

RAILROAD WORKERS FORWARD!

BY WM. Z. FOSTER



COMMUNIST LABOR
COLLECTION

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RAILROAD WORKERS, FORWARD!

by

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

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CHAPTER I

Poverty for the Workers; Prosperity for the Owners

Contents

I: Poverty for the Workers; Prosperity for the Owners	5
II: The Workers' Demands	14
III: Wanted: A Militant Trade Union Policy	18
IV: A National Federation of All Railroad Workers	27
V: Unite the Trade Union Movement	40
VI: For a Farmer-Labor Party	47
VII: The Road to Peace, Freedom and Prosperity	54

CHAPTER I

Poverty for the Workers; Prosperity for the Owners

EVER since its birth about 100 years ago the railroad industry, heart of the American industrial system, has been exploited for the enrichment of its private owners. The portion of the workers has always been long hours, low pay, unemployment and bad working conditions; while the owners of the industry, who perform no useful service in its operation, have reaped billions and billions in wealth. The workers have always had to fight for self-preservation against the voracious sharks who own the railroads, and whatever modest successes they have achieved in defending and improving their living and working standards have been won only at the cost of unremitting struggle.

Since the close of the World War in 1918 the railroad industry, which was then already highly efficient, has made further great strides in this respect. But the advantages of this increasing productivity have not gone to the railroad workers. More than ever they suffer from excessive work, mass unemployment and low standards of living; while into the hands of the owners the rich stream of unearned wealth continues to flow in billions. This one-sided prosperity is the situation that confronts the railroad workers, and the twenty-one standard railroad craft unions, with their ultra-conservative leaders and policies, have not been able to basically alter it.

Unemployment and Overwork

The railroads, like American industry generally, are characterized by a situation where the workers who have jobs suffer grievously from overwork, while the great masses of workers are without work at all. Every railroad worker knows from practical experience the tremendous speed-up and introduction of labor-saving devices that have taken place on the railroads within recent years. These developments have permeated every department of the railroad service.*

It is not so many years ago that a 50-car, 2,000-ton train was a heavy one, but now 100-car trains of 6,000 to 7,000 tons are ordinary drags. Freight trains used to run at maximums of about 30 miles per hour, but now they go from 40 to 60. And so it is all along the line—larger engines, bigger cars, faster trains, heavier steel, better road beds, more efficient methods of train dispatching, signaling, shop work, maintenance of way work, office work, etc., with the workers being driven faster and harder at every point in the industry.

Labor-saving through all this speed-up, mechanization and rationalization adds up to astounding totals. Thus, from 1921 to 1929, there was an increase of nearly 46 per cent in revenue ton-miles hauled without any increase in the number of railroad workers employed. And in a recent issue *Labor*, indicating the increased productivity of railroad workers in the period from 1932 to 1936 and quoting a forthcoming government report, stated:

"In this four-year period, the report says, the average 'output per railroad employee' increased 45 per cent. In other

* For interesting details on this matter see *The Railway Clerk*, July, 1937.

words, each railroad worker is producing nearly one-half more than he did in 1932, measured in 'passenger miles' and 'ton miles.'"

In all American industries, as we know, efficiency and output per worker are rapidly increasing, but nowhere faster than on the railroads. In the same four years, 1932 to 1936, when the railroad workers' output increased 45 per cent, says *Labor*, "the average manufacturing employers' output went up only 29 per cent."

It is because of this tremendous speed-up that today 1,200,000 railroad workers are now doing practically as much work, measured in revenue ton-miles, as 2,000,000 did seventeen years ago. The remaining 800,000 have simply been driven out of the railroad industry. And the railroad owners, by their consolidation plans, hope to throw 250,000 more railroad workers out of jobs. The employers' argument that the displaced railroad workers have found jobs in other industries is an insult to their intelligence. All industries, although now almost back to normal production, are still flooded with workers for whom there are no places. With 8,000,000 to 10,000,000 industrial workers yet going about unemployed, a fat chance the unemployed railroad workers have to secure employment elsewhere. Of the huge army of unemployed in this country living at starvation levels, it is safe to say that at least 10 per cent are railroad workers.

Low Wages and Poverty

When President Roosevelt recently declared that one-third of the American people are ill-nourished, ill-clad and ill-housed, his remarks were actually an understatement so far as railroad workers are concerned. Except in the case of certain categories of skilled workers, the railroads are a low wage industry. The great bulk of the railroad workers

do not receive enough properly to support themselves and their families.

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has compiled a minimum cost budget (adjusted to present living costs) which shows that the yearly income needed to keep a worker's family of five in "comfort and decency" calls for annual expenditures ranging from \$1,742 in Schenectady, N. Y., to \$2,169 in San Francisco, California. But the yearly wages of the big majority of railroad workers fall far below these basic requirements. Fully 750,000 railroad workers (even if they work full time, which they do not) receive at least \$400 less per year than the lowest government figures set for the minimum needs of a worker's family. Of this number more than 200,000 have wage rates about \$700 below the "comfort and decency" budget, and about 100,000 railroad workers live on wages \$1,000 a year lower than the cheapest of the government budgets call for.

Nor are general wage conditions on the railroads improving. The swiftly rising cost of living in the past few years has more than offset the wage increases received by railroad workers. The Labor Research Association, basing itself on the figures of the National Industrial Conference Board, an employer organization, states that between April, 1933, and June, 1937, the general cost of living rose nearly 24 per cent (food up 45 per cent, rent 38 per cent), and in August, 1937, this figure was boosted to at least 26 per cent. As against this huge four years' rise in living costs, railroad workers have received two general wage advances in the same period; the first the restoration of the 1932 cut of 10 per cent, and the August, 1937, increases, averaging $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent for the non-operating workers, and about $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent for those groups of workers engaged in the engine, train and yard services. Thus, as against advances

in living costs of about 26 per cent, railroad workers have received wage increases of not more than 20 per cent. This means that in the past four years real wages on the railroads have been actually reduced. And now, with these wage agreements on the railroads just concluded, the workers face another period of rapidly rising cost of living that will put them still further behind.

So far we have been speaking of the conditions of only the fully employed workers. But how about the unemployed, of whom at least 600,000 still consider themselves railroaders? We cannot ignore them, as the railroad companies and many reactionary union leaders would have us do. They are still with us and must also live. What has happened to their living standards? The answer is tragic and well-known. During their long years of joblessness they have exhausted their small savings and sold off their homes (if they were not confiscated for non-payment of mortgages). Fortunate if they receive even the miserable W.P.A. wage, the unemployed have sunk to semi-starvation levels. They live in shacks, without proper food and medical care, a prey to misery and despair.

Considering the railroad workers as a whole, unemployed as well as employed, the only possible conclusion we can come to is that in recent years the living standards of railroad workers have suffered a catastrophic decline. No, President Roosevelt, not one-third of railroad workers are "ill-nourished, ill-clad and ill-housed," but more than one-half.

Prosperity for the Railroad Owners

But what a different picture presents itself when we turn to the powerful capitalist groups who own as their private property the great railroad systems, so vital to the life of the whole American nation. Into the pockets of these capital-

ists flows a great golden stream of wealth from the railroad industry. Far, indeed, from their personal experiences are the evils of unemployment, over-work, low wages and semi-starvation that the workers suffer from.

Last year the railroad owners extracted from the railroad industry no less than the huge sum of \$836,000,000, and this year, with business improving, they will probably draw down at least \$100,000,000 in excess of this gigantic figure. This wealth is unearned, wrung from the toil of the workers. The railroad owners, in return for their huge rake-off, perform precisely no economic function whatever. They are purely parasitic; for the railroads, from every social point of view, might much better be owned by the people as a whole.

The actual managers of the roads—the railroad officials who think that \$15 per week is too much wages for a section hand—are also not slow to plunge their own greedy hands into the rich mass of wealth created by the railroad workers. A few of their salaries, as reported by the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission, are: S. T. Bledsoe, A. T. & S. F., \$61,000; D. Willard, B. & O., \$60,000; W. H. Harahan, C. & O., \$61,243; W. P. Kenney, G.N., \$60,000; R. L. Dearmont, M.P., \$81,000; H. Holden, S.P., \$60,000; F. W. Charske, U.P., \$63,700; L. W. Downs, I.C., \$60,580, etc., etc.

