

AMERICAN LABOR FACES NEW PROBLEMS IN STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION UNITY

By Rose Wortis

The decision of the CIO conference last week to call a constitutional convention will be greeted by all friends of the CIO and the entire progressive movement. Bent on consolidating its forces through such a convention, the CIO simultaneously declared its readiness for unity of organized labor on the basis of recognition of industrial unionism.

It gave the proper answer to those people who, to hide their opposition to industrial unionism, attempt to discredit the great achievements of the CIO by slanderous accusations against John L. Lewis, just as the reactionaries have raised the cry of dictatorship against President Roosevelt during the recent fight around the Reorganization Bill in Congress.

The decision for a convention shows that the CIO unions, the most democratic trade union organ-

izations in the various fields where they operate, have reached a point in their development where they will consolidate their forces nationally into a gigantic democratic trade union center, embracing more than four million. The enemies of Labor and the opponents of trade union unity will attempt to interpret this decision as a definite conclusion that the prospects for a united labor movement are hopeless, that the division will become permanent. The speeches of Hillman, Brophy, Quill and other leaders at the conference show that, far from reaching such conclusions, the CIO stands ready to resume negotiations just as soon as the leadership of the A. F. of L. is willing to agree on a basis for unity that will not jeopardize the achievements of the CIO.

POPULARIZE CIO DECISIONS

What are our tasks in this new situation? How can we, together with other progressive forces, frus-

trate the hopes of the enemies to keep the labor movement divided?

Of first importance in this regard is the question—how the decisions of the Washington Conference will be reported to the members of the CIO as well as of the A. F. of L.

One of the weaknesses in the work of our comrades, and many other progressives in the trade unions, is that they are entirely too often so absorbed in their daily routine work, that they take too much for granted, and do not always avail themselves of the many opportunities to explain to their membership the important questions involving general policies of the labor movement. Too often they are content with giving important reports only to the leading bodies, such as the general executive boards, joint boards, etc. This was particularly true in many unions after the historic Atlantic City Conference, which will occupy an important place in the annals of American Labor.

How else can we explain the fact that many CIO unions are reacting so slowly to legislative measures and are doing so little to press for legislation decided upon by the Atlantic City Conference? How else can we explain the slowness with which many of the most advanced unions are carrying through the Atlantic City program for organization of the unemployed? Even in such unions where Communists are not the deciding factor in the leadership, as in the Amalgamated, International Ladies Garment Workers and others, our comrades can be a factor in bringing such important issues before the membership.

RAISE UNITY ISSUE AT COMING CONVENTION

In the present situation it is of utmost importance that we develop the widest possible discussion among the members of the CIO as well as the A. F. of L. on

the decisions of the Washington conference.

The coming few months are of vital importance. Beginning with the month of May, a series of national and state conventions of the American Federation of Labor will take place throughout the country. Among the former are the Catering International, the Sheet & Metal Workers Alliance and others. During the same period there will also be a number of national conventions of the CIO unions, such as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the U.O.P.W.A., etc.

Irrespective of how important the trade issues coming up at these conventions may be, the key problem for all these convention preparations, whether CIO or A. F. of L., must be trade union unity on the basis of industrial unionism. The need for unity should stand out as the most important issue. Even in

such unions where the progressive forces are still weak, and likely to be in the minority, we must not neglect an opportunity to raise the question of unity. As far as the CIO union conventions are concerned, they have an opportunity to demonstrate before the entire working class their urgent desire for a united and militant labor movement.

Particular emphasis must be laid on the conventions of the State Federations of Labor held prior to the national convention of the A. F. of L. In the past, the progressive forces in the unions have failed to realize the importance of these conventions. The A. F. of L. state conventions, particularly in the East, have rarely represented the full sentiment of the progressives.

Proper mobilization on the part of the progressive forces for the national and state conventions; positive actions for unity taken at such conventions as that of the Catering

International, whose president is a member of the Executive Council of the A. F. of L.; similar action on the part of the convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, led by a vice-president of the CIO, will bring the question of trade union unity once more to the forefront and may force the Executive Council to recede from its untenable position.

The decision of the CIO to hold its convention in the Fall should fit in well with the plans of the progressive forces in the A. F. of L. It offers the progressive forces an opportunity to bring before the masses the real danger of a prolonged split, and a way of preventing it. If the progressive forces understand the great responsibility history has thrust upon them, and work properly, it is not only within the realm of possibility that unity negotiations will be resumed, even before the CIO convention is convened, but there is still a possibility

that, instead of two separate conventions, CIO and A. F. of L., Labor will meet in one conference of eight million organized workers. Even such well informed journalists as Louis Stark in his article in the New York Times of Sunday, April 17, does not preclude such possibility.

