

Our Language Federations and Industrial Work

By JOSEPH ZACK.

How to make our party a party of action has no means as yet been solved. The improvement most noticeable in the last two years is mainly in the line of correct topics and policies. The bulk of party members, however, are still as inactive and ineffective as they were in the old Socialist Party. The Industrial Department of the party, the only effective innovation that differentiates us from the S. P. still comprises only a small portion of our membership.

The bulk of our party members are still the same as they were in the S. P. The only difference is that, sentimentally they adhere to the Third International. Our party organization as such is also the same as the parliamentary S. P. The key to

the problem of making our party one of action, not only in wish but in reality, is to be found in the federations. The bulk of the workers in all the heavy industries, in fact most of the industries (with the possible exception of railroad and printing) are foreign workers. Examination easily shows that the bulk of the A. F. of L. are foreign born workers. The problem is to remodel our federations ideologically and organizationally in such a way as to make them effective in reaching the workers organized and unorganized in various industries. Much has been said about the difficulties of doing this work. I have been active along this line and studied this problem and I confidentially say that for every dis-

advantage our language federations may have in comparison with the English speaking units, there are several advantages to beat them.

A Daily Press.

First of all, the foreign workers in most all the languages are most receptive to our message; second, almost every federation has a daily press, which can be made a tremendous asset in moulding the sentiment, raising enthusiasm for our enterprises and getting our own members into work. The English speaking units are at a disadvantage on either of the above two points. The only advantage the English speaking units have is that they are able to speak the official language of the land, which is also the language of most of the trade union meetings. The strongest and apparently most decisive argument in the minds of our federation comrades, which prompts them to believe that their federations cannot become effective in industrial work, is that the members of the

federations belong to hundreds of different trades of crafts, dispersed over an immense number of places all over the United States, and that if divided into so many units for industrial work the whole thing would become unworkable and absurd.

Alleged facts.

This is logic apparently based on facts; but the facts are all different. On going over the memberships of the various federations, we will find that the members of the Jewish federation are mostly needle-trade workers. The members of the Finnish federation are in the main (about 70 per cent) wood workers. Several thousands of them are members of the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. The bulk of the Italian members are either needle, textile or construction workers. In fact the bulk of the membership of all of our federations can be found working in these industries.

We will find that a Russian branch in a steel town is mainly composed

of steel workers. A Hungarian or Polish branch in a mining town mainly of mine workers. A Lithuanian branch in a textile town, mainly of textile workers, etc., etc., etc. This geographical division in industries is also a great advantage for our work. A simple registration of the members of any of the federations would easily show what occupation the bulk of its members are engaged in, and upon which industry the federation must concentrate. Once the federations would make it their task to organize and devise means to reach the workers in the industries most represented by their nationality, they would have to study the problems of the workers in those industries, how to organize them, how to lead them in the struggle for a better living and our language press would then begin to reflect the struggles of these workers. Our more advanced members would then have something to discuss and write about intelligently, for it would be from the field of

action; from experience. Our foreign language press would then become a real labor press, a press that would tell the workers what to do right here and now. Our federations would then have real influence among their workers in the industries and their press an expanding circulation. The whole federation would become active, powerful and growing.

Problem of Organization.

The problem how to organize this work and link it up with the whole party industrial machine, locally and nationally, is an important detail. A commission of practical organizers more or less familiar with this problem, would solve this without much difficulties. Each federation would have to be taken by itself. The Russian federations, Russian Ukrainian, Lithuanian, could most likely have a closely combined joint industrial machine, since most of their active members and their members in general understand Russian. The members of

some federations speak mostly all English, and some federations have only a very small population of their nationality in the U. S. like the Letts and Esthonians. (There being not more than 30,000 of both nationalities in the U. S. as a whole). It must be necessary or useful to have any industrial machine and they will have to as best they can, work within the English industrial machine.

All these are practical organization details, the important thing is the adoption of the policy of organizing our federation members for industrial work as a whole. This could be done, I believe, easily enough generally, that is, a resolution passed by the C. E. C. of the party convention, but that would merely remain a wish; what is needed is that the whole federation membership understands and adopts it and goes into action to put it into effect, and that is far more difficult.

(To be continued.)