

WHAT MEANS A STRIKE IN STEEL

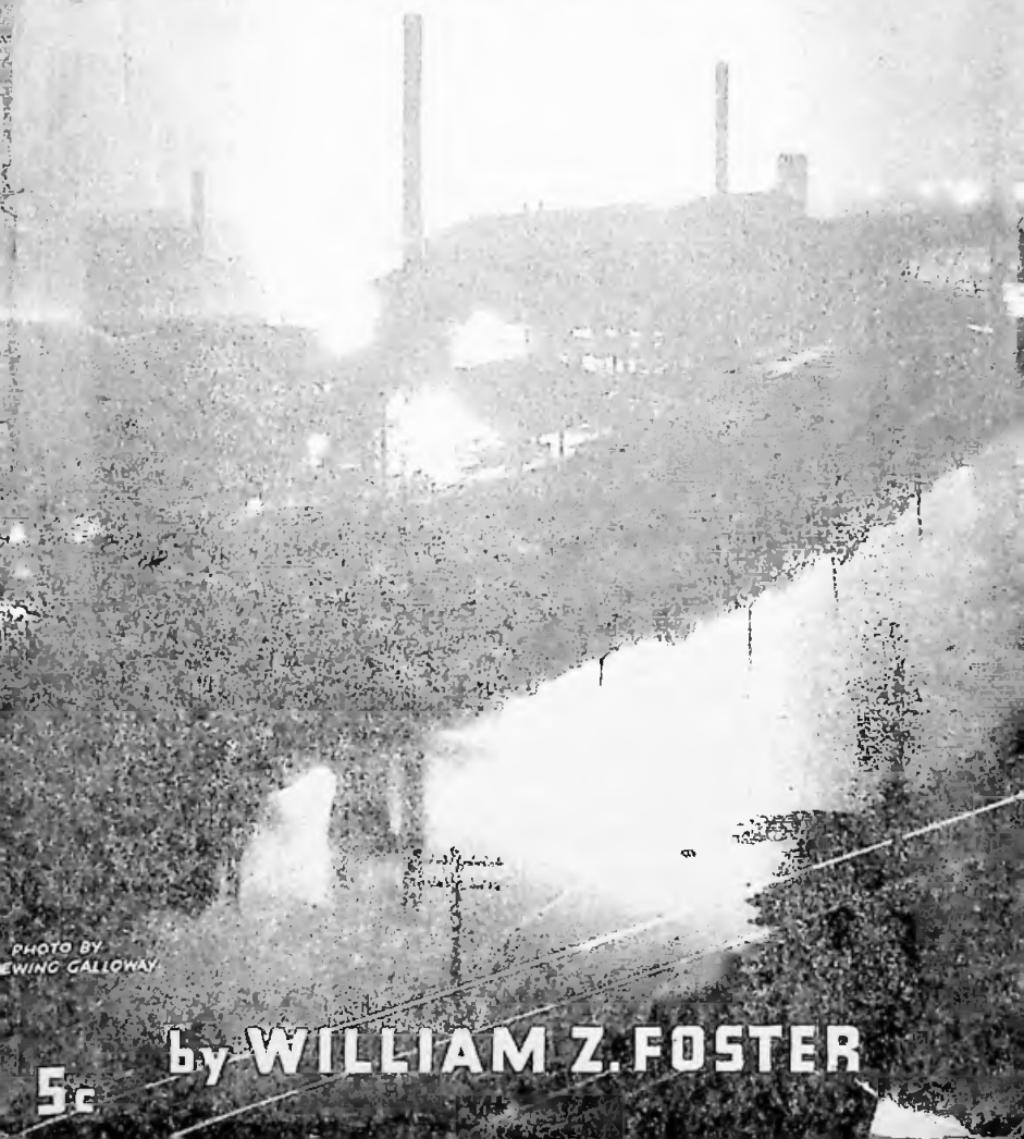


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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROSPECT FOR A NATIONAL STEEL STRIKE

IN 1919, after the steel trust, by the use of troops, gunmen, scabs, lying newspapers and mass starvation, had violently broken the strike of 365,000 steel workers and lashed these oppressed toilers back into the mills, I ventured to forecast in my book, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, that "it will not be long until they have another big movement under way. . . . The great steel strike of 1919 will seem only a preliminary skirmish when compared with the tremendous battles that are bound to come."

This forecast is now in all probability about to be realized. Events are fast shaping up for the greatest labor struggle in American history, one that will involve unparalleled masses of striking workers, and probably several industries, in the very heart of the industrial system, with the steel industry as the storm center of the whole movement. Already the beginnings of this huge struggle are to be seen, as I write this, in the upheavals among the automobile workers.

The Long Struggle of the Steel Workers

Ever since the decisive defeat of trade unionism in the steel industry during the great Homestead strike 44 years ago, the steel trust has ruthlessly lorded it

over the vast army of steel slaves. The steel barons have enforced upon the workers the most ruthless exploitation, with low wages, the long day and work week, infamous spy systems, boss tyranny in the mills, wholesale slaughter by unprotected machinery, etc., etc. They have made of the steel towns dirty, miserable, poverty-stricken, disease-laden shack communities ruled by gunmen and servile company political tools and devoid of all culture and beauty. And the national and state governments have actively assisted in maintaining this outrageous situation.

The steel workers have waged many fierce and determined struggles to end their intolerable position: the heroic Homestead strike of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (A.A.) in 1892, the hard-fought battles of the A.A. in 1901 and 1909, the brave struggles of the I.W.W. in McKees Rocks in 1909, the huge national strike of the 24 allied A. F. of L. unions in 1919, the bitter strike of the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union (T.U.U.L.) in Ambridge in 1933, the general organization campaign of the A.A in 1934 and many other big movements throughout the years. During these heroic struggles for liberty, company thugs have jailed and murdered many steel workers and union organizers, and their martyrdom is symbolized by the assassination of the able and courageous organizer, Fanny Sellins, who was shot to death by steel trust gunmen in 1919.

All these courageous battles of the steel workers were lost, that is, lost in the sense that they failed to achieve their major goal of unionizing the industry. Some of

them, it is true, brought a measure of relief to the steel workers, such as the great 1919 strike which abolished the 12-hour day and seven-day week and established generally improved conditions. All of them drove the iron of class bitterness deep into the steel workers' hearts, but none of them resulted in establishing a solid organization in the steel industry.

The ever-present enemy combination of the powerful steel trust and the hostile capitalist government, aided by the maneuvers of dishonest A. F. of L. labor leaders, was always too much for the steel workers. But now the steel workers, with better leadership and organization, are mobilizing their forces for a new struggle, for a fresh attempt to secure relief from the outrageous tyranny and exploitation in their industry. The Committee for Industrial Organization, comprising 15 unions with a total of some 1,500,000 members and headed by John L. Lewis, the aggressive president of the United Mine Workers of America, is going ahead with determination to organize the half million workers in the great steel industry. The field leader of the work is Phillip Murray, chief of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (S.W.O.C.) and vice-president of the U.M.W.A.

A Favorable Outlook

Many factors combine to make the present situation very favorable for the success of the C.I.O. campaign. First, the steel workers, like the great body of American workers generally, are in a highly militant mood and are determined to force concessions from their employers. They are especially strengthened in their new

morale by the defeat of Landon in the 1936 elections, and they feel a new sense of confidence and power.

Second, conditions in the industry are on the upgrade from an economic standpoint and are favorable for a drive to organization. Besides, the steel bosses are somewhat on the defensive after their big election defeat.

Third, the Roosevelt government is deeply obligated to labor and even if it will take no active steps to organize the steel workers, it will probably not definitely oppose it, as so many administrations have strenuously done in the past.

Fourth, another favorable factor is that for the first time a substantial section of organized labor, the C.I.O., realizes the vital importance of organizing steel and is pushing forward energetically toward its accomplishment. The drive also has the support of the Communist Party, and other militant and progressive forces.

Fifth, the organization drive is proceeding on the advantageous basis of uniting all the steel workers into one industrial union, the A.A., instead of into a couple of dozen disunited, squabbling craft unions as in previous campaigns.

A Huge Strike in the Making

The drive of the steel workers for trade union organization will almost certainly result in a big strike, probably the greatest this country has ever known. It goes without saying that the steel workers will do everything possible to secure their demands without such a struggle; for they well know the toll of suffering that that they have to pay in all great strikes. But they

probably will have no choice in the matter, as the arrogant steel kings will most surely force a strike. They will never concede the workers' elementary demands for the right to organize, better wages, shorter hours, improved working and living conditions, etc., without making every form of resistance they can under the given circumstances. They made this quite clear at the very outset of the steel organizing campaign in the middle of 1936, when the American Iron and Steel Institute, the central organization of the steel magnates, declared in a statement published simultaneously in 375 national full-page newspaper advertisements at a cost of \$500,000 that the steel corporations were determined to resist at all costs the organization of the steel industry. The militancy of the automobile kings and coal barons, closely allied with the steel magnates, also illustrates the employers' determination to fight to save the open shop.

Nor can the Roosevelt government be counted upon to prevent the strike by forcing the steel trust to establish human standards in their industry. What is developing is a head-on collision between the steel trust and their long-oppressed workers. Unless all signs fail, the great steel strike of 1919 was only a dress-rehearsal for the big battle that is looming up in 1937.

