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# LABOR'S GENERAL STAFFS MEET

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

**T**HE recent meetings of the C.I.O. National Board and the A. F. of L. Executive Council, in Washington and Chicago respectively, prior to their coming conventions in Philadelphia (November) and Boston (October), faced a series of major problems. These center in the situation created by the opposition confronting the Federal Administration in its conduct of the war, and relate to every major sphere of war policy: the home front, the military front, the diplomatic front. The great task before both committees is to mobilize the vast potential strength of the workers to break down this defeatist opposition and to see to it that the war is carried on militantly, with our full national power, and determination to win a decisive victory over the Axis and fascism. Above all, this would mean the establishment of a second front in France immediately.

The opposition against the Roosevelt policies, and with it against organized labor, is indeed a formidable one. Made up of various elements, including profiteers, labor baiters, poll-taxers, politics-as-usual hacks, and outright friends of Hitlerism, many of which elements have wormed their way into various

government departments, it presents a real menace to our war objectives and to American democracy. The fact that such organizations as the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Bankers Association and the United Chambers of Commerce, as well as the bulk of the Republican Party and the reactionary wing of the Democratic Party, not to mention such influential names as Hoover, Taft, Vandenberg, Hearst, McCormick, etc., are linked up with the opposition, makes it clear that a very substantial section of the American capitalist class is opposed to many of the most important war policies of the Roosevelt Administration.

## *Defeatist War Sabotage*

On the home front this powerful opposition, controlling great chains of newspapers and dominating the majority in both houses of Congress on many vital issues, is systematically undermining the authority and prestige of President Roosevelt as our national war leader. It has been able to torpedo the President's seven-point stabilization program, having largely prevented the stabilization of prices and the limitation of profits, thereby threatening the

country with the grave danger of inflation. It is assailing national unity by its attack upon the trade unions, notably by its passage of the Smith-Connally law. It is creating a reactionary atmosphere in the country, the natural consequences of which are such outrages as the "zoot suit" riots in Los Angeles and the pogrom against the Negroes in Detroit. It is purging or destroying the influence of the best war elements in various Government departments. And now these reactionary forces, skillfully mobilizing their resources, are preparing to grab full control of the country in the 1944 elections.

On the military front, this strong defeatist opposition is also making its detrimental influence felt. This has been a very big factor, if not the decisive one, in preventing the Government from making good its agreement of June 11, 1942, with the U.S.S.R. for a second front, by, together with the British, invading France. Had this agreement been carried out, it would have won the war a year ago. Political opposition has so far prevented the second front—for it is absurd to say that we lack the necessary men, ships, guns and planes. Although the recent military victories are dampening its hopes, the opposition to Roosevelt is undoubtedly trying to stalemate the war against Hitler, by limiting our military action in Europe and by switching our main attack against Japan.

On the diplomatic front the pernicious pressure of the anti-Roosevelt opposition is likewise being exerted. These people go all out for

the appeasement of Franco and Man-nerheim, for active support to the Darlans and Badoglios, and they lose no opportunity to cultivate misunderstandings with the U.S.S.R. They oppose every democratic development in Europe. Undoubtedly, the more consciously defeatist elements in the opposition are definitely aiming at a negotiated peace with a reactionary, or even quasi-fascist, government set up by German big business interests to save what they can from the wreckage in their coming defeat.

A dangerous angle in this whole situation is the tendency of President Roosevelt to yield in the face of the defeatist opposition rather than to come to head-on grips with it. This is primarily due to the lack of powerful, well-organized backing on the part of organized labor. Although Roosevelt took a courageous stand by vetoing the Smith-Connally Bill and by insisting upon farm price subsidies, nevertheless, in many instances, he is following a dangerous line of appeasing the reactionaries. This is exemplified by his failure to go to the people with his seven-point stabilization program and thus force the present reactionary Congress into line, by his refusal to blast ahead with the second front in spite of all resistance, by his permitting the State Department to coddle various European fascist Quislings, by his chastisement of such win-the-war leaders as Wallace and Welles.