During the years of the great industrial crisis hundreds of thousands of railroad workers were brutally thrown out of their jobs, without protection of any kind. More than a million walked the streets unemployed, unable to provide for their families, who suffered in a state of semi-starvation. But no such hardships came to the railroad owners. Their rich flow of profits from the industry went on, guaranteed by law, good times and bad. Their dividends, it is true, were

considerably reduced in the crisis years, but by far the greatest source of their income, the fixed charges of the roads, which legally must be paid by every railroad so long as it is solvent, continued undiminished. And the hundreds of millions of dollars in government subsidies helped to this end. Read and learn from the following table, prepared by the Labor Research Association from reports of the I.C.C. It gives the fixed charges received by the railroad owners since 1930 (in millions of dollars):

	1936	1935	1934	1933	1932	1931	1930
Rent for leased roads....	134	149	151	150	138	151	171
Interest on debt (bonds)	509	509	511	524	525	518	509
Other deductions	21	22	21	16	27	28	24
Totals	667	680	683	691	690	696	704

See from this table how the owners were protected during the crisis. Their unearned capitalistic toll upon the industry was paid without fail. Take 1932 and 1933, for example. These were periods of the most desperate suffering by the workers, yet the railroad bondholders went right on, drawing \$690,000,000 and \$691,000,000 (not counting dividends) in each of these terrible years, which was even more than they drew (\$667,000,000) in 1936, a year of so-called prosperity. Besides, in these crisis years, with price levels generally reduced, their dollars were worth much more, so their incomes actually increased in value. The bondholders and the interest grabbers—these are the people, not the workers, whose interests are protected in the present financial set-up of the railroads.

The Class I railroads of the United States are capitalized at about \$24,000,000,000. But the whole network of railroads could be built now for about half that sum. The rest of their capitalization is "water," upon which the roads collect

year in and year out hundreds of millions annually for bond interest, stock dividends, etc. This huge fraudulent capitalization was built up by the railroad kings through long years of the worst land stealing, bribing of government officials, stock-jobbing, cut-throat swindling, etc., in the history of this or any other country in the world.

The railroad owners have already been paid in interest, dividends, etc., many times as much money as they ever actually invested in the industry. Thus, between the years 1920 and 1930 alone (not to speak of eighty other years) they received about five billion in dividends, plus some seven and one-half billion in fixed charges, or about enough to rebuild the whole railroad system. But the railroad kings still own the roads and continue to collect their billions from year to year, and they aim to go on doing so indefinitely.

The railroad owners always make a "poor mouth" when the workers insist upon more pay, and many Grand Lodge officials echo these cries of the railroad companies' "poverty." In 1937 negotiations this tactic was so obviously a dodge to defeat the workers' demands that even *Barron's*, a well-known Wall Street weekly paper, remarked it. But the foregoing facts and figures show that the roads are well able to pay all the wage demands that the workers are making upon them.

Eventually the railroads must be nationalized. During the industrial crisis even Coordinator Eastman and various railroad capitalists began to talk of government ownership, calculating that thereby the government would guarantee the owners their fat profits. To frighten business interests and to defeat present wage demands, *Railway Age* is now warning about government ownership. But when the railroads become nationalized the unions must see to it that it is done so as to bring the maximum advantages to the work-

ers, not to the owners. Among the necessary conditions for nationalization are: revaluation of the railroads and the squeezing out of their watered stock and bond values, reduction in bond interest and stock dividend rates, reduction in the excessive salaries of top railroad executives, protection against loss of jobs through railroad consolidation, and thoroughgoing guarantees of adequate wages, six-hour day, right of trade union organization and participation in the management of the industry for the workers. The Wheeler bill in Congress should be amended to this effect.

CHAPTER II

The Workers' Demands

IN ORDER to relieve the evil conditions of the workers in the railroad industry, as outlined in the previous chapter, the achievement of the following demands is necessary:

1. Increased Wages:

The recent wage advances were inadequate to meet the advancing cost of living, much less to basically improve railroad workers' living standards. They should, therefore, be supplemented by further substantial wage increases.

2. Against Unemployment:

The six-hour day and five-day week.

Guaranteed full time employment for all regularly assigned forces, the minimum of such forces to be set at 1,500,000 workers.

Guaranteed two-thirds of full time for all stand-by forces.

A full-crew law.

A seventy-car train limit law.

Against all consolidation plans (including the dismissal wage agreement) that reduce the number of railroad workers.

Two weeks' vacation with pay, and ten days' sick-leave pay annually.

3. Social Security:

Unemployment insurance for all railroad workers.

Improved old age pension system, through amendment of

Railroad Retirement Act to reduce the age limit to 60 years, to grant full pensions after thirty years of service, regardless of age limits, to eliminate payments of workers and to increase rate of pensions.

4. Safety:

Track and Bridge Inspection Bill.

Train Dispatcher Bill.

In the above demands of the railroad workers, the two most urgent are those for wage increases and the six-hour day. Behind these should be concentrated the full power of the twenty-one railroad unions, as well as the support of organized labor generally.

There are other vital demands, covering great groups of workers in addition to those on the railroads, which should also receive the energetic support of all railroaders. These measures are necessary in order to do away with many grievous evils that the working masses suffer from. Among the more important of them are:

Greatly increased appropriations for W.P.A. work, as the unemployed must not be allowed to starve.

Adoption of the original Black-Connery wages and hours bill, with provisions for adequate minimum wage rates and the thirty-hour week.

Amendments to the Social Security Act to drastically improve the terms of federal unemployment insurance and old age pensions.

Amendment to the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act to greatly improve the slum-clearing and cheap-housing provisions.

A federal anti-lynching law, to protect Negroes from murder mobs.

The Child Labor Amendment to the United States Constitution, to abolish child labor.

The American Youth Act, to provide better education and opportunity for young workers.

For the release of Tom Mooney, the Scottsboro Boys, J. M. McNamara and other political prisoners, and for the repeal of all so-called anti-syndicalist laws.

An adequate program of farm legislation to relieve the farmers from crushing mortgage, tax and rent burdens, with cost of production guaranteed for their produce.

Outlaw all scab-herding, strikebreaking detective agencies.

Disarm and disband all vigilante groups.

Outlaw company unionism in all its forms.

Confiscate and abolish all stores of arms and ammunition in industrial plants.

Steeply graduated income taxes upon yearly incomes of \$5,000 and more.

Taxation upon all at present tax-exempt securities.

Curb the dictatorial power of the United States Supreme Court.

Nationalization of the banking, munitions and railroad industries.

Repeal of the present Neutrality Act and the adoption by the American government of a peace policy of cooperation with other countries against fascist war-making aggressor governments on the basis of the collective security principle: "Keep America out of war by keeping war out of the world."

While fighting for the foregoing major railroad and general mass demands, the railroad workers should also join up with the rest of the labor movement to defeat the host of anti-labor legislation that is now cropping up in the national and state legislative bodies. Among the more important of such destructive measures in Congress are: various proposals to amend the Wagner Labor Disputes Act in order to incorporate the trade unions, to make them subject to the

anti-trust laws, and to restrict their right to strike and picket; sedition bills and teachers' oath laws designed to stifle free speech and to otherwise diminish the people's civil rights; fake anti-war bills (Sheppard-Hill Bills) whose real purpose is to destroy the trade unions; proposals (Dies Bill) to deport foreign-born workers, deny them jobs and fingerprint them; plans to shift the tax burden onto the workers and farmers, etc., huge military appropriations and many other reactionary measures.

CHAPTER III

Wanted: A Militant Trade Union Policy

IF RAILROAD workers are to make real headway toward improving their conditions and winning the foregoing demands drastic improvements will have to be made in the make-up and conduct of the railroad trade unions. And the first betterment in this respect should be the development of a more militant policy.

Labor unions are fighting organizations. Their effectiveness in winning concessions for their members, in a given political situation, depends directly upon their ability, if need be, to bring production to a standstill. When the employers fear the striking power of a union they make concessions to it, and only then. Unions, therefore, must cultivate their ability to strike effectively, but, of course, they should use the strike weapon judiciously. Fancy arguments by leaders, reliance upon arbitration or upon the "good will" of employers and other such maneuvers, can be no substitute for powerful and militant unionism.

The railroad workers, true to this principle, have a long record of militant struggle. Among their many battles for justice were the great national strike of 1877, the A.R.U. strike of 1894 led by Debs, the Illinois Central-Harriman strike of 1911-15, the 1916 strike movement of the four Brotherhoods for the eight-hour day, the "outlaw" shopmen's strike of 1919, the "outlaw" switchmen's strike of 1920, the national shopmen's strike of 1922, and scores of

individual craft strikes on various railroads in recent years.

The top leaders of the railroad craft unions seem to have completely forgotten that labor unions are fighting bodies, if they ever knew it. They work on the false theory that the interests of the workers are identical with, or rather subordinate to, those of the railroad owners. Their line of policy is to conciliate the railroad companies, not to militantly defend the interests of the workers.

For many years, with justice, the Communists have been pointing out this situation. And now their assertions are borne out by devastating charges made by President A. F. Whitney, of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. In the official journal of that organization for July, 1937, he makes the sharpest attack on the policy of the railroad union leaders that has appeared in the official union press for a generation. Says President Whitney:

"In recent years there has developed a philosophy within the Railway Labor Executives Association to the effect that railway labor should surrender its democratic rights to petition the government for just legislation and should circumscribe its activities by carrier limitation."

In other words, this means that the railroad union leaders have been shielding the interests of the railroad owners and not fighting vigorously for the demands of the workers. President Whitney in this article gives many proofs of this fact, and the history of railroad unions for twenty years past (not to go further back) tells the same story. Let us learn a few lessons from that history.

