

# THE PARTY BUILDER

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INTERNAL BULLETIN

April, 1945

## DISCUSSION ON TRADE UNION POLICY

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## DISCUSSION ON TRADE UNION POLICY

This special issue of the Party Builder contains a memorandum on trade union policy adopted by the Political Committee at its meeting March 19, 1945, as well as comments on the memorandum received to date.

The question of trade union policy will be one of the central points for discussion at the Plenary sessions of the National Committee, to be held in New York May 12th and 13th.

We invite additional comments from party members on the question of trade union policy, to be published in subsequent issues of the Party Builder.

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MEMORANDUM ON TRADE UNION POLICY

1. In the main, Roosevelt's war labor policy has consisted of: (a) The utilization of the war to extract the no-strike pledge and to bind the unions in the vise of compulsory arbitration through the WLB. (b) In return for the surrender of their independence, the unions have been "rewarded" with a "tolerant" attitude by the employers. As long as this policy assured the return of super profits the corporations, with few exceptions, gave "recognition" and "maintenance of membership" to the unions.

2. But this period of "class peace" is now approaching its end. It is evident that the big corporations are determined to smash the power of the unions as part of their reconversion plans. They fear the potential strength of the organized labor movement. The approaching German collapse is accelerating the union smashing drive. The auto magnates in particular are pressing for a show-down.

3. The challenge of the corporations will not go unanswered. This can be observed from the growth of union militancy already witnessed. Despite the capitulatory conduct of the top bureaucrats, the union militants in the plants appear ready and eager to accept battle. They are restive under the burdens imposed on them by the war. They are fed up with the WLB and are straining to break the chains of the no-strike pledge.

4. The demand for the unions to quit the WLB, the demand to revoke the no-strike pledge, is growing more insistent. This was reflected in the union conventions last Fall. It was reflected in the results of the UAW referendendum. A tiny group of rank and file auto militants challenged the powerful combination comprising the forces of government, capitalist press, employers, Stalinists and union bureaucrats. Yet, approximately one-third of the votes cast were for rescinding the no-strike pledge. This conflict has even found its echo in the recent meeting of the National CIO Executive Board.

5. The opportune time for the crystallization of a left-wing in the unions is at hand. The major task confronting the militants today is that of organization -- organization for the big struggles looming ahead.

6. This task of organizing the left-wing in the unions can be accomplished only if it has the conscious guidance and leadership of the party. We are duty bound to undertake this work -- and to do it boldly and aggressively.

7. Our party must execute a tactical turn in its trade union work. The period since American entry into the war was, for us, one of patient agitation around a few essential slogans. Our cautious method of working in the unions was dictated by the situation that existed until recently -- a situation that can be characterized as one of acceptance by the workers of the sacrifices demanded of them in the name of the war.

8. The workers are emerging out of their passivity. Our party has been in the vanguard of the agitation for the revocation of the no-strike pledge, for labor to quit the WLB, for an independent labor party. It is now our task to take the lead in organizing the left-wing forces around the above-mentioned issues.

9. Needless to say, in undertaking this big job of organizing the left-wing forces we must guard against the twin dangers of adventurism and opportunism. It must be recognized that it is far more difficult to maintain a correct approach in action than it is in agitation.

10. In carrying out this tactical turn, it will be necessary to make a careful survey of each industry where we have significant forces and to map out a realistic course of action. This can best be done by close collaboration of the comrades involved and the national trade union department.

11. This memorandum is presented to the P.C. If it is acted on favorably it should be submitted to all N.C. members for discussion and ratification and serve as the basis for a more rounded resolution at the next Plenum. Membership meetings, as well as regional conferences, should be arranged for discussion and action.

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#### IN EXPLANATION OF MOTION OF MORRISON:

The memorandum dealing with the proposed change in our trade-union tactical approach can be divided into two sections. One consists of a motion to change our tactic and the other of the motivation for the motion.

I am for the motion -- whole-heartedly since I believe the turn should have been made some time ago, prior to our convention in November.

I am uncertain about the motivation because of my belief that the turn should have been made before and because the motivation as presented shows definite signs of "tail-ending".

I therefore suggested that Comrade Stein's memorandum be divided into two sections and we proceed to vote for the motion itself.

The motivation can be discussed by the P.C. and the discussion will bring out possible differences. If we can get together on the motivation then a report of the discussion can be made to the Plenum and what if any changes were made in the original motivation. If we cannot get together then we can present a united motion with different motivations and a discussion can proceed on the differences in motivation.

Since this proposal was unacceptable to the majority I have decided to present to the N.C. the motion which I think should have been adopted. Later on I shall either offer some amendments to the motivation of Stein or present my own motivation.

The motion which I present is based on Stein's original memo which included the phrase "policy of caution". That phrase has been eliminated.

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MOTION BY MORRISON:

1. The "policy of caution" which we have pursued in our trade union work must now give way to a policy of an active, aggressive participation in the struggle against the trade-union bureaucrats who have bound the trade-union movement to the Roosevelt war machine. Whether the "policy of caution" was correct or incorrect during the past year can and should be discussed. The problem, however, is to make an immediate tactical change. To continue following our previous policy would mean running the risk of alienating our party from the struggles of the militant workers.

2. It is the task of the party to assume leadership in organizing left-wing movements within the trade unions on the basis of such issues as opposition to the no-strike pledge, no participation of Labor in the War Labor Board and for an independent labor party.

3. In making this turn we do not give up caution. All policies, to be effective, require both caution and boldness. We must avoid both the danger of opportunism and of adventurism. Caution is not a policy; it is a method of carrying out a positive policy. In carrying out our new tactic it will be necessary to make a careful survey of each industry where we have significant forces and map out a realistic course of action. This can be done best by close collaboration of the comrades working in an industry with the national trade union department.