#### *United Political Action*

The key to the whole war situation, as far as the United States is

concerned, is for the trade unions to mobilize thoroughly the masses of the American people to back up the President and to insist upon a second front policy, smashing through the defeatist opposition. The people have shown by many polls and in various other ways that they are ready to support an all-out effort for victory in the shortest possible time. The increasingly favorable military situation of the United Nations, especially the great Red Army offensive and the surrender of Italy, shows that such a vigorous war policy is both timely and necessary.

The C.I.O. and A. F. of L. Boards put in the forefront of their attention the all-important question of united political action to back a militant policy to win the war. As usual, however, the C.I.O., under the progressive leadership of Philip Murray, proved itself the more sensitive to the war situation and more productive of fruitful policies. Properly rejecting as a move that would divide the workers the Social-Democratic project of launching an immediate labor party, the C.I.O. struck out correctly with a detailed plan of united action between the C.I.O., A. F. of L., Railroad Unions and their friends throughout the country. The C.I.O. resolution says:

“(a) The heads of these organizations should immediately meet for the purpose of establishing a program of joint action on all issues directed towards an intensified prosecution of the war, the protection of organized labor against its enemies, a fuller participation of la-

bor in the war effort and for a complete mobilization of the people in support of the war program of our Commander-in-Chief, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

“(b) The heads of the organizations should seek to create joint committees on a local and state-wide basis throughout the nation to encourage joint action between labor and all other groups and organizations that desire to give their whole and complete support to the war program.”

The C.I.O. National Board, in Washington, put teeth into this correct program by setting up the national 5-man Political Action Committee, with Sidney Hillman at its head. Hillman promptly proposed joint action to the A. F. of L. Executive Council. He also proceeded to hold very successful political action conferences in the East and Middle West and is now stimulating organized political activity throughout the labor movement.

The A. F. of L. Executive Council, at its meeting in Chicago, while expressing alarm at the offensive of the defeatist reactionaries, particularly their attacks upon the trade unions, failed to make the necessary vigorous political response, such as the C.I.O. did. With typical conservatism, loaded up as it is with Woll-Hutcheson Republican defeatists and hamstrung by a lot of antediluvian bureaucrats, the Executive Council saw no reason to adopt appropriate measures to meet the new and urgent situation. It rejected what it called the “entangling alliance” proposed by Hillman and

harked back to the old Gompers line:

"The Council," said Wm. Green (Associated Press, Aug. 12) "decided to reaffirm our traditional non-partisan policy—to oppose our enemies and support our friends, regardless of political affiliation. In order to do this we will again form our own non-partisan political committee."

The refusal of the A. F. of L. Executive Council to accept the C.I.O. proffer of political cooperation does not, however, exclude all joint action between the two organizations. As the *Daily Worker* of August 16 pointed out, undoubtedly many A. F. of L. organizations will work closely politically with C.I.O. and Railroad organizations. In fact, they are already doing this in various parts of the country. The tendency will increase rapidly, undoubtedly, as the election fight develops.

### *Wages and the High Cost of Living*

Another prime question that occupied central attention at the meeting of the two labor executives is that of maintaining the workers' living standards in the face of rising prices. In this respect organized labor may be said to have three general tasks: (a) to force a roll-back of prices to the September, 1942, levels, as pledged by President Roosevelt, (b) to see to it that basic wage and piece rates, in the event of a failure to secure a roll-back of prices, are raised in accordance with the increase in the cost of living,

(c) to establish incentive wages as a means of stimulating our somewhat lagging production.

On the first two of these points both national committees of organized labor found themselves in substantial agreement with, as usual, the C.I.O. speaking out more clearly and correctly. It supported strict enforcement of price ceilings and the President's program of subsidies to farmers to keep food prices down, and it added:

"In the event Congress prevents the use of subsidies and thereby prevents the rolling back of prices, then the national officers of the C.I.O. are hereby authorized and directed, on behalf of all the affiliated C.I.O. unions to call upon President Roosevelt, Mr. Byrnes, the Director of the Office of War Mobilization, and the National War Labor Board to revise the 'Little Steel' formula so that wage adjustments may be made to bring wages up to the present level of prices."

