

# Trade Union Unity: A Vital Political Necessity

by WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

The split between the A. F. of L. and CIO, originating primarily as a trade union matter, a collision between the progressives and conservatives in the A. F. of L. over the organization of the workers in the mass production industries—has now become a political question of profound importance. If the split is not soon healed, at least to the extent of establishing a working cooperation politically between the CIO and the great bulk of the A. F. of L. membership, it may well be the cause of the 1940 national elections being lost by the New Deal, with all the far-reaching defeat to democracy in the United States and internationally that this would imply. The workers and progressive forces should clearly realize this political danger in the split and tackle the unification problem accordingly.

The A. F. of L. reactionaries, who caused the split in the first place, are now extending their war against the CIO into the political field. This policy first began to show itself markedly in the 1938 gubernatorial elections when William Green and his cronies openly supported anti-New Dealers in Pennsylvania, Ohio, California and other states. Their political splitting policy was later developed further by the A. F. of L. Executive Council leaders keeping up a constant barrage of attack against various New Deal legislative measures, notably the Wagner Labor Act. And now, with the decisively important 1940 elections approaching, Green, Woll, Hutcheson and Company are carrying their treachery to its logical conclusion by more and more aligning themselves with the anti-New Deal forces and by obviously planning to either openly oppose or to covertly sabotage the New Deal presidential election ticket. If there is one thing that the reactionaries hope for more than any other in order to carry the coming national elections it is that labor remain split; hence by opposing every effort of the CIO and progressives towards labor unity the A. F. of L. leaders are performing vital political service for the worst enemies of the working class.

The split, if prolonged into the election campaign, will have the effect not only of confusing many workers but also of antagonizing and alienating large numbers of otherwise friendly farmer and city middle-class voters. The split is especially dangerous from the political point of view because the Republicans and Tory Democrats hope to swing the elections by the double tactic of a ferocious-red-baiting campaign directed against everyone and everything progressive, and the making of unlimited demagogic promises to the toilers. The demoralizing effect of such methods upon the masses will be greatly increased by confusion in labor's own ranks caused by the split.

The 1940 elections will be close and desperately fought. The reactionaries are resolved at every cost to wipe out the New Deal and all its works, and they are preparing to use all their tremendous power to carry the elections. Under no circumstances, therefore, can the forces of democracy afford to lose the great number of votes which will be surely sacrificed if labor remains split. To go into the elections with the trade union movement divided against itself is to invite a major disaster.

Consequently, it is obvious that if the New Deal forces are to win the elections (as well as to check the present offensive in Congress and the state legislatures against all progressive legislation) it is of the most basic necessity to develop a practical political solidarity in labor's ranks. The way to do this is to build up a collaboration of the New Deal elements in the A. F. of L. with the CIO, or at least to achieve parallel action between the two forces. The fight for actual trade union unity must be kept up and greatly intensified, in spite of the recent break-up of the unity negotiations by the A. F. of L. leaders' splitting policy. But while we are attempting the actual amalgamation of the two trade union centers the urgency of the political situation demands categorically that cooperative or parallel actions between them be developed.

This cooperation or parallel action, at the present juncture, necessarily takes the form of joint movements by the CIO and AFL New Dealers on a city, state and national basis, to carry local elections in support of legislation in which the masses are interested, and against the innumerable democracy-destroying projects of the capitalists. This tactic should be amplified and extended over into the national elections. By means of such joint action it will be possible to create an effective solidarity of labor in the elections in spite of all that Green and Company can do to the contrary. That the A. F. of L. workers will make this political cooperation with the CIO is proved by numerous very effective actions they have already carried out along this line in Pennsylvania, Illinois, California and many other states. The joint fight of the CIO and progressive forces of the A. F. of L. in defense of the Wagner Labor Act is an example in point.

To develop such political cooperation, while fighting for actual trade union unity, is of course, principally the task of the CIO and the New Deal forces inside the A. F. of L. But it is a vital job in which non-trade unionist progressives also have a very important part to perform. They, like labor, have vital interests at stake, and their voices in support of the position of the CIO and of the unity forces of the A. F. of L. can be a potent influence in cementing labor's split ranks. It is in realization of the political significance of the split and the role they have to play in helping heal it that caused Roosevelt, LaGuardia, Murphy, Perkins, Olson and many other progressives to speak out so clearly recently for trade union unity.

In the trade union movement as a whole and in the ranks of the democratic forces generally the sentiment for trade union unity, on a basis that would guarantee the existence and growth of the new CIO organizations in the mass production industries, is overwhelmingly in the majority. Roosevelt, in his re-



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peated calls for unity, expresses the practically universal will of the progressives; Lewis reflects the unity determination of the whole CIO; Tobin undoubtedly speaks for a vast majority of the A. F. of L. membership and the New Deal section of its leadership, and Whitney gives voice to the real sentiments of the great bulk of the railroad workers. Against unity, therefore, are chiefly only a relatively small number of labor reactionaries, strategically situated in the A. F. of L. Executive Council and supported by the most sinister capitalist forces in the United States.

The task, therefore, is to unite all these great unity forces of the CIO, AFL and progressives and to achieve the solidarity of Labor in spite of the official A. F. of L. splitters. And the immediate steps towards accomplishing this, as indicated above, are open cooperative and parallel actions between the CIO and the New Deal forces in the A. F. of L.—mean that are already being increasingly put into practice by the masses in the struggle.

The 1940 elections will mark a critical turning point in American history. They will decide whether, with a victory of the New Deal, the United States is to face still more definitely towards a policy of peace and democracy, or whether, with a victory of the Republicans and Tory Democrats, the country will start on the road towards fascism and war. The elections also will have profound international significance, giving great support to either world democracy or world fascism, as the forces of democracy or of reaction win. To carry the elections is, therefore, of the most vital urgency to the toiling masses. And the first consideration to assure such a victory is to establish political solidarity in the ranks of Labor.