The Vital Issues at Stake

The successful outcome of the present organization campaign in the steel industry will have wide economic, political and social repercussions. It will far outrun in significance the building up of the Amalgamated As-

sociation into a powerful union of 500,000 workers, important though this objective may be. It will constitute a great victory of the whole working class over the open shop policy of American finance capital and it will deal a shattering blow to company unionism in all industries. It will give an enormous stimulus to trade union organization, both in the mass production industries and throughout industry generally. In 1919 already we understood that a victory of the great steel strike would open the doors for organization in many industries, but now the unionizing possibilities of such a victory are far greater. It would prepare the way for the organization of many millions of workers and would institute a radical improvement in wages and working conditions throughout American industry.

Victory in steel would also have profound effects upon the trade union movement as a whole. It would definitely establish the principle of industrial unionism, not only in the mass production industries, but aid also the reorganization of all trade unions upon an industrial basis. It would lay the basis for a new and progressive leadership in the A. F. of L. and would undermine the paralyzing policies and corrupt regime of the present clique of reactionaries who have long been a stumbling block to the American working class. A successful outcome of the steel drive would so strengthen the hands of the progressive elements in the trade unions that they would be able to carry through the reunification of the A. F. of L. in spite of the policy of the Greens, Wolls, Hutchesons, Freys, Whartons and other labor reactionaries to split the movement.

The success of the steel campaign would also greatly push labor forward politically. Not only would the broad mass movement that must develop around the organization of steel result in making the 30-hour week, adequate unemployment relief, genuine social security, abolition of industrial spy systems, elimination of strikebreaking detective agencies, and many other demands of the workers, active political issues that would have to be granted by the employers and the government, but it would also further the political organization of the workers. The workers' class consciousness would be aroused, and volume and speed would be given to the movement for a Farmer-Labor Party and the eventual development of the People's Front in the United States. Nor could such popular advances in the United States fail to have favorable effects upon the world struggle of the toiling masses in defense of democracy and against hunger, fascism and war.

On the other hand, a defeat for the workers in the present effort to organize the steel industry would be a most serious setback to labor generally. The after-effects of the 1919 steel strike defeat were disastrous for organized labor as a whole, and a defeat of the steel workers now would be a worse blow and would give a great stimulus to reaction and fascism in the United States. Such a defeat must be avoided at all costs. Victory for the steel workers must and can be achieved if the struggle is carried through aggressively and with the systematic mobilization of all of labor's available forces.

The bosses know full well the possibilities and im-

plications of a trade union victory in steel. That is why they are determined to fight militantly and to bring into play all their battery of forces against it. The Greens and other reactionaries of the A. F. of L. also know what it means to their antiquated system of craft unionism and their fat bureaucratic jobs, and that is why they, too, are fighting against the success of the steel campaign, even going to the extent of splitting the labor movement by ousting the C.I.O. unions, in order to prevent it.

When the big steel strike comes, its winning must be made the first order of business for every progressive force in the United States. A great steel strike would be a turning point not only in the trade union movement, but in American life generally. The fight of the steel workers for organization is the cutting edge of the struggle of the toiling masses against the whole lineup of reaction and incipient fascism in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO

STEEL STRIKE STRATEGY

WHEN organized labor goes into such an important strike struggle as that evidently now looming in connection with the organization of the steel industry it must proceed with a definite strike strategy, based upon a realistic measuring of the balance of the opposing class forces and modified from time to time as changing circumstances dictate. We may be sure that the employers, in their fight to preserve the open shop, which is worth billions to them in extra profits, are going ahead with a highly developed strategy.

In the following pages, therefore, I shall undertake to outline some of the major principles of a sound strategy and tactics for the steel workers' struggle; to develop a line of policy that is realistic and justified by the present economic and political situation and by the general relation of forces between the capitalists and the workers. The leaders of the C.I.O. and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee are, of course, experienced strike leaders, and it is not for me to instruct them in strike strategy. There remains, however, the task of putting into popular form the principles of strike strategy and strike organization in this very vital situation.

In the development of any severe strike struggle between the workers and their employers the following general propositions, among others, should be constantly borne in mind.

First, the cultivation of a firm ideological solidarity

in the ranks of the strikers. The bosses, proceeding from the traditional exploiters' principle of divide and conquer, constantly attempt to split the workers along lines of skilled and unskilled, Americans and foreign-born, Negroes and whites, men and women, employed and unemployed, adults and youth, Catholics and Protestants, radicals and conservatives. This danger is especially very acute in struggles in the boss-ridden steel industry.

In 1919, the employers and their tools tried with all these means to pit one section of the workers against the other and they may be depended upon to do so again in 1937. As against these disruptive moves the workers' leaders must counter by a loyal defense in the interests of all these various groups, thus making them all feel that they have everything to gain from the success of the general movement.

They must focus the attention of the masses primarily upon the immediate economic and political demands of the steel workers and reject all reactionary efforts to divert the workers' attention into abstract discussions of race, religion, politics, etc. Especially there must be no boss-inspired Red-baiting allowed to take root in the steel workers' movement and to disrupt its forces. The steel campaign can be a success only if the maximum possible ideological solidarity of the workers is achieved and maintained.

Second, another important consideration in the question of developing a successful strike strategy is the careful cultivation of a high morale among the strikers. This is very necessary in fighting such a vicious combination as the steel trust, and morale building must be

gone about systematically. The achievement of the ideological solidarity previously discussed is an important element in developing a good morale among the workers, but it must be supplemented by various other factors, including persistent education of the masses regarding the strike situation and the political meaning of the struggle, by cultivating mass participation in strike activities and democratic control of the strike, by exercising a determined and reliable leadership, by a firm but not mechanical discipline, an effective dramatization of the struggle, good strike organization, etc.

Third, a further elementary question of good strike strategy is to proceed upon the general principle of the offensive. Workers, like soldiers, fight best on the attack. A defensive strike is a losing strike. The steel workers should never allow themselves to be put on the defensive. Every halt must be utilized to organize a new attack and every attack by the employers or the government must be offset by some form of renewed counter offensive. Only when workers are completely defeated is such a policy not possible. The steel workers must know how to guard their strike reserves and to draw upon them when a new forward movement is necessary. The present economic and political situation greatly favors a policy of the offensive.

These elements of strike strategy—a firm ideological solidarity of the workers, a high morale in the strike, a strike that proceeds upon the principle of the offensive—must be constantly borne in mind in developing every stage of the coming struggle. But there are many other principles of strike strategy, no less important, which I shall now proceed to discuss in some detail.

The United Front

A unified command is a fundamental principle of strategy in all strikes, as well as military operations. What is involved in it is the unified action of the fighting forces. Failure to achieve such a unified strike leadership, principally through craft divisions, has cost the workers many a bitter defeat. Especially is a unified command and real solidarity of the workers necessary to beat the open shop kings in the steel, auto, rubber, oil, etc., industries.

The industrial form of the C.I.O. unions conducting the struggle in these industries lays a solid foundation for a unified command and the vital strike unity. Nevertheless a danger threatens from the craft union leaders of the American Federation of Labor. These reactionaries, although they themselves for years have done nothing to organize the mass production industries, are extremely antagonistic towards the Committee for Industrial Organization doing the job. They assume a log-in-the-manger attitude. It is more than likely, herefore, that they will inject themselves into the situation and try to inveigle a fringe of the skilled workers into their many disconnected craft unions. At the moment I write these lines they are following such a strike-breaking policy in the General Motors auto strike.

Such an action would be a crime against the steel, auto and other workers, as it would seriously split their ranks and weaken their fighting force. But no one familiar with the shady history of the reactionary A. F. of L. leaders need be surprised to see them adopt such a disruptive course. They have done it time and again in strikes of independent unions. The danger is all the

greater inasmuch as the trust magnates, happy to see the workers dissipate their strength fighting each other, always greet and encourage the craft union leaders in their splitting tactics. Nor would such a development be unwelcome to the Roosevelt administration as offering a prolific source of slippery compromises.

The introduction of craft unionism into the mass production industries by the A. F. of L. leaders should be resisted militantly by every progressive force in the whole labor movement as a strikebreaking policy. This resistance should be supported by an aggressive campaign to educate the unorganized masses as to the historical failure of craft unionism in the mass production industries, and by a call to these workers not to join the craft unions but to affiliate themselves with the C.I.O. industrial unions.

If, nevertheless, the craft unions should succeed in getting into steel by the time the strike takes place, they must be dealt with on a united front basis, and unity of action sought in this manner. They should be drawn into the strike on a full cooperative basis with the industrial unions. This means that they ought to be allowed and induced to send regular delegates to the strike committees, and likewise to their sub-committees for relief, defense, publicity, etc., and that they should also participate in the mass picketing and other mass strike activities. The craft leaders would object to this, so it would have to be done over their heads by direct appeal to the membership. Only in the unlikely event, however, that the craft unions should become real factors in the steel industry would it be practical to make

the resultant trade union agreement of a joint character signed by other unions as well as the A. A.

In the developing great strike movement at all cost there must be prevented the shameful but all too common spectacle of union strike-breaking, that is, of one or more unions striking while the others work. The solidarity of labor demands that the craft unions stay out of the mass production industries and leave the field to the industrial unions. For them to enter these industries at this time could serve the interests of no one but the great trust magnates and reaction generally.