4. Since a Plenum cannot be held immediately the motion should be presented to a mail vote of the N.C. members and put into effect immediately thereafter, if a favorable vote is received. The change in our tactic should be discussed before the membership in order to prepare our members to carry out the tactical change in the best possible manner.

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COMMENTS BY LYDIA BENNETT

Chicago  
March 24, 1945

I heartily welcome the decision of the P.C. to permit a freer and more aggressive course for our members in the trade union movement. The restraints placed upon the functioning of our members in some localities -- particularly in some cases in Chicago -- have for several months been very irksome. The rigid and mechanical application of the so-called policy of caution has meant that some of our members have been placed in embarrassing positions in their trade unions because they long ago reached a point where their activities had to go beyond and above the level of simple advice-giving to that of the acceptance of concrete responsibility in the guidance of the work of the unions.

I think it would be wrong and dangerous to consider the liberalizing of our restraints upon trade union activities as an abandonment of our previous line, which I have always considered as having been mistakenly dubbed a "policy of caution" as if there could be counterposed to it -- as a policy -- one of incaution. Our policy in operating as revolutionaries in the trade union movement is always one of caution; if we ever decide to act in an incautious manner we consciously break with and violate our general policy and the objectives and potentialities of such a move must be carefully considered. I hope, too, that this necessary and belated adjustment of our functioning does not result in a swing in the opposite direction. Formalism in the application of this new policy can be disastrous, just as the formalism which characterized the application of our "policy of caution" in some places served as a crippling restraint upon our activities.

The implication of the motivation given in the resolution is that some qualitative change has occurred in the labor movement to dictate our change in policy. I do not accept this. There has undoubtedly been a steady quantitative change in the mood of resistance of the workers as well as of their union leaders; but this was perceptible several months ago -- certainly at the time of our last national convention. But in my opinion this change has not yet reached the point where it can be recognized as a qualitative change. It should be noted that the referendum vote of the UAW showed just about the same proportion of resistance as the debate and vote at the convention of this body several months ago.

Unless the change in the mode of our operation in the unions is accompanied by a thoroughgoing and steady education of the ranks of the party in the objectives and meaning of our work in the unions, I am afraid the new policy can lead to real disaster where the guiding hand of the national organization cannot be immediately felt.

In conclusion I want to express my satisfaction that a motion for a change of line is submitted to the entire body of the National Committee for ratification. It is to be hoped that motions on matters of general political importance will be similarly handled in the future.

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COMMENTS BY V. R. DUNNE

Minneapolis  
March 22nd, 1945

I received the memorandum on trade union policy and have discussed it with a couple of the comrades of the committee here. I have no difficulty in coming to agreement with this proposed change of line. We, I think, can also agree that we are not proposing a change too soon. Also just as certainly, no change could have been made at an earlier date. Our attitude towards this, as well as towards all other questions of the relation of our party forces to the mass movement has been governed in the past and is still governed largely by the tempo of the events on a world scale in the giant military struggle between the imperialist powers.

There can be little doubt this military struggle in its main campaign is drawing to a close. The collapse of the German military machine is at hand. On the day that this collapse becomes known to a certainty to the masses of the workers in the trade unions, we will undoubtedly witness a quick acceleration of the tendency already noted towards a policy of militant struggle.

Our problem, as you point out, is of course, first of all to clarify the question in our own ranks. In view of the fact that the Plenum is tentatively proposed for the middle of May, I think that we will have sufficient time to reorient the party.

In expressing my general agreement with the memorandum, I should also say that I consider it quite probable that there will be a tendency on the part of many of our comrades without long experience in the mass movement to visualize the task of forming a left wing as synonymous with the idea of calling so-called left-wingers into a caucus and presenting a program. It is my opinion that we should, right from the start, make every attempt to avoid this too mechanical approach to what is undoubtedly a very complicated problem.

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COMMENTS BY ARTHUR WOOD

Detroit  
March 29, 1945

I find myself in general agreement with the memorandum on trade union policy; that the major task is one of organization of left wing groups under the conscious guidance of the leadership of the party. I further agree that the party should carry out this policy boldly and aggressively. For that it is necessary that the party be made more aware of its tasks in the coming period.

I fully agree with comrade Morrison that caution is not a policy but the method of carrying out a positive policy. But this

point has been continuously stressed by the party trade union leaders and was the dominant theme of the auto conference held last August in Michigan. In carrying out our trade union policy in the recent period of rescinding the no-strike pledge, getting labor representatives off the WLB and building an independent labor party we never failed to warn our comrades of the necessity of cautiously feeling their way because of the danger of victimization both to our comrades and sympathizers. However, this cautious approach did not prevent our comrades from taking the lead in organizing a rank and file caucus in the UAW around the party trade union program and initiating and building up the nucleus of a labor party in Michigan.

Today a still greater opportunity opens up to us not only in auto but in various other unions. We must therefore extend our work in this field and I am all for orienting the party in this direction in the coming period.

While I am in favor of carrying out this task boldly and aggressively I cannot but realize that the danger of victimizations is as great today as it ever was. We are continually getting sharp reminders to that effect. I feel that in making a tactical turn in this period victimizations of our comrades will sharply increase unless this fact is brought out in clearer terms than appear in the memorandum on trade union policy.

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COMMENTS BY E. HENRY

Detroit  
April 4, 1945

The proposal to make a "tactical turn" in our trade union work as outlined in the "Memorandum on Trade Union Policy" seems to me to be a timely one.

After considerable thought on the matter, I am offering the following as a contribution to the discussion on this question:

While I find myself in wholehearted agreement with the proposed extension of our trade union work (we in the UAW, because of a more favorable situation, have been proceeding along the proposed line for some time now) the "Memorandum" strikes me as being far too loosely formulated.

