
The Revolutionary Unions in the New York District

By ROSE WORTIS

I WANT to deal with two important points raised in the reports of Comrades Browder and Stachel, namely, the higher political level of the present strike wave and the need of developing the struggle of the workers on the basis of a class struggle, both amongst the unorganized workers and inside of the reformist union, and how we are meeting this new situation in the New York District.

Since the Extraordinary Conference last July we have made some progress in trade union work in New York City. In July we had a membership of 23,000 in the T.U.U.L. unions in New York City; our membership today is about 45,000

in unions affiliated with the Trade Union Unity Council with about 12 to 15 thousand in independent unions, this number has now been increased by the addition of the independent taxi drivers union. At the same time, we have also made considerable gains in our opposition work in the A. F. of L., where we have an organized following of about 50,000 workers supporting our program and leadership; needle, building trades, printing, food, etc. In the recent period we have even made a beginning of opposition work among the longshoremen and heavy metal, etc. In the recent period we have been confronted with a number of difficult problems. Outstanding was the underestimation of the readiness of the workers to enter into struggle. This found expression in practically every industry where important struggles developed. In such industries where we were quick in correcting our line we succeeded in leading the struggles of the workers, increasing and consolidating a much larger membership. This is true in the shoe workers and needle workers, etc. Another difficult problem was discussion about liquidating the T.U.U.L. unions. This was greatly stimulated by an extensive campaign carried on by the renegades which even affected some leading members of the Party. How did we meet this issue? Not on the basis of a formula as to which phase of our work is more important, T.U.U.L. work or work in the A.F. of L. We were guided by only one consideration, namely how can we best advance our class struggle policy among the workers.

In the Furniture Workers Union, our fraction, overwhelmed by the A.F. of L. campaign, came forward with the idea of liquidating our union on the eve of the strike. We defeated the liquidation tendencies with the result that today we have a union which has about 10,000 workers nationally—mostly native American elements.

In other instances in some of the lighter industries, such as jewelry, doll workers, etc., where our unions did not have a mass basis and masses of workers were recruited into the A.F. of L., we decided for our union to go into the A.F. of L. with the result that today our comrades are elected leaders of masses in these unions, fighting for our class struggle line. In the ship yards where we did not watch the situation very closely we continued to carry on agitation for our unions while the A.F. of L. recruited large numbers of workers. As a result when the strike came in the shipyard we were isolated from the workers. Thousands of workers were striking under the leadership of the A.F. of L. with our union playing no role. In the needle trades, building trades and among the food workers, we developed our independent unions side by side with our opposition in the reformist unions with the result that we have not only been able to win better

conditions for the workers in our T.U.U.L. unions, but through our struggles have forced substantial concessions for the workers in the A.F. of L., as was the case in the needle trades where we forced the bosses to give the dressmakers and cloakmakers higher wage scales in the codes. This was openly admitted by Grover Whalen, chairman of the N.R.A., who warned the bosses that if they do not give in to the demands of the workers, the Communists would take over the strike.

This shows that our policies in the trade union field must be based on the conditions found in the particular situation. Another shortcoming in our work during this period was the failure to bring forward the face of the Party and to meet the red scare. This has been corrected after the strike struggles. Our Party fractions in most of the unions have grown, not to the extent possible, but we have gained considerably.

In the past period most of the strikes that we have led were in industries where we had a union in existence. Today we are facing a new situation in New York City. There is a strike wave developing among the workers in New York City, especially in industries where there is neither a T.U. U.L. union nor an A.F. of L. union. In those industries there is today, as never before, a mass resentment growing among these workers against the company unions. For example in the I.R.T. subway system where the workers have succeeded in forcing a meeting of the company union which was attended by close to 1,000 workers where the workers formulated their demands and elected a rank and file committee to present them to the company. I recently met with a group of Western Electric workers where a company union was put over about a year ago. The workers in this shop had a meeting of 1,000 and decided to demand the return of the 10% cut. With proper work we can either convert this company union into a real union or take the workers out of the company union and organize them into a real union.

We also see a mass movement for struggle developing among the radio workers. If we want to reach the young workers and women workers, the radio industry of New York should be given immediate attention since 80% of the workers are young women. Therefore the Party of New York is confronted with a very important task of assigning the proper forces so that we can become the leaders of these workers and organize them into T.U.U.L. or independent unions under Communist leadership.

We had our first experience among these sections of unorganized workers in the taxi industry where there was no union until very recently. The taxi strike is of the greatest importance, not only for the Party in New York but for the entire Party. In this strike we have seen the new phase

of development in the American labor movement as dealt with in reports of Comrades Browder and Stachel. We see here a strike developing on the basis of illusions in the N.R.A. The taxi strike in New York City is the first important strike developed directly against the N.R.A. which helped to sell out the first strike. It is the first important strike against the company union which is a growing menace to the entire labor movement. Our experience in this strike has shown to us the possibilities of establishing ourselves in the leadership of these sections of the workers.