A Determined Objective

A good military strategist never forgets his main objective, although bad leaders often do so. He refuses to allow himself to be diverted from his goal by the feints and tricks of his opponents. And so it is with the labor strategist; he, too, must always keep his major objective in mind. He must constantly be on the alert to keep the employers from sidetracking his whole movement into the fatal swamp of delay, disintegration and betrayal. Especially is such vigilance necessary when the enemy is the powerful and resourceful steel trust.

Up till the present time the central strategy of the steel corporation has aimed at destroying the steel campaign by giving niggardly wage increases to the workers and by cultivating the company unions, although their great plant supplies of tear gas, machine guns and other deadly weapons show that they are preparing for drastic violence. The employers have been unable as yet under the present circumstances to employ the widespread dis-

charge of workers, suppression of free speech, terrorism of workers and organizers, etc., with which they opposed the organizing campaign in 1919.

As soon as the movement of the steel workers approaches the point of mass action we may expect that the steel barons will go into the next stage of their anti-union strategy, not only by using more terroristic methods, but also by having recourse to the policy of seeking to divert the whole thrust of the union away from the companies and into a hopeless morass of governmental committees, court action, time-killing mediation, etc. The first real test of the steel workers' strength and strike strategy will come when they have organized the bulk of the workers and they serve their demands upon the Iron and Steel Institute for a conference to work out a national trade union agreement for the steel industry. It is at this point that the steel companies will attempt to paralyze or kill off the workers' movement by bogging it down in a swamp of disintegrating maneuvers.

This is when the workers must be most acutely on guard and when they have to persist most determinedly towards their central objective of forcing concessions directly from the employers. The steel workers must not trust their cause into the hands of the Roosevelt government. The government is allied with many great capitalist interests, and it cannot be depended upon to force the steel trust to make a settlement favorable to the workers. Especially must the steel workers beware that Roosevelt's "era of good feeling" policy does not result in some sort of a compromise disastrous to their movement. If Hearst and other labor haters are en-

thusiastic over the so-called "era of good feeling" it is because they see in it a possible means to check the workers' advance to trade union organization and better living conditions.

Still fresh in the minds of the workers are the maneuvers by which the Roosevelt government, the courts and the A. F. of L. leaders killed off the Weirton steel strike and also the devious means by which they ruined the powerful movement of the steel workers in 1934, the one being sidetracked into endless court actions and the other getting lost in the trickery of a board set up by Roosevelt. These defeats of the steel workers through the Roosevelt government are in line with those of the workers in the automobile and other industries during the days of the N.R.A. And Roosevelt's recent wholesale cutting of unemployment relief and his general attitude of conciliation toward the employers has not increased the workers' confidence in him.

Such experience must serve as lessons to the steel workers in their present developing struggle. Towards the Roosevelt government their attitude must not be one of naive reliance, but of mass pressure to preserve civil liberties in the steel areas and to force the steel trust to yield to the demands of its workers. The steel workers must not let their movement degenerate into mere court actions to defend their right to organize, or long-winded government-controlled elections supposedly to learn whether or not the A.A. has the right to represent the steel workers. These questions must be settled by pressure against the employers and, if necessary, by mass strike action.

The central aim of the movement should be a direct

settlement between the unions and the employers, and every step taken must be directed to accomplish this end. The steel workers should not enter into arbitration proceedings or other settlement maneuvers engineered by the government unless, first, their major demands have been conceded, and the steel trust is most unlikely to make such preliminary concessions. These warnings are especially necessary inasmuch as the workers still have many illusions regarding the liberal policies of the Roosevelt government and such illusions can easily lead to defeat.

A Maximum Mobilization of Forces

Should the employers fail in their inevitable attempt to liquidate the steel workers' movement through government or court action, or through some such phony arbitration as employers have so often defeated workers in the past, then in all likelihood they will set out to beat the C.I.O. and the Amalgamated Association in an open strike struggle. Just what kind of a fight they are getting ready to make may be gathered from the fact that they are now storing up their plants with machine guns, rifles, tear gas, etc., and are even drilling their thugs in preparation for a fierce strike. The steel workers, therefore, must base their plans upon the practically certain prospect of a great strike against the steel corporations.

The perspective of a huge national strike confronts the workers' leaders with the necessity of bearing closely in mind another basic principle of strategy, that of mobilizing a full sufficiency of forces to achieve their objective. A good strategist never sends a boy to do a

man's job. This strategic principle may be illustrated by an old-time circus story: A boss canvasman was explaining to a visitor how vitally important it was that the cook-wagon should arrive early on the circus lot in order that the men could breakfast, or else they would not put up the big top.

Said he: "No cook-wagon; no breakfast, and no breakfast, no work," and he explained therefore, that they always used the precaution of having eight of the strongest horses to pull the cook-wagon over the muddy roads.

"But," inquired the visitor, "suppose the roads are so poor that your eight horses can't pull the cook-wagon, what then?"

"Oh, then," said the circus boss, "we put on more horses, and if they can't do the job we get out old Babe the elephant, to push it from behind."

"Still," persisted the visitor, "suppose the roads are so terribly bad that even all these horses and old Babe together can't haul the cook-wagon through the mire, how about that?"

"Oh hell," declared the boss with finality, "we just put on more horses and more horses. The damned cook-wagon simply has to go through."

It is in this spirit of unconquerableness that the workers' leaders must face the eventuality of a national steel strike. They must be prepared to throw more and more forces into the struggle until finally they budge the "immovable" steel trust. The steel campaign must come through and that is all there is to it. Nothing will be handed to the workers gratuitously, either by the bosses directly or by the government. All they will get is what

they are willing and able to fight for. The key to the winning of the movement of the steel workers is the greatest mobilization of labor's forces ever made in the United States.

The Proper Time and Place

Another major strategic consideration that must always be borne in mind in strikes is that of dealing the blow at the best time and place. The enemy must be hit both at the proper moment and its most vulnerable spot. The steel workers, if they keep this point clearly in mind, are in a splendid position to win.

The C.I.O. plans to have the majority of the steel workers organized by the middle of February, 1937, after which the demands of the workers will be submitted to the American Iron and Steel Institute and a conference insisted upon. This is a practical schedule and it climaxes the steel movement at a most favorable moment. Undoubtedly by the date set the great majority of the workers can readily be organized. Then, allowing a few weeks for preliminary negotiations, the steel situation should come to a head somewhere about the end of March.

This is just the time (March 31) when the national agreement of the 500,000 bituminous miners expires. From a strategic standpoint obviously the correct thing to do is to link up the struggle of the steel workers with that of the bituminous coal miners, and possibly also of the anthracite miners, thus developing a broad movement of about a million coal miners and steel workers. This appears to be the aim of the C.I.O. and, if so, it is sound strategy. The interests of

these two basic sections of the workers are bound up together. They have largely the same forces of massed financial capital to fight, and there is every reason why their fight should be combined into one general movement against the closely allied steel and coal corporations.

A joint strike of the one million steel workers and coal miners would exert a tremendous power. It would bring to a standstill the two most basic industries and tie up other industries far and wide. It would constitute by far the greatest strike in American history. In view of the favorable situation in industry, with production rapidly rising, the combined coal miners and steel workers would probably be able to secure victory, forcing the open shop kings, for the first time, to treat their workers like human beings. But labor should "make assurance doubly sure" by hooking still more horses to the cook-wagon if need be. There must be contemplated the extension of the strike struggle among the vast armies of workers in the automobile, rubber and heavy metal and electrical fabricating industries, and also further, if necessary.

The C.I.O. is now conducting organization campaigns in these mass production industries. In the present situation, so very favorable for organization work, its campaigns can easily and should be speeded up so that the unions involved (which, as they are led by the C.I.O., would not have to depend upon the reactionary leaders of the A. F. of L.) can also present their demands to their employers by the end of March, if not sooner. The entrance of the workers in the auto, rubber, aluminum and other highly vulnerable and closely

interlinked mass production industries simultaneously or at approximately the same time into the struggle would enormously strengthen the whole movement. Such a movement in the key industries would constitute a most effective coordination of the strategic principles of opportune time, key place, sufficient power, etc. While each of these great groups of workers has its own demands, the entire movement should be coordinated around the central strategic task of winning the demands of the steel workers. This main objective especially must not be forgotten in whatever settlements are arrived at in the various industries.

It may turn out in reality that the steel workers, coal miners, automobile workers, etc., will not actually coordinate their national movements—the auto workers especially are running ahead and developing a great national struggle of their own. Possibly, in view of labor's present extremely favorable position, these great groups, acting separately, may achieve their major demands. It is also possible, although most unlikely, that they can secure their demands without great strikes. Nevertheless, the foregoing proposed line of strategy, the linking together of these big movements, with steel as the center, is basically correct. It would be a tremendous manifestation of labor's power. It is the best course to be followed under the present circumstances, the policy that would insure the workers' victory most quickly and completely in these industries and open the doors the widest for a general advance by labor on all fronts.

Every conservative and reactionary influence will be exerted to prevent the steel workers, miners and other

key workers from acting jointly and will seek to defeat or half defeat them one section at a time. It is, therefore, the great task of the progressive forces to do all possible to link the steel, coal, auto and other workers into one great united front fighting movement against massed finance capital.

