

Jan 1946

RESOLUTION ON THE ROLE AND TASKS OF THE PARTY IN THE TRADE UNIONS

This resolution is a continuation of and a supplement to the resolution on The Tasks of the Party in The Trade Unions adopted by the plenum of August 3, 1945 and approved by the Active Workers Conference of August 4, 1945. After certain indicated changes in the preceding resolution the two parts will be combined into one resolution and presented as the draft resolution for the forthcoming convention of the Party. Since the convention is many months away it will probably be necessary to make changes in the resolution or to supplement it in order to give considerations to developments which may later take place in the labor movement. The final draft will be submitted to the National Committee for approval before being sent out to the Party during the pre-convention discussion.

1. At the close of the Second World Imperialist War the proletariat in the United States was confronted with the virtual closing down of industry, mass lay-offs, reduction in wages, increase in hours of work and the prospect of being faced again, within the short period of one decade with mass unemployment.

For the unions, particularly the CIO unions of the mass production, this meant a severe reduction in membership accompanied with depleted treasuries at a time when it had become clear that the organized working class would have need for all of its strength in human and material resources to carry on the struggle against the employers which had only been held in check during the war by the no-strike pledge which had been imposed on the working class by its class collaborationist leadership.

The manifest dissatisfaction of the organized proletariat could not be restrained with the closing of the war. The restraining influence of the trade union bureaucrats and the political finesse of Roosevelt, who was no longer at the helm, could not be operative after the close of hostilities. Although Truman had been supported for vice-president by the CIO leadership, he was an unknown quantity to the labor movement and not even the labor bureaucracy found it possible to acclaim him as a "friend of labor" as had been the case with Roosevelt.

The resentment of labor over its treatment during the war and the betrayal of its confidence by the government, was further intensified by the fact, becoming ever clearer as the months passed that the bourgeoisie was prepared to reduce the standard of living of the working class, to attempt to disrupt the unions, while at the same time maintaining the price level and holding up the resumption of peace time production, thereby making it impossible for the workers to have jobs and a regular income.

2. It was this objective situation which prompted the current strike wave and brought over a million workers out into the streets. It is significant of the times and in indication of the mood of the workers that while the overwhelming majority of the strikers are of the CIO, the big independent unions are also on strike. The relative quiescence of the AFL craft unions is also significant. In fact many sections of the craft unions have found it possible to secure substantial increases in wages without resorting to the strike.

3. The complete failure of the Stalinists to influence the labor movement in a conservative direction, to win labor to a peaceful existence or to the acceptance of their incentive pay schemes following the war, must be noted.

This cannot be attributed to the recent "left turn" of the Stalinist party but rather to a loss of influence by that party, following their crass betrayals during the war and to the heightened understanding of labor acquired during the past few years.

4. The present strike wave is not the simple bread and butter struggle of past years. While the workers fight for better working conditions, they make demands today never before advanced by any large section of American labor. Today notions about full employment and an annual wage are a part of the program of labor in the United States. The more advanced workers among the trade unionists are beginning to understand faintly that the question of prices, production and productivity are indissolubly tied in with the question of wages.

This is the significance of the demand of the UAW in the General Motors strike that the union have the right to examine the books of the corporation and that no price increase accompany a rise in wages.

5. Any correct analysis of the current strike wave will reveal that the proletariat in the United States stands at the beginning of awakening political consciousness. The struggle being waged today between proletariat and bourgeoisie is a political struggle; conscious on the part of the bourgeoisie; inchoate and primitive on the part of the proletariat.

6. The objective scene and the unfolding of the class struggle on a higher plane than ever before in the United States prompt the question: Where is the working class going? What are its aims and objectives? This question cannot be answered by the proletariat itself, the trade union leadership, the Stalinist party nor by the reformists. It can only be answered by the revolutionary Marxist party.

If there be no such party of sufficient size, influence and strength then there can be no answer. The working class masses cannot guide, train and lead themselves. They cannot do this even in the trade union struggle. If they are left to themselves, despite their courage, determination and loyalty; to carry on the political struggle and forge the instruments of political activity and power, they will suffer sure defeat.

7. This a challenge to our Party which we are ill-prepared to meet today. At our full strength we are only a very small party. When we were at our full strength in the factories and unions we were even then a really insignificant force. While we performed miracle, considering our meagre forces and lack of struggle experience, we could not meet the demands made and the requirements of the situation,

8. Today while the crest of the strike wave rises, we find ourselves in the discomforting position of being revolutionaries without a union, divorced from the striking workers and with no opportunity to have influence except through our press. This is a deplorable state of affairs for revolutionists who are members of a Party with a correct program and an unblemished record to find themselves with no place to apply that program, with no place to test their program in action in the class struggle. Today as the working class tests its strength with the bourgeoisie we of the Workers Party find ourselves standing on the sidelines as spectators, watching and commenting but not participating.

No amount of analysis, of interpretation of comment and advice can substitute for active participation. Trade union resolutions are a very poor substitute for being in the factory and in the union. The excellence of Labor Action with its weekly coverage of the leading events is not near enough.

9. The Party must return to the factory and to the union; to the working class. We must get back before we acquire the old habits. We must not risk the danger of becoming a propaganda sect, a publication society, a small group of advisors to the proletariat. The resolution on That Character and Tasks and Perspectives of the Party has adequately analysed the nature and history of our Party and has presented the practical steps which must be taken.

10. The Party has one advantage today which we did not have in 1940-41 when we entered the war factories. We are not a green Party today. We have acquired some experience. We have functioned in the organized labor movement. Despite many mistakes we functioned well. This means that when we enter the factories and the unions again we will not start from scratch.

11. We must profit from the mistakes we made in the past. We did not succeed in indoctrinating the trade union fraction, the NC, the branches, and the whole Party with the concept of the meaning of political activity in the unions. Our trade unionists were too bogged down in routine trade union work. The Party as a whole did not understand what we were attempting to do in the unions and what we were doing. The Party did not assimilate the policies of the Party for union activity as contained in the various political and trade union resolutions. This in part accounts for the statement made by some comrades that the "Party was underground during the war." The Party does not even yet understand that during the war, to the extent of our forces and abilities, we were immersed in the class struggle.

12. We must combat any tendency in the Party to return to the old and relatively sterile practice, especially today when we are out of the factories, of dramatic activities in the streets (anti-Smith, Indonesia) in place of the hard, unglamorous, Bolshevik Jimmy Higgins political work in the trade union movement.

13. The real test of our Party will come now that the war, with its cost-plus contracts is over. As the bourgeoisie prepares to operate with its own capital and to contend with what competition exists, greater productivity will be demanded of the workers. Wages will be lower and working conditions will be such that it will be more difficult to keep a job. Our Party will now for the first time really be confronted with the necessity for genuine "proletarianization with all that means in the life of a worker.

14. The problem of effective political work in the unions by the Party is a problem for the NC of the party. It is a problem which can only be solved on the basis of increasing political maturity of the Party, increasing hardening of the Party and a developing sense of responsibility and self-discipline by the Party as a whole.

15. To do effective political work in the unions will depend in no small measure on the emergence and growth of the Party cadre as set forth in the resolution on the Character and Perspectives and Tasks of the Party. To build such a corps of comrades educated in the Party political line, with understanding

how to apply the political line of the party, who will defend the party; comrades who adopt for themselves a rigorous discipline and become in every sense "party people", is a necessary pre-requisite to effective political work in the unions.

David Coolidge,
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