During the World War the railroad workers built up a very powerful organization of some 1,800,000 members. It was militant and progressive. Under the big mass upsurge of that period the railroad unions were developing a greater and greater solidarity through local, system, divisional and

national federations, and, with their Plumb Plan and intensive political activities, they constituted the progressive wing of the whole American labor movement. This situation naturally greatly alarmed the railroad companies, and they proceeded, with the help of their labor leader friends, to undermine the fighting spirit of the powerful railroad unions.

Their aim was especially to take away the strike weapon of the unions; for the companies dreaded the economic power of the strongly organized workers in the key railroad industry. The first long step toward eliminating the strike among railroad workers was the passage of the Transportation Act (with the union leaders' support) in 1920. This law crippled the railroad unions by placing them under the hostile Railway Labor Board, which set about actively to worsen conditions for the workers. The workers rebelled against it and the great national strikes of the "outlaw" switchmen of 1920 and of 400,000 shopmen in 1922 resulted. The union leaders ruthlessly broke the first of these strikes and failed to support the "legal" shopmen's strike solidly, several of the unions remaining at work while the rest were striking. The consequence was a very disastrous defeat which cost the railroad unions several hundred thousand members and gravely weakened their power and progressive character.

The railroad leaders made the effects of this disaster worse by adopting, in 1923, the notorious B. & O. plan of union-management cooperation. The theory of this scheme was that strikes were unnecessary; that all the workers had to do was to speed up production and their steady work and high wages would automatically result. The general consequence was to worsen working conditions, to further destroy the militancy of the unions, to turn them into speed-up agencies of the bosses, and thus to contribute to the general over-

production that caused the great industrial crash of October, 1929.

Together with the disastrous B. & O. plan no-strike policy, the union leaders developed labor banking. This was another cure-all substitute for militant union policies. As every railroader knows, it finally wound up in one of the worst financial scandals in the history of the United States, with the B. of L. E. membership losing some \$17,000,000.

Not satisfied with the undermining effect of all these anti-strike tendencies, the railroad companies proceeded (again with the open support of the railroad union leadership) to more completely hogtie the railroad workers by the passage in 1926 of the Railway Labor Act, then popularly known as the Watson-Parker Law. This Act, with its tangle of mediation, arbitration and delay (which six years later was made still worse by amendments) further seriously weakened the strike right of the railroad workers and made arbitration semi-compulsory.

The railroad union leaders hailed the Watson-Parker Law as a great victory, but the Communists denounced it correctly as highly injurious to railroad unionism and they were condemned and expelled from the unions for so doing. In a pamphlet I wrote at the time, I said that this law "virtually fastens compulsory arbitration upon the necks of railroad workers, it outlaws strikes. . . . The W.-P. law is a blow at the vitals of railroad unionism."

And so it has turned out in fact. Between the effects of the semi-compulsory arbitration of the Railway Labor Act and the non-militant attitude of the union leaders, the twenty-one railroad unions have sunk deeply into a no-strike program. They have also developed other reactionary tendencies. From being the progressive head of the labor movement, as they were in 1920, they have become its tail-end. True, the

railroad union leaders talk big, adopt radical demands and take strike votes. Such maneuvers may fool some workers but certainly the companies are not deceived by them. The railroad owners know that when they say "no," the union leaders subside. The employers even sneer about it in their trade journals. Said the *Wall Street Journal* recently: "No one supposes that strike votes mean a strike; things don't happen that way in the railroad industry."

The notorious anti-labor sheet, the *Chicago Tribune* (August 7) scoffs at the no-strike policy of the unions thus:

"Twenty years ago the threat of a railway walkout would have been front page news. Business men would have been frantically facing a nationwide stoppage of industry. It would have been a national crisis equal only to the prospect of war. Today a strike vote is merely a ripple in the course of events, and the membership of the brotherhoods scarcely take it seriously."

Some Recent Railroad Experiences

In recent labor history there are many more examples to be found of the harmfulness of the railroad union leaders' refusal to fight the employers. Thus, in the depth of the industrial crisis, when millions of workers were on the brink of starvation, the railroad union leaders were even more energetic than the company officials (from whom they took their tip) in denouncing unemployment insurance and substantial work relief programs. Together with President Green and the other reactionary moguls of the A. F. of L., they declared that the establishment of federal unemployment insurance would degrade the American working man and destroy the trade union movement. If, since then, progress has been made toward instituting government unemployment insurance, the railroad union leaders are not entitled

to a particle of credit for it. It was the Communists and other militants who made the real fight for this fundamental reform.

Then there was the 1932 wage-cut in which the railroad unions led the wage reduction retreat of the general labor movement. President Whitney tells a scandalous story about that. He declares in his article in *The Railroad Trainman* that in the face of the distress then prevailing the union leaders proposed a conference with the companies to provide relief for unemployed railroad workers. But, says Whitney, "The only thing that came out of this conference, which was originally designed by the Railway Labor Executives Association to give relief to employers, was a 10 per cent cut payroll reduction." This constituted a gift of \$400,000,000 out of the workers' pockets to the companies before the reduction was eventually cancelled. And this cancellation was brought about not by efforts of the union leaders, but by mass pressure of the workers, a movement in which the rank-and-file Railroad Brotherhood Unity Movement played a big part.

The non-struggle policy of the railroad union leaders was further illustrated in the matter of old age pensions. It was not they who initiated the pension movement; that was done by the rank-and-file Railroad Employees National Pension Association. The railroad companies frowned upon the idea of a federal pension system; so, of course, the union leaders were also cold toward it. It was only when the railroad workers' sentiment for pensions was almost universal that they came forward with a much inferior bill to that proposed by the R.E.N.P.A. And in the recent amendments to the Railroad Retirement Act (the pension law), so says President Whitney, needless concessions were made to the companies that will cost the workers many millions yearly.

The case of the dismissal wage agreement was another example of the union leaders yielding before the demands of the companies. The owners demanded consolidation principally so that they could knock some 250,000 railroad workers out of jobs. As usual, the union leaders fell in with their plan. Instead of making a last ditch resistance against any loss of employment through consolidation, they (while making much anti-consolidation talk) surrendered to the companies by accepting the miserable dismissal wage in return for throwing large numbers of workers out of work. Then they hailed their retreat as a wonderful victory. This dismissal wage business will return to sorely plague railroad workers when the industry goes slack again and the companies vigorously take up once more their consolidation plans. Chairman Carrol of the Interstate Commerce Commission is now demanding that all the roads be combined into one unified national system. President Roosevelt has also recently strongly advocated consolidation. The whole dismissal wage agreement should be scrapped.

The sham battle conducted by the railroad union leaders around the question of the six-hour day is still another example of their weak policy. To kid the workers they have talked loudly about this issue, but they have done nothing to realize it in the several years since it was adopted as policy by the railroad unions. And now we have the deplorable spectacle of President Harrison of the Railway Labor Executives Association agreeing with the companies, in view of the then pending wage negotiations, not to insist upon the six-hour bill at this session of Congress. President Whitney is right when he says:

"This Harrison-Phillips philosophy of attempting to surrender the democratic rights of railroad workers to seek desirable legislation in the name of reaching agreements with the

carriers, will ultimately lead to the destruction of the organized labor movement if continued."

The union leaders threw overboard the six-hour day and other important legislation presumably in the interests of getting the men a favorable wage increase. But the wage agreement also turns out to be just one more instance of yielding before the powerful railroad corporations' demands. As we have already remarked above, the August, 1937, wage increases were so low that they did not even keep pace with the rising cost of living. They were the very minimum that the workers could be temporarily forced to accept by the combined pressure of the companies and the union leaders.

The Need of a Vigorous Policy

This constant surrender of the union leaders before the companies registers itself in bad wages, hours and working conditions for railroad workers. It must be stopped. The railroad unions should begin to function again as real labor organizations. The railroad workers are powerfully situated in industry. Their power is tremendous. With a militant policy they can extract many additional concessions from the avaricious companies.

The railroad workers must reconquer the right to strike, which has been surrendered up by their leaders. Railroad workers, like all others, may be depended upon to use the strike right intelligently and judiciously. The anti-strike provisions of the Railway Labor Act should be repealed. The railroad union leaders who persist in being so careful of the railroad owners' interests should be supplanted by men who look to their own union membership for instruction.

The whole history of the labor movement proves that the workers get concessions from their employers only to the

extent that they are able and willing to fight for them. For example, in 1916, the four Brotherhoods won the basic eight-hour day by a strike movement. Tiring of the companies' opposition and the politicians' delay, they set September 4 as the strike date; but Congress hurriedly passed the Adamson Law on September 2, two days before the strike deadline. Compare this militant policy and its real results with the present empty, endless dilly-dallying over the six-hour day bill.

Or take the question of company unionism. For years, with all their arbitration and other fol-de-rols under the Railway Labor Act, the railroad union leaders were quite unable to eliminate company unionism from the railroads. It was only with the development of the great organizing campaigns, strikes and intensive political activities of the C.I.O., which reflected themselves among the railroad workers and shook some life into the railroad unions, that real progress is finally being made to end the menace of company unionism on the railroads as well as in industry generally. The whole brilliant success of the C.I.O. emphasizes afresh the correctness of militant union policies.