I recognize that the "Memorandum" is intended only for the N.C. and as the basis for a more rounded resolution following discussion at the proposed Plenum. Nevertheless, and especially in view of Comrade Morrison's remarks and proposals as contained in the minutes of the P.C., I believe my characterization of the draft as "too loose" is in order.

The statement of the objective conditions which dictate this tactical change as contained in the outline cover most of the essential points.

Of considerable importance to us, and in my opinion lacking in the original draft, is the fact that the growth of militancy and the general willingness of the workers to do battle with the bosses which we have noted in the recent period, will be given tremendous impetus with the conclusion of the first phase of the war in Europe.

To most workers, the conclusion of the war in Europe is synonymous with the end of the war itself.

The points of the "Memorandum" dealing specifically with the proposed tactical change (points 6-10) need more careful formulation. Point 6 states we must carry through the job of organizing the left wing "boldly and aggressively". Point 7 as formulated gives the impression that cautious or careful conduct of our comrades was a thing necessary in a period which no longer continues to exist.

In my opinion, a danger which must be guarded against in making the proposed shift, is that our comrades must not be given the impression that all restraints on our trade union activity are removed, that the need to function in a careful manner is a thing of the past.

Our experience here in the auto union should be of value to our comrades everywhere. Even though we took the lead in organizing the Rank-and-File Caucus and can say that without our intervention this development would not have taken place, we have, during this whole period, exercised considerable care in our work in this field. This has been dictated by the fact that our comrades have been and still are vulnerable. Because of this, all of our comrades do not participate in the same manner or degree. Our work has been guided by our desire to aid and give direction to the Rank-and-File Caucus without unnecessarily exposing all our comrades to reprisals.

The emphasis which I place upon the continued need for the careful work of our people, even in carrying out the new tactical line, may seem out of place in the leading committee of our party, but I believe it to be not only of value but a necessity in our presentation of this proposition to our party ranks.

Naturally, the proper conduct of our comrades in this regard can only be worked out through the development of all our practical work under the closest supervision and guidance from the party center. Nevertheless, I believe it necessary to emphasize the limitations and restrictions which continue to exist when presenting the tactical change so that our comrades will have a rounded perspective on this very important question.

Needless to say, the mass upsurge which we will see in the days not far distant will make possible a "more bold and aggressive" activity than we can at present permit ourselves. I believe it would be well in presenting this change to the membership to hammer home the lesson that well planned, careful work by our party comrades is not merely a wartime phenomena.

Morrison's remarks on "tail-endism" do not find a responsive chord. I have mentioned the limitations and restrictions on our work even in the most favorable situation in the UAW, where for months we have been applying the tactic now proposed as a general tactic. Comrade Morrison must be much more specific. When should the change have been made? What specific situations would have permitted us to pursue a different policy?

As far as I am concerned, if the proposed change in our general tactical line was made solely on the basis of the recent militancy of the workers without taking into account the eminent conclusion of the first phase of the war in Europe, I, for one, would hesitate before making such a decision. It should be obvious that a far more restricted activity would be in order if the "end of the war" factor were not present.

I will confine myself to these brief remarks, but look forward to participation in the discussion on this proposal at the Plenum.

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COMMENTS BY AL CUMMINGS

Detroit  
April 6, 1945

The memorandum on trade union policy adopted by the P.C. states "our party must execute a tactical turn in its trade union work". The turn is to consist of organizing a left wing in the trade unions. And this task "can only be accomplished if it has the conscious guidance and leadership of the party." This is the heart of the P.C. proposal, and I am for its adoption. However, in view of Morrison's criticisms, I feel it necessary to make some comment.

The proposal made by the P.C. for the party as a whole began here in Detroit just prior to the Michigan State CIO Convention last year. We had observed here that the agitation for the revocation of the no-strike pledge, for labor to quit the WLB, for an independent labor party, had taken hold of the best UAW militants -- thereby making it possible to begin the organization of a rank and file caucus. We initiated that caucus and formulated its program. We, of course, had kept in touch with the center on the development of this force here. The P.C. sent Frank to Detroit prior to the last UAW Convention to aid us in the tactics to be employed in the rank and file caucus, and in the last UAW Convention.

All of this of course, occurred at the time when we had not yet proposed a general revision of tactics for the party as a whole.

Did we then last Fall make a general exception for Detroit in the policy of our party in its trade union work? No, of course not. Our policy in the trade union movement was then, as now, the program which we present to the trade union movement. (The no-strike pledge,

the WLB, the labor party, etc.). The application of the policy and program, (because of the exceptional circumstances, in Detroit, the center of the most democratic and militant union in the country) made it possible for us to give an organizational expression to our agitational slogan. The lessons of that struggle have permeated enough into the labor movement as a whole to make possible a general application of the tactics we pursued here.

The charge of tail endism leveled against the committee by Morrison shows a lack of understanding of how to apply a trade union program.

To have applied the tactics pursued here last Fall to our trade union work generally would have been adventurism and brought with it its inevitable opportunist deviations. The Shachtmanites in their work in Buffalo and in their work here have given us ample opportunity to study an adventuristic application of our trade union policy.

We are now witnessing here in Detroit in the Ford Bomber local 50, the inevitable consequence of a prematurely organized left wing grouping. John Zupan, one of the active organizers of the rank and file caucus here, following the trade union advice of the Shachtmanites, organized the rank and file caucus without understanding the political limitations of the ordinary trade union militants. He had no difficulty organizing the caucus, or talking about the rank and file program, but as the February elections rolled around he found himself the captive of a Reuther caucus, which refused to go down the line on the no-strike pledge. Thus, we see that even here in Detroit without our direct guidance, this caucus inevitably degenerated. And I'm now talking about the application of a line in February 1945, not about the possibilities last year.

