

Balance Sheet of the New Line

by Herbert Zam

In the final analysis, the test of the correctness or falseness of a certain line, policy or tactics is in its results. If, after the application of a certain policy, the Party is strengthened, then, obviously, that policy was essentially correct. If, on the contrary, the movement has been weakened while objective conditions did not become more unfavorable then, obviously that policy was incorrect.

It is now two years since the "new line" has been in full bloom in this country. In that period, all the "open", "hidden" and "conciliatory" opposition to this line has been "crushed." The "excesses" were discovered and eliminated. The "left manifestation" of "opportunism" was exposed and destroyed. Only the pure "line" and its pure application remained. There can be no more scapegoats found to assume the blame. If there are faults, defeats, failure, they rest on the shoulders of the "new line" and its advocates. In these two years also, there has been a continual extension of the favorable conditions for Communist activity, the economic crisis and severe unemployment, sharpened war danger, greater sympathy for the Soviet Union among large masses of workers, farmers and middle class elements. The burdens of the toilers have become heavier. As a consequence there was a decided movement of large masses of workers to the left. The Party had better opportunities than had existed for years. And yet, what are the results?

The Party Membership

The first place to test the growing or diminishing influence of the Party, is in the Party itself, its strength as an organization. Does the membership increase or decrease? That is the most vital question. If the influence of the Party upon the masses increases, then the most advanced section of these masses flock into the Party. But in the case of the "third period", we see something quite different. Not only has the membership of the Party not increased, but it has decreased steadily since the "new line" was first put into effect. Today the Party has less members than at any time in its history.

The Trade Union Work

We next turn to the most important field of Party work among the masses—trade union work. Here we see a disastrous situation. The ultra-left policy of dual unionism has not only resulted in the destruction of the influence of the Party in the reactionary unions, but has also destroyed whatever new unions had previously existed. Let us cite a few cases. Today, the Trade Union Unity League claims 15,000 members for all the unions, Leagues and groups affiliated with it. But two years ago the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union alone had 15,000 members. The Independent Shoe Workers Union had 5,000. The National Textile Union had 3,000 members in New Bedford alone. The National Miners Union had several thousand members and a tremendous number of followers. The Auto Workers Union in Detroit was growing rapidly. In April 1930 the Marine Workers Union had 4,000 members. Today the Marine Workers Union has less than 200 members, the Needle Trades Union has a maximum of 1500-2,000 members, while the others enumerated exist only on paper.

In addition to these "new" unions, the Party either controlled or had dominant influence on a whole series of other unions, as for instance, in New York: the Iron Workers Union, the Window Cleaners, the House Wreckers, the Union of Technical Men. These unions, all with substantial memberships, were either wrecked or handed over to the right wing as a result of the false policies. The case of the Amalgamated Food Workers is even more striking. An independent union, for years supporting the Party in all its campaigns, thoroughly militant, with 6,000 members in an important industry, conducted, under the inspiration of the Party a number of brilliant struggles but because the Party was defeated by a small margin in the question of affiliation to the T. U. U. L., a split was carried out, a few hundred split away, and the Party lost all influence in this union!

What about the influence of the Party in the reactionary unions? It has been practically wiped out. The United Mine Workers presents a tragic example. In 1926-27 the left wing was so powerful in it that John Brophy, the left wing candidate, received a majority in the elections, for president. Lewis, who stole the elections, as even the liberals admitted, credited Brophy with 68,000 votes against 110,000 for himself. But today, the left wing is so weak that when the miners in Illinois revolted against Lewis and split from the U. M. W. A., the Party was not even there to give them leadership, thus enabling a few bureaucrats to place themselves at the head of the movement and sell it out to Lewis. In the Anthracite, which today is seething with revolt, with miners seeking a way to rid themselves of Lewis, the Party has so little influence among the 150,000 organized miners, that for the first time in the existence of the Party, it could not get enough local endorsements to put up a left wing slate in the district elections. The tragedy of the situation among the miners has only repeated itself on a smaller scale in every industry. The abandonment by the Party of work in the reactionary unions has left a clear field to the bureaucrats. When the rank and file move against the bureaucracy, they find no leadership and the movement collapses. It would be interesting, if space were available, to take a few of the more important cities and list the A. F. of L. locals which the Party used to control, and which it has lost as a result of the "new line". A comparison of Party united front conferences in 1927 and 1928 with recent ones would tell the tale.