It is high time that the railroad unions wake up and cut themselves loose from the strangling meshes of the Railway Labor Act. This law should be changed to strike out all its semi-compulsory arbitration features. Meanwhile, the railroad unions should adopt a line of vigorous action on both the industrial and political fields. Such a policy will translate itself into higher living standards, better jobs, and greater security for railroad workers, as well as in an enormous strengthening of the whole labor movement .

CHAPTER IV

A National Federation of All Railroad Workers

THE railroads, as we have pointed out above, are a low-wage industry, despite the tremendous potential economic power of the unions. President Harrison of the R.L.E.A. has stated that the average wage of the members of the fourteen non-train service unions, after the 1937 wage increases, is only 64 cents per hour, as compared with auto 90 cents, steel 82.5 cents, rubber 83 cents, tires and tubes 92.5 cents, etc. (all of the latter being industries where the C.I.O. is strong).

In the previous chapter we have seen the basic cause why this low-wage condition prevails on the railroads, namely, the no-strike policy and subservient attitude of the union leaders toward the railroad companies. Now we shall examine another elementary reason, that is, the horse-and-buggy system of twenty-one autonomous craft unions which exists on the railroads and which vastly reduces the strength of the workers.

A Battleship vs. a Fleet of Canoes

The railroad companies are powerful, united and ruthless. They are controlled by the greatest combination of capitalists in all the world. In her notable book, *Rulers of America*,* Anna Rochester says (pp. 223-224) :

* Anna Rochester, *Rulers of America*, New York, International Publishers.

"No section of American industrial life has reached a more advanced stage of capitalist development than the railroads. Here we find highly developed monopoly and an open and far-reaching use of the state on behalf of corporations."

"... there are thirteen major systems . . . controlling, directly or indirectly, nearly 90 per cent of the total mileage in the United States. Concentration of railroad power is even greater than this figure implies. For back of the thirteen major systems and the eight smaller systems is the dominating power of Morgan and Kuhn, Loeb."

The great House of Morgan, together with its Kuhn-Loeb, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, du Pont and other affiliates, dominates not only the railroads, but also many other industries, including steel, automobile, munitions, public utilities and coal mining, as well as various big banking and commercial enterprises. The gigantic Morgan financial octopus directly controls capitalist interests of 30 billion dollars; it is closely linked to another 16 billions, has influence over 16½ additional billions and is allied to 15 billions more. Thus the Morgan group either directly controls or actually dominates some 77 billion dollars of capital, or "more than one-fourth of the American corporate wealth."

It is against this monstrous, ruthless, united capitalist aggregation that the union representatives have to contend when they sit down in conference with representatives of the Association of American Railroads. The capitalist wolves may fight among themselves for ownership of the industries, but they present a united front against labor.

And what kind of an industrial organization do the railroad workers possess as against the gigantic power of the banker-owners of the railroad industry? The answer is a disgrace and a disaster to the whole labor movement—twenty-one weak, squabbling, autonomous craft unions. It is

a mosquito fleet of canoes trying to fight a great battleship. Small wonder, then, that the railroad workers do not get better results from their labor unions.

The Need for a United Organization

For forty years or more the most progressive railroad workers have realized the burning necessity for greater solidarity and a more compact form of organization. They understood the utter folly of single craft unions, or separate groups of such unions, trying to fight the powerful and united combination of railroad corporations. Such a stupid course has led to lost strikes and defeated wage negotiations time after time. Consequently, ever since the days of Debs and the American Railway Union in 1893-94, the progressives have striven to develop a more unified railroad unionism. The companies, of course, have always violently opposed these labor unity tendencies and consequently, inasmuch as it is the union leaders' policy to sneeze every time the railroad owners catch a cold, they, too, have set their faces like flint against consolidation of the railroad craft unions and the development of concerted action among them.

Indeed, some years ago, there was the absurd spectacle presented of the railroad union leaders, their own organizations scattered and disunited, carrying on a vigorous campaign for the amalgamation of the railroad companies. Their arguments on how and why the employers should consolidate are contained in a high-priced report submitted in 1921 to the Railroad Labor Board by W. Jett Lauck on behalf of the Railway Employees Department of the A. F. of L. In this most untimely report the advantage of unity of the railroad systems was stressed and opponents of it were condemned as reactionaries motivated only by "matters of

personal advantage." The railroad union leaders would, instead, have done much better had they planned the unification of railroad unionism and taken upon themselves the criticism that they directed to the opponents of unity of the railroad systems.

At the time of the great strike disaster of 1922, when the running trades worked while the shop trades struck and thus all were defeated, the Communist Party and the Trade Union Educational League initiated a broad campaign for the amalgamation of the craft unions into one industrial union. This timely proposal was endorsed by a majority of the rank-and-file workers generally in the railroad crafts, but the union leaders, by reason of their iron-clad, undemocratic grip on the unions, defeated the movement.

These same railroad union leaders have also castrated and frustrated the federation movement on the railroads. Federation sprang up on a large scale several years prior to the war as a result of progressive rank-and-file activity. It set about linking together the various craft unions, and the great I.C.-Harriman lines strike of 1911-1915 was fought over the issue of federation recognition by the companies. The federation movement prospered, however, in spite of railroad opposition, and it gradually spread all over the country. This resulted in the organization of the Railway Employees Department of the A. F. of L., and during the war and shortly afterwards, climaxed in various joint national movements of all the railroad unions and the signing of the all-inclusive national wage agreement. In many respects it was of a broad, rank-and-file, democratic character.

The railroad union leaders, with a few notable exceptions, sabotaged the federation movement from the outset. They saw that its logical result would be to draw the unions closer and closer, until finally they became a compact organization.

And this was precisely the last thing that the railroads and their friends, the Grand Chiefs, wanted. So they proceeded to sidetrack the whole federation movement.

Their attack on federation was twofold. Especially following the 1922 defeat, they systematically set about weakening the local, system, division and national federations by letting some fall to pieces altogether, and by undermining the rest in various ways. Then they proceeded to develop a substitute for the whole federation movement. This substitute, worthless like most substitutes, is the present Railway Labor Executives Association. This body, consisting nationally of the Presidents of the twenty-one railroad unions, has its counterpart in the association of General Chairmen on various railroad systems. Among other things, the R.L.E.A. has gutted the Railway Employees Department and left it virtually without any functions. The R.L.E.A. is a form that reduces rank-and-file control of the railroad unions and the solidarity of the workers to a minimum. It has been a convenient instrument to prevent the workers from making any real struggle against the railroad companies.

The great success of the C.I.O. in organizing the steel, auto and other industries on the basis of industrial unionism has again caused a new growth of militancy and solidarity among railroad workers. One important manifestation of this is the so-called "local associations movement" now developing in many railroad centers. This movement, despite its similarity of name, is unlike the system of national "associations" of General Chairmen and Grand Chiefs, in that it is a genuine attempt to link up all the various crafts on a given railroad system or important railroad center into one broad representative body. It is not a substitute for federation, but a builder and developer of it and a wide path to the solidarity of all railroad workers.

In order to head off this new progressive movement for solidarity of all railroad workers, the leaders of the Railway Employees Department recently issued a leaflet graphically picturing the twenty-one railroad organizations as constituting one great unbreakable chain—the Railway Labor Executive Association. This was a brazen attempt to kid railroaders into believing that they, too, have an industrial union. Such an argument is an insult to the intelligence of railroad workers. What kind of a chain is it in which each link has the power to leave the chain or yield to pressure whenever it sees fit? A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and the Railway Labor Executives Association is a whole chain of weak links. In fact, its links are not actually joined together at all.

The 1937 wage negotiations showed once again the falsity of the claim that the R.L.E.A. is an “unbreakable cable.” Here we saw two quite separate groups of unions, one composed of the five running trades and the other made up of fourteen non-train service organizations, and each carrying on entirely distinct wage negotiations. This separation injured the interests of both groups. Suppose it had turned out that one group had refused to accept the companies’ final proposals and declared a strike. Then we would have 1922 all over again, with part of the unions striking and the rest working and helping the employers to break the strike. Railroad workers have had enough of such criminal craft union stupidity. They want a consolidation of their union forces that will bring them into a united front against the powerful railroad combine.

What Kind of a Railroad Federation

What is urgently necessary is to join together all the railroad craft unions into one well-knit national federation. This

federation should be based upon the acceptance of three general principles by the affiliated organizations :

- A. One national wage agreement for all railroad workers.
- B. The federation should finally formulate the workers' demands and be in charge of all negotiations with the railroad companies in support of these demands.
- C. The decision as to whether the workers should strike or not in a given situation to rest solely within the jurisdiction of the federation.