The memorandum makes reference to the danger of adventurism and opportunism, and to the all important fact that this turn must be made with the direct participation of the center. An analysis of our work here shows that building of a left wing caucus does not mean running head long into election campaigns of the local union to take over their leadership. It means first of all educating a group of workers around the need of a correct union program. Secondly, that such a program cannot be carried into effect through electioneering dickerings with the trade union bureaucracies. The organization of a left wing grouping cannot be accomplished over the heads of the workers. It must be accomplished by the workers.

Our work here demonstrates that the party locally was not tail ending workers. We initiated the first caucus. The P.C. was not tail ending the Detroit comrades. It directly participated and advised us in our work. It is necessary that the application of the new turn be undertaken with the greatest care in the evaluation of the forces involved in each situation. We must remember that all the recent strikes in Detroit have led to defeats and victimizations of the best militants. Nevertheless we have learned here it is possible under these circumstances to organize the left wing forces. It is important for us to remember however, that our resources are far too limited to permit their wasteful expenditure in these initial struggles of workers for a new leadership and a new program.

COMMENTS BY ANDREWS

Akron  
March 24, 1945

I am in general, in favor of the proposal to orient the club in a bolder direction in the trade unions. However, I believe the memorandum could and should be amplified and improved before it goes to the membership.

"Class peace" even in quotation marks is too inexact a description of conditions between labor and capital during the past period. The constant guerilla warfare by the employers against the unions, under cover of the no-strike pledge and the workers' patriotism, never subsided for a moment. On the contrary, the tempo has steadily increased, and deliberate provocations have now reached a near-climax. The German collapse, of course, will give rise to an immediate counter-offensive by the workers.

In the section on the organization of left wing groups, a word of warning is necessary concerning the sectarians and the Shachtmanites, who have often gotten into our hair in these groups, and concerning which our comrades need advice.

As for the main line of the memorandum, I am in complete agreement. I do not believe it came too late. It is ridiculous to say that, since no nationally significant rank and file left wing development has passed us by. On the contrary, where the trend began to change, in auto and rubber, we were there, Johnny on the spot, and participated in leading capacities in the formation and organization of the new groupings against the bureaucracy. This was within our "Old" line. In Auto everyone knows this to be the fact. In rubber, we participated also in the anti-Dalrymple caucus, and in consultation with the N.O., played an important part in that development, which has placed us in the position to capitalize on the coming upswing. In fact, we are now participating in detailed plans for the organization of a national rubber caucus, on the basis of plans laid long ago. Comrades are too mechanical who claim that we did not orient the party correctly, since within the framework of the line of caution, bold steps were taken where conditions allowed. What is of importance in the change of orientation is the fact that with the German collapse, as every union man feels in his bones, the militants will be freer to act; this fact, plus the fact that the corporations are impatiently pushing their union busting line in preparation for what they know is coming, is the political reason for a general "push" toward more aggressive action.

Our policy of caution was based on the need to preserve our cadre. This need still prevails. In fact, recent strikes in Detroit bear out the need to proceed with caution now as before. But as conditions ripen. . . and they are not ripe yet in the sense of any full-fledged revolt taking place, we will take more chances because of the increased political opportunities.

Auto and rubber show that things are on the move. In the Steel Union the rank and file is far less on the move. Our trade union tactics will still necessitate a careful analysis of each situation on the basis of the particular conditions, and no one should be allowed to interpret the new tactical approach as anything like a blueprint to be followed indiscriminately in every union at any time. We will have to be flexible with the new line, just as we were with the old.

I repeat. . . if anyone believes we were late . . . please show us where we suffered any setbacks or missed the boat. That is the only proof that we were Kvostist. And of course there is no such proof. There is plenty of proof however, that the Shachtmanites, who are wavering and have wavered between pure adventurism and opportunism in the unions, have experienced plenty that proves a more cautious and thoroughly principled line was best.

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COMMENTS BY MAC INGERSOLL

Toledo  
March 6, 1945

Bob, Ted and I had a long discussion on the memorandum which you sent on the Trade Union Policy. We are in general agreement with the line of the memorandum, both its premises and its conclusions. There are some points which we discussed which will undoubtedly come out when broader discussions are organized to consider this change in line.

1. We feel that it should be stressed over and over that we are not going to go hog-wild in the union movement a-la-the Shachtmanites just because we have changed our policy and agree that the time has come to move ahead to the organization of a national rank-and-file movement. We must still continue to move cautiously because the danger of isolation and victimization still will exist. What has changed will be our perspective and our general course and not our manner of handling ourselves. In our party the danger of a misunderstanding about this is not great but every comrade must be informed as to what the change in policy means.

2. The points raised in paragraph 10 must be understood by all comrades, especially those in branches in the position we are in, in Toledo. Here, due to the peculiar situation in the labor movement, we must follow the lead of Detroit and any attempts to rush ahead would be adventuristic. We feel that there will probably be a tendency for each branch to look upon the turn as something that must be applied in every local situation regardless of the circumstances. For this reason we believe that great stress should be laid on nationwide and industry-wide plans and close collaboration between branches in the regions and with the N.O.

All of these things have been implied in your memorandum but this will indicate to you the nature of our discussion and the reaction of the comrades here to whom the memorandum was introduced.

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COMMENTS BY MIKE BARTELL

Chicago  
March 30, 1945

I wish to record my opinion on the proposed "turn" in our trade union policy.

I am in full agreement with proposal and the motivation of the "memorandum". I do not agree with the idea that this proposal comes too late, and that the reorientation should have been made sooner. If by "sooner" it is meant a few weeks or a month sooner, then the question is not even worth discussing. If however, by sooner is meant a long time ago, then the proposition is false.

In what sense is it too late? Is there a resurgence in the labor movement that is sweeping over our heads? On the contrary, on the whole the labor movement is still relatively passive, the struggles are still isolated and sporadic.