To what extent it will turn out to be possible to call into action labor's heavy first line reserves, both to win their own demands and to achieve victory in the steel struggle, remains to be seen. But one thing is clear; whether the steel workers strike alone, jointly with the miners, or in combination with other industries, at least they must have substantial support from the railroad workers. The latter must refuse to haul raw materials into, or finished products out of the steel mills. If the conservative leaders of the railroad brotherhoods do not agree to prohibit the hauling of cars in and out of struck mills the rank-and-file railroad workers must be organized not to go through the picket lines into the mills and all this in spite of the wage concessions that the companies are evidently preparing to give them to lull their fighting spirit. Failure of support from the railroad workers in this elementary respect was a basic cause for the loss of the 1919 strike and it must not be repeated.

Organized labor must be prepared, if necessary, to support the approaching steel strike by strike action far and wide in many other industries. At all costs the steel workers' struggle for organization must be won. The fate of the trade union movement is bound up with the steel workers, whose movement must needs be carried through to victory.

Political Action in the Strike

A national strike of steel workers, and especially a great combined strike of workers in steel, coal and other industries, would be highly political in character. It would become immediately the central political issue of the country. No one would have a keener appreciation of this fact than the employing interests of the country. In such a situation, we might be sure that they would shout revolution in all keys, and try to utilize the government to stampede the workers back to work in a welter of violence and confusion.

The workers must also be acutely aware of the political character of the developing mass struggle and, as good strategists, be prepared to use every political weapon at their disposal. In the great general strike in England in 1926, one of the worst errors made by the conservative union leadership was to ignore the obviously basically political character of the movement and to try to keep the struggle restricted to the economic sphere. This was disastrous, as it prevented the workers from utilizing their many political means of struggle. Such a mistake must not be made in the great struggle that in all probability will develop before the organization of the steel workers is conceded by the steel trust.

Let me repeat: political action does not consist in relying upon the Roosevelt government to win the workers' fight against the steel trust. On the contrary, the workers must mobilize all their political organizations and sympathizers to reinforce the great economic strike struggle of their unions by bringing mass pres-

sure upon the government, local, state and national, to prevent the use of troops, injunctions, etc., against the strikers and to force a strike settlement favorable to the workers. Immediately with the development of such a great strike movement as now appears certain, Labor's Non-Partisan League, the various Farmer-Labor Party groups, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the progressive blocs in the national government and state legislative bodies, and other political forces sympathetic to labor, should all connect up their forces to mobilize public sentiment and bring determined political pressure against the steel corporations through the government.

The occasion of the strike should also be utilized politically by labor's coming forward militantly with its whole legislative program for the preservation and development of civil rights, for the 30-hour week, improved social security and unemployment relief, the legal right to organize, abolition of company unions, prohibition of scab-herding and spy systems, etc. A victory in steel should be accompanied by a general advance of labor legislation in every field.

A great strike in steel, coal and other industries would also put immediately upon the agenda of the day the question of the political mass strike, and the workers must, from the outset, prepare to use this powerful political force. It is certain that in many localities, especially where the authorities tried to suppress the right to picket and when they used violence against the strikers, local general strike movements would or could result. Also, on a national scale, should the steel trust, supported by organized capital, make a determined ef-

fort to defeat the strike by violent measures, the question of a national general strike would almost certainly become a living issue among the ranks of labor, regardless of the efforts of the reactionary trade union officials, the employers and the government to prevent it. The political mass strike could have as its objectives the withdrawal of troops and the re-establishment of civil rights in the strike areas, the removal of anti-labor government officials, the advancement of important labor legislation thrust up by the strike situation, against the shipment of strike breakers, against evictions of the strikers, for placing of strikers on government unemployed relief, the release of arrested strikers, and for the favorable settlement of the strike.

During the past several years the American working class has gained much experience with the weapon of the mass political strike to add to its previous experience with the historic Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes. It learned very much about this form of political struggle in the great San Francisco strike of 1934, as well as in such local general strike situations as those of Pekin, Terre Haute, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, etc. The many valuable lessons from these struggles must be used if such strikes occur during the approaching labor upheaval. Should the organized employers seriously threaten to beat the strike of the steel workers and the other mass production workers, the masses of American workers generally must defend the right of the steel slaves to organize by using, as the situation may demand, the local or national political mass strike.

CHAPTER THREE

STEEL STRIKE ORGANIZATION

IN THE previous chapters I have discussed several major principles of strike strategy and tactics necessary to apply in the event of a great strike in steel and allied industries. It now remains to consider a number of others required to insure the success of such a struggle. These include good strike preparations, thorough-going strike organization, democratic strike leadership, mass participation in strike activities, care of the material welfare of the strikers, mobilization of the strike reserves, etc.

In view of the existing very favorable economic and political circumstances a national strike of steel workers, and especially a great strike of steel workers and coal miners combined (and also possibly other industries), would create a situation extremely difficult for the employers to handle, and would probably be of short duration. Nevertheless it would be dangerous simply to place reliance in the prospect of a short, quickly victorious strike. If the employers determine to fight against the unionization of the unorganized workers militantly and with all their power, the consequence might well be a long and bitter struggle, even where such huge masses of workers are involved.

We must remember that the 1919 steel strike of 365,000 workers lasted three and a half months; also that the national railroad shopmen's strike in 1922 of 400,000 workers continued for five months, and that

the great coal strike in 1927, involving some 500,000 workers, went on more than a year. In fact, as I write this, we are now seeing the powerful strike of 70,000 maritime workers lasting over two months although it has shipping completely paralyzed on the entire Pacific Coast and badly lamed on the Atlantic and Gulf Coast. And the glass workers, also, have been on a national strike 14 weeks already.

In any event, whether the employers intend to resist to the last ditch or not, the best way to bring about a speedy and favorable settlement of the probable 1937 steel strike, which the bosses are forcing on the workers, is to make that strike the biggest, best organized and most effective in American labor history. The principles of strike organization outlined in this chapter are calculated to help achieve this end. They are based on sound experience and can be applied not only to steel, but also to automobile and such other industries as may be involved in mass strike movements in this period.

Strike Preparation

Fundamental to the carrying out of a good strike strategy is a thorough preliminary organization for the struggle. This is equivalent to the recruiting and training of an army before the battle. Such preparation is especially necessary in an industry like steel, where the workers have had very little experience in organization and disciplined action, and where the power and ruthlessness of the enemy they have to fight are enormous. Good preparation gives the workers incomparably greater striking power. It is on the same principle that drilled troops are far better fighters than raw recruits.

In strike preparation the first thing to be considered is the building of the union itself. This requires that the present steel campaign be speeded up so that practically the entire body of steel workers are members of the union before the actual strike begins. Nor should the office workers in the steel plants be left out of the steel union in its drive to organization. Under the stimulation of the great strikes in the auto, glass and other industries and with the workers present readiness to organize this speeding up can be easily accomplished by the application of broader methods of organizing work—that is, the holding of great series of mass meetings, widespread radio broadcasts, vast distribution of literature, etc. It should not be difficult, with the use of such intense organizing methods, to soon have the workers pouring into the union in a great flood. The steel campaign should aim at solidly organizing every worker in the steel towns, including restaurant workers, building trades, retail clerks, etc., into their respective unions.

The extension of the union to include all possible masses of the steel workers is the main insurance against the development of the dangerous back-to-work movements that are always organized by the employers in every great strike and which are now so menacing in the automobile strike. It is, of course, vitally necessary to organize the most important key plants, but the work must not be confined to them. It must take in the whole steel industry.

Can the sit-down, stay-in and walk-out types of local strikes which are now so rapidly organizing the workers in the auto industry also be used in the preliminary stages of unionizing steel? This remains to be

learned. As the steel movement grows, as the workers feel the union becoming strong, as their morale and feeling of power rise, and as they see workers in other industries conducting local strikes successfully, the steel workers, smarting under long years of injustice, may incline to try such strikes themselves, at least in the smaller independent plants. Whether or not they can do so successfully will depend upon whether the employers take advantage of such local strikes to force unprepared and disastrous partial struggles. In any event, the C.I.O. will do well to proceed cautiously in this matter, to guard carefully against untimely local strikes and to continue its present strategy of subordinating all local activities to the development of a great disciplined national movement of steel workers.

It may well be that the method of the stay-in strike will be applied to many steel plants in the event of a general strike call. Whether or not it will be used will depend upon several factors: if the workers consider the experience in the automobile industry was successful, if the government is hostile and will permit the use of gas and other violence against stay-in strikers, if a union feels strong enough to control the plans without staying in, if the prospect is for a long or short strike, etc. It was the steel workers, in Homestead in 1892, who gave the first and most heroic American example of strikers occupying struck plants and it may be followed in the approaching strike.

Besides signing up the workers it is also necessary, as soon as practicable, to set up the new local unions of the Amalgamated Association, and to get them functioning. These locals should be not merely general con-

glomerations of all the workers from each mill; they should be departmentalized, with sub-locals for the most important mill departments. New officials should be elected throughout the union. The establishment of the locals and new officials will do much to raise the discipline of the men; it will give them more of a feeling of being organized and will increase their confidence in each other and in the stability of the movement. Such solid organization will double the weight of their blow when the strike test comes.

