

CPA Discussion Page

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The Labor-Management Charter

The amended draft resolution issued by the National Committee deletes all reference to the labor-management charter that was contained in the first draft resolution issued by the National Board.

The first draft resolution stated, "Utilize the Labor Movement Charter to press for the organization of the unorganized, to strengthen collective bargaining, to defend the trade unions from all attacks by the open-shoppers, to raise living standards and to promote the fight for 60,000,000 jobs."

Labor must and will fight for these objectives. However, to expect even a substantial minority of capital to agree to go along with labor in achieving this program indicates ignorance of the stark realities of the capitalist economic system.

Therefore, I am in agreement with the amended resolution which sheds this illusion and makes clear that labor, in the first place, together with its allies, will have to struggle every inch of the way against the main forces of capitalism if it is to achieve these goals.

These conclusions are corroborated by the experiences of labor-management bodies during the war.

The principle of labor-management cooperation arose as a practical necessity for the increase of war production. Its basic purpose was to break bottlenecks, speed production, conserve materials, promote plant safety, eliminate causes of absenteeism.

In March, 1942, Donald Nelson launched a drive to set up joint labor-management production committees in plants throughout the country. The CIO and AFL response was immediate and enthusiastic. Actually, the CIO had already acted, Phil Murray having submitted such a plan in December, 1940. The UE and the NMU already had such councils in operation. Other unions had concrete proposals for increasing production in their industry.

What was the reaction of employers? William Witherow, then president of the National Association of Manufacturers, ridiculed and opposed the plan. Wendell Lund, head of the WPB Labor Production Division, testifying before the House Tolson Committee (September 1942), stated: "Many employers have been unwilling to grasp the significance of these committees as an aid toward increasing their production. No amount of effort on the part of government or the unions has been successful in making these executives realize the need for tapping the production reservoir of employee ideas and cooperation."

Thus, thousands of factories had no committees at all because of employers' resistance both to government's and labor's efforts to secure their cooperation. Substantial numbers of the committees that were set up remained on paper or became defunct. Management rendered many of the committees ineffectual by refusing to grant them real authority. Committee proposals and suggestions in many cases were arbitrarily disregarded, and other committees were confined to bond selling, blood banks, etc.

Employers made all kinds of excuses for their refusal to go along, calling the committees "a stepping stone to socialism." These excuses have proved to be groundless, for where labor-management committees have functioned the privileges of management to earn a profit, to maintain basic direction of the plant and, of course, their ownership, was not threatened in any way.

The fact is that when it came to a question of relations with labor, capital generally gave second consideration to production for war and first consideration to ways and means "of keeping labor in its place," or weaken it, during the war and for the postwar. Thus, class fears that cooperation with labor

might strengthen unions held capitalists back from all-out war production. Genuine cooperation with labor in the building of labor-management committees would have speeded war production for our Army and our Allies in quicker time and in greater volume than has happened otherwise.

Where employers allowed the committees to function or unions overcame employers' resistance to them, the workers contributed greatly in war production. Communists correctly fought for the building up of such committees, and the most successful ones are in unionized shops.

However, the influence of our revisionist policies and visions of a coming Utopia of higher wages, automatic full employment after the war, etc., affected the attitude of Communists on these committees. We took an uncritical approach to the employer, sometimes defending them from the workers, weakening the resistance of the workers to engage in mass actions within the framework of the no-strike pledge. A strong Social Democratic tendency grew up, which still exists, of Communist union leaders basing their policies upon personally influencing management rather than keeping the pressure of the workers in a constant state of mobilization for the solution of problems.

As a result, many sound non-Communist forces in the unions began to suspect us, and were moved in the direction of participating in groups which were fighting such union leadership for one or another reason. The record is replete with sad consequences of such policy.