On the third point, that of incentive wages, the A. F. of L. leadership showed itself to be sound asleep, drugged by traditional trade union fears of the speed-up. Meanwhile, in every industry in the country the productivity of the workers is rapidly on the increase (in many cases as much as 50 per cent to 75 per cent in the past year); yet the workers have received no advantage from it in the shape of increased wages, except in the relatively few cases where incentive wage plans are in effect. The C.I.O., although its board meeting did not specifically endorse the incentive wage, is alert

to its significance. In the steel, electrical, auto, and other industries this system is spreading. At a recent meeting of the War Labor Board, President Murray stated the general opinion of the C.I.O. leadership regarding incentive wages as follows:

"Encouragement should be given to all wage policies which result in increased production with corresponding increased earnings for the workers. Such a policy requires, however, the most careful protection of the workers so that their efforts for increased production to further the war effort will not result in merely inflated profits to industry, or in lack of employment because of poor scheduling or shortage of materials."

#### *Labor's No-Strike Pledge*

Organized labor's pledge not to strike during wartime came in for much consideration at the meeting of both labor and executive committees. This was because, (a) the cost of living was steadily climbing, (b) the wages of war workers were virtually frozen, and (c) John L. Lewis, with his three national strikes of coal miners, was trying desperately to have the labor movement repudiate its no-strike pledge and to embark upon a strike policy. Altogether the situation amounted to a real crisis. Labor's loyalty to its own and the nation's basic interests in the war were at stake. Lewis' policy would have led labor into a deadly trap, disastrous both to itself and the war. In his drive to get labor to pull out of the War Labor

Board and to embark upon a course of tying up the industries and grabbing what it can, Lewis, an old-time Republican, was acting in direct concert with the defeatist opposition in Congress.

The two labor executive boards took active steps to resolve this serious crisis, by reiterating their no-strike pledge as being in the fundamental interest of labor and our whole people. The Executive Council of the A. F. of L., with certain circumlocutions and evasions of the Lewis issue, condemned the Smith-Connolly Act as provocative of strikes. The C.I.O. National Board, however, categorically condemned John L. Lewis for having provoked the passage of the Smith-Connolly Act and militantly restated its no-strike pledge.

Lewis failed in his efforts to stampede the labor movement into a strike policy in the midst of this war of national liberation. It would be folly, however, to believe that the battle is over on this crucial issue. With victory in the war looming closer, with the employers intensifying their profiteering, and with the workers increasingly demanding relief from excessive living costs, the only way that serious wartime strikes can be avoided is for organized labor to put a drastic halt to rising prices by the exercise of its united political power.

#### *Trade Union Unity*

In the urgent need of organized labor to exercise its full power the question of organizational trade union unity, national and interna-

tional, remains a vital issue. On both angles of this question the position of the C.I.O. is clear and correct—it is for immediate unity, by its present unions becoming part of that body as they are, with the A. F. of L., and it stands unequivocally for the unity of all the trade unions of the United Nations. Hence, it evidently did not feel called upon at its Board meeting to restate its position.

On the question of national trade union unity, the A. F. of L. Executive Council, however, reiterated its 1938 stand, which amounts to a demand for an "unconditional surrender" of the C.I.O. Said Mr. Green (*N. Y. Times*, Aug. 16):

"At that time and at intervals since then we proposed that the C.I.O. unions once chartered by the A. F. of L. should again come back to us, that then a joint committee be named to adjust the jurisdiction disputes between the rival unions. After these have been adjusted all of the former A. F. of L. unions would come back into the Federation at the same time."