POSITION OF THE ILGWU LEADERSHIP

An important, though not decisive, problem in the further struggle for unity, particularly as it relates to the CIO, is the position of the ILGWU. Representatives of this union, from the very beginning have been vacillating in their position. Though making important steps forward, and aligning itself with the progressive forces in the country, the leadership of the I.L.G. W.U. has not cut loose from the influence of the reactionary "Forward" clique. The "Forward"

American Labor Faces New Problems In the Struggle for Trade Union Unity

(Continued from Page 2)

from the very beginning has openly opposed the CIO, and advocated a policy of capitulation to the reactionary Hutcheson machine.

Since the formation of the CIO, it has secretly and consistently conspired with Matthew Woll to break the Amalgamated and ILGWU away from the CIO. The hypocritical appeal of Matthew Woll (the same Woll who is the author of the anti-Semitic report at the 1936 convention of the A. F. of L. which even the reactionary hand-picked delegates could not swallow) to the ILGWU to abandon the CIO was the direct result of the underhanded work of the "Forward" clique. Mr. Dubinsky, in a public statement, referred the decision to the GEB.

It is quite true that a number of GEB members have been and are opposed to the CIO. Whatever may be the position of the membership of their respective locals on other union questions, these GEB members surely do not speak for the majority of the membership of the ILGWU, who are enthusiastic supporters of the CIO, and demonstrated it at the last convention. There is serious doubt as to whether they even express the sentiments of their respective locals on this issue. This could be best proven by a poll of the entire membership. The last convention of the ILGWU, after long and serious deliberation, decided to continue affiliation with the CIO as the best way to work for unity.

We Communists are in full sympathy with the desire for unity on the part of the leaders of the ILGWU, but most emphatically disagree with Mr. Dubinsky as to the responsibility of the break in the negotiations. The desire for unity on the part of Mr. Dubinsky has undoubtedly helped the CIO to take the initiative on unity, but his recent statements have done very much harm.

If the ILGWU is to remain true

to its convention decision, to use its power and influence for unity, it cannot but go hand in hand with the other CIO unions. Any step backward, even if the union remains independent, can only serve as encouragement to the reactionary leaders of the A. F. of L. to resist unity. It will lessen the pressure for unity. It will give grist to the mill of reaction. It will encourage the Hutchesons and Freys to continue their war on the CIO and will be in complete contradiction to the letter and spirit of the ILGWU convention resolution.

A great responsibility rests on the Communists and progressive forces in the ILGWU in the coming weeks. Without allowing themselves to be provoked into unnecessary struggle, these forces should exert all efforts to mobilize the rank and file in support of the CIO and to make clear to the coming meetings of the GEB the desire of the membership to remain part of the progressive and militant CIO and urge the GEB to carry out the convention decision to work for unity through the channels of the CIO.

FOR UNITY ACTION

Another important task confronting us, which we must cope with simultaneously with the development of the campaign for organic trade union unity, is the work for unity of action on the economic field, and especially for unity of action in the coming election campaign. It is vital that the recovery program presented by President Roosevelt receive the unified support of the A. F. of L. and the CIO.

Unless the CIO and A. F. of L. unite in support of this program, and through this unified support mobilize other sections of the population, there is a serious danger that the reactionaries who defeated the Wage and Hour Bill, the Reorganization Bill, the same forces who are conspiring to initiate a wholesale wage cutting campaign, starting

with the railroad industry, will once more place the profits of the rich above the welfare of the common people and work to defeat the Roosevelt recovery program. Unity of action around these immediate issues will lay the basis for unity of action in the coming election campaign to defeat reaction. The victory of the reactionaries in Seattle has sounded the danger signal.

The A. F. of L. workers have shown in many ways that they are opposed to Green's policy on the political, as well as on the economic field. The action of many local unions throughout the country in affiliating with Labor's Non-Partisan League, despite Green's orders, proves this. The decision of the New York Central Trades to merely acknowledge Green's letter without taking any action shows that even such forces in the A. F. of L. who are not ready to join Labor's Non-Partisan League (or A.L.P.) shrink from officially splitting Labor's ranks.

The progressive forces in New York and elsewhere must approach the problems of unity in the election campaign in a realistic manner. While exerting all efforts to get all A. F. of L. unions to affiliate to the A.L.P., we must not despair if this is impossible for the moment, but on the contrary, take the next best step to have A. F. of L. Non-Partisan Committees, and develop parallel action with the A.L.P. along the lines of the 1937 New York elections, where the A. F. of L. and A.L.P., though working separately, cooperate with each other and mobilize their respective members in support of the same candidates and program.

The decision of the special conference of the New York State Federation of Labor with regard to the Constitutional convention, as well as its legislative program, is with few exceptions, very much like the proposals of Labor's Non-Partisan League, and shows every possibility for joint action in 1938.