A federation founded upon these three elementary principles would lay the basis for real solidarity and united action among the railroad workers. It would enormously increase their power as a whole. In all other respects, in the beginning at least, the unions affiliated to the industrial federation could retain their autonomy: holding their own conventions, electing their officers, formulating their craft demands, enforcing the agreement in their respective spheres, conducting their insurance systems, collecting their own rates of dues, etc. The effectiveness of this type of organization is shown by the successes achieved in the past four years by the Maritime Federation on the Pacific Coast.

The way to bring about such a national industrial federation of railroad workers is by developing the already existing principle and practice of federation on the railroads. All the international railroad unions should be hooked together nationally in a broad federation; the local, system and divisional federation should also be expanded to include all railroad unions; and there should be built up all-inclusive railroad councils in every city or town with two or more railroads. Cultivation of the new "local associations movement" is an important step in this general direction. All the leading committees and conventions of the various stages of the national railroad federation should be based on a broad rank-and-file

representation, and not be merely little handfuls of officials as in the case of the R.L.E.A. and its associated system chairmen. All the national unions ; local, system and divisional organizations, and local railroad councils should send delegates to biennial conventions of the great national industrial federation.

From the workers' standpoint there is every reason why the railroad unions should be joined together in such a federation—it would mean more wages and better working conditions for the workers, the certainty of making the railroads 100 per cent union, the making of vast economies in union administration, etc. The only objections against such a federation are the fears of the companies of its great power and the dread of the union officials that it might disturb their too-well-paid jobs. The old horse-chestnut argument that such a broad federation could not properly take care of the interests of all the groups of workers is thoroughly discredited by experience in many industries. It was also shown to be false in the railroad industry itself by the former national railroad wage agreement, which covered all railroad unions and all categories of railroad workers.

In addition to linking the railroad unions together in this federated form, there should also be a process started of amalgamating the most closely related unions. This would also lend added great strength to the whole railroad movement. Thus the O.R.C., B.R.T. and S.U.N.A. should be combined into one union—the leaders have been preventing this obviously necessary amalgamation for thirty years. And the same is also true of the B. of L. E. and the B. of L. F. & E., which, but for official opposition, would have naturally fused together a generation ago. Several of the metal trades unions should also be combined, to the benefit of all. The

two Negro organizations of Pullman Porters and Dining Car Employees should likewise be combined. In short, by amalgamation the number of unions could, with great profit, be cut at least in half at once. Then the double process of federation and amalgamation should be continued until it reaches its logical conclusion, the eventual development of a great departmentalized industrial union of all railroad workers. With such a united organization the railroad workers would indeed be a power in the land. The C.I.O. has demonstrated the worth of industrial unionism in the steel, auto, rubber and other industries; this form of organization will also prove no less valuable in the railroad industry.

The railroad workers, whether in their present craft form of organization, or in later stages of federation and amalgamation, should also enter into close cooperative arrangements with the unions of maritime, truck, bus, trolley and aircraft workers, with the aim of eventually establishing a great wide federation of all transport workers. The railroad companies are trying to lead railroaders into fighting other transport workers as competitors and enemies; but the railroaders must not be so trapped. All transport workers have interests in common against the great transport capitalists and they should all stand shoulder to shoulder.

More Trade Union Democracy Needed

Besides federating and amalgamating the railroad unions, they also stand in urgent need of democratization. Such democratization will modernize and strengthen them. Among the more basic measures necessary to this effect are:

A. The shameful discrimination against the large body of Negro railroad workers must be discontinued. There are more than 125,000 Negroes employed in the railroad indus-

try. They are grossly abused by the companies, being forced to accept the worst jobs and the lowest pay. In time of unemployment, they are the first fired and the last hired. Many railroad unions condone and assist this outrageous Jim-Crow system by refusing to allow the Negroes to become union members and to give them organized protection. This condition is a disgrace to the labor movement and a grievous injury to both white and Negro railroad workers. It must be ended, and the hand of democratic union fellowship extended to the doubly-oppressed Negro workers.

B. A more progressive, democratic and intelligent attitude must also be taken toward women and young workers in the railroad industry. They should be allowed freely to join the unions, their grievances should be carefully looked after, and special methods to organize and educate them need to be developed.

C. Unemployed railroad workers should also be retained as union members. This will greatly stimulate the unions to fight for their rights. One of the most shameful features of the great industrial crisis was the ruthless way in which the railroad and other craft union officials dropped the starving unemployed from the membership rolls.

D. The railroad unions also have a crying need for democracy in the conduct of their business. With but rare exceptions, the organizations are dominated by small groups of entrenched officials at the top and the rank and file have little real say in the actual running of the organizations. This was seen once again by the way the recent wage settlements were railroaded through, without the workers being allowed to vote on them and in spite of widespread protest.

The Chicago conference of general chairmen that accepted the recent wage increase of the fourteen non-operating unions was a shocking example of bureaucratic domination.

First, the general chairmen were given no previous inkling of the nature of the settlement until they heard Harrison report it at the meeting. Then they were not allowed to discuss the matter in the meeting, as the gathering was at once broken up into crafts, where various means of pressure were used to whip disgruntled chairmen into line. Among these means of coercion were threats to leave out of the settlement altogether any craft that voted against accepting its present terms, lying assertions that the strike vote did not have a majority, etc. By such undemocratic means was the inadequate settlement rammed down the throats of the railroad workers.

To democratize the procedure of the railroad unions the following major proposals are fundamentally necessary: the right of the membership to vote on all wage settlements; their right to recall elected officers by majority vote at any time; more democratically organized conventions, which should be held biennially and the officers' reports published thirty days in advance; election, not appointment, of convention committees; free discussion of all economic and political questions and opinions in the local meetings and official union journals; more strict and business-like system of financial accounts; compulsory retirement of union officials at the age of 65. Especially is it necessary to put an end to the undemocratic and generally harmful practice of paying union officials such large salaries and expense accounts that they live like capitalists and lose all feeling as workers. The practice of examining into workers' political beliefs as a basis for their membership in the union or eligibility for official positions should be abolished—true trade union democracy accepts all honorable workers as members without regard to their race, sex, religion, age, nationality or political opinion.

E. Another important democratic reform necessary to the railroad unions is to broaden out and strengthen the grievance committees along the lines of the new shop steward system of C.I.O. unions. The present grievance and bargaining committees of the unions in the railroad industry are too narrow, too much the affair only of paid officials. This is wrong; every negotiating committee, from the bottom to the top, should be heavily rank and file in composition. The experiences in the auto, steel and other industries prove the enormous importance of having a well-knit system of shop stewards for each department, shop, plant, etc. Such a shop steward system, adapted to railroad conditions, would greatly strengthen the unions. It would enormously facilitate organization work, would bring about better wage agreements, and would put an end to the harmful chiseling against existing agreements that the companies are carrying on everywhere.

To accomplish these basically necessary measures to strengthen the railroad unions—federation, amalgamation, democratization—it is indispensable that the progressive elements in the unions should campaign vigorously for them among the union members. Of the foregoing proposals there is not one that the broad rank and file would not favor if given a free expression of opinion. But the bulk of the conservative officialdom is against these measures and the unions are so undemocratically run that the will of the leaders, not the membership, is what ordinarily prevails.

This situation can be changed. By raising these questions among the membership, by making them live issues in every local union, in every local and system federation, in every international union convention, by filling the dry-as-dust official union journals with discussions of them—the great rank-and-file membership can be stirred to demand them.

And once this is done, the conservative officials will either drop their opposition or be supplanted by more progressive leaders. The advance of the railroad unions to a powerful and democratic industrial federation of all railroad workers will come when the progressive elements in the unions set out earnestly to bring it to pass.

CHAPTER V

Unite the Trade Union Movement

THE present split in the labor movement, with the A. F. of L. making war against the C.I.O., is a grave handicap to the progress of the trade unions and to the achievement of the workers' demands. It is a detriment to the railroad workers, as well as to every other section of the working class. It is high time that this war be ended and that labor unite its ranks against its common enemy, the great capitalists.

The reactionary capitalist interests of the country rejoice over the split in the ranks of the trade unions. This is because it is all to their advantage. A writer in *Railway Age* (July 17) expresses cynically the widespread employer opinion that "The only way to fight labor unions is with labor unions." The split in the labor movement gives aid, comfort and encouragement to every enemy of the workers.

Recent months have shown especially the harm of the split. The attacks of the A. F. of L. leaders upon the C.I.O. have exerted a very injurious effect upon the organizing campaigns and strikes of that organization. It is true that, in spite of these attacks, the C.I.O. has made great progress in organizing the workers in the hitherto unorganized mass production industries. Thus it has organized steel, auto, rubber, and is making rapid headway in many other industries. In one year it has added over 2,000,000 members to

its ranks and in so doing the C.I.O. has become a stronger national center than the A. F. of L. in point of numbers, strategic position in industry and general political influence.

But how much greater progress would have been made had labor been united, had the A. F. of L. leaders been supporting this organization work instead of sabotaging it? It is safe to say that at least twice as many workers would have been organized. The war of the A. F. of L. against the C.I.O. is a hindrance to the organization of the unorganized and a barrier in the path of the workers. It must be stopped.