Whereas in the first strike our comrades were bodily thrown out of these meetings, in the second strike the most popular elements were the Communists. Through our militant leadership we have won the confidence of the workers. As a result of this we have recruited in the Party in the past week close to 60 taxi drivers; we have been able to sell more Labor Unities among the taxi drivers during the past month than we sold in all of our unions in New York. As a result of our work many strikers have adopted the Daily Worker as their official organ. It was a fine sight to see the taxi drivers in thousands leaving their hall and almost trampling upon the comrade selling the Daily Worker in their eagerness to see how their strike was dealt with in the news and editorials of the Daily Worker. The leading comrades in the editorial staff took a great interest in the strike, spending their days with the strikers, and I am sure their efforts will be repaid a thousandfold.

Not only have the Daily and Labor Unity become popular among the taxi drivers, but also other periodicals.

However, even in this strike there was some hesitancy in bringing forward the Party. At the first conference called in support of the strike, some of the leading comrades questioned the advisability of permitting the Party speaker to address the conference and bring a donation in the name of the Party. All the comrades agreed after the conference that the action of the Party was correct and the discussion among the workers which followed was helpful to us in combatting the red scare, explaining the program of the Party, all of which strengthened our influence among the workers. There was also some improvement in direct Party participation in the strike. While in the past the section of the Party did not actively participate in the strike struggles, the Party sections responded to this strike, though by no means sufficiently. The sections issued leaflets, a number of mass meetings were called in support of the strike and in that way we were able to bring the face of the Party before the strikers and to expose the treacherous role of the Socialist Party in the first and second strikes. This was very helpful in the struggle.

As far as our unions are concerned, they quickly realized

the importance of this strike and its effect on the entire transportation system in New York City which is a concentration point of the district, and the movement generally responded much better than ever before. We collected \$5,000 within a period of ten days, in support of the strike, from the needle trades workers, food workers, etc., who also sent speakers to address the strikers, thus making the taxi drivers part and parcel of the New York militant labor movement.

Even in this strike there were many shortcomings which I have no time to discuss at this time. Among them was the failure to penetrate the Negro taxi drivers. However, in this strike more than in any previous strike in New York City were the demands of the Negro workers against discrimination, against jim-crowism and the right of Negro drivers to work in every part of the city (at present they can only work in garages in Harlem and operate special color cars known as jim-crow cars) brought forward not only by our comrades, but through our influence by the other rank and file strike leaders. If we follow up our work we will establish our leadership over these workers.

There is one other important lesson we can learn from this strike which is of value to the entire Party, namely this: Not only were we able to lead this strike, but we also understood the psychological moment when it was necessary to make an organized retreat. It is important to state here that the taxi strike was actually settled on March 24th. As a result of the militant street battles the companies were forced to agree to a plebiscite and had already sent out a letter to its men appealing to them to vote against the union. This was a great victory for the workers since there was no doubt as to the outcome of the vote. However, as soon as the news of the treacherous Roosevelt-Green agreement became known, the companies withdrew from the plebiscite. General Motors stepped into the situation. With the help of Comrade Stachel who worked very closely with us, we analyzed the situation and came to the conclusion that we would not be able to get full union recognition at this time. Together with our leading forces we worked out a plan for settling the strike on the basis of garage committees, reinstatement of all workers, elimination of the blacklist and payment of the tax money. This settlement has been accepted by the workers who have returned to work under the leadership of their shop committees. This is a defeat of company unionism in the taxi trade. If we follow up the organized retreat, we can establish a real union of the taxi drivers and a union that will play an important part in the organization of an independent trade union center in New York.

The question of an independent trade union center in New York City is not a matter for the distant future with

us but an immediate perspective. There are close to 100,000 workers in New York who can be brought into an independent trade union center organized under our leadership. The partial success of this strike will be helpful towards realizing this immediate perspective. In order to really get these 100,000 workers under our leadership it is necessary that the unions of the TUUL play an important role in the development and extension of our influence among the workers, something which has been lacking until now.

Our unions in New York City, and I dare say throughout the whole country, are busy with their day to day problems, and do not realize that in order to solve their problems it is necessary for them to help the entire revolutionary trade union movement. Because of this underestimation, the TUUL in New York is not a real functioning trade union center. In most other centers there are no councils in existence at all. This is a great shortcoming and must be corrected. If we want to be a real factor in the organization of this independent trade union center, we must consolidate the TUUC, we must build our own unions with the thousands of members in the TUUL unions. We will then be able to establish ourselves as the leaders of this independent trade union center on the basis of a class struggle policy. To correct this shortcoming, it is necessary to strengthen our Party fraction as the leading force for carrying through the Party policies in the union.

We in New York City know, that as the strongest trade union center, the Party has a right to expect much more and better work from us. We are confident that on the basis of the decisions that will be made at this convention we will go forward in New York City to strengthen our opposition work in the AFL and to build the independent class struggle center so that within a short period we can issue a call for a national convention to form an independent federation in the name of 100,000 organized workers of New York City.
