

Trade Union Unity Convention

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

ARTICLE II.

THE main task confronting the T. U. E. L. convention in Cleveland on June 1-2, is the organization of the unorganized. All the other work of the convention: the fight against the war danger, the struggle against the labor fakery, the development of an effective strike strategy, etc., must be built around and so carried through as to further this great task of establishing trade union organization among the vast masses of the unorganized.

As I have pointed out in a previous article, the toiling masses, under the pressure of capitalist exploitation, the speed-up, wage cuts, etc., are becoming increasingly ripe for organization. The workers are beginning to wake up. This is to be seen on all sides, as well among the textile workers of Tennessee and North Carolina, as among the automobile workers of Michigan, etc. It is the role of the T. U. E. L. to give form and leadership to this growing discontent, which portends great labor struggles in the not distant future, especially when with industry depressed, the employers intensify wage slashing. The Cleveland convention will give a powerful stimulus to this general work of organization.

Itself an Organizer.

That the convention must be a large one, that it must consist of delegates from all sections and industries in the country, goes without saying. But this is not all. The convention must be not merely a large gathering of workers come together to launch an organization drive. It must itself be an integral part of the actual process of organizing the unorganized. Most of the delegates will come from the unorganized industries—although many will also represent established unions. Fundamentally important is it, that the very process of building the delegation of these unorganized workers shall lay the foundations from which later will develop the revolutionary industrial unions. This will be done by using the shop delegate system as the basis for the convention delegation from the unorganized industries.

The delegates from the unorganized industries must not be simply

Organization of Unorganized

(This is the second of a series of four articles by William Z. Foster on the Trade Union Unity Convention to be held in Cleveland June 1 and 2. In these articles Comrade Foster will deal with the factors that make the Trade Union Unity Convention necessary, the organizational and ideological preparations for the convention and its tasks. The other articles will appear in successive issues of the Daily Worker.)

picked up here and there as individuals. If so, the convention will lack a mass base, and its organization program will be crippled from the start. Such wrong tendencies must be combatted. The delegation has to be based upon shop committees. That is to say, the largest possible bodies of workers must be united in committee forms in the various unorganized plants and the T. U. E. L. delegates shall be elected by and report back to these workers. Whether these shop committees can be organized openly or whether they must be built secretly (as in most cases) will depend upon local conditions, but build them we must in any event. In this building of shop committees the convention, and the unions which will grow out of it must be linked up directly with the fight for the economic demands and grievances of the workers directly involved. Otherwise the convention recedes into fields of sterile abstraction.

Start New Unions.

These shop committees will form the nuclei of future local union organizations. At the convention those in the given industries will be linked together in special industrial conferences. Active campaigns will be initiated to begin to develop them into mass organizations and movements as soon as possible after the conclusion of the convention. Not individual workers representing only themselves are what will build the T. U. E. L. convention and further its work, but delegates coming from the shop committees in their respective industries. The success of the T. U. E. L. convention will directly depend upon how far we have gone in building shop committees among the unorganized.

From Basic Industries.

Another vital principle necessary to make a success of the T. U. E. L. convention is to concentrate upon securing delegations primarily from the key and basic industries. While it is necessary for us to secure all possible delegates from miscellaneous trades and callings, the convention must be built essentially upon workers coming from steel, automobile, textile, rubber, electrical manufacturing, meat packing, chemicals, etc. Special attention must also be given to securing delegates from the war industries. At the conference a program will be laid out to combat the growing war danger, but this can achieve maximum success only if substantial numbers of workers are brought to the convention from the war industries.

It is necessary also to make the delegation thoroughly representative of the various sections of workers in the respective industries. Negroes, women, youth, and principal language groups. A vital essential also will be to secure a substantial delegation from the South, now being rapidly industrialized. Every effort must be put forth for representation from this new field of working class struggle.

Mostly Unorganized.

The T. U. E. L. Convention will be unique among other reasons, because it will be the first labor union convention ever held in America made up primarily of unorganized workers. That it will consist of many hundreds of delegates is certain but the big problem now is to have these delegates really represent masses of workers united around shop committees, that is the beginnings of real labor unionism in the respective industries. This can and

will be accomplished if the left wing will rally all its forces for the work.

Our slogan must be a shop committee and a T. U. E. L. convention delegation from every large plant. Then we must proceed to practically and energetically put this slogan into effect. In the respective industrial districts the most important plants must be singled out and intense work carried on by the local T. U. E. L. groups and organizers to build secret or open shop committees in them and to send delegates to the T. U. E. L. Convention. Thus, for example, in a district like Chicago, delegates should be gotten from the various big packing plants, the large steel mills, International Harvester Works, Crane Co. plant, G. & N. W. Railroad shop, Western Electric Co., etc. Especially should the small towns, with the large industries, be not neglected. An organizer worth his salt can get real representation from those plants, with their masses of exploited and discontented workers. The fitness of our organizers should be largely judged by their ability to build real delegations from the industries in their respective districts to the T. U. E. L. Convention. The immediate building of T. U. E. L. general groups in all localities is vital to this whole work of organization.

New Unions' Big Role.

The new unions in the mine, textile and clothing industries will also play a big role in building the convention delegation, not only from their established locals, but especially from the unorganized sections of their industries. In turn the convention will provide them an excellent means to unite these unorganized workers and to extend their organization. All the unions will be greatly strengthened by the new contacts established at the convention.

The T. U. E. L. Convention, laying the basis for a vigorous section of the R. I. L. U. in this country and redoubling the struggle for union organization and against American imperialism, will be of the most vital importance. Let us make it the best convention in the history of the country. Let us deal through it a deadly blow at the A. F. of L. misleaders, and give fresh inspiration to the masses of bitterly exploited workers.