

The T. U. U. L. Convention

By WM. Z. FOSTER

A MATTER of outstanding importance in connection with the Trade Union Unity League Convention is the fact that the Convention constituted in itself a dramatic demonstration of the growing radicalization of the American working class under the fierce pressure of capitalist rationalization. It showed the correctness of the Comintern and Profintern line on trade union work in the United States. It is fundamentally necessary that we fully realize the significance of the Comintern in this respect because, unquestionably, there was in the preparation for the Convention, a serious underestimation of its potentialities, based upon an underestimation of the radicalization of the workers. This realization is further necessary, because there is a real danger that this underestimation may carry over into the follow-up work after the Convention, thereby crippling the new trade union center.

The Convention, in many ways gave proof of the great and growing body of radicalization which lay behind it among the workers. First, there was the large and representative delegation, assembled in spite of very imperfect preparatory organizational work. It must be said that in many districts the Party and the T. U. E. L. apparatus did not respond to the Convention call with sufficient energy. On the whole, the work was greatly neglected. The program of holding shop meetings and local conferences, especially in the outlying districts, to build the delegation and to begin preliminary union building was carried through in only a very few instances. The tendency was merely to skim the surface, so to speak. Only in the last three or four weeks preceding the Convention was even this superficial work done. In some cases there was even an organized pessimism in T. U. E. L. circles regarding the Convention, a clear case of the militants dragging behind the masses.

Nevertheless, when the Convention assembled it presented a splendid body of 690 delegates, most of them from the basic, most highly rationalized industries. The rousing response of the workers overcame much of the inadequate organization work and literally crowded out the pre-Convention pessimism, some of which even got so far as the first day of the Convention. But it was hard for these pessimists to maintain their destructive point of view in the face of this big and representative delegation with 181 miners, 150 youth, 66 steel and metal workers, 52 auto workers, 72 women,

64 Negroes, etc. The splendid Negro delegation was especially significant as exemplifying the radicalization among this section of the working class. Pessimism vanished in the flame of enthusiasm generated by these militant workers.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that no injury was done by lack of preparations and by the negative attitude assumed by many comrades towards the Convention. On the contrary, had the Convention been thoroughly understood, properly evaluated, and the necessary work done, undoubtedly the Convention could have been twice as large as it was, it would have had a better mass base, and its general effects would have been much greater.

The growing radicalization of the workers was expressed not only in the size and composition of the Convention delegation, but especially in its splendid spirit. The workers simply burned with enthusiasm. They were militant and revolutionary. They wholeheartedly endorsed the entire program of the Profintern and the T. U. E. L. They left no place for trimmers and opportunists. They wanted to fight and to build a movement to fight with. The blazing rank and file spirit of resentment against capitalist rationalization was the outstanding characteristic of the T. U. U. L. Convention. It swept all before it like a storm towards the realization of the Profintern policy for the establishment of the new center and its revolutionary program. This rank and file enthusiasm compared very favorably with the mood of many leading comrades.

This spirit manifested itself among many other respects by the most enthusiastic response to slogans against imperialist war, for the defense of the Soviet Union, and to speeches regarding the building of socialism in that country. The Convention also rallied to the Gastonia defense in a manner that leaves no doubt that great masses of workers are increasingly learning the political significance of the great labor trials now proceeding. The Convention enthused and enthused again over the program of the new revolutionary industrial unions and the new union center. It burned with resentment against the A. F. of L., S. P. and Musteite misleaders of labor. It was animated from beginning to end with a strong spirit of solidarity between Negro and white workers. It endorsed with enthusiasm the whole class struggle program of the T. U. U. L.

The Lovestone group in the Convention was crushed by this militant spirit of the workers. It suffered a complete debacle. Lovestone and his lieutenants went to Cleveland and held a national caucus against the Party. They especially figured on making an effective mobilization in the T. U. U. L. Convention to put across their right wing line. They had a few delegates, who

diminished in number as the Convention proceeded. These were organized carefully with prepared speeches in the approved Lovestone manner. Gitlow was the chief of this Convention group. He came into the Convention on the second day, greeted with ominous silence and an occasional cat-call. It was the policy of the Lovestoneites to intervene in the general debate then proceeding and to attempt to wreck the work of the Convention by interjecting their own program.

But neither Gitlow nor his followers ventured to take the floor. They did not dare to face that revolutionary Convention with their opportunist proposals. Not a single Lovestone delegate spoke in any session of the Convention. It was the most striking example of political cowardice ever exhibited in a left wing convention in the United States. Gitlow sat limply in his seat, unable to confront the splendid fighting spirit of the hundreds of proletarian delegates.

Finally, on the last day of the Convention, Lovestone, through Gitlow and Vrataric, introduced a resolution on the Labor Party and another on Gastonia. If the Lovestoneites had a general program for the Convention, they did not dare to present it. The two resolutions which they did introduce were both of a distinctly right wing character, the Labor Party resolution being simply an opportunist proposal for a united front with the labor bureaucrats, and the Gastonia resolution being a proposal to drop the defense slogan and to unite with the liberals upon the frame-up slogan.