Good strike preparation also requires that the company unions be entirely merged into the A.A. before the time the probable strike actually takes place. If not, the bosses will attempt to use them as strikebreaking organizations. The company unions, declaring openly for the A.A. and its demands, should from now on carry on the most active campaign to mobilize their membership into the trade union. And if, when the strike does occur, the company unions are not entirely absorbed by the A.A., they should join in its strike call and then formally merge with the trade union. The declaration of the strike must sound the death knell of company unionism in the steel industry, if the workers have not succeeded in killing it even before that time.

Should there be any A. F. of L. craft unions in the steel industry when the strike takes place they should be linked up with the A. A. and should join in its general strike call.

All these organization preparations for the strike should be accompanied by a most thorough education of the steel workers on the tasks and significance of the coming strike. The union demands should be literally

plastered over the entire steel industry, and also popularized far and wide throughout the whole country. With myriads of bulletins, leaflets, stickers, posters, etc., as well as broad radio campaigns, newspaper advertisements, etc., the workers and the general public should be taught the meaning of the struggle and be kept advised of its progress. Great mass local, district and national rank-and-file conferences and meetings of steel workers and as things approach a head, a great mass strike vote, should be utilized to educate and organize the steel workers for the coming struggle.

The old adage "Well begun is half done" applies to strike strategy as well as to other activities. The first blow is often decisive. Usually trade union strikes are badly organized, which weakens them from beginning to end. But this one must be different. It should be thoroughly prepared, organizationally and ideologically. If this is done, then when the steel workers almost certainly strike in 1937, their walkout will be so complete that "no one will be left in the mills even to blow the whistle".

Democratic Strike Leadership

One of the basic means for building a strong strike and for the working out of good strategy is the development of a democratic strike leadership through national and local broad strike committees. Usually A. F. of L. strikes are managed by small and remote committees of bureaucratic officials. These people, whose conservative and slippery policies make it necessary for them to prevent rank-and-file "interference in the strike control", remain quite detached from the working masses. They issue arbitrary commands to the workers,

who have practically nothing to say about the whole strike. Commonly the result is that the latter's high qualities of discipline, enthusiasm and fighting spirit are but little developed. Thus the entire strike is weakened.

The broad democratic strike committee system, which is based on the best strike experience the world over, is vastly superior to the prevailing primitive A. F. of L. system of a handful of dictatorial officials running the strike as they please. The broad strike committee gives the workers the realization that the strike is really their affair. It awakens in them an intelligent discipline and not merely a blind obedience to orders; it raises their morale, avoids the usual mass passivity and brings about the maximum mass activity. Above all it provides the means for the strikers to contribute their intelligence to the shaping of strike policy. The broad strike committee system also aids the work of the strike executive leaders by connecting them directly with the masses. It facilitates their knowing what is actually taking place in the strike fields, what tactics the bosses are using, what are the workers' moods, etc.

It also provides the mechanization for the swift mobilization of the workers for a needed defensive or offensive maneuver. This system of broad strike committees has been used to a considerable extent in the A. F. of L. needle trades, and other progressive American unions, but especially by the revolutionary unions, such as the I.W.W., T.U.U.L., etc., and by many unions in other countries. It has always proven highly effective. The coming steel strike, in keeping with the progressive character of the C.I.O. movement, should

systematically apply the powerful weapon of the broad strike committee.

The democratization of the strike leadership should start at the top. The national leading committee of the whole strike should consist not only of the national union executives but also of striker representatives from the various striking areas (and industries, if more than steel is involved). This broad committee, with proper departments for publicity, relief and defense, should deal with major questions of policy. It should meet frequently and have a small executive committee carry on the strike leadership between meetings.

Large departmentalized strike committees, based upon the regular union officials plus a broad representation of mill strikers, should also be organized in the respective steel towns and districts, as local circumstances may dictate. Each steel mill should also have its own broad strike committee. The mill strike committees should conduct their local activities under the leadership of the local or district strike committees; the size of the committees varying according to the size of the mills, the rate of representation ranging from one member for each 25 workers to one member for each 100 workers. Such mill strike committees should be thoroughly representative of all departments, special care being taken also to see that Negroes and foreign-born workers are fully represented and elected to responsible leading posts. The women's trade union auxiliaries should be represented in the strike committees.

The mill strike committees have a maze of functions. Especially complicated are their tasks in the case of stay-in strikes. They have to be organized, through

sub-committees, to attend to picketing, discipline, food, sleeping arrangements, medical care, entertainment, defense, liaison with the local strike committee and other struck plants, etc. Consequently, the mill committees must be highly responsive to the needs and control of the strikers.

The strike committees, national, district, local and mill, should be fully authorized to conduct the strike in all its phases, the various regular trade union organs, such as national executive boards, district councils, local unions, etc., meeting only to transact routine business not immediately connected with the strike. The various strike committees should be elected on the eve of the strike. Before the strike is ended the national strike committee should submit the proposed terms of settlement for a referendum vote by the strikers.

These principles of democratization and departmentalization should also be introduced into the A. A. structure as the union is built. The A. A. constitution is obsolete, unfitted for the steel industry and should be completely rewritten.

Mass Strike Activities

The working out of a good strike strategy requires the highest degree of mass participation by the strikers in the organized activities of the strike. More than that, it also involves drawing the strikers' families into these activities, for the strikers' women and children are also very effective fighters and morale builders. Only by such a general participation of the whole strike-bound population and the development of the highest degree of activity possible by men, women and children, can the maximum striking power of the workers be

realized. In this respect again, the coming steel strike must be vastly superior to the ordinary A. F. of L. strike, in which, because the conservative leaders fear the growth of militancy among the rank and file, only a small percentage of the workers, not to speak of their families, actually carry on the strike, the great mass remaining passive.

In previous pages I have discussed various forms of cultivating a high degree of mass strike activity—the holding of democratically elected local, district and national rank-and-file pre-strike conferences to formulate and popularize the workers' demands and to elect the union officials, the taking of a national mass strike vote, democratic participation in the broad strike committees, general voting upon all settlement proposals, etc. To these measures should be added the holding of frequent mass meetings during the strike; mass parades of strikers; mass marches of men, women and children from district to district and mill to mill; the sending of small delegations, or flying squads of workers, from one area or industry to another; the teaching of the strikers to sing labor songs in their meetings and demonstrations; the development of sports activities for the youth; the holding of social affairs, etc.

But the most important of all forms of mass strike activities is mass picketing. Good picketing is a decisive factor in every big strike—that is why employers are so rabidly opposed to it. Picketing is usually grossly neglected in the ordinary A. F. of L. strike, only a few of the workers carrying it on, and then merely in a desultory fashion. The consequence is a great loss in the holding power of the strike. The best way to con-

duct picketing is on a mass basis. Not only should all the strikers be mobilized for picketing, but their women and children as well. In addition, prominent liberals and others should be brought into the strike areas from the outside to march in the picket lines. Where one or more industries are striking, joint picketing should be organized. The unemployed can play a most important role in picketing, and the members of non-striking unions should also be systematically drawn into the work. Women's and children's picket lines should be organized on special occasions. This system of broad mass picketing raises enormously the political level, enthusiasm and resistance power of the strikers. It has been used effectively in many I.W.W. and T.U.U.L. strikes, by the more progressive A. F. of L. unions, and by many unions in foreign countries. When the 1937 steel strike comes, the progressive C.I.O. should adopt the modern, effective system of mass picketing.

The picket line should be well organized, not mere crowds of workers. It should be under the control of the picket committee, which is a section of the strike committee. The picketers should be organized into squads, each squad headed by a carefully selected captain. All strikers should be required to do their bit at picketing. The youth especially should play a big role in the organization of the picket lines. The picket committee must maintain pickets around the mills at all times, whether or not they are trying to operate with scabs. Especially must there be great mass picket lines on Monday mornings and upon all occasions when attempts are being made to bring scabs into the mills. Often the difference between bad picketing and good

picketing is the difference between a lost and a won strike.

Strike Publicity

The question of a well-organized strike publicity is most fundamental to the success of a great strike in steel, or a combined strike of steel, coal, auto, etc. In such a big strike the capitalists will frantically howl that the whole movement is an insurrection, a revolution, and they will throw their entire publicity machine, the newspapers, radio, etc., into the task of terrorizing the public and of driving the workers back to the mills in a welter of violence and confusion. In the 1919 steel strike they used such a Red scare effectively, with the help of the Wilson government. In the San Francisco general strike in 1934 they also loudly shrieked revolution and created a hysteria among sections of the population, and they do the same thing to a greater or lesser extent in every strike. We may be absolutely certain, therefore, that their poison-gas campaign would be infinitely worse in the case of the prospective nation-wide steel or steel-coal strike involving up to a million or more workers.

To combat successfully this vicious strikebreaking propaganda offensive of the employers will be basic for the winning of the strike. In order to create a favorable public opinion it is necessary that the workers develop a great publicity counter-offensive of their own. They must dissipate the charges of revolution by centering the whole agitation around the immediate economic and political demands of the struggle. They should relentlessly expose the vast riches and profits of the employers and the health-destroying, spirit-killing poverty

of the workers, the terrorization and suppression of civil rights by the bosses' gunmen, the great significance to American democracy of a victory by the workers, etc. The strikers must know how to dramatize their struggle by sending women's and children's delegations to the state legislatures and to Congress, by securing investigations by government and citizens' committees, by covering the country with a network of sympathetic mass meetings, by staging great mass demonstrations of all kinds throughout the strike areas, by monster mass picket lines, etc.

