

The Party in New York and Work Among Jobless

Must Overcome Burocracy; Organize the Movement Around Demands of Workers

By I. AMTER

I.

The analysis of the New York situation applies to many districts, and therefore the following articles should be dismissed by each District Committee.

The relief authorities of New York City have removed more than 50,000 families from the relief rolls. On September 22, 35,000 families received their last Red Cross baskets. Relief precinct workers have been instructed to drop scores of cases in their territory, using their own judgment as to which cases these should be. Wholesale evictions are taking place. Relief is being drastically cut. Home relief is coming to an end. Work relief at low rates of pay and for a totally inadequate number of hours is taking its place.

In the face of this situation why has the unemployed work of the Party so seriously slumped in the New York district—and in other districts? The reasons are many.

1. The propaganda of the "New Deal" and of N.R.A. has affected a section of the Party membership. In the beginning, even some leading local comrades believed that the provisions of the recovery act were such that we would not be able to oppose it. The analysis of the Party seemed to clear them up—but not for long. In the Bronx, a comrade is waiting for the "new Party line." This comrade believes that the Open Letter does not meet the situation. But the Open Letter is just the answer to the N.R.A.—and no "new line" is needed. What applied when the Open Letter was written applies now, with even greater vigor.

Opportunistic Analysis

Certain workers temporarily have had their wages increased, some new workers have received jobs. Some comrades have come to the conclusion that capitalism therefore is on the upgrade once more—that unemployment is a back issue. A new early crash and a rapidly mounting cost of living will follow, sharpening the situation as never before. The analysis of the comrades is opportunistic and is keeping the Party from grasping the situation and meeting its tasks. The District has a big job ahead in clarifying the membership, for without this the work on no field will go forward.

2. The Open Letter has been applied in a one-sided manner. The Open Letter correctly declares, as did the 14th Plenum Resolution of the Central Committee two years ago, that the main channel of the Party work is shop and trade union work.

The Open Letter, however, also lays down as a basic task the organization of the unemployed and a vigorous fight for relief and unemployment insurance.

The Party in New York has swung

into shop work, leading many strike

struggles, struggles against the at-

tempts to stop the activities of the

revolutionary unions (Whalen and

the courts) etc. The task of organ-

izing and leading the struggles of the

unemployed, on the other hand, has

fallen into a slump, in spite of the

recognition that mass unemployment

is a permanent phenomenon at this

stage of capitalism.

Shop work and the building of the

industrial unions together with

building the left oppositions in the

reformists unions must go hand in

hand with the building of the Un-

employed Councils and leading joint

struggles. The unemployed have been

on the picket lines, aiding the shop

workers in their struggles. With the

sagging of the unemployed work,

strike-breaking automatically in-

creases, so that the strike struggles

are endangered.

3. There is open disbelief that Un-

employment and Social Insurance

can be won. There is the idea that

unemployment insurance is only an

agitational slogan, or, as one com-

rade states, "something to worry the

capitalist with at times." If in 29

states during the past winter un-

employment insurance bills were in-

roduced; if Roosevelt admits that

millions will never return to work;

if the predictions of Johnson, Green

and Roosevelt that 6,000,000 would

return by Labor Day have not ma-

terialized; and if the figures of pro-

duction and consumption show that

the line is downward, then it is clear

that there is not only the need of

unemployment insurance, but the

necessity of mobilizing all forces to

struggle for the Workers Unemploy-

ment Insurance Bill. This is lacking

in the New York District.

These are the main political issues

hampering the development of our

unemployed work and not only in

New York. Now as to our methods

of work.