In the Cooperative Movement

When we turn to the cooperative field, the same dismal picture presents itself. At one time the Party was so powerful in the cooperative movement that at the national conference of the Cooperative League of America it was only a few votes short of a majority, while at the same time it was able to elect a majority of the delegates to the International Cooperative Congress and a very strong minority to the National Board. Today, the same conference takes place and the Party has not a single delegate. The Party's position is presented by someone from the outside, and not one delegate gets up to defend the Party's position. The key organization in the cooperative movement in the United States, the Central Cooperative Exchange of Superior, Wis., with 20,000-25,000 individual members, for years under the complete control of the Party and one of its greatest sources of strength, has been lost thru ultra-left policies and narrow, mechanical, sectarian methods of work.

Among the Fraternal Societies

Among the fraternal organizations also, the left wing is being wiped out by the splitting policy. In the Workmen's Circle, an organization of over 80,000 members, where the left wing had a following of 25,000 workers, a split was engineered which broke away perhaps 5000-6,000 members. In the Independent Workmen's Circle, an organization of 6,000-8,000 members was controlled by the Party. The ultra-left line has not only resulted in loss of control, but in a split in which about 2,000 followed the left wing and the rest remained in the organization. A similar situation occurred in the reactionary Hungarian fraternal organization. At the convention in 1929, the left wing was supported by about 40% of the delegates. Instead of continuing to work in the organization, the Party decided to split and join the revolutionary Hungarian fraternal organization. Less than 1,500 workers followed the Party. (The organization had 25,000-30,000 members). In the Lithuanian organization, where the Party had an

actual majority of the membership, but not a clear majority at the convention, instead of consolidating its support and overthrowing the right wing administration, the Party decided to split, taking only a fraction of its followers along with it. Unfortunately, it seems that the present leaders of the Party have learned nothing from these events. A similar course is being followed in every fraternal organization in which the Party has yet any influence and more splits are in preparation with what disastrous results can be imagined.

Strike Struggles

In strike struggles the Party has met with the same disastrous results. In contrast to the splendid struggles of the period of 1925-29 (Passaic, New Bedford, the mining strike, the needle trades struggles, Gastonia, the shoe strike, the cafeteria strike), we find a whole series of strikes ending disastrously for the Party: Lawrence, Flint, Philadelphia and New Orleans waterfront strikes, needle trades. These strikes, at first hailed as great victories are now admitted to have been disasters even by the R. I. L. U. Executive.

This gives us a bird's eye view of what has become of the left wing in the American labor movement, at one time such a powerful factor. In successful imitation of their German predecessors, Ruth Fischer and Maslow, the present leaders of our Party have substituted revolutionary phraseology and noisy demonstrations for the basic mass work in the organizations without which a Communist Party cannot be built.

We see that the events themselves have repudiated the "new line". It has been tested and found wanting. It has brought not success, but failure; not added strength, but greater weakness; not new allies, but loss of old support; not the acquisition of new forces, but the loss of the best old ones. It has brought the Communist movement of the United States to a very low ebb. Any real improvement in the position of the Party is today out of the question as long as this false line remains.

The Way Out for the Needle Workers

WHY I JOINED THE I. L. G. W. U.

by Chas. S. Zimmerman

I have decided to join the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. In order to forestall misrepresentation, slander and rumors which this step may bring forth in certain circles, I am here-with issuing a statement setting down the facts clearly so that all workers may understand the reasons for my action.

The Struggle in the I.L.G.W.U.