The "turn" is motivated primarily on the basis of a theoretical analysis, a forecast of the coming round of class struggle which is inevitable with the ending of the war. I believe this estimate is a correct one. The ending of the war in Europe alone will unquestionably cut deeply into the "national unity". The only significant concrete manifestations thus far of the change in the objective situation are the recent battles in Detroit and the action of the TWOC.

The proposal does not come too early only because it will require a period of time in which to reorient the party and to take the preliminary steps in our union work.

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COMMENTS BY JACK WILSON

Youngstown  
April 5, 1945

It is my opinion that the memorandum on the trade union policy is one that should and must be carried out for the reason that you have given. I agree with the motivation given for this tactical turn and believe that when agreed upon will be very fruitful for us. Our party through its greatly expanded press circulation of the Militant can gather around it great forces that will be decisive in the coming days ahead.

The rising revolutionary tide in Europe, with the end of the fighting on the imperialist front, will give a great impetus to the rise in the militancy on the American scene. The rise in the discontent among the workers that will follow the tremendous cut-backs and consequently the worsened economic conditions of the workers will give answers to the campaign of the capitalist class against the organized workers. Our party, as proposed in the memorandum, must not find itself on the outside of this movement but must be in a position where it can influence it.

As to the application to the proposed policy to our particular situation. We cannot determine too far in advance as to what formal organizational steps could be taken in the local situation. We would undoubtedly have to carry on a little probing and find out how many of the good militants, who have considerable influence, would go along with the setting up of a caucus locally. It is very and more than likely that the activities of the most advanced section of the American labor movement -- the UAW -- again would give the lead. The fact is beginning to be shown here as a result of The Militant, which is read by many of the best militants, and also in the rise in the militancy of the workers that the UAW rank and file movements are being watched by the leading militants in steel. So we cannot say too far in advance exactly how the work would and could progress, but history is on our side and sooner or later we will be able to participate in the left wing caucus.

In the struggles that are being carried on here between the militants and the Murray machine, the workers are learning real lessons and are more and more realizing that they must depend on a program and policy that is not in conformity with that of the top bureaucracy. Concrete proposals from us will bring these militants closer to us.

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COMMENTS BY RALPH GRAHAM

Los Angeles  
March 27, 1945

1. I approve of the Memorandum on Trade Union Policy adopted by the P.C. March 19, 1945. The proposed tactical turn in trade union policy is well motivated by the facts of the present situation which the Memorandum notes.

The phrasing of Paragraph 7 of the Memorandum appears to counterpose "caution" in trade union work to the new tactical orientation proposed in the ensuing paragraphs. I think this should be amended, since caution, though perhaps of a different order, will be necessary in applying the new line as well. This is recognized in Paragraph 9.

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COMMENTS BY MURRY AND BOWERS

Los Angeles  
April 4, 1945

On the question of the trade union memorandum, we are both in favor of the general line contained therein but would like to give further thought and consideration to it. There are a number of points we would like to discuss.

Generally, the tempo of development of the West Coast trade union movement appears to be much slower than in the East, and perhaps a considerable moderation of the tactic proposed will be necessary here.

\* \* \*

OUR CHANGE IN TRADE UNION TACTIC

By M. Morrison

When the "Memorandum on Trade Union Policy" was first presented to the Political Committee, I proposed that it be divided into two sections -- one, the proposal for the actual change and two, the motivation for the proposal. I was immediately in favor of making the change but I was not certain whether the motivation was correct. Off-hand it created the impression of "tail-ending".

I am now more than ever convinced that the change of policy which is being proposed now should have taken place at least in the early part of last summer. I have had an opportunity to read the article "Review of Our Trade Union Policy" by A. Winters, in the Internal Bulletin, Vol. VI, No. 9, October 1944, and I am astonished that the proposals made in that article were not accepted by the convention.

It is true that the article contains no motion calling for a specific change but it clearly indicates the necessity for such a change and our trade union leaders should have accepted the article as a basis for the formulation of a motion or resolution.

As a matter of fact there was a sufficient number of signs of an awakening of the trade union militants in the early part of the summer of 1944 to make it mandatory on our part to warn our comrades that the "policy of caution" must not be interpreted to mean no participation or even leadership of the left wing movements that would in all probability arise before and during the conventions of some of the larger unions.

How is it possible to look back upon the conventions that took place last summer without recognizing that the trade union militants were beginning to organize against the bureaucrats? Either we were asleep at the switch or else we saw what was going on before our eyes and did not see the necessity of informing our comrades to relax the policy of caution and actively participate in the leftward movement of the trade union militants.

It is hindsight on my part, I must admit, but I can clearly see now that the run-around which the WLB was giving the unions, the pressure of mounting taxes, the desire to make as much money as possible before the inevitable lay-offs, and possibly the relaxation of the war pressure because of the successful invasion of Normandy were factors in the attempt of the advanced elements in the trade union movement to break the chain of the no-strike pledge. A revolutionary party keenly alert to what is going on should have immediately shifted the emphasis from caution and advised greater participation on the part of its members in the movement of the trade union militants.

I must recall to the comrades a statement made by Comrade Winters in the article mentioned above. He wrote that "the important thing is that we actively participate in our union life and then we set the level of participation before each concrete situation".

It is clear that the "policy of caution" was correctly applied by the comrades in Bayonne and if it was interpreted otherwise by other comrades they were completely wrong. Caution should not be made an independent policy; if it is, it means giving up all activities. Under some circumstances we should be more cautious than usual and the war was such a circumstance. But it did not mean that we sit back and do nothing.

Comrade Winters, in his article, outlined the activities that were open to the comrades in Bayonne and, by implication, told the party that the other comrades should try to follow the same activities. Absolutely correct advice and should have been made and followed in the early Summer. But I am told that many hours were consumed at the convention in an attack on the Bayonne comrades as adventurers and opportunists. If that is so then no greater crime was committed at the convention.

That possible victimization should not prevent us from participating in some activities is an absolutely correct statement made by Winters. Caution was necessary to prevent wholesale victimization but the possibility of having some victims is no excuse for doing nothing.