What about the future of the Labor-Management Charter? My opinion is that it will not endure because it does not correspond to developing realities. Already it is threatened with destruction by the Ball-Burton-Hatch Bill. This will tear apart the Wagner Act and make a farce of collective bargaining. Yet the charter states specifically, "Collective bargaining with management shall be recognized and preserved, free from legislative enactments." Eric Johnston and his associates agreed to defend that point. It will be interesting to see to what extent this group, that has been described as enlightened capitalists, will join with labor in the fight against the bill.

What about the future of factory labor-management committees? Output for the war against Japan must continue uninterrupted. At the same time these committees must begin to deal with reconversion and postwar problems as a central question. If it is not on their agenda, the workers will look askance at these committees and even begin to question the role of the union. Questions must be raised in these committees such as the company defining its reconversion and postwar wage policy, its reconversion and postwar production program, its readiness to enter into stable union relationships after the war.

These questions will impose a strain upon the existence of most committees, but they must be dealt with if there is to be even a semblance of orderly process in the reconversion period. Employers, particularly those pressed to the wall by monopolies, may go along in varying degrees, but there should be no illusions on this score. Regional conferences of management, labor and other community forces can serve a useful purpose in the formulation of community job programs.

Finally, employers in a few instances already are behaving as they did at the end of the last war when they used such committees as an anti-labor nucleus in the postwar. Vigilance of the workers should also be kept on guard against old-line trade union officials and corrupt elements who may plan to utilize

such committees for class collaboration along reactionary lines.

Thus, the record of employers generally is dismal for honest cooperation with labor, even under the pressure of a gigantic war to save our national existence. In their minds their class interests, and not

national interests, are decisive. An important clue to their calculations for the postwar is seen in their support for the Ball-Burton-Hatch Bill. Despite its fake liberal sponsorship, it is clear evidence that big capital, instead of preparing to give "unlimited opportunities for every

American," expects hard times for the mass of the Americans after the war. Monopoly is girding to throttle the struggles of the people for a better life and in particular to shackle the labor movement.

Labor's reliance upon other forces will lead to disaster. Labor must have allies, but it must first build up and rely upon its own strength in the period ahead.

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Active Unionists for CPA Committees

Earl Browder and the majority of the National Committee developed the thesis that there would be no postwar crisis in our national economy; that whatever problems might arise could be solved "with the least possible burdens upon the people."

The leadership of our movement, from top to bottom, with but few notable exceptions (Foster, etc.), accepted this revisionist opportunistic line. Whereas Browder and the National Committee must take full responsibility, we leaders in the labor movement, who have been elected to responsible positions of trust and leadership by the mass workers, must also assume a major part of the responsibility for permitting our line to become perverted and directed into the channels of bourgeois reformism and social-democratic opportunism. We failed to base our thinking and action on fundamental Marxist-Leninist concepts of organization and struggle to preserve and extend democracy.

We forgot the fundamental discussion by Dimitrov, in 1935, when he said:

"It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure, or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy."

I welcome the belated knowledge of the true character of Foster's opposition. It is most unfortunate that he failed to present his point of view to the convention which dissolved the CPUSA. It is most unfortunate that the basic discussion on such an important policy question, when presented by a leader of our movement with 50 years' service to labor, was confined to a small, select group of trade unionists who happened to be readily accessible to the national officers. This lack of collective leadership reflects a lack of confidence in the working people and must be cut out of the work of our organization.

The errors of our past policies have caused inestimable damage to the growth of our movement and to the prestige of its leaders. To say, in the draft resolution, that our organization has grown 25 percent belies the realistic fact that we have made no basic headway to win decisive sections of American trade union membership or leadership to our organization and socialism. The record, if investigated, will denote alarming deterioration in the composition of our membership and leadership.

Some comrades have said, "We're all subject to error, but the past is the past; let's get down to what is to be done now." They are right in wanting to get down to "what is to be done now." But to do that requires a depth of understanding among our whole membership of the character of our errors and the roots from which they sprang. Only

in this way can a resolute struggle to cut the cancer of American exceptionalism from the body of our organization, guarantee the success of our revised policy and program of action.