Not the least of this essential publicity work is the education of the strikers themselves, who will be subjected to the fiercest propaganda barrage from the employers in attempts to stampede them back to work. The striking workers should be systematically taught the meaning and implications of the strike through a plentiful flow of regular bulletins, special leaflets, mass meetings, radio broadcasts, etc. Especially must they be kept informed in detail as to the progress of the strike itself. In this connection, in case of a hard strike, among other such measures to be adopted, rank-and-file delegations should be sent from district to district so that workers may be directly informed as to the status of the strike from personal observation. In 1919, in the later stages of the struggle one of the most effective strikebreaking methods of the bosses was to have fake delegations of workers visit various strike districts and then start false reports and demoralization among the strikers, both in their home towns and other centers. Neglect of the fundamental task of systematic education could easily result disastrously in a bitterly fought steel strike.

To meet these huge educational tasks of creating a favorable public opinion and of keeping confusion out of the ranks of the strikers, the national strike committee should set up a special publicity section, with an experienced publicity director in charge. This publicity department, in addition to building its own immediate publicity machinery, should systematically mobilize the trade union, revolutionary and liberal press, as well as friendly radio broadcasters and newspapermen working on the capitalist press. All these elements cooperating together would constitute a great educational force, one that could make the voice of the strike heard loudly and clearly in every corner of the country.

Strike Relief

Strikes, like armies, march on their stomachs, and many are the strikes that have been lost through hunger. In making ready for a great strike in steel it is necessary that all preparations be made to build up a strong system of strike relief, despite the probability of the struggle being of short duration. In the matter of relief work, as in so many other of their phases, usually American strikes are very weak. Strikes which provide relief systems that can serve as types for the coming strike were the 1919 steel strike and the 1926 Passaic textile strike.*

The strike relief machinery should be in operation not later than two weeks after the strike begins, because

* See *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, by William Z. Foster, and *The Passaic Textile Strike*, by Mary Heaton Vorse.

from the outset there are always emergency cases requiring attention. The C.I.O. general call for a strike fund ought to go out immediately upon the declaration of the strike. This to be supported by calls from the A. F. of L., individual trade unions, state federations, central labor councils and other sympathizing organizations. Of course, the reactionary A. F. of L. leaders will either openly or covertly oppose such strike support, but their opposition must and can be broken down by rank-and-file pressure.

The striking union or unions should set up an organized relief department as a sub-section of the general strike committee, with an experienced relief organizer in charge. Strike relief work has two general aspects—collection and distribution—and there must be created special organization for each. On the collection side, the organization should consist of: (a) trade union strike relief committees in various cities and towns; (b) united front relief committees or other workers' organizations in the same localities; (c) special relief committees of liberal professionals, clericals, pacifists, writers, etc. All these committees are to be coordinated through the national relief department of the strike committee. A corps of relief collectors and organizers should be put in the field by the national relief organization. Depots should be established in all important centers for the collection of cash, food and other strike supplies. National and local relief conferences ought to be held wherever practical. There can be drawn into the relief collection work not only trade unions, but also churches, Y.M.C.A.'s, Negro organizations, fraternal societies, farmers' unions, veterans' organizations, cooperatives,

unemployed workers' organizations and workers' political parties.

The distribution side of the relief is to be handled by special relief committees of strikers in the strike areas, under supervision of their respective strike committees. The relief committees require sub-committees to investigate needy cases and to check up generally on the distribution of relief. In this sphere, the strikers' womenfolk can do very important work.

At the outset of the strike all efforts should be made to get the strikers on the home relief lists upon the same basis as the unemployed. This can be accomplished in many places with the proper political mass pressure.

Inasmuch as regular strike benefits could not, in all probability, be paid in a national 1937 strike of steel workers, the strike relief necessarily takes three major forms: (a) distribution of cash for the strikers' special expenses; (b) common kitchens where food is prepared for the strikers and their families, with special food for the smaller children; (4) commissaries from which families may carry home groceries, clothing and other strike relief supplies.

Money. The organizations forming the C.I.O. should place upon themselves heavy strike assessments. Other unions should adopt voluntary assessments. This financial income should be supplemented by tag days, shop collections, social affairs, special milk funds, etc., organized by the strike committees in the various centers.

Food. Great concentration must be made upon the collection of non-perishable foods by the strike committees, house-to-house collections being organized. Special attention should be given to collecting strike

relief supplies in the immediate strike areas and surrounding territories. The farmers provide a rich source for food collection in such big strikes and their organizations need to be contacted.

Shelter. This is always a great problem in large strikes. It must be attacked in a variety of ways: by doubling up the evicted families with others, by moratoriums in rent paying in strike-bound towns, by extension of credit to strikers by landlords, by court action and mass pressure to prevent evictions, etc. Where company towns exist, tent colonies and barracks may be necessary to take care of the wholesale evictions. The shutting off of gas, electricity and water can often be stopped by exerting political pressure upon the local authorities. In some instances cash is necessary to meet rent, water, light and similar expenses.

Clothing. Systematic collections of all kinds of clothing should be made by the relief committees all over the country. Local clothing repair units can be established in the strike towns by sympathetic women and tailors. Cobblers should be organized to take care of shoe repairs, etc.

Medical Aid. In every strike center medical units of voluntary doctors, dentists, nurses, etc., should be established. Medical units also may be organized outside and sent into the strike areas by the relief committees. In addition, there should be committees of outside doctors to visit and to give publicity on conditions in the strike districts.

Relief collection and distribution must be handled basically as a political question, not as a matter of charity. In the strike districts, strike relief should be so

organized as to stimulate mass picketing, each picketer being furnished with a card which is punched to indicate the amount of picketing he has done. The collection of relief in the various cities should be utilized to arouse the class-conscious solidarity of the workers and to draw the broadest masses of workers into active support of the strike. The whole relief apparatus, collection and distribution, must be utilized to popularize the objectives of the strike, to prevent the recruitment of strike-breakers, to defend the strikers' civil rights, and to bring pressure to bear upon the employers and the government for a favorable settlement of the strike. A well-organized relief system can exert a tremendous force in strengthening the strike, both economically and politically.

Strike Defense

In every strike the question of defending the civil rights and personal safety of the strikers and the union leaders constitutes an important problem. Especially is this problem acute in a great strike against the lawless and violent steel barons. Defense activities are not only a matter of court action, but especially of mass pressure of the strikers and the widest possible masses of strike sympathizers against the government and the employers. The national strike committee requires a legal department which organizes this branch of strike work. Here the International Labor Defense can also play an important part. A staff of voluntary attorneys should be recruited nationally and in the respective strike areas.

Attacks on the civil rights of the strikers by the employers, in whatever manner, must be militantly re-

sisted. All the forces of the strikers, the outside labor movement, the strike relief organization and the sympathetic masses generally should be mobilized to protest against such attacks on the democratic rights of the workers, through the holding of mass meetings, sending of delegations to the state legislatures and Congress. When injunctions are issued forbidding the right of free speech and assembly the strikers should follow the traditional American trade union policy of ignoring such court orders. When troops are brought into a strike area the strikers must not only firmly insist upon the maintenance of their civil rights, but also know how to fraternize with the soldiers and thus win as many as possible of them to the side of the strike.

Vigilant protection must be constantly given to the persons of the strikers and their leaders; when either striker or leader is arrested for strike activities, he should be promptly defended legally and politically. Where there is danger of violent attacks upon the strikers' meetings or upon their leaders by gunmen and vigilantes, these meetings and leaders must be personally defended; such protective measures being organized by the picket committee and being especially the task of the youth. Against the company-controlled violators of civil rights and for the personal safety of strikers and leaders the strikers should make active use of all available political institutions, including the arrest and prosecution of the armed thugs; the securing of injunctions against the violators of the workers' civil rights; the removal, impeachment and election defeat of lawless city and state officials.

Mobilizing the Strike Reserves

Every good general understands that a basic part of his strategy is carefully to mobilize and utilize his reserves, and the need to do this is no less acute in a strike, especially in the case of a great strike in steel and allied industries. Such a strike would for the outset have vast potential reserves, created by the profound sympathy the strike would awaken in the toiling masses. These masses would realize that not only were the strikers' interests involved in the struggle, but also their own living standards and democratic rights. The strike leadership must know how to organize and make the maximum use of this favorable mass sentiment of these great reserves. Usually, this kind of work, like the various other tasks that go to make up a strong strike, are grossly neglected in A. F. of L. strikes. Such must not happen in the steel strike, for we may be sure that the steel trust will mobilize every reactionary influence in the United States behind its cause and the workers will need every possible ounce of support for theirs.

The question of mobilizing the reserves of a national steel strike involves not only developing the solidarity of the workers' main forces directly—the support of the unorganized masses of workers, of the members of company unions, of the unemployed, of the non-striking trade unions, of workers' cooperatives and of the workers' political parties—but also the mobilization of the huge masses of semi-proletarian and petty bourgeois sympathizers who are actively interested in the winning of the strike. This necessitates the development of united front committees of youth clubs, fraternal societies, churches, peace movements, professional guilds,

women's clubs, Negro organizations, farmers' cooperatives, veterans' associations, etc., for various strike tasks.