It is the struggle against the comrades from Bayonne that make me convinced that we were tail-ending, that we were guilty of waiting for an upsurge of the masses before making a turn. It is good that we have decided to make the turn before the upsurge actually comes.

The central motivation of the memorandum for the change of policy is that up to now the workers accepted the sacrifices demanded of them in the name of the war and now the workers are emerging out of their passivity. To take into consideration the mood of the masses in determining what should be our slogans and activities is absolutely essential. But to wait for the whole mass to move and fail to take into consideration the more advanced sections is to reduce a correct principle to an absurdity.

The problem is not only not to step too far ahead of the masses but not to let the forward sections get ahead of us. The problem is to analyze events and to recognize the first signs of motion and adapt our agitation and activities to the early stages as well as the later stages of the mood of the masses.

If there are at present left-wing movements in which we did not play a decisive role, although it was possible for us to do so, then we were too passive. If we permitted left-wing movements to be organized without at least participating in them, during the last Summer, then we were wrong. If we failed to step up our activities in line with the mood of the advanced sections of the workers then we followed a tail-ending policy. And the very fact that we speak of a change of policy now shows that we failed to react sufficiently to the events of last Summer.

The motivation speaks in terms of waiting for the masses and not in terms of guiding the advanced sections of the masses. It is true that now we are taking the necessary initiative but it is also true that we condemned those who saw the necessity for such an initiative before we did and at the proper time.

Comrade Winters ends his article of last October by saying that everywhere the workers are growing increasingly restless. More and more progressive formations are taking shape as an expression of this fact. He saw then what we are first seeing now.

In truth, in every case where our trade union comrades followed a correct policy there should not be any necessity for a decisive change. There is a possible exception in the case of the Spinners Club. Should our change of policy mean that now we become active, whereas before we were not active, it would only mean that we did not understand the "policy of caution".

One may say that the essence of our change of policy is that we are now orientating ourselves to organizing left-wing movements. But it can hardly be that the workers all of a sudden become ripe for left-wing organization. The events of last Summer show that the advanced workers were already then ripe for left-wing organization. Undoubtedly more workers are ripe now than were last Summer.

For the Bayonne workers the change in policy could not mean much more than to emphasize boldness rather than caution. Because they participated in every left-wing movement.

Wherever our comrades must make a contact with an already existing left-wing movement there one may be sure that we were following a wrong policy.

It is in general a thankless task to argue about the motivation of a motion with which one agrees. We agree on what to do so what is the use of arguing, is a common attitude. But thinking comrades will always consider the motivation of great importance. If a mistake has been made -- although of a minor character -- it is necessary to recognize it so that more serious mistakes can be avoided in the future.

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## THE NEW TURN IN TRADE UNION POLICY

By A. Winters and Larry Williams

We have read the "memorandum on trade union policy" adopted by the Political Committee and we support the practical proposals outlined in it. It will come as no surprise to the party membership to learn that the Bayonne trade union fractions view this turn as long overdue. Twice last year -- first in a letter to the Political Committee in February, 1944 and again at the November 1944 convention -- we suggested substantially such a turn and our proposals were not acted upon.

The first question we asked ourselves, then, upon seeing the P.C. memorandum, was: what new events have occurred upon which the P.C. bases its proposal -- events so different from the situation last year that they justify the present turn and show that the P.C. was correct in not making the turn when we proposed it?

"The workers are emerging out of their passivity," says the memorandum, and this appears to be its basic reason for making a turn now. But all the concrete evidence which the memorandum gives to prove this existed already clearly before our last convention!

Let us examine the memorandum's proofs of the fact that the workers are now emerging from passivity.

1. "The demand for the unions to quit the WLB, the demand to revoke the no-strike pledge, is growing more insistent," says the memorandum. And then it gives its proof: "This was reflected in the union conventions last Fall." But if this was so last Fall, why, then, didn't we make the turn at the November convention?

2. "It was reflected in the results of the UAW referendum." True enough, that the one-third votes cast for rescinding the no-strike pledge is an important indication of the rising sentiment of the workers. But we already had sufficient evidence of this when, against the resistance of the official union leadership, the militants got a majority at the UAW convention for the referendum. So this factor, too, was already sufficiently known to us at the time of the November party convention.

So that the very evidence adduced in the memorandum turns out to be evidence that was already available to us six months ago, at least, and which could have been acted on at the November party convention.

Why do we insist on this fact? Why, since we agree with the practical proposals of the P.C. memorandum, don't we simply vote for it and let it go at that, since after all the important thing is that we all agree on what to do now?

Because the P.C. memorandum is not content to simply propose the new policy -- it also insists on a blanket justification of the

whole past conduct of trade union work by the P.C. It says: "Our cautious methods were dictated by the situation that existed until recently. . . ." The word "recently" is a bit of ambiguity which we would like to see clarified. Does it mean until now? That seems to be the implication.

It is our contention that the policy of caution was pursued for a much longer period than it was justified. In February 1944 we sent a letter to the P.C., the essence of which was that we saw a do-nothing policy being followed by the party in most trade union situations, and to remedy this we proposed a conference of trade union activists to study the new developments and to work out a tactical program. This proposal was rejected. We then asked that a trade union discussion bulletin be issued by the P.C. in which we and others could exchange information for a better national picture. This, too, was rejected, the reason given being "security reasons".

Again, in the pre-convention discussion (Internal Bulletin Vol. VI. No. 9, "Review of Our Trade Union Policy" by A. Winters), and at the November 1944 convention, we tried to get a serious discussion of new tasks opening up in the unions. The agenda of the convention made it well-nigh impossible to get it. We were known to have a different point of view on the trade union situation, but were only given ten minutes to express it.