These resolutions were defeated unanimously by the Convention. The Lovestone delegates did not venture to speak for their own resolutions, nor did they even vote for them. It was a case of complete political bankruptcy. As for the Cannon-Trotskyites, they made no showing at all, not one of their delegates being in evidence.

The final debacle of the Lovestone group in the Convention in the face of the militant delegates came in the election of the National Committee. Gitlow was nominated by a Lovestoneite as a representative from the needle trades section. When his nomination was put to the Convention he received only two votes. He presented a sorry spectacle as a member of the Executive Committee of the Profintern in a Convention of the American section of the Profintern.

The Lovestone group systematically minimizes the radicalization of the workers, but at Cleveland, in the militant T. U. U. L. Convention, the radical spirit of the delegates swept this group to complete defeat.

Besides in its size, composition, and revolutionary spirit of the

delegates, the Convention further exemplified the growing radicalization of the workers by the determination with which it went at its work. This intensity indicated how seriously the delegates took the Convention and their earnestness in putting its program into effect. They saw in the movement being initiated something vital and real in their lives as workers.

The Convention was very business-like, accomplishing a huge amount of work in the three days' sessions. But the delegates' determination to really take hold of the work was even more keenly shown in the respective industrial and special conferences held in competition with the Convention. These conferences were veritable vortexes of the most lively activity and enthusiasm.

In previous T. U. E. L. national convention, such sectional conferences were largely formal in character, with leading comrades presenting the programs almost entirely; but not so this time. The rank and file delegates took hold of the conferences with unprecedented energy. Each conference was the center of intense interest of the delegates in its section. Moreover, the delegates attacked wholeheartedly the work of developing programs in the respective industries and groups.

The Negro conference was the outstanding of the many conferences. It was an inspiration to the whole Convention. The youth, women, and Labor Unity conferences were also of unprecedented size and vigor. The same may also be said of the metal, railroad, needle and various other industrial conferences. They all plunged deeply into the practical work confronting them in their respective spheres. It is not in the province of this article to deal with the work of these conferences, but merely to indicate the general characteristic of their intensity.

The extraordinary interest in the work of the individual conferences can only be explained on the basis of the extreme vitality of the Convention, or in other words, by the real radicalization which animated the delegates and the masses who stand behind them.

The great lesson of the Convention, the demonstration of the growing radicalization of the working class, must not be lost upon us. If it is, the new trade union center, as well as our Party, will suffer keenly. The pessimism existing prior to the Convention among active comrades, amounting to a certain degree of chvostism, or dragging behind the masses, and a failure to understand the real meaning of the Third Period, must be drastically liquidated as a menace to our Party work in all its phases.

It now becomes necessary to follow up the work of the T. U. U. L. Convention with energetic campaigns of agitation and or-

ganization. A great danger now is a period of relaxation or inactivity based upon a real failure to understand that the workers are becoming ready for struggle.

The program outlined by the Convention for the organization of the unorganized, the building of the new unions, the strengthening of the left wing in the old unions, must be carried through most vigorously. The first step in this work will be the holding of conferences on a wide scale to hear the reports of delegates from the Convention. There must be conferences of the shop groups, the local unions, left wings in the old unions, shop gate meetings, and general conferences in all industrial centers. The most energetic efforts must be made to draw Negro workers into such gatherings. These conferences must be utilized to build the machinery of the T. U. U. L., to carry forward on all fronts its program of organization and struggle. The T. U. U. L. must be built up as a dues paying organization, and as the real leader of the left wing union movement. The conferences must give special attention to the extending of the circulation of Labor Unity. The vitality of our movement in every district will be measured by the extent to which these preliminary conferences are held. The splendid impetus given by the Convention must be intensified by the most active organization work on all sides.

This whole program of activity can only be carried through if there is the proper realization in our ranks of the growing radicalization of the working class and the readiness of the workers to build the T. U. U. L. The Convention gave a striking demonstration of this. Remnants of the pre-Convention pessimism must be ruthlessly liquidated as a most serious right deviation. Only in this way can we proceed effectively with our work. If the follow-up work of the Convention is no better than the preparatory work in the districts, then much of the beneficial effects of the Convention will be lost.

Not only must we realize that the workers are ready to build the T. U. U. L., but also that there exists a splendid opportunity to build our Party. We must put on a big Party drive for membership, especially for the establishment of shop nuclei, and the building of shop papers in the basic industries. The situation is such that we must aim at having a strong shop nucleus and a vigorous shop paper in every important industrial plant. This work must be undertaken with greater vigor and more system than ever before in Party history. Such Party nuclei and shop papers will be the best guarantee for the success of the general organizational program of building the T. U. U. L. The strengthening of the Party by drawing in these fresh proletarian elements and their engage-

ment in such vital work as the building of the T. U. U. L., will liquidate the remnants of Lovestoneism in our Party and will deal a death-blow to the attempts of these elements to establish an anti-Comintern party. It will unite our Party as never before.