The Cause of the Split

In order to learn the way to heal the breach in labor's ranks, we must first briefly examine the causes of the split. If we do this fairly we can only arrive at one conclusion: The responsibility for the division lies at the door of the ultra-conservative leaders of the A. F. of L.—the Greens, Wolls, Freys, Whartons, Hutchesons, etc. The split was caused by the stubborn refusal of these reactionaries, for narrow personal and craft reasons and against the interests of the whole labor movement, to adopt the means without which it was impossible to organize the workers in the mass production industries, namely, industrial unionism. It is the same type of conservative misleadership that is holding back the improvement of railroad unionism and railroad working conditions.

The A. F. of L. leaders are blind to the lessons of the past, deaf to all rational argument. But experience of the past twelve months has fully demonstrated the correctness of the industrial union position of John L. Lewis and the C.I.O. in this controversy and the utter futility of the craft policy of Green and the A. F. of L. Executive Council. A year ago there might have been some room for honest doubt

in the minds of conservative workers and trade union leaders; for after all, industrial unionism was new and untried in the mass production industries. But there is no longer reasonable ground for any such doubts. By its great organizing victories in steel, auto and many other industries, the C.I.O. has proved in life itself the validity of its program of industrial unionism. In a few months' time it has organized industries that the craft unions broke their heads over in vain for forty years. To refuse, as the A. F. of L. leaders do, to recognize this plain fact is deeply reactionary and an injury to the labor movement.

The course of the A. F. of L. Executive Council in the whole C.I.O. controversy has been criminally stupid. They began their incredible policy by rejecting in the San Francisco and Atlantic City Conventions (1934-35) Lewis' proposal that the mass production industries be organized into industrial unions. Instead, the A. F. of L. leaders stubbornly clung to their antiquated horse-and-buggy system of craft unionism which has been totally unable to organize these workers. The A. F. of L. Executive Council followed up this reactionary craft policy by arbitrarily ousting the C.I.O. unions with 1,000,000 members when Lewis and other industrial union leaders, as was their right under the A. F. of L. constitution and in conformity with the true interests of the labor movement, set up the C.I.O. and began to organize the great industries that the A. F. of L. leaders had been unable and unwilling to organize for many years past.

The next stage in the splitting policy of the A. F. of L. leaders was to openly sabotage the C.I.O. organizing campaigns in steel, auto, etc. And when great strikes developed there (General Motors, Chrysler, Republic, Bethlehem, etc.), we saw the shameful spectacle of Green, Frey and other A. F. of L. leaders, their policy bankrupt, condemning these

strikes and thus actually helping the employers and their vigilante gangs to break them. From criminally splitting the labor movement, Green and Company had come finally to a policy of actual strike-breaking. And recently the A. F. of L. leadership has taken the next logical step of its ruinous splitting policy by attempting to break up the already established C.I.O. industrial unions through setting up rival unions to them with the help of the employers. Suicidally the A. F. of L. has declared open war against the C.I.O. in every industry.

The Way to Trade Union Unity

It is obvious that trade union unity can only be achieved on the basis of the C.I.O. program that the mass production workers be organized into industrial unions. Industrial unionism is no longer merely a proposed plan; it is a living reality. The industrial unions are already here, millions strong, and occupying the most important industries—steel, auto, heavy metal, meat-packing, lumber, etc. The process of establishing unity is the recognition of this accomplished fact and the acceptance of these already existing unions. The craft unions, which have nothing more than empty paper claims in these industries, will have to abandon their jurisdictional "rights."

By the same token, the A. F. of L.'s so-called unity plan of establishing craft unionism in steel, auto and other mass production industries is criminally useless. It would split the existing mass industrial unions into dozens of weak and squabbling craft unions. Such a course would destroy all unionism outright in these industries and surrender them back to the open shop, where they were until the C.I.O. appeared on the scene. It is unthinkable that labor should take such a suicidal backward step. The A. F. of L. leaders are trying to do the impossible, to reverse the stream of

progress, to use water that has already gone over the mill. Industrial unionism in the mass production industries is here to stay and it must be recognized as the fundamental basis for labor unity.

It is also clear that the path to trade union unity can only be traversed by defeating the splitting policy of the A. F. of L. top leaders. These people, with their obsolete craft unionism and disruptive plans, do not represent the interests and wishes of the workers, not even the rank and file of their own unions. They have never let their membership vote on the question of industrial unionism and they would not dare to do so. If they did, the unions would upset their whole reactionary policy and endorse the program of the C.I.O. The workers want unity and they are opposed to the inter-union war now being carried on by A. F. of L. leaders.

It is necessary, therefore, that this whole matter of unity be brought to the attention of the members of the craft unions. Every trade and industrial union in the country should speak out on the matter. The C.I.O., A. F. of L., and Railroad Brotherhood organizations should discuss and act upon the question. The A. F. of L. Executive Council's reactionary policy must be defeated and reversed by an overwhelming mass demand for unity. The Communist Party, true to its loyal support of every interest of the working class, is doing all possible to this end.

Railroad workers should take an active part in this campaign for trade union unity. They have as much to gain from it as any other section of the working class. Precisely because there are both A. F. of L. and independent unions on the railroads, the railroad workers have a big role to play in the movement for trade union unity. When labor is finally united the four Brotherhoods must also be included in the new organizational set-up. The policy of keeping these

organizations separate from the rest of the labor movement is just another expression of the harmful conservatism of the railroad union leaders. It has weakened labor as a whole and it has benefited no one but the railroad companies and other capitalist interests.

Three important immediate tasks now stand before us in the fight for trade union unity. First, all support should be given to the C.I.O. in its organization campaigns and strikes. The C.I.O. is at grips with the greatest industrial combinations of America and it should be energetically supported by every resource at labor's command. By such support the moot question of industrial unionism is being settled by actually organizing the mass production industries, and the hands of the C.I.O., the real mass force for unity and trade union progress, are strengthened.

The second general task in bringing about trade union unity is to encourage the present widespread tendencies of local A. F. of L. bodies to refuse to unseat C.I.O. delegates and to cooperate with the C.I.O. in strikes, organizing campaigns, legislative programs and political activities, as exemplified by such recent cooperation in Buffalo, New Jersey, Akron, Canton, New York City, Detroit, West Virginia, the steel areas, etc. The more this local A. F. of L.-C.I.O. cooperation develops the broader grows the basis for the eventual unification of the labor movement.

The third task in fighting for labor unity is to support the demand for a great trade union convention to unify the labor movement. To this convention should come A. F. of L., C.I.O., Railroad Brotherhoods and independent unions, to be there united into one powerful national labor organization. Progressive forces everywhere should support this demand in local unions, central labor councils, state federation conventions and international union conventions. A vast rank-

and-file demand for unity should be created, one that will overwhelmingly defeat the splitting policies of the Greens, Whartons, Hutchesons, Wolls, Freys, etc.

There are now, since the successes of the C.I.O., about 7,000,000 organized trade unionists in this country. United in one national center around a militant and progressive program, their power would be enormous. The organization of the unorganized would go ahead at doubled speed, the economic and political demands of the workers would be increasingly victorious, the political strength of the working class would be tremendously enhanced. Railroad workers would especially profit by being brought into close collaboration with such powerful unions as the Miners, Steel Workers, Auto Workers, etc.

Reactionary capitalist forces, insolent and aggressive from their recent success in the strike in "little steel" and in the defeat of Roosevelt's Supreme Court proposals, are now again rearing their dangerous heads. Labor divided against itself cannot defeat these enemies. But labor united is invincible. The unification of the trade union movement would be the saddest news, the heaviest blow to these reactionaries, whose policy is to divide and rule. Trade union unity is the next great step forward for labor and it must be taken soon and decisively.

CHAPTER VI

For a Farmer-Labor Party

THE struggle of the workers is rapidly taking on more and more of a political character, and the same is true of that of other toilers, including farmers, and city small middle-class elements. This is because, in the present very sick capitalist system, these toiling masses increasingly confront acute problems which can only be relieved through governmental action. Necessarily, therefore, they have developed many mass political demands which were hardly heard of a dozen years ago. Among these demands are those for unemployment insurance, public works relief, old age pensions, hours and wages legislation, legalization of trade union organization, farm relief, housing laws, youth legislation, regulation of production, nationalization of certain industries, etc. Railroad workers, of course, are as deeply interested as any other workers in these big political problems.

Now, in order to achieve these burning needed demands it is absolutely necessary that the toiling masses, particularly the workers, should develop a strong political party and real activity. For many years the trade unions have dabbled in politics, as their leaders, largely for personal advantage, have endorsed candidates indiscriminately in both big parties. But by this method the working class vote has been kept disorganized, the plaything of unscrupulous reactionary politicians. It was inevitable, therefore, that the capitalists retained practically full control of the government in all

its branches—legislative, judicial, executive—nationally, as well as in the various states and cities, and they freely used this governmental power to suppress the workers and to feather their own nests. The working class was almost a zero politically.