Our main point at that time was to recommend more participation and utilization by the party fractions of the rank and file movements that already existed in many unions. What was the reaction to our recommendation? Not a single P.C. member expressed himself on this specific question in writing before the convention. During the convention, the P.C. members stood aside, while delegate after delegate rose (apparently they thought they spoke for the leadership) to attack our conception. They did not stop at this, but went on to attack the trade union work of the Bayonne branch. Comrades like Gray of Buffalo, Harry Robinson of Newark, Andrews of Akron, attacked our work as opportunist and "adventurous" and some of them compared us to the Shachtmanite "adventurers".

What is noteworthy is that all our trade union work had been regularly reported to the P.C. and approved by it, certainly never criticised. Yet the convention attacks upon us were not reproved by one word from the P.C. members present. On the contrary, C. Thomas, P.C. reporter on the U.S. resolution, in his summary joined with the rest in labelling us opportunists and adventurers.

We have thick skins and weren't a bit hurt. What we want to emphasize now is an important lesson in party behavior. We made certain recommendations at the convention. It was the elementary duty of all delegates, and especially the P.C. members, to examine constructively and judge on merits our recommendations and our criticisms of party policy. The fact is, however, that what we had to say was not examined constructively, but was viewed as "factionalism" and as being part of the dispute on the European question. All-too-willing supporters of the leadership threw everything they could find at us, while the leadership itself let this go on because, after all, it was

an attack on supporters of a minority political position. The leadership didn't care what arguments were used against us, so long as it was against us. In this way the trade union question was muddled up so that the delegates went home far more confused on it than before.

Had we had a decent discussion on the trade union situation at the convention, we might have begun functioning properly in the unions since that time and without the need for making the turn now.

#### A Case of Tail-Ending

It was our duty to discern the signs of aggressive movement among the masses and to provide leadership to the advanced workers rather than tail-end them. This the party leadership has failed to do, notwithstanding the statement in the memorandum that "our Party has been in the vanguard of the agitation for revocation of the no-strike pledge, for labor to quit the WLB, for an independent labor party." Who or what, in this case, is meant by the Party? It is very significant that the memorandum does not say that our fractions had been in the vanguard of this agitation; and, indeed, it could not say it. By the party in this case the memorandum undoubtedly means the party press.

Needless to say, the party press has always said the necessary things about the trade union situation; that the workers need a labor party, that the unions should quit the WLB and rescind the no-strike pledge, etc. etc. Insofar as the party press got into the hands of the workers in the shop, they learned that these things should be done.

But how to reach the best workers in the shops? Mass distributions of our paper at plant gates are good and useful. Sale of subs to the worker beside you on the bench is very good. But these methods have their distinct limitations. As we wrote in the pre-convention discussion;

"We cannot expect to incidentally and accidentally chance across a contact who happens to play his trade next to you, but rather we should be consciously participating in the arena which would most likely attract the better elements.", in the rank and file movements in the unions.

#### What Could Have Been Done: The Example of Bayonne

As most comrades know, in Bayonne our fraction work has been markedly different than that of other branches. In the Spring of 1944 (six months before the party convention), we entered the Rank and File Caucus in X Shipyard. We were a small group, engaging in a programmatic fight with the opportunist leaders of this caucus on the questions of the no-strike pledge and quitting the WLB. We won that fight. The control of the Caucus and the conduct of the ensuing election campaign remained, however, in the hands of the opportunist leaders who tended, naturally, to play down the real issues. But, as we anticipated, the Stalinists took up the programmatic questions and furiously waved the flag and the fighting fronts in the face of the union membership. The result of this intense educational campaign was a 33% vote

for the defeated Rank and File slate and for junking the no-strike pledge and the WLB. The subsequent capitulation of a number of the opportunist leaders of the Rank and File (who were automatically delegates by virtue of their shop stewardship) at the National Convention of the union did not by one iota demoralize the repeal movement. On the contrary, the best elements drew closer to us for leadership. Having been given an orientation and spurred on by one reactionary "stabilization directive" of the WLB after another, the militant wave expanded tremendously.

As a result of our work, within a few months we were in a position to take substantial charge of the Rank and File Caucus. A full program was again developed, including a position for an independent labor party, and accepted with the most trifling opposition. Group meetings with an average attendance of 50 workers were conducted for several consecutive weeks prior to the union election. They were patterned on the style of party branch meetings and devoted primarily to intensive education on every phase of the Rank and File program. A then current apathy of a vast section of the membership was converted to enthusiastic support of the pledge-repeal movement. Our comrades dominated the steering committee and were in absolute control of publicity for the election campaign. In addition to a number of leaflets, two issues of a four-page newspaper, the "Rank & Filer" were issued.

The Stalinists were caught flat-footed and had no answer, and had to call for help from their national-ranking union functionaries.

Over 12,000 votes -- a record vote -- were cast in the local union election, and the Rank and File got 5,300 votes, failing only by 400 to be the victor. Since the election, the wave of militancy has continued.

Our Party fraction is recognized by many workers as a principled political group, and has gained greatly in prestige as the guiding force of the thriving Rank and File movement.

Most important, because this was our main objective, is the fact that we have won a circle of friends among the best, leftward-moving elements in the union -- all of them today "Militant" subscribers who plug the paper to their co-workers.

#### What Was Not Done In New York

New York has been and still remains one of the basic political centers of the party. But its chief drawback was its lack of solid proletarian roots. After the fight with the Shachtmanites, the New York local made a serious and successful effort to colonize into industry. Many experienced and political party people were sent into industry. Yet in August 1944, in a City Committee report to the N. Y. Local convention, we read the following admissions: "We must report a considerable decline in the size and strength of three of our most important fractions in the basic industries. . . Production cutbacks and layoffs have recently struck heavy blows at our concentrations. One of our most important fractions was completely wiped out and another plant fraction was considerably reduced by mass layoffs. . .