For a number of years there went on a determined fight in the I. L. G. W. U. against the right wing leaders and their reactionary policies. The climax of this militant struggle was the Joint Action fight in which we, the left wing, won control of the New York Joint Board. Then the reactionary bureaucrats expelled the Joint Board from the union. For two years—from the end of 1926 to the close of 1928—we fought against this expulsion, against this splitting of our union by the reactionary leadership, in a militant, in an energetic effort to save the unity of the organization.

In the course of this struggle, because of the expulsion of the Joint Board, there was no effective union left in the field. The bosses took advantage of this. Working conditions which it took us years to win were lost, were broken down.

In this fight against the bureaucracy and their reactionary policies, the great mass of the needle trades workers supported the left wing. Therefore, we decided to solidify our ranks by organizing a union to fight for and to defend the interests of the workers in the trade. When the N.T.W.I.U. was organized, it had real possibilities, a good chance to become the decisive factor in the field, as could be seen from the militant dress strike it waged in the beginning of 1929.

A Change of Line

In the same year, a number of new developments and significant events occurred which changed the situation entirely. First of all, towards the middle of 1929 the N. T. W. I. U. made a sharp break with the tactics so successfully pursued by the left wing for years. This new course split the ranks of the left wing. Many active rank and file workers were eliminated and removed from all activities in the N. T. W. I. U. All trade union democracy was wiped out in the organization. Thus the Industrial Union was seriously weakened and its fighting capacity undermined. Then, thru the so-called cloak-makers "strike" in July 1929, the reactionary bureaucrats forced most of the cloak makers to join the right wing union. The I. L. G. W. U. became the only union in the field so far as the cloakmakers were concerned. In February 1930, a similar so-called "strike" was called among the dressmakers and thousands of these workers were thus compelled to join the right wing union.

The N. T. W. I. U. leadership, continuing its false policies, refused to face facts as they are, refused to recognize the changed situation. Instead of gaining ground, the N. T. W. I. U. soon began to lose all the way down the line. At this point we proposed that the N. T. W. I. U. adopt the policy of building an organized left wing in the conservative unions, in those organizations where the mass of needle trades workers were to be found. Our proposal of this constructive

policy of organizing a left wing within the right wing unions was met only with sneers, denunciations, and slander.

The Logic of the False Course

The logic of the whole wrong course of the N. T. W. I. U. was seen in its recent dress strike which was a flat failure. This strike showed only all too painfully that the empty, bombastic phrases of the N. T. W. I. U. went over the heads of the masses of workers and didn't in the least inspire them or stir them to action. The inevitable disaster came. Today, the N. T. W. I. U. has become only a small propaganda group. Today, the N. T. W. I. U. can't do a thing to improve the conditions of the workers and cannot therefore function as a union.

Today, the right wing union, tho it has the masses in its fold, does not and cannot fight for the conditions of the workers because of the class-collaboration policies of its leadership, because it is controlled by bureaucrats whose reactionary policies only stifle the union. That's why the mass of workers in the I. L. G. W. U. are so dissatisfied, so discouraged, and inactive. That's why they are not fighting against the bureaucracy and the bosses, not fighting for better conditions. Disillusionment and demoralization have replaced the militancy which has hitherto always prevailed in the ranks of the needle trades workers.

The Way Out

But there is a way out of this deplorable situation for the needle trades workers. What has to be done is to revive the fighting spirit of the workers, to mobilize them for struggle against the bosses and the bureaucracy. Only the left wing workers can arouse them to militant action. Therefore, it is the duty of every left wing worker to join the I. L. G. W. U. for the purpose of building up this union into a powerful weapon in the hands of the workers against the bosses—to fight for one mighty union in the industry.

It is for all these reasons that I have decided to join the I. L. G. W. U. That is why I will help in every way to work for a militant class struggle program for the union, to fight against the reactionaries and the bosses, and for one powerful needle trades union in the industry. I believe it is now the duty of every militant, every left wing worker, every class-conscious needle trades worker, to join

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THE general decline in industrial activities is continuing. Steel output has fallen to 44%. Car-loadings dropped to a new low for the present crisis. Electric power output continues its downward trend. The decline in automobile production is more than seasonal. The "blue chip" stocks are still falling, with the U. S. Steel be-