Obviously this condition must be remedied. The laboring people must have a great party of their own. The workers and other toilers, comprising the overwhelming mass of the people and possessing basic interests in common against the capitalist exploiters, will be invincible politically once they are united in a great Farmer-Labor Party, a broad People's Front.

Such a political organization is gradually commencing to develop. We saw the beginning of it in 1932 when the great masses, rallying behind Roosevelt, dealt a smashing blow to the reaction and its infamous Hoover, starver of the unemployed, assassin of the war veterans, enemy of the farmers. In 1936, the masses displayed a still stronger get-together spirit, rallied again behind Roosevelt and overwhelmed the combined reactionary capitalist forces, the Morgans, du Ponts, Hearsts, etc., together with their long list of demagogues and stooges—Landon, Lemke, Coughlin, Al Smith, Gerald K. Smith, etc., etc. Historians will date the birth of the eventual People's Front from the 1932 and 1936 elections.

These elections were wonderful demonstrations of the political power of the masses, once they are aroused and have a definite program and leadership. And that their results, despite the workers' lack of political organization, have been worth the effort cannot be denied. Despite all the hesitation and vacillations of Roosevelt, the workers and farmers have gained considerable from the New Deal. The starvation policy of the Hoover government was smashed; some small

measure of relief was given to the hungry unemployed, to the bankrupt farmers, to the little home-owners; and at least a start has been made in building up a body of legislation in social security, the right to organize trade unions, farm relief, etc. The way was also opened to the present great increases in trade union membership.

Democracy Versus Fascism

But all this is very preliminary. What has been accomplished so far only scratches the surface of the needs and possibilities of the masses. The big political struggles of 1932-36 are but skirmishes of the huge battles that are soon to come and those great movements of the masses are merely the beginnings of the powerful organization that they will finally build up.

The reactionaries, although defeated in 1932 and 1936, are by no means crushed. Owning all the great banks and industries of the country, occupying highly strategic positions in the government, and animated by a ruthless spirit, they remain militant and powerful. Have we not seen in the 1937 Congress how, in spite of Roosevelt's huge popular and Congressional majority, they defeated his proposals to reorganize the Supreme Court and wrecked his program of social legislation? They are now seeking to destroy Roosevelt's leadership in the Democratic Party and to split that party. In the steel strike they boldly organized their vigilante gangs and murdered eighteen workers in cold blood. In industry, although their company unions are illegal, they have reorganized them as fake independent (yellow) unions. On all fronts, they are mobilizing their forces to cripple or break up the trade unions, to restrict the civil liberties of the masses, to destroy the beginnings that have been made in

social legislation, to shift the tax burden onto the backs of the toilers. They are seeking to again secure full control of the government, by hook or by crook. The Republican Party is the main rallying ground of these reactionaries, although the Democratic Party also has its full share of them.

The political struggle in this country is now rapidly deepening and sharpening. And more and more clear becomes the central issue of it all—democracy versus fascism. The great bankers and capitalists are being saturated with a fascist-like spirit. Increasingly the Morgans, du Ponts, Fords, Graces, Hearsts, Girdlers, etc., look for inspiration and guidance to the programs and methods of the Hitlers and Mussolinis. To fool the masses, these capitalists and their great battery of newspaper writers, politicians, radio commentators, preachers, economists, etc., speak much of democracy, but there is no democracy in them. Behind all their demagogy is a ruthless determination to enslave the American people for the benefit of a small ruling class.

The workers and other toilers must awaken to this danger. Especially necessary for them is it to become aware of the increasingly fascist character of the capitalist reaction. The Hoover starvation government was bad enough; but should the reactionary forces win decisive control of the national government again that would be an evil day for American democracy. The regime they would set up would be infinitely worse even than Hoover's. It would be dominated by the violent union-wrecking spirit of the Fords, Weirs, Hearsts and Girdlers. Since the election of 1932 the capitalists have chafed rebelliously at the bridle then put upon them. The motto they nourish is "Once out of this, never again." Should they succeed in winning the political victory, we may be dead certain they would adopt the most drastic measures to so disorganize the workers and other toilers and to so

deprive them of civil rights as to make them politically helpless. They would move rapidly in the direction of fascism.

The Need for a Farmer-Labor Party

The workers and their allies, the small farmers and lower middle class, must be alert to defeat this reactionary offensive. This they can accomplish if they will mobilize their forces. They are the overwhelming majority and they can scatter the hosts of reaction, and maintain and expand democracy in the teeth of every attack by its incipient fascist foes.

But to do this a great party of all toilers, a national Farmer-Labor Party, an American People's Front, must be built up. Such a party should be a strong federation of trade unions, cooperative organizations, farmers' associations, peace movements, fraternal societies, youth groupings, women's clubs, veterans' organizations, societies of technicians, the Socialist and Communist Parties, etc. These great groups have common interests against the great foe of the masses, the big bankers and industrialists. The Farmer-Labor Party, representing the huge majority of the American people, could elect a truly democratic government and successfully defend the interests of the masses. It would be the continuation and logical result of the great people's democratic movements of the national elections of 1932 and 1936.

In France, two years ago, the French masses were confronted with the imminent danger of fascism. But they organized a great People's Front movement, elected their own government and gave fascism a smashing defeat. In Spain, likewise, the Spanish workers, peasants and small middle class people formed a People's Front to head off the rising fascist menace and we have all seen how valiantly they have

fought to defeat the combined fascist forces of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. In the United States the general development goes in the same direction, although the situation is not so far advanced as in France and Spain. The capitalists' trend is more and more toward fascism, and the workers and their allies, to defeat them, move steadily toward the creation of a People's Front, a national Farmer-Labor Party. In France and Spain the Communist Party was the chief organizer of the People's Front and in the United States it is also its chief advocate.

To build a great Farmer-Labor Party we must proceed along several paths. Lots of preliminary work must be done. First, an organized movement is necessary to actively support progressive candidates upon the Democratic (or in some cases, Republican) ticket. Then, there is the necessity in many cases to set up independent candidates and labor tickets. Also in various states and municipalities, where a sufficient mass movement develops, local and state Farmer-Labor Parties ought to be organized. Besides, in all legislatures—national, state, city—blocs of labor, farmer and liberal representatives should be built up. And all these developments should be carried on with the definite idea in mind of eventually combining them into a great Farmer-Labor Party that can score a real political victory for the toiling masses.

The trade unions must be the leaders in this great mass movement. But the A. F. of L. top leaders, true to their unprogressive character, have always opposed the formation of a separate party of the toilers. Gradually, their opposition is being broken down, however. The formation of the C.I.O. and Labor's Non-Partisan League has given considerable stimulus to the Farmer-Labor Party movement, but the pace of development is still too slow, and the need for action is

very urgent. The struggle for the organization of the Farmer-Labor Party should be pressed on all fronts.

The problems of railroad workers especially are political in character. This is because the railroads are the heart's blood of the industrial system and anything touching them (whether of wages, freight rates, etc.) so deeply concerns the whole country that the government must intervene through the I.C.C. and otherwise. Thus, because of the sharply political character of all railroad matters, railroad workers have long been the most political-minded section of the working class and they have been instrumental in securing a considerable body of separate railroad labor laws. They also played the leading part in the greatest effort made by American workers to set up an independent political organization, the big movement of the Conference for Progressive Political Action in 1921-24. Now the labor situation in all industry becomes so acute that it, too, as well as that of the railroads, takes on more and more of a political character and the great body of the workers also are becoming political-minded. The railroad workers must break through their present political isolation and join with these masses in common struggle; they must also strive to eventually bring the railroad industry under the general labor laws, amended and improved, that regulate the conditions of the workers in all industry. This course of action will greatly facilitate the passage of much-needed railroad legislation (see Chapter II) as well as further the whole cause of organized labor generally. The railroad workers should be the leaders in the fight for the political demands of all the workers, for organizing a national Farmer-Labor Party, for building the American People's Front.

CHAPTER VII

The Road to Peace, Freedom and Prosperity

THE world is now in an unprecedented state of upheaval and crisis. It has just passed through one tremendous industrial breakdown and is rapidly approaching another still worse; in many countries fascism, with its terrorism, demagoguery and medieval barbarism, has come to power; and worst of all, the monster war is here again. Spain, Ethiopia and China are being ravaged by the militarist fascist powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, and the whole world is trembling on the brink of a murderous slaughter that will be incomparably more terrible than the World War of 1914-18.

The meaning of all this misery, tyranny and devastation is that capitalism, the system under which the whole world lives, except the Soviet Union, is now in decay and break-up. Capitalism, which grew in the past two hundred years, has exhausted its historic mission of laying the foundations of industry. It is now about to follow feudalism, its predecessor system, onto the scrapheap of history, and to be succeeded by a higher form of society, socialism. The present turmoil in the world—industrial crisis, mass pauperization, fascism, war, and revolutionary struggle—is the crashing of obsolete capitalism and the birthpangs of the coming socialist order of society.

