

PARTY PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION SECTION

Bourgeois Reformism and Social Reformism

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.

(The second article of this series by Comrade Foster was published in the Daily Worker yesterday. It dealt with the following points: social reformism the main danger; the varying tempo of social reformism; the question of decline and crisis; and American trustified capital and social reformism. Today we print

the next instalment of this article.

5. Consolidation Tendencies of Imperialism.

In his book, "Imperialism," Comrade Lenin analyzes the widespread consolidation of capitalist forces, with a consequent reshaping of all institutions and capitalist policies, and development of irreconcilable domestic and world contradiction as the essential characteristics of imperialism. In this respect he points out the concentration of industry and monopoly, "the centralization of finance capital and its merging with industrial capital, under 'the hegemony of finance capital.'" Many later Comintern documents, while pointing out the deepening internal contradictions of imperialism, have further concretized this general concentration tendency. Thus the Program and the Theses adopted by the 6th World Congress of the Comintern laid great stress upon the development of state capitalist tendencies, the Theses declaring, "a growth is observed in state capitalist tendencies, both in the form of state capitalism proper (state electrical stations, municipal industrial and transport enterprises) as well as in the form of the merging of private enterprises with the organs of the state."

This growth of state capitalist tendencies in the respective imperialist countries, which the Theses say is "the characteristic expression of the present critical period of capitalism," is declared to be "objectively a pre-requisite for military economic mobilization for future conflicts."

As part of this general consolidation of imperialism for economic and

political conflict, for more intense exploitation of the working class, the Comintern Program indicates that "imperialism splits off the better-placed section of the working class from the main and more oppressed section of the masses. This is the upper stratum of the working class, bribed and corrupted by imperialism. They comprise the leading elements of the social democratic parties." This splitting-off process of the labor aristocracy and its integration into the forces of imperialism is further concretized in the Theses of the 6th World Congress as, "The grafting of the upper stratum of the reformist trade unions and 'reformist parties' on to the employers' organizations and the bourgeois state, the appointment of workers to official positions in the state and capitalist organizations, the theory and practice of 'industrial democracy,' 'industrial peace,' etc."

This analysis of the Comintern applies completely to American imperialism, even as to British, Japanese, or any other imperialist system. In this country especially are these concentration tendencies in evidence. Rapid strides are being made in more closely joining the big capitalist industrial-financial organizations with the state, in grafting the upper stratum of the trade unions onto the employers' organizations and the government. And the whole process is an integral part of American imperialism's feverish war and rationalization program.

Here we come to the crux of our problem. The present discussion, provoked by my article in "The

Communist," turns around exactly the question of the grafting of the reactionary trade unions onto the imperialist organizations, especially its industrial aspects; how this takes place and what are its general implications for the old trade unions, for the new revolutionary industrial unions, and, of course, for our Party. In this respect we have sev-

6. The Company-Unionization of the Trade Unions.

In my article in "The Communist" and in many previous articles (which have been put forth for the past three years and have remained unchallenged in our Party and the Comintern and Profintern until the present controversy), I have analyzed the industrial aspects of the process of grafting the American reactionary trade unions into the employers' organizations as the company-unionization of the trade unions. According to this analysis, the old trade unions, under the pressure of the employers' open shop drive and the efforts of the A. F. of L. leaders to re-adapt the unions to serve even more effectively as instruments of the employers, are being rapidly degenerated in the general direction of company unionism. That there is a distinct trend towards the merger of company unionism and A. F. of L. trade unionism and the emergence of a semi-company unionism of strong fascist-like tendencies in which the A. F. of L. bureaucracy will play a decisive role. This is the path taken, especially since 1922, in the United States in the grafting of the trade unions onto the employers industrial organizations, the connecting of the labor aristocracy to the machinery of American imperialism in the industries. My article in "The Communist" points out that this tendency is being hastened by the developing war situation sharpening economic depressions, and the Leftward drift of the masses.

eral theories, principally those of Comrades Pepper, Bittelman, and myself, all of which presume to base themselves upon the general analysis given by the Comintern.

The tendency towards a merger of company unionism and reactionary trade unionism proceeds along both ideological and organizational lines. Ideologically, the A. F. of L. leadership has surrendered almost completely to the rationalization-company union engineers and economists of American imperialism. This surrender constantly becomes more open and unashamed. In the early stages of the "new orientation" of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy towards intensified class collaboration in its almost frantic efforts to re-adapt the old unions to the reformist needs of the arrogant employers, a tendency which became especially apparent after the loss of the national strike of railroad shop mechanics in 1922, the A. F. of L. dressed up the rationalization program of the employers in pseudo-working class clothes and gave its various phases new names, such as, "the new wage policy," "the higher strategy of labor," etc., but now they increasingly put forth these capitalist programs "in the raw." They make no opposition to, and in many cases openly advocate capitalist welfare systems, company sport activities, group insurance, employ stock-buying, etc. Their ideological "fight" against company unionism has been whittled down to nothing. They accept and propagate all the illusions of capitalist efficiency socialism, provided these do not bear a too "radical" aspect.