4. Burocracy is widespread in

the unemployed movement in New

York. There is direct appointment

and removals of Unemployed Council

functionaries by the Party Commit-

tees. These functionaries are re-

sponsible not to the masses but to

the Party Committees. As a result

we witness the following:

a) The leading functionaries warm

the seats in the headquarters, waiting

for cases, and giving directions

and orders, instead of being in the

neighborhoods, helping the less de-

veloped comrades in the work, and

themselves canvassing, organizing,

leading the workers in the neighbor-

hood struggles.

b) This brings about an isolation

of the leaders from the struggle, and

because of the inexperience of the

other comrades, isolation of the Un-

employed Councils from the great

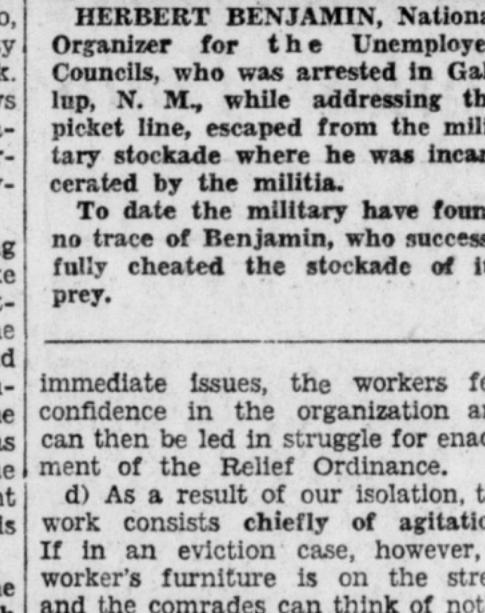
mass of the unemployed.

c) The consequence is that the Party does not know the immediate issues in the neighborhoods—issues on which the workers can be mobilized and will struggle.

Grip of Isolation

For instance, there is no question that the Workers Relief Ordinance represents the immediate needs of the workers of New York. But if we cannot get the workers to struggle for it, then as an issue it strikes no roots. This is due to the failure of the Unemployed Council, through its isolation, to find out the immediate issue that can arouse the neighborhood. For example, in Pittsburgh, in one section it was milk for the children; in another, shoes for the children—and Pittsburgh also has a Workers Relief Ordinance. A demand has meaning only in so far as it can mobilize workers for struggle. That must be our starting point and guide in getting the workers into action. Through struggle on the

ESCAPED MILITIA



HERBERT BENJAMIN, National Organizer for the Unemployed Councils, who was arrested in Gallup, N. M., while addressing the picket line, escaped from the military stockade where he was incarcerated by the militia.

To date the military have found no trace of Benjamin, who successfully cheated the stockade of its prey.

immediate issues, the workers feel confidence in the organization and can then be led in struggle for enactment of the Relief Ordinance.

d) As a result of our isolation, the work consists chiefly of agitation. If in an eviction case, however, a worker's furniture is on the street and the comrades can think of nothing better to do than to hold an election campaign meeting in front of the house, they only drive away the workers. Agitation is necessary in our work, better agitation than at the present time—but it must be accompanied by persistent struggle.

As against this, we have the example of a single comrade who recently was assigned to the West Side. This comrade found a longshoreman who faced eviction. The comrade went down to the waterfront, held a meeting of longshoremen, and discovered that a number of them also had received eviction notices. From this meeting he went back to the house of the first longshoreman, held a meeting of about 200, elected a delegation to go to the landlord, a Wall Street bank, raised hell there, returned to the West Side and together with the longshoremen made preparations to prevent this eviction.

Up to the present, our meetings were greeted with bricks and vegetables. The workers did not see us in action. Now action was being planned, and the throwers of the bricks, boys belonging to a Catholic boys' club, have been neutralized, and contacts with a few of them have been established. What has changed

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Suspended Sentences for the Diamond Cement Strikers

BALTIMORE, Md. (By Mail)—Four seamen, who participated in the strike of the S. S. Diamondoid Cement, were given suspended sentences of 60 days in criminal court here.

The court was forced by the defense of the seamen and the mass protest to withdraw the jail term originally given. The chief witness of the prosecution was the former third officer, Samuel Elgin of the ship, who turned against his fellow officers and seamen to scab. He has been rewarded by being made first officer.