisie and the workers are concerned empirically with the general strike. That is why the minority makes this its basic strategic orientation. The party of the Fourth International does as we have seen.

2) Upon stratification also is based, today, the question of the social program for the miners and all other workers. Neither the WP nor the SWP has the faintest conception of what is propaganda for a social program today in the US. All I can do is to mention some of the more important questions posed by this serious crisis. The WP and the SWP will come to them in time. They will have to. But I have written as I have done because the miners strike was not the decisive action in the present stage. That was only a preliminary. The party now has to decide what it will advocate in the new round of demands that is coming up. It must devise some policy, above all, it must cease talking rhetorically about general council for strike strategy and united action. What united action does it mean? What does it propose that the millions of poised workers do in order to defeat Murray and Reuther's organic treachery? I state categorically that propaganda for a labor party and nationalization now take a secondary place. What is required is propaganda and agitation for concrete action. What does the party propose? I can only say finally that, particularly with the necessary preparation, issue after issue of Labor Action during the crisis should have been: a UMW issue; General Strike issue; the paper filled with interviews from workers in the plant on the general strike (for and against); every statement on the general strike by the bourgeois press reproduced; the article by the Times reproduced in full and elaborately analysed. We would have struck home. That was, is and will have to be our function in crises such as these.

COAL CRISIS, THE PARTY AND RECRUITMENT

I leave for the last the question of the party and the party membership. On December 1st, J.T. Farrell spoke at the NY headquarters on literature. Over 200 people came and some were turned away. On December 8th Greenberg spoke on the decline of art. There were nearly 200 people. At both these meetings, it was announced that Coolidge had visited the mine areas and would speak on December 15th on the strike. There were not fifty people present for Coolidge's meeting. The complete responsibility for this rests on Labor Action and its policy. If, during the weeks before we had oriented ourselves as I have indicated, the climax of months of preparation with the pamphlets, reprints from Labor Action and the New International, etc., and the party mobilized, we would have had a real mass meeting. This UMW question is the biggest single political event since the end of the war. The whole world looked on not only interested but vitally affected. It was

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the climax so far to the first strike wave and the bourgeois preparation to break the second. Yet the party did not want to hear a first hand report. If the party reacted in this way, how will contacts react? On this deadly serious issue, the party remains dead or confused. It is the inescapable result of the false line. And that is why the WP and the SWP remain unable to rise to their responsibilities and really grow. *I stated that recruitment was to be undertaken in harmony with the rhythm of the advancing class struggle. I pointed out that by preparing for the events and then going all out when they come, we can compel people to think, to go beyond the day to day struggle, to join or remember us.

I again reminded the National Committee of this in my memorandum at the Plenum. We have done nothing to help build the party by means of this crisis. That is the miserable fact. In a few months the situation may change. It may remain stagnant. No one knows or can know these things. But I submit that the party has no line to meet the present situation at a time when the whole country is shaken by the potentialities of the struggle and now to deal with these "paralyzing strikes is first on the order of the day.

PS. This article was finished when I read the following in Labor Action of December 23rd (in an editorial, in large print) "It is, for example, an incontestable certainty that the government will think twice about trying to slap an injunction on the auto or steel workers if it knows in advance that such a move will provoke a national protest embracing all forms of actions, including stop-work action. The same goes for anti-labor legislation and so on down the line."

Surely someone besides the Minority will raise a voice in protest. What is stop-work action? I ask again: "What is "stop-work action"? Does the party advocate "stop work action" for "anti-labor legislation and so on down the line." If we are to have "stop work action" down the line then where is the party to lead this? Will such action not be under the direction of the present labor leaders? And what does "down the line" mean? That, I beg to state, is an extremely loose statement. The more the leadership tries to extricate itself, the deeper it sinks. This paragraph alone justifies my whole article which I have written, I may add with considerable restraint.

J.R. Johnson
January 11, 1947

*In the convention resolution on Building the Bolshevik Party.