In the preceding pages I have sketched concretely some of the ways in which these very vital petty bourgeois and semi-proletarian strike reserves can be utilized, including their participation in publicity work, technical aid for strikers, defense and relief activities and general political work. To facilitate the mobilization of these reserves, a national citizens' committee, comprising such liberal strike sympathizers—including politicians, educators, scientists, writers, artists, etc.—should be set up at the commencement of the strike. This liberal committee must work closely with the national strike committee in political activities in support of the strike, and should stimulate the formation of local relief committees of liberal strike sympathizers. Especially in the strike areas is it necessary to build up similar strike citizens' committees of professionals, small businessmen, clergymen, white collar workers, office-holders and representatives of various mass organizations, to offset the strikebreaking activities of the ever-present and dangerous citizens' committees organized by the employers. A national strike in steel and allied industries must be made a great rallying issue for the major massing of the democratic forces of the United States to win the struggle.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSOLIDATING THE VICTORY

IT is a fundamental principle of strategy, whether military or labor, to follow up the victory by pushing back the enemy on every front and to capture all possible of his strongholds. In the months ahead the C.I.O. leaders, as well as the progressive forces generally of the labor movement, must give this strategic principle serious consideration.

Lenin once wisely remarked that we never can have real victory unless we also know how to retreat when need be. A good general always bears this thought in mind. In this situation, however, there need be no perspective of retreat. The strategy must be based on the offensive, and animated by a spirit of daring and indomitability. The stage is all set for a great labor victory, provided only that the trade union leadership rises to the occasion, to the height of its tasks. This victory, which can be so readily won, must be realized to the full in all its possibilities and implications. In the first chapter of this pamphlet I indicated the great importance to the working class of a victory in the steel industry. Now let us look at this whole matter a little more concretely.

. Organizing the Millions of Unorganized

When, early in 1936, the workers of France, fighting against the rising menace of fascism and organized in

a great united front of Radicals, Socialists and Communists, defeated the reactionary forces and elected the present Popular Front government, one of the aftermaths of their victory was that within a year the French trade union movement increased its membership from some 1,500,000 to over 5,000,000. This is about equivalent to the American trade union movement (considering the differences in size and industrialization of France and the United States), leaping up from its present low figure of about 3,500,000 to a membership of 15,000,000 or 20,000,000. A victory in steel in the United States, if properly followed up, would undoubtedly give a tremendous stimulation to trade union organization in general in this country. It is a question whether there will be as great an advance as that which followed the victory of the Popular Front government in France. But certainly success in the steel industry would throw the door wide open for the organization of many millions of workers. The extent to which the possibilities of the situation will be realized will depend largely upon the ability and farsightedness shown by the trade union leadership.

Even in the very favorable situation after a great victory in steel, the organization of these millions of workers can only happen in the fullest measure if the progressive forces everywhere in the trade union movement make the task of organizing the unorganized all labor's first order of business. Determined drives must be made to begin the unionization of the huge masses of unorganized in all fields, the millions of general metal and electrical workers; the mass of textile work-

ers, the army of truck, bus and taxi drivers; the great numbers of unorganized packing house, metal mining, building trades, food workers, lumber workers, agricultural workers, etc., as well as those in the auto, rubber, aluminum, oil, glass and other industries now being organized by the C.I.O. Nor should there be forgotten the masses of white collar workers, teachers, technicians, office workers and government employes, who are increasingly ready for organization.

Big inroads by the trade unions into these great unorganized millions can be made by the labor movement if the work is gone about with system and decision. Every branch of organized labor must take up the organization work. The C.I.O. should seize upon the event of a victory in steel to redouble its own efforts to organize the mass production industries and to stimulate all sections of the labor movement into the greatest organizing campaign in the history of American labor. The reactionary A. F. of L. Executive Council must be compelled by mass pressure to support the growing organizing campaigns, or at least not to sabotage them. Every international union, state federation of labor, city central body and local union should begin organizing work in its respective sphere. The whole labor movement must surge with organization work. This is the first task in consolidating a steel victory, by registering it in the fundamental field of organization among the unorganized millions. If this task of organization is well conceived and properly carried out, it will mean incomparably more power and militancy for the labor movement in this country.

Reorganize the Trade Unions

The organization of steel and other mass production industries, with its establishment of the principle of industrial unionism and its smashing victory over company unionism, its bringing of millions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers into the unions and its giving rise to a militant and union progressive leadership in these industries, would necessarily have profound effects upon the whole trade union movement in many directions. It would lay the basis for a far-reaching revamping of organized labor's policies, structure, leadership and general outlook. It would provide the workers with a splendid opportunity to free themselves finally from the mess of reaction and crookedness that has marked A. F. of L. officialdom for many years past. To consolidate the victory in steel especially requires that it register itself in full force in this sphere by a profound reorganization of the trade union movement as a whole.

The further substantial advance of the trade union movement in this country necessitates breaking the control of the Greens, Wolls, Hutchesons, Ryans, Freys and the other top misleaders of labor, together with that of their local understrapper gangsters, racketeers and small-time reactionary bureaucrats. These people have stood in the way of the workers' progress all too long, drawing their enormous salaries and shamelessly playing the game of the bosses. More and more the workers are evidencing a disposition to get rid of them, as is shown in such recent elections as those among the New York painters, teamsters and longshoremen and in many other places. And with a real victory in steel, this ten-

dency would be enormously strengthened. The workers, if given proper leadership, will be ready to make a grand sweep of the whole reactionary crew that now dominates so many trade unions.

The trade unions must also break finally with their reactionary top A. F. of L. officials' traditional policy of class collaboration, and begin to orientate towards a policy of class struggle. Fifty years of bitter experience teaches that class collaboration, based upon the false principle of the harmony of the interests of capital and labor, has nothing but defeat to offer the workers. The workers can gain nothing by their officials wheedling the bosses and adapting the unions to the latter's needs. They can only go forward by a policy of struggle. The workers can win only what they have the power and determination to fight for. It is high time that the trade union officialdom was jarred loose from the bosses' apron-strings. For the first time in its history the American trade union movement will stand on its own legs, both in the economic and the political struggle.

A further vital part of the necessary reorganization of the labor movement is that the trade unions must be thoroughly democratized. The workers should put a final end to present baneful conditions of national unions that never meet in convention; local unions that go on for years without holding meetings, stolen trade union elections; officials self-elected for life; expulsion of workers because of their political opinions; unions controlled by notorious racketeers; trade union agreements adopted without rank-and-file sanction; corrupt leaders furnishing union-card strikebreakers to employ-

ers; open defiance of majority rule by union officials; union conventions comprised almost entirely of paid officials, etc., etc. The present forward surge of the workers, especially in the event of a victory in steel, is just the time to deal a mortal blow to this whole poisonous system of autocracy and corruption that has cursed the American labor movement for so many years.

The badly needed reorganization of the trade union movement should also result in placing not only the unions in the mass production industries upon an industrial union basis, but the craft unions generally as well. Steps ought to be taken in every industry where the craft unions are established to gradually consolidate them into industrial unions through a process of closer cooperation, federation and amalgamation. Practical first steps towards this industrial goal are: one general national agreement for all railroad trades and a strengthening of the railroad federation movement by including all of the twenty-one railroad unions; uniform agreements in the building trades to expire on the same date; amalgamation of the metal trades into one industrial union; formation of a national maritime federation on the Pacific Coast model; organization of a general transport workers' federation; creation of a federation of the needle trade unions; closer affiliation of the printing trades; federation of the food trades unions, etc. A victory in steel and in other mass production industries would greatly facilitate this advance of the craft unions generally towards industrial unionism. Craft unionism, a product of the horse-and-buggy age, was obsolete 30 years ago and it is a heavy drag on the progress of the

working class. It must be superseded by a modern, effective system of industrial unionism in all industries.

Reunite the American Federation of Labor

The present split in the A. F. of L. is a menace to the interests of every worker in this country. It leads to a weakening of the organizing campaign in the mass production industries; it causes craft union strikebreaking during strikes of the industrial unions (auto, radio, etc.); it divides labor's forces politically, and it weakens the working class on every front.

The split is the rotten fruit of the reactionary Green bureaucracy which, fearing that the organization of the millions of unorganized, semi-skilled and unskilled will jeopardize its rich sinecures, have gone even to the extent of splitting the labor movement in order to prevent the organization of the unorganized and to maintain its own worse than useless leadership. It traitorously and illegally suspended C.I.O. unions with over 1,250,000 members, simply because the latter seriously undertook the organization work in the mass production industries that the A. F. of L. Executive Council has stubbornly refused to do. No one but the employers and a handful of reactionary trade union leaders profit from such a shameful spectacle. The breach in the ranks of labor must be healed. The present situation, and especially if the steel workers are victorious, offers a splendid opportunity for the progressive forces of labor to mend the split in the A. F. of L. on a sound, progressive basis.