Other comrades attempt to justify the National Committee's withholding of the Foster letter from our membership, claiming that it would have disrupted our unity of effort in support of the war. This is sheer nonsense. The members of the National Committee responsible for creating this kind of undemocratic, non-Communist atmosphere, which prevents the fullest discussion of policy questions, have no place in the leadership of our Communist movement.

Our erroneous line weakened our contribution to national unity and our nation's war effort. Finance capital and their stooges got away with murder, greedily protecting and strengthening their vested interests. This, coupled with brazen profiteering and strikes against price control, was at the expense of the war effort. Our lack of proletarian vigilance contributed to our Government's failure to call this type of sabotage strictly to account.

The struggle for a correct policy and line within our party strengthens and unifies our ranks, increases our vigilance and multiplies our contacts with the broad masses.

Lack of support for Foster's position resulted from the failure of us trade unionists to understand our obligation to fully participate in the leadership of our party. This is because of the deep-rooted disease of "economism" that permeates the American Labor movement and keeps it shackled to its opportunistic (Gomperism) and anarchistic (IWW) past. We Communists in the labor movement are still shackled to the old idea that our job is to take care of the trade unions (negotiations, strikes, production, building unions, etc.) and somebody else will take care of the politics of the movement. We condescended once in a while to take care of what we called "practical" politics. We tended to leave our political thinking, however, to our "brain trust."

Our incorrect policy encouraged this "economism" in the labor movement. It encouraged political laziness because it based our Communist work on class collaboration instead of class struggle. We cor-

rectly dissolved our Communist factions within unions to promote trade union unity, but while doing so our general policy tended toward the development of class collaboration and we forgot what Dimitrov said in 1935:

"We are even prepared to forego the idea of creating Communist fractions in the trade unions if that is necessary to promote trade union unity. We are prepared to come to terms as to the independence of the united trade unions of all political parties. But we are decidedly opposed to any dependence of the trade unions on the bourgeoisie, and do not give up our basic point of view that it is impermissible for trade unions to adopt a neutral position in regard to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie." (* Pages 128-129, "The United Front Against War and Fascism.")

On the other hand, the leaders of our association, national and state, with but few exceptions, developed no conscious trade union cadre policy. Up until the establishment of the CPA, trade unionists on our leading committees were as scarce as hen's teeth. Afterward, a few were elected, but far too few.

The draft resolution is extremely weak in its failure to point out the relationship to composition of leadership and our basic errors in policy. In refreshing and strengthening the leading committees of the association, we must cut out our cancer of isolation from the main stream of the American labor movement. We must promote and develop within our leading committees, local trade union leaders, shop stewards and rank and file workers from the unions and the shop.

We cannot be satisfied, in my opinion, unless a majority of our leading committees from top to bottom are composed of workers actively associated with the main stream of American labor. This is the way to refresh our leadership and train a Marxist-Leninist leadership capable of understanding and solving realistically the complex problems that confront America and its toiling millions. This kind of a leadership will be able to understand, to plan and direct the struggle against the growing attacks of American industry against labor and all the people.

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Worth Repeating

WHITHER CHINA? is the question asked in the latest issue of *The War and The Working Class* (now renamed), to reach America (that of April 15), the article concluding: Judging by utterances in the press, public circles in the freedom-loving nations which interest themselves in the military and political situation in China are not losing hope that in spite of the efforts of the reactionaries, and notwithstanding many unfavorable portents, China will succeed in setting up an efficient democratic government which will enjoy the support of the people, strengthen national unity and increase the country's war effort. Whether these hopes are justified or not, it is difficult to say; but one thing is clear: unless urgent measures for the democratization of the political life of the country and the creation of national unity are carried out, China cannot occupy the place in the comity of democratic nations that she ought.