Organizationally, the surrender of the A. F. of L. bureaucrats to

company unionism also proceeds. Their only complaint is that the employers do not accept their surrender fast enough and let them build semi-company unions. The borderline between company unionism and reactionary trade unionism becomes constantly fainter. The two movements already overlap at many points. Actual amalgamations of company unions and trade unions have occurred in the cases of the Nash company union and the Mitten Plan company union. Such organizations as those established in Oshawa, Colorado, and various parts of the coal industry, following the automobile and coal strikes, while ostensibly trade unions, were so closely controlled by the companies as to verge upon company unionism. Various forces, represented by Woll's Civic Federation committee, W. Jett Lauck, etc., are advocating the organizational amalgamation of the trade unions and company unions. The eagerness with which the A. F. of L. snapped up Mitten's offer showed their willingness to go much deeper into company unionism whenever the employers say the word. Throughout the old trade unions the officials tend to look upon themselves more and more as agents of the employers to speed up and control the workers. Increasingly they rely upon the capitalists and the state to maintain them in office against efforts of the workers to dislodge them.

The trend is definitely toward the development of a type of unionism between company unionism and present-day degenerated trade unionism. This unionism, based primarily upon the corrupt labor aristocracy, is ideologically close to company unionism, and with the A. F. of L. bureaucracy playing a central role in it. Social democracy

everywhere bears the seeds of fascism. In the developing semi-company unionism these seeds are sprouting very considerably.

Objective conditions are increasingly favoring the development of this unionism. It is a period in which American imperialism, confronting increasing difficulties at home and abroad, has to modify its methods of open dictatorship and to have recourse somewhat to the means of social reformism, although this is of a fascist-like type. The growing situation makes it necessary for the imperialists to draw social reformists, concretely the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, more closely than ever into their service in order to demoralize the workers in the face of the war preparations, and this is being done. The increasing radicalization of the masses, because of industrial crises, wage cuts, the speed-up, unemployment, etc., and the inevitability of mass struggles in the near future, further adds to the necessity of the imperialists utilizing the A. F. of L. bureaucracy (also the S. P.) in a strikebreaking role. To do this involves the development of some sort of unionism, at least in strategic sections of industry and during periods of pressure from the masses. This will mean an intensification of the present tendencies toward company unionism, not the development of the traditional trade unionism. For several years past the A. F. of L. leaders, with their program of intensified class collaboration, have been traveling fast in the direction of company unionism. A sharpening war situation and growing mass struggles, with an actual or threatened growth of the new revolutionary unions, will hasten this process. These leaders will be the tools of the employers in building up a strike-breaking system that may best be characterized as company unionism, with a shadowy independence, and tinged with trade union terminology, traditions, and leadership. We have already

noted the beginnings of such unionism. The so-called "Labor Age"—Muste group of "progressives," like the "Left" social democrats in Europe, will simply act as a phrase-mongering cover-up movement for this organized system of betrayal.

The spread of this semi-company unionism will depend primarily upon the urgency of the need of the capitalists. Comrade Bittelman incorrectly says that in my article in "The Communist" I minimize the decisive role of our Party. He declares that the question of whether or not the A. F. of L. will grow "will be decided in the very heat of the struggle, in the head-on collision between Communism and reformism." This is true, but not in the sense that he puts it. Of course, in the long run, our Party, at the head of the revolutionary masses of workers, will eventually shatter all the reformist organizations and the capitalist state. But for the immediate future it is exactly the pressure of the masses, led by us, that will tend to force the capitalists to build their semi-company unionism under A. F. of L. leadership. The heavier our pressure, the more their tendency to construct such movements as buffers against us, on the same principle, although to a sharper degree, that they built the company union movement originally as a dike against trade unionism.

The growing surrender of reformist trade unionism to the ideology and organization of company unionism constitutes to a certain degree a merger between social reformism and the industrial phases of bourgeois reformism. This is not merely an American phenomenon. It is also taking place in various other countries, in varying degrees, in England under the name of "Mondism," in Germany as "industrial democracy," etc. It is one of the main paths of social democratic betrayal of the workers to capitalism. More and more the social democrats look away from Karl Marx and towards American efficiency engineers.

My articles on Capitalist Efficiency Socialism pointed this out. Their chief error, as I have already indicated, like in my article in "The Communist," was in not making it clear that in spite of this partial merger of social reformism and bourgeois reformism, social reformism, with its insidious illusions and powerful base among the organized labor aristocracy, remains the most dangerous kind of reformism, that kind upon which the capitalists always depend in their crisis, the last bulwark against the proletarian revolution.

The concluding portion of Comrade Foster's article will be printed in the Daily Worker tomorrow. It will take up his criticism of the point of view of Comrades Pepper and Bittelman, as well as of the other comrades and will sum up his position on the entire question.



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