The breakdown of capitalism occurs because, under this system, the industries, the land and the means of distribution are owned by private individuals and exploited for their

personal advantage, and not for the general welfare. Production is carried on for the profit of a small group of owners, not for the use of the whole people. This central fact gives birth to all the crises and struggles that are more and more tearing the capitalist system to pieces.

Private ownership of industry creates a class of parasitic capitalists who relentlessly exploit the producing masses. They force them to work for such low returns that they cannot buy back what they produce. This causes overproduction, industrial crises, mass unemployment and wholesale poverty and pauperization. At the same time, the capitalists of the various countries, through their imperialistic governments, wage desperate struggles with each other to seize the territories of weaker peoples and also each others' in order to secure sources of raw materials and to find markets for the mountains of unsalable products that are choking their industrial systems. This international struggle for markets, raw materials and territories is the central cause of modern war.

Naturally, the toiling masses of workers, farmers and small middle-class elements struggle to save themselves from this enveloping deluge of hunger, oppression, exploitation and war. At first their struggle takes on forms that aim to reform capitalism; but as the capitalist crisis deepens, their fight becomes more and more directed towards abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism. The capitalists, seeing the handwriting on the wall and determined at all costs to retain their ownership of industry and the land, strive with the most ruthless violence to break up the toilers' opposition. Wherever they are decisively victorious they completely destroy the trade unions, the cooperatives, and the workers', farmers', middle class and Socialist and labor political parties and they stamp out every semblance of freedom and democ-

racy. This is fascism, the monstrous product of a dying capitalism.

The United States is part and parcel of the world capitalist system and follows its general development. Because of its greater strength it has not yet shown the signs of decay so clearly as in European capitalism, but it is nevertheless traveling the same broad path to disintegration. The workers got a taste of its deep sickness in the recent great industrial crisis. And far worse lies directly ahead. Today the world, mainly because of its huge campaign of rearmament, is experiencing a certain stimulation of industry, the United States included. But this is only temporary. The same forces that produced the last crash are still at work and with greater force than ever. They will soon become dominant again and cause another industrial smashup (if the world is not plunged into war beforehand) that will be far more devastating than the last one. Already the signs of this new industrial crisis multiply in the United States and other countries, and railroad workers are being laid off in big batches. The only prospects that capitalism holds out to the masses are industrial crisis, mass starvation, fascist terrorism and murderous war.

Socialism the Remedy

The capitalists cannot save their decaying system. Their low wage programs and their subsidies to industry are powerless to eliminate industrial crises; their innumerable peace treaties and disarmament conferences cannot prevent war; their fascist terrorism cannot beat back the rising revolutionary movement of the workers and their allies. In spite of every effort of the capitalists—whether it is the New Deal of a Roosevelt or the terror regime of a Hitler—the crisis

of world capitalism broadens, deepens and rushes ever more rapidly toward its ultimate revolutionary climax.

Nor can the workers and their allies accommodate themselves to the dying capitalism or galvanize it into life again. By strong industrial and political organization and militant struggle for immediate demands (better wages and hours, farm relief, social security, etc.) they can mitigate the destructive effects of the capitalist crisis; by powerful People's Front movements they can smash back the fascist terrorists and, at least temporarily, hold in check the impending war; but eventually the intolerable pressure of the collapsing capitalist system will force the masses, in self defense, to abolish capitalism and to set up socialism. To lead in the establishment of socialism is the great historic mission of the Communist Party.

Socialism will establish a system of collective production for collective use. The great industries and the land will be owned by the people themselves through their socialist government and worked for the masses' benefit. In acquiring these basic means of social livelihood the parasitic ownership claims of the big capitalists will be canceled, but the interests of small owners and independent producers will be protected.

By abolishing private ownership of the basic means of production, socialism will do away with exploitation of man by man, the great curse of humanity. It will thereby lay the basis for the solution of all the great economic and political problems that are now tearing capitalist society to pieces and which are the symptoms of its coming death. Socialism will open up a new era of progress and happiness for the human race.

Socialism will abolish war. With capitalism eliminated, the bitter imperialist struggle—for markets in which to sell surplus commodities and for sources of raw materials—

which causes modern war, will cease. War is unthinkable between cooperative, collectivized socialist nations. Under socialism the ages-long dream of humanity will be realized and the sword finally will be beaten into the plowshare.

Socialism will completely destroy fascist tyranny and establish true democracy and freedom. All oppression and slavery are based upon the private ownership of the means by which people must live: the industries, the land, and the transportation systems. When this private ownership is abolished exploitation of mankind is stopped, the shackles are struck off enslaved humanity and the foundations of genuine liberty are laid.

Socialism will also provide the great masses a prosperity such as they now can hardly dream of. A recent American government study showed that, even with present productive forces, an annual income of \$4,400 for every family is possible.* Socialism will realize this great prosperity by a two-fold process. First, by the adoption of the most advanced machine technology, quite impossible under private ownership, it will raise the productive level of industry and agriculture far above their present status. Second, by the adoption of enormous economies it will place vast masses of additional wealth at the disposal of the people—among these economies being the saving to the people of the scores of billions of dollars that now go yearly to the capitalists in the shape of interest, rent and profit; the elimination of the terrific losses caused by mass unemployment; the saving of the huge waste caused by war and militarism; the abolition of the useless expenditure of effort in the thousands of parasitic and anti-social occupations that infest capitalism, etc., etc.

Under socialism, which is the early stage of communism,

* *The National Survey of Potential Production Capacity.*

the people for the first time in history will lead a life worthy of free human beings. It will be the beginning of a new world of progress in every sphere. The freedom, culture and well-being of the people will advance with gigantic strides, and the masses will soon come to look back upon our present system of capitalism with loathing such as we now consider humanity's early stage of savagery.

The Soviet Union, before our very eyes, is furnishing a graphic demonstration of the vast potentialities of socialism. In that country the toilers have taken over the government, the industries and the land, and are building socialism under extremely great difficulties. Twenty years ago, the Soviet Union was a backward agricultural land, with very little industry and with terrific mass poverty and ignorance as a result of many centuries of tsarism. The whole country had also been ravaged and wrecked by seven years of the World War and civil war. Moreover, the Soviet Union has been constantly surrounded by hostile capitalist governments trying to throttle its new social system.

In spite of all these terrific handicaps, however, the Russian workers and peasants, led by their great Communist Party, are successfully building socialism. They have demonstrated the workability of the new system beyond all question of doubt. They have completely abolished industrial crises and unemployment; they have developed a swift speed of industrial and agricultural development such as no country in history, not even the United States, has ever known; they have liquidated mass illiteracy and have launched the greatest mass culture movement ever known; they are rapidly abolishing crime; they are raising the living standards of the masses by leaps and bounds; they have wiped out anti-Semitism and have fused their many races into one united people; they are developing the first real democracy in human history,

and their country, with its powerful defensive Red Army, is the greatest bulwark in the world for peace. With their new socialist society, the Russian workers and peasants are the trail blazers for the whole of the world's oppressed and harassed humanity.

Socialism and American Tradition

Ever since the foundation of the American republic, and many years before, an intense and persistent struggle has gone on between the exploiting and exploited classes. On the one hand, the exploiters—bankers, industrialists, big landlords—have striven with all their power, through their ownership of industry and the land and their control of government, to rob and oppress the great toiling masses of the population. With these capitalists is identified all that is corrupt, parasitic, undemocratic, tyrannical and anti-social in American history. They have always been the enemies of the people.

On the other hand, the exploited—the huge masses of workers, poor farmers, small tradesmen and professional elements—have resolutely fought against the exploiters through this long period for the right to live like human beings. Their protracted struggle in colonial times for religious liberty, the revolutionary war for national independence, the fight against Negro slavery, the fight for public schools and the right of universal franchise, the long struggle of the trade unions to protect the working and living conditions of the workers, the prolonged fight of the farmers and small business interests against being enslaved by the encroaching trusts, the big election struggles of 1932 and 1936 against mass starvation of the workers, farmers and lower middle class—these were the work of the exploited masses, and it

was out of these vast movements, directed against the ruling capitalist class, that have come whatever of democracy, freedom and prosperity the American people have ever enjoyed in the past or enjoy now. With this historical struggle of the great producing masses is identified all that is free, democratic and progressive in American life. The toiling masses, not the capitalists, are the founders and builders of American democracy.

The present-day mass fight to beat back growing fascism and to preserve and extend American democracy—by a great Farmer-Labor Party People's Front—is the continuation of the long struggle of the democratic masses. The eventual establishment of socialism will be the fruition of this historical movement. Socialism is not the strange and alien thing that the Hearsts and Girdlers would have us believe. On the contrary, it is the summing up, the logical climax of the whole course of the American social process. It will be the final victory of the years' long struggle of the toiling masses over their exploiters and oppressors. "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism."

The party of socialism in the United States is the Communist Party. It is the militant leader in the struggle of the workers to shield themselves from the devastating effects of a decaying capitalist system; it is the vanguard fighter in the struggle to abolish capitalism altogether and to establish socialism. Every militant worker should be a member of the Communist Party.

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