

AFL and CIO Merger Plan

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

THE FUSION of the AFL and CIO, now in the works, can be an event of tremendous importance in the life of the American working class. Every worker should rejoice

that the 20-year war between the two federations appears to be ending. The consolidation of the trade union movement, with some 15,000,000 members,



has profound potentialities in shaping the future of organized labor and the class struggle in general in this country. It can provide the workers with a weapon of immense power.

But the constructive possibilities of the merger will not be realized if matters are left to the determination of such men as George Meany, head of the new combination, whose ideology differs little from that of a typical monopoly capitalist. As it now stands, the merger project has many serious deficiencies. To what