It is necessary first of all to prevent the present split

from spreading. The workers must refuse to unseat C.I.O. union delegates in the state federations and central labor unions if ordered to do so by the A. F. of L. Executive Council. They must hold intact the labor movement at the bottom, even if it is split at the top. There must also be no splitting of international unions; wherever the question of affiliation to the C.I.O. or A. F. of L. develops, the principle of majority rule must prevail in all such cases. It is important also that the C.I.O. retain its present status as a national committee to carry on organization work in the basic industries, as this will prevent the reactionaries from spreading the split into all sections of the labor movement, as they would do if two rival national labor federations faced each other. Meanwhile, while putting these emergency measures into effect, a unity campaign must be carried on far and wide throughout the whole trade union movement, to win as many as possible of the trade unions to condemn the splitting policy of the A. F. of L. Executive Council and to give active support to the organization work of the C.I.O. Especially must the local A. F. of L. craft unions stand solid with the C.I.O. industrial unions and vice versa in the case of strikes, and under no circumstances permit their members to work when strikes are in progress.

The C.I.O. is based upon the most fundamental sections of the proletariat, those in the heavy, mass production industries. It is doing incomparably more vital and important work than the reactionary Executive Council of the A. F. of L. The latter is a brake on the labor movement, while the C.I.O. is carrying on the

most fundamental work of organization and stimulating labor's progress generally. The C.I.O. already clearly has the backing of an overwhelming majority of the organized trade unionists, as well as of great masses of the unorganized workers. And as its work of organization proceeds the mass support of the C.I.O. will increase by leaps and bounds in all sections of the working class.

It is most vitally important that the C.I.O. organize this vast supporting sentiment in the craft unions, so that these progressive forces, united on a sound program of industrial unionism and the organization of the unorganized, can break once and for all the deadly grip of the Executive Council reactionaries on the labor movement and throw their full strength into organization work. In the present circumstances the victory over these reactionaries will not be too difficult, if the C.I.O. will give more attention to this matter and take more active steps to organize the progressive forces throughout the labor movement.

Under the consequent heavy pressure, the machine of the Greens, Wolls and other reactionaries in the craft unions would soon collapse and the progressives secure the leadership of the labor movement. And in the process the unity of labor could be re-established, despite the reactionary opposition. The present great surge forward of the masses, especially in the event of a victory in steel, must result in uniting the forces of labor—A. F. of L. craft unions, C.I.O. industrial unions, railroad brotherhoods and millions of unorganized workers—into a great united, progressive A. F. of L. based upon industrial unionism.

A victory in steel, with its resultant mass enthusiasm and increased fighting spirit, must especially be utilized to strengthen the workers politically. It is disastrous folly for the workers to support and depend upon the old political parties. This is true also of the present administration. The Roosevelt government is a capitalist government and will of its own volition do nothing to infringe upon the real interests of the great financial rulers of the country, nor has it done so in the past. All the real concessions that the workers will get from the present government is what they have the organized power and good sense to fight for. The workers and other toilers must have their own political party and program and give them strong mass support.

The next months should see great political activity on the part of the workers, farmers, and lower middle class elements. In conferences and meetings they should map out united front programs of state and national legislative demands and then give them the solid backing of all their trade unions, farmers' organizations, progressive blocs in Congress and state legislatures, and of the workers' and farmers' political parties. Meanwhile, they should also systematically set up local and state Farmer-Labor Parties, wherever there is a sufficient mass basis. This whole developing political movement should go in the direction of the formation, as soon as possible, of a great national Farmer-Labor Party, the beginning of a broad People's Front in the United States, to wage struggle against the growing menace of hunger, fascism and war.

Clearly, the C.I.O. has a heavy responsibility to fur-

ther this progressive political work. The reactionary A. F. of L. leaders have refused to develop independent political action by the workers and they know no other political policy than to keep the masses enchainied to the Republican and Democratic Parties. It is highly dangerous further to neglect building a great Farmer-Labor Party of the toiling masses. These masses are more and more showing signs of breaking with the two old parties, and if organized labor does not give them the lead with a new party, they are exposed to the serious danger of falling under the control of such demagogues and fascists as Hearst, Coughlin, Smith, Lemke, Townsend, etc. The organization of the workers in the mass production industries, and particularly if there is a victory in steel, will lay sufficiently broad foundations for a great Farmer-Labor Party in the United States and otherwise facilitate its development. History thrusts upon the C.I.O. the responsibility of bringing such a party into actual being.

The Struggle for World Peace

With the great strengthening of the trade union movement in numbers, program, leadership and class consciousness that will come from the organization of the workers in steel and other basic industries the trade union movement of this country must take a more positive part in the struggle to maintain world peace and democracy. The world is facing the war threats and tyranny of the fascist aggressors, the Hitlers, Mussolinis, Francos, etc., and more and more the democratic forces of the world, with the Soviet Union at their head, are organizing to prevent these fascist barbarians from

deluging the world with a new and more terrible blood-bath. The American workers must do their share, side by side with the democratic masses of other countries, to hold back this threatening slaughter and to defend the very existence of civilization itself.

The A. F. of L. policy of non-participation in world affairs is fatally wrong. Despite the sophistries of President Roosevelt, William Green, Norman Thomas, and a host of others, there can be no neutrality for the United States in the war that the fascists are now so busily preparing. The whole world will be drawn into the slaughter if and when it comes. The only way America can keep out of war is by keeping war out of the world. At all costs, the American workers must help stop the approaching war by supporting the policy of collective security against the fascist aggressors. We must give active aid to the brave Spanish workers and peasants who are now struggling heroically against the fascist butchers; we must support militantly the peace program of the Soviet Union; we must re-affiliate the American trade unions to the Amsterdam Trade Union International; we must connect up our own forces with the anti-fascist fighters for peace in every country. And all these measures must be backed up by a powerful united front peace movement in this country, consisting of trade unions, farmers' organizations, professionals' associations, youth organizations, peace societies, women's clubs, religious bodies, local Farmer-Labor Parties, Socialist Party, Communist Party, etc. As a mass progressive force the C.I.O. has the responsible task to draw the great body of trade unionists into this vital struggle for peace.

Role of the C.I.O.

The C.I.O., led so aggressively by John L. Lewis, is doing a historically important thing in carrying on its vigorous campaign to organize the armies of exploited workers in the mass production industries. As we have seen, this campaign has within it possibilities for a fundamental strengthening and reorganization of the whole American labor movement. Thus the C.I.O. has become the actual leader of the trade union movement. The Executive Council of the A. F. of L. has shown itself opposed to this vital organization work and because of its narrow craft union and personal interests has refused for many years past to do the organizing that the C.I.O. is now undertaking. Had it so desired, the A. F. of L. could have easily organized the steel workers during the war, or during the Coolidge period of prosperity, or during the strike upheavals under the N.R.A. in 1933-1934. But the A. F. of L. wanted nothing to do with the organization of the steel workers. And worse yet, now that the C.I.O. unions, which are awake to the basic importance of this task to themselves and to all other workers, are proceeding to accomplish the organizing work that the Executive Council has so long neglected or prevented, the Executive Council actually suspends them, one-third of the whole labor movement, from the A. F. of L., and thus traitorously splits labor's forces in the face of the enemy. Never, even in the shady history of the A. F. of L., has misleadership sunk to lower levels. The A. F. of L. Executive Council has surrendered the true leadership of the trade unions into the hands of the C.I.O.

The Communist Party heartily supports the C.I.O. organizing campaigns in the steel, automobile, rubber, glass, textile, oil, etc., industries, and it mobilizes all its forces to assist in this work. It extends this aid for the same reason that it supports every forward movement of the workers wherever it may originate or what form it may take, whether it be a strike, an organization campaign, the carrying on of independent working class political activity, or what not. The Communist Party has no interests apart from those of the working class, and every victory of the workers is a victory for the Communist Party. But in supporting the C.I.O.'s organizing work the Communist Party does not fail to point out constructively and in a friendly spirit whatever it may consider to be weaknesses in that work, such as the insufficient mobilization of the progressives in the craft unions to support the C.I.O.'s position, hesitancy in using more aggressive methods of mass organization work, underestimation of trade union democracy, failure to raise the question of industrial unionism regarding the craft unions themselves and insufficient orientation towards the formation of a national Farmer-Labor Party. Also the Communist Party, with its revolutionary program, looks far beyond the perspective of the C.I.O. It aims at the abolition of the capitalist system and the complete liquidation of the exploitation of man by man through the private ownership of industry and the land, by the establishment of socialism.

The C.I.O. has done very good work up to date, but its biggest tasks still remain ahead. There is to be accomplished not only the successful completion of the

organization drives in steel, auto, etc., but also, as I have pointed out, the broad tasks of consolidating the victory; that is, of realizing the full economic and political possibilities of the C.I.O. movement, including the extension of the organization work far and wide in industry generally; the re-establishment of a unified and democratized A. F. of L. based on industrial unionism and a class struggle policy and with a progressive leadership; the foundation of a great united front Farmer-Labor Party as the beginning of an American People's Front; the building up of a broad peace movement, etc. These tasks confronting the C.I.O. amount, in sum, to a veritable renaissance of the whole American trade union movement.

John L. Lewis and other C.I.O. leaders, although having a very conservative background, have shown a real spirit of progress in the development of the C.I.O. movement. Their progressive advance was a most extraordinary development to take place in the ranks of the reactionary A. F. of L. trade union leadership. And to accomplish the historic tasks of the great forward development of which they stand at the head, new tests will be made of their responsiveness to the masses' needs. To realize in full the implications and possibilities of the situation they will have to display the broadest vision and liveliest progressivism. They have in their hands the opportunity to do a most fundamental service to the working class, not only of America, but of the whole world.

New York, January, 1937

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