The chief reasons for this decline flow from the temporary nature and instability of the war industries; illness and fatigue, absentees and transfers."

We can dismiss illness, fatigue, absentees and transfers as serious excuses since every fraction has these problems in more or less the same proportions.

What about our U.E. fraction in New York? Why did that fraction decline in strength? It is evident that this fraction did not participate in the left wing which developed in its local. One cause of this non-participation there was the party leadership's terrible fear of the left-wing group because it was coming under Shachtmanite leadership. Had the U.E. fraction been given the healthy, stimulating work of participating in the left wing, it would not have evaporated as it did.

What about our UAW fraction in New York? In our February letter to the P.C., and in our pre-convention article, we warned the party as a whole that layoffs faced the party fractions in many places, and that where such threats existed, party activity must be consciously stepped up. Our Brewster UAW fraction was wiped out with one blow by a cutback order (this local, incidentally, had a whole history of militant struggle behind it). Here, too, tail-ending had tragic results. We could not have avoided the cutback, but had our fraction stepped up its activity, it could have won party prestige, experience, contacts, recruits. When party people are engaged in healthy left wing movements, their fractions don't disintegrate as the New York report shows they did.

As late as August, when rank and file caucuses in the unions existed in New York, the only advice that the N. Y. leadership could offer in order to break out of their isolation was the following: "Above all, we must view the call-back campaign for regular Militant subs as our biggest opportunity for breaking the N. Y. Local out of isolation and building for the first time, a sizeable working class periphery." Could a turn have helped the New York Local then? The answer obviously is yes, but our "cautious policy" of tail-ending could only at best recommend a call-back campaign to gain us a working class periphery as a poor substitute for the far more important task of entering the rank and file movements.

We are limited in our analysis to the situation in New York with which we are in direct contact. Since we never have received in writing a report as to how other fractions functioned, we are not in a position to concretely discuss situations elsewhere. We requested such information but never did receive any in writing.

#### The P.C. Lack of Method

Above all, we want to criticize the complete lack of method involved in our trade union work.

To begin with, the P.C. memorandum is the first attempt at national guidance in two years. And we have previously pointed out

above that left wing rank and file movements meanwhile were in the process of being formed. In many major unions; auto, rubber, steel, ship, etc., rank and file movements have already been formed and given leadership without our substantial participation. If some comrades protest that this is not so, let them answer why the P.C. now finds it necessary to regear the party. If the party had already attempted to supply the leadership to these already formed groups, why does an educational campaign have to be conducted inside the party? The author of the P.C. memorandum himself confesses, unconsciously, that the party fractions provided no substantial leadership in the past period to the left wing movements when he says; "The major task confronting the militants today is that of organization -- organization for the big struggles ahead". As far as he is concerned, the task of organizing militants is a job for today. It did not exist yesterday for him. Yet he, himself, has to admit that the militants did organize yesterday; in other words, without our participation.

What were we, then, doing yesterday? The author of the memorandum tells us that we then had "cautious methods". We defy anyone to explain what that means in terms of concrete activities. Of course, we must plan all activities cautiously. We must study carefully the moods and aspirations of the masses. We must propose, discuss and carefully weigh all plans. One had to be cautious in the unions even in peacetime and wartime made caution that much more important. But what kind of activities were we cautious about? Caution is not a policy, but only a way which we carry out a policy.

We are sad to say that this again is an unconscious admission that there was no kind of leadership supplied to the workers in the field by the P.C. of our party.

We come now to what we consider to be the fundamental cause of all this staggering around. For the P.C. there is only in effect two stages in the trade unions (1) passivity, "acceptance by the workers of the sacrifices demanded of them in the name of the war", and (2) after that -- today -- "organization for the big struggles looming ahead."

What the P.C. analysis leaves out is the period in between these two stages. In between is a whole period of contradictory struggle, temporary setbacks, initial organization before the upsurge. There is in the P.C. memorandum no clear understanding that one must tactically regear the party at every stage of the development of the masses and not, in effect, ignore these intermediary movements, while calmly awaiting the upsurge.

#### What Shall Our Objectives Be?

Furthermore, there is no clear-cut objective outlined for the rank and file movements. How far can these movements be safely led today? We on our part want to warn the comrades that while we should participate in rank and file movements taking in broad layers of the workers, it is not yet, generally, possible to lead and win large strike struggles. For, while the workers are increasingly fighting

their class war in the factory, their desire to see the war through to a successful conclusion makes them hesitate at harming the war effort. Despite the worsening of their economic position, there is no automatic political reflection of this fact. They know and feel the undermining of their living standards, but they still have the illusion that this is their war. At times, their class interests clash with their patriotic illusions, and for a while lead to strikes, etc., but always they are brought into line by their fear for the "boys over there". After the defeat of Germany, the war against Japan may play somewhat the same role.

So that our immediate objective in the rank and file movements cannot as yet be, generally, leading them in strikes. We do not exclude the possibility of leading successful strikes in exceptional situations, but it is not the most likely variant as yet.

Our main immediate objective in these movements still must be to win their cadre elements to our program of action and then to our party. Our program of action cannot as yet stir the majority of the masses of the union to strike struggle, but it can win thinking leftward-moving workers to our party.

#### What Shall Our Program of Action Include?

We have still before us the tasks which our party press has stressed for the trade unions; rescind the no-strike pledge, withdrawal of union representatives from the WLB, for the labor party.

More and more, however, we must now bring to the forefront concrete slogans around the issues of layoffs and reconversion. Such as;

A 40-hour week with no reduction in pay (which can change, at a later stage, to 30-hour week with no reduction).

Reconversion of all idle war plants, both public and private, for production for civilians.

Keep all members in the unions -- set up unemployed divisions to fight for jobs, unemployment insurance, etc.

Enforce seniority by the union hiring hall in all industries.

A labor organization of veterans of World War II.

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