This virtual ultimatum means that the A. F. of L. moguls have no real desire for labor unity, unless the C.I.O. should decide to commit hara-kiri and let them select what they please of what was left. Such united action as has developed between the A. F. of L., and the C.I.O., at the top, chiefly in the combined Labor Victory Board, was directly urged by the Roosevelt Administration. Animated by antiquated craft prejudices and narrow personal interests, the A. F. of L. Council lead-

ers are following a line which makes organized labor go through this most crucial period in its history split in the middle and gravely weakened by division. Characteristically, Mr. Green said that organic unity in the next six months was "not within the realm of possibility."

The A. F. of L. Council's failure to accept John L. Lewis' application for the re-affiliation of the United Mine Workers, however, was a service to labor, and it came as a blow in the face of that defeatist, Lewis, insolent and autocratic, who hoped to dominate and use the A. F. of L. Council as an instrument against the war and to split the workers away from President Roosevelt. It would have been a step away from labor unity to welcome Lewis back into the Federation. Although the Council was largely motivated by craft industries and personal ambitions in by-passing Lewis' application and referring it to the Boston convention for final action, the pressure of the A. F. of L. masses against Lewis was also not without its effect in their action. Anyway, it was a good job to keep Lewis out.

The A. F. of L. Executive Council failed to reverse its previous position of refusing to cooperate with the Soviet trade unions. Its policy of joining up with the British unions and leaving the Soviet unions and the C.I.O. on one side as untouchables is becoming more and more untenable. It is a policy of weakening the labor base of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition. It also flaunts the will of the millions of

organized workers in the C.I.O., the Railroad Brotherhoods, the Latin American unions, many British unions, and various sections of the A. F. of L. itself who are more and more insistently demanding real international trade union unity. It is indeed a political absurdity when Secretary-Treasurer George Meany, speaking the sentiments of the A. F. of L. Executive Council, tells our Government and people that "An enduring peace cannot be achieved and maintained except through international cooperation," while he and his colleagues of the Executive Council at the same time refuse to cooperate with the Soviet trade unions. It is a bad situation that will eventually be liquidated by mass worker pressure, generated by the urgency of the war.

#### *Labor and Post-War Problems*

Questions of the post-war period occupied a great deal of attention at the meetings of both labor boards, and no doubt they will also be in the forefront at the coming A. F. of L. and C.I.O. conventions. Now that the peoples of the United Nations are definitely convinced that they are going to smash Nazi Germany and Japan, it is natural that they should begin to think ahead about the post-war world. In this respect organized labor cannot stand mute in the rear, but must let its voice be heard. In this whole matter the question of international cooperation between the labor unions is one of major importance. Only if the trade unions of all the United Nations are acting in concert

can they hope to exert their maximum influence on the shaping of the post-war world.

Both the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. national boards have committees on post-war problems. These should get together and work jointly. As things now stand, the C.I.O., by previous actions as well as by this Board meeting's decisions, tends to go along, with criticisms, in the general direction of President Roosevelt's proposed post-war economic plans, at least on the domestic field. Whereas, in the proposals of the recent A. F. of L. Executive Council, said to have been drafted by Matthew Woll, there is in their solicitude for the capitalist profit and for "free enterprise" a suspicious scent of the National Association of Manufacturers. The time is ripe for labor to study systematically and in a united manner the complex national and international problems that the workers will not only have to confront once the war comes to an end but which are already becoming urgent practical war issues.

#### *An Estimate of the Two Meetings*

From the foregoing it is obvious that the C.I.O. National Board meeting sounded a much clearer and more militant labor and patriotic note than did the A. F. of L. Executive Council. On every issue dealt with by the boards—political action, the wage question, the no-strike pledge, trade union unity, post-war problems, etc.—the C.I.O. top leadership showed itself to be far in advance of that of the A. F. of L.

This is not to say that there were no weaknesses in the C.I.O. Board meeting. The most serious shortcoming was its failure to take up more concretely American military and diplomatic policy, such as the urgent question of the second front and the relations to the peoples of the occupied and liberated countries. These questions must be given much more attention by all of organized labor. Above all, now, the question of the second front, with which is bound up the whole matter of shortening the war, must be made a living question throughout the millions of organized workers.

The more progressive character of the C.I.O. board meeting as against that of the A. F. of L. indicates the difference in the make-up and functioning of the two committees. The C.I.O. National Board is a democratic, progressive body which reflects and responds to the attitudes and opinions of its great mass of followers. It is in actuality a leading committee for the millions of workers it represents. But the A. F. of L. Executive Council is none of this. It is unrepresentative and undemocratic, the rank and file having virtually no say in its proceedings. It continually drags after the labor movement, usually acting as a brake upon it. How far behind the A. F. of L. membership the Council lags was well illustrated by the recent progressive state conventions in Ohio and New York, which adopted war policies much superior to those of the national A. F. of L. leaders.

Part of the explanation for the

unprogressive character of the A. F. of L. leadership is to be found in the presence in the Executive Council of such defeatists as Woll, Hutcheson and Dubinsky, who fight against all militant war policies. But this is not by any means the whole story. The Council is also loaded up with antiquated bureaucrats who, even while subscribing to a correct general win-the-war line, are too conservative to do much to apply it. So it has been for many years in top A. F. of L. circles. It is a leadership which, in principle, is against initiating or enforcing any new policies itself. It can be budged only by rank-and-file pressure.

Although the C.I.O. National Board is manifestly far more progressive and is carrying out a much more militant war policy than the A. F. of L. Executive Council, this does not mean that the gap between them is as great as to exclude organizational unity and political cooperation. On the contrary, there is a basic political unity between them in that they are both supporting the war and backing up the President. The difficulty is that the A. F. of L. Council leadership is crippled by the presence in its ranks of confirmed defeatists and by long-time bureaucratic conservatism. The cure for this situation is for the great rank and file of the A. F. of L. membership to speak out on policy and to exercise mass democratic pressure upon the high officialdom to have their will translated into A. F. of L. policy. More and more this is taking place locally—on questions of the second front, labor unity, Negro rights, and



many other issues. A renaissance of the A. F. of L. is under way, and it is welling up from the bottom. Many state and city A. F. of L. bodies are in direct conflict with the ultra-conservative policies of the Executive Council. That the coming convention of the C.I.O. in Philadelphia will be of a militant win-the-war character is assured; but to what extent the A. F. of L. convention in Boston responds to the war needs of the workers and the nation will depend primarily upon the degree to which the more alert lower bodies and rank-and-file forces make their democratic will felt on their leaders.

#### *The Task Ahead*

In order to overcome the dangerous forces of reaction and defeatism now raising their head in this country, it is absolutely necessary that organized labor—the A. F. of L., C.I.O., and Railroad Brotherhoods, and the miners—unite their forces politically, along the general lines proposed by the National Board meeting of the C.I.O. Only by labor throwing this vast force behind the President and by insisting that he stop all appeasement of reactionary elements at home and abroad, can our country be kept on a path that, together with the rest of the United Nations, will ensure the smashing of Hitlerism and effective post-war reconstruction. Organized labor, united politically, must take up in dead earnest the fight to establish a great Anglo-American second front in Europe,

to stabilize our economy, to develop a national diplomacy directed toward destroying fascism in Europe, not protecting its decaying structure; to keep our country from being captured by the reactionaries in the 1944 elections. Failure of labor to unite politically to do these things would bring the most serious consequences to the outcome of the war, to the shape-up of the post-war world, to the very existence of the trade union movement itself.

In every city, state and Congressional district in the country all the forces of organized labor and other win-the-war elements should come together and set up joint committees. These should take up the urgent task of politically registering the millions of uprooted war workers and also develop other active political work in support of the war. Preparations must be made for labor to cast a solid win-the-war vote in 1944. From every section come reports indicating a great political awakening among the toiling masses. It is shared in by all the branches of the labor movement—C.I.O., A. F. of L., etc. This mass movement must be encouraged and stimulated in every possible way. To help do this is also the main task of the Communist Party. American organized labor is moving toward united political action, on a far broader basis than ever before in its history. That it shall reach this goal of political unity quickly and in overwhelming masses is imperative for the future of our country.