

## Is Our Trade Union Work Important?

By I. AMTER.

TRADE union work is regarded in various ways by comrades of the party. In general there are two points of view: (1) One that trade union work may be important, but the unions are reactionary and there is little hope of the Communists gaining influence. The other point of view is that trade union work is useless in view of the fact that the unions embrace only a small section of the working class and since they have no intention of organizing the big mass of the unorganized, it is better for the Communists to occupy their time and devote their energy to work among the unorganized and prepare them for action.

Both points of view are wrong. It is true that the unions are in the hands of the reactionary officials, but the idea that the progressive movement can make no headway is an expression of the worst pessimism—and pessimism is utterly unfounded. There are thousands of progressives in the unions—many conscious and many unconscious. But the progressives have no definite program—and they are unable to organize themselves. It takes the dynamic force of the Communists to organize the progressives into the left wing, give them a program and direction. Hence every Communist must get into the unions and be active in them.

**Unions Are Class Organizations on Economic Field.**

The other type of Communist de-

clares that only a small section of the working class is organized and that this section, taken as a whole, is made up of the skilled workers. These Communists point out the fact that there are 22,000,000 unorganized workers and that it is mainly the function of the Communists to work among them. No one would deny the necessity of working among the unorganized. In fact, in view of the low state of organization of the American working class, it is one of the MAIN functions of the trade unions to get in the unorganized. The trade unions are the organizations of the working class on the economic field, whether they are of a reactionary or radical character. The Communists make use of the existent unions insofar as they can be employed to organize the American workers.

The Communists of this type do not recommend any substitute for the trade unions. Councils of action, shop committees and clubs are no substitute for unions. Both types of Communists have no basis for their claims. Work in the trade unions is the most important work at the present time. The Communists have not yet evolved a method, nor are they strong enough to put thru a campaign for organizing the unorganized. This will require much preparation—and the result of the campaign will be the strengthening of the existent unions or the formation of new unions.

**Bosses Do Not Ignore Existing Unions.**

The membership of the party agrees

with the nature of the campaigns that the central executive committee has laid out. These campaigns—for recognition and defense of Soviet Russia, for the protection of the foreign-born workers, for a labor party—are based upon the existing conditions in this country and on the plans that the capitalists and the capitalist government have in mind in order to break the organized labor movement of the country. If the capitalists entertained the same view of the trade union movement that some Communists do, then they would ignore the trade unions as instruments of the working class. But as they know that rebelliousness is growing among the workers and that this resentment is beginning to express itself in the unions; and as they know that the Communists and radicals are organizing and giving shape to this discontent, they are carrying on a vigorous open shop campaign to destroy the entire organized labor movement, which the Communists consider reactionary. The United Mine Workers of America are in the hands of reactionaries—and yet the coal operators had to negotiate long with Lewis before they could find a formula that would save Lewis' face for a short time, when he sold out the strike. The installation of company unions demonstrates another trick that the manufacturers employ in order to give some semblance of union organization to the workers, even tho they are worthless and are intended to prevent

the growth of real trade unions. The Communists, therefore, must regard trade unions as very important. They must regard preparation for this work equally essential. Party fractions—the organization of the program and of the Communist forces in a union—must meet in order to prepare this work. Without a well-working party fraction there can be no successful Communist trade union work.

There is still another type of Communist in the party who, because of inability to speak well, or to speak the English language fluently, regards it as a waste of time to belong to the unions. If all the comrades of the party spoke English well, it is perfectly obvious that all the members would not speak at unions; the fraction would decide who would be the spokesmen and the others would take the floor only as the steering committee decided. The function of a Communist does not consist only of talking. There are other functions, such as distribution of literature, speaking to individuals, etc., that every Communist can perform.

The Communists must begin to realize that those who can belong to the unions must get in and do their Communist duty. It is useless to talk of developing the Communist movement and of getting the masses to follow our party unless we begin to function also, and above all among that section of the working class that already understands organization—understands it and is in the trade unions.