

World Labor Unity And the A. F. of L.

By Rose Wortis

II

How do we establish the status and functions of the trade unions in any particular country other than by reading the basic law of the country governing the organization of trade unions, and the laws and regulations of the unions? A reading of Soviet law completely contradicts the assertion of Matthew Woll and his colleagues about the role and functions of the Soviet Trade Unions. To quote from the Soviet Constitution:

"In conformity with the interests of the working people and in order to develop the organizational activity, initiative and political activities of the masses of our people, citizens of the USSR are insured the right to unite in public organizations, trade unions, cooperative organizations. . . ."

No such anti-labor laws as have been adopted in 20 different of our states are even conceivable in the Soviet Union.

THE REAL SOURCE

The official report by P. G. Maslakov on model rules for trade unions, delivered to the Seventh Congress of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions on Sept. 13, 1938, reads in part:

"In our country every worker, employee, engineer, technician, physician, agronomist, teacher, scientific worker and art worker, as well as students of higher educational institutions, training colleges or factory apprentice schools, has the right to join a trade union. The only requirement for membership in a trade union is that one accept the rules and abide by the decisions of the trade union. . . ."

"All members of a trade union take an active part in the work of their organization. They have the unrestricted right to decide all questions of trade union life, to vote and be elected to any trade union body or congress."

"They have the right to recall from any trade union body such of their representatives as have not justified the confidence of the membership before the expiration of the term for which they were elected."

"... the fundamental questions of the organization are decided by the trade union members themselves. The members of the union are its actual masters, and all trade union organs and officials are accountable to them. . . ."

"... All trade union bodies are elected by secret ballot."

"... All elected trade union bodies and officials are accountable to the trade union members who elected them."

"... The decisions of the higher trade union bodies are binding on the labor bodies. . . ."

A pamphlet recently issued by Clifford T. McAvoy, Legislative Director of the CIO, who made a study of the Soviet trade unions, gives the following summary of their functions:

"The Soviet trade union has many and diverse functions. As in the United States, it negotiates and enforces collective bargaining agreements with management, establishing wages, hours and working conditions for the workers in each factory and enterprise under its jurisdiction. It represents its members in taking up and adjusting grievances. It publishes its own national and local newspapers and magazines. . . ."

WOLL'S BIG LIE

These few quotations from real authorities on Soviet labor give the lie to the slanderous characterization of the Russian trade unions as the "Russian labor front" and give the lie to the fact that they have no autonomy. The Soviet law does provide for the free organization of workers, trade unions, without any interference from anti-labor employers and politicians, such as we encourage in our country. President Brown of the Electrical Workers, reporting on the South American unions, stated with great enthusiasm that in Chile, when the workers vote by majority to join a certain union, the government compels the firm to negotiate with the union for all workers. If this is considered advancement, how much more basic are the guarantees for collective bargaining rights given by the Soviet Government to the workers of that country:

"All frequent changes of Russian domestic and foreign policy are obediently echoed by the government officials in charge of the RUSSIAN LABOR FRONT," says the report of the AFL.

Why should not the Russian workers carry out the domestic and foreign policies of their government, since they themselves constitute that government? The representatives to all legislative bodies in the Soviet Union, beginning with the local Soviets to the Supreme Soviet, are elected by the workers. These representatives decide all governmental policies and control the execution. It is in this sense that a different relationship exists between the Soviet government and its trade unions. It is something which the American workers are still aspiring toward.

In our country, where the workers have but little representation in the government, the leadership of the AFL rarely followed an independent policy in relation to the basic problems even at times when the policies of the government did not coincide with the best interests of labor. We need only go back to

the last war, which—as is now universally admitted—was an imperialist war. The same is true in the more recent period, in relation to Spain, the first experiment of aggression by Hitler and Mussolini. The AFL gave its approval to the policy of non-support to the Spanish Government.

The same is true in relation to our government's policy toward the Soviet Union, Munich, etc. And even today, on the basic policies of the war, such as the second front, the AFL does not take a position independent of the government, and all those who try to bring pressure on the government for more speedy execution of its commitments for a second front are denounced.

Thus we see that this flimsy argument of Matthew Woll against the Soviet trade unions has little justification in fact as far as the AFL is concerned.

As to interference in the internal affairs of other trade unions, the report says:

"It (the AFL) does not attempt to impose its ideological views on the labor organizations of other nations"—which by implication the Soviet unions do.

INTERNAL "INTERFERENCE"

This does not exactly gibe with the facts, as far as the AFL is concerned, especially when we examine the relations of the AFL with the Latin-American unions. The Executive Council does not come to the table with clean hands. What are reasons for the persistent refusal of the AFL to recognize the CTAL, the organization representing the Latin-American unions, which is universally recognized by the British Trades Union Congress, the Soviet Trade Unions, the CIO and the labor movement of the rest of the United Nations, but the fact that the AFL leadership does not like the political complexions of the CTAL leader Toledano, whom they suspect of being a Communist? What is this but interference in the internal affairs of other trade unions. Refusing to deal with them because they are not influenced by the prejudices of the reactionary leadership of the AFL and insist on the right of electing leaders of their own choice?

The main reasons for this psychic fear of the AFL leadership to associate itself with the other trade unions is the effect that such an association will have in stimulating the already developing progressive trends in the AFL itself. No wonder Mr. Woll is ranting against the "Communists" who, he says, "have joined the unions of the Federation and have disguised their Russian affiliations to better carry on their disloyal and subversive activities."

The "subversive" activities of which Mr. Woll speaks are the struggles carried on by the progressive forces in the AFL to build and strengthen the American labor movement. It is these struggles which Woll denounces as "subversive" which have helped to bring up the membership of organized labor in our country from 3,000,000 to 12,000,000, have helped to open the doors and bring into the ranks of organized labor hundreds of thousands of Negro workers, won the struggle for unemployment insurance which Woll fought to the last. Helped to develop the independent political activities of labor, so that labor, instead of being a stepping-stone for careerist politicians, has become a vital force in the life of our nation, actively participating in the determination of our nation's policies.

WHAT WOLL FEARS

It is these activities of the supposed "partisans from abroad"—because they make it more difficult for the reactionaries—that Woll in reality fears. These activities will make it more difficult for the reactionaries to maintain their bureaucratic control of the millions of organized workers of the AFL who, through various machinations, contrive to keep themselves in office for life. Leaders of the Woll type are afraid of democratic processes in the labor movement through which the masses try to influence the policies of their organizations and make it impossible for a small clique to use the AFL as a means of advancing the personal fortunes of reactionary, defeatist Republican politicians, headed by Hutcheson and himself.

(Continued Tomorrow)

Bronx Candidates to Discuss Race Hate

Anti-Semitism will be discussed tonight by Bronx councilmanic candidates at a symposium sponsored by the Jewish People's Committee at the Harry Meloff Center, 888 E. 180th St.

Isadore Begun, Communist candidate; Michael J. Quill, independent candidate; Louis Cohen and Salvatore Ninfo are among the invited speakers.