

# Labor Builds Biggest Political Movement

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

The AFL, CIO and Railroad Brotherhoods are now developing the biggest political movement in their history, in support of Roosevelt and Truman and a victory Congress. This vast movement, because of the split in the ranks of organized labor and also a lack of political leadership on the part of the AFL and Railroad union leaders, is not expanding according to a uniform plan, but is springing up in various and complicated committee forms. Nevertheless, the movement is naturally proceeding along several pretty well defined general channels.



First, there is the PAC-CIO, headed by Sidney Hillman. This, the most advanced phase of labor's political organization, consists of national, regional, state and city committees, and, in its more developed sections, also reaches down to organizations in wards and precincts. With its widespread activity, the PAC-CIO has already given ample proof of its effectiveness and potentialities.

Second, there are the large numbers of nonpartisan, legislative, and unofficial political action committees of the AFL and the Railroad Brotherhoods. These are organized on a state, city and local union and even ward and precinct basis. The recent call of William Green for the formation of 1,000 union committees to mobilize the 7,000,000 members of the AFL for registration and voting in the November elections should, if taken up vigorously by the AFL rank and file and lower officialdom, give impetus to this important form of trade union political organization. The committees so formed, however, instead of following the insipid "neutrality" policy of the AFL Executive Council towards the Presidential election, will, for the most part, certainly work for Roosevelt's reelection.

## JOINT COMMITTEES

Third, there are the joint political action committees made up of representatives of the CIO, AFL, and Railroad Brotherhoods. These joint movements, to be found in various states and in many cities, are very important, as tending to unify the political efforts of organized labor in general. In some sections where this form is well developed it reaches down to the bottom in the shape of ward and precinct labor political clubs.

Fourth, there are a number of broad movements, linking up organized labor with middle class sections of the population, including such bodies as the NCPAC-CIO, the American Labor Party of New York, the Independent Voters League of Illinois, etc. Such organizations have great potentialities for drawing in farmers, professionals, small businessmen, etc., as labor's allies in the broad Roosevelt campaign. They also often establish ward and precinct organizations.

Fifth, there are the labor committees of the Democratic Party. Among the major advantages of these labor committees are that they hook together in single bodies all branches of the labor movement, and in doing so they establish a close working relation between the trade unions and the Democratic Party. The prospect is that there will be a national labor committee of the Democratic Party, to be headed by Daniel Tobin.

In various sections, however, union leaders, not waiting for the formation of a national committee, are busily—upon their own initiative—setting up committees on a state and city basis. Such committees can be extended also

upon a ward and precinct basis. Doubtless a wide network of Democratic Party labor committees will be formed, once the active pro-Roosevelt elements realize their prime importance.

Even a little consideration will make clear that these complicated committees do not necessarily overlap, but, on the contrary, essentially supplement one another. They all dovetail into a logical pattern. Hence, in lieu of a broad national unified political movement of organized labor, the obvious thing to do is to cultivate and strengthen all these types of labor political organizations which are now so freely and spontaneously springing up all over the country. In the wards and precincts, where the only appreciable problems of overlapping organization exist, ways should be worked out to achieve unity or cooperation on the basis of adjustments to local conditions.

In building this complex political movement a number of leading principles should be borne in mind. Among the most important of these are: (a) to apply the nonpartisan principle in every possible instance, in the sense of winning Republican and independent voters to support Roosevelt on the basis of the fundamental issues of the campaign; (b) to support energetically all tendencies making for political unity within the ranks of labor and between the workers and other pro-Roosevelt forces; (c) to keep the whole organization busy with active election work—registration of voters, fight for reconversion legislation, active educational work and preparations for a record mass turnout in the November elections; (d) to finance the work by intensive campaigns of fund collections, etc.

## SUPER-CAUTION HARMFUL

In this election the active workers must combat those super-cautious or reactionary elements who try to paralyze all political work of the unions on the grounds that it is in violation of the Hatch and Smith-Connally Acts. Organized labor must learn to take the fullest advantage of its political rights, even under such laws, while at the same time working tirelessly for the repeal of this restrictive legislation, insofar, at least, as it is used to cripple the political action of the workers.

The unions must likewise defeat those elements who would disorganize the workers' political work by attempting to hasten the whole movement into untimely labor parties or third party movements.

The extent to which labor can make its strength count in this election will depend primarily upon the extent to which it carries on grass roots activities—in the shops and local unions, in the wards and precincts. In past elections, organized labor's efforts hardly went beyond the formal endorsement of candidates and the setting up of a scattering of narrow nonpartisan union committees or labor committees of the Democratic Party, composed mostly of a few top union officials. But this time the whole labor movement must be organized and activated as never before. Nonpartisan committees today must have truly mass breadth and mass support and the Democratic Party labor committees must be made into real instruments to mobilize the hosts of labor. Especially must broad ward and precinct labor clubs be formed everywhere. Only by such intensive activity, on a scale never before seen in the American labor movement can the defeat of the Dewey reactionaries be assured and a smashing victory made certain for the Roosevelt win-the-war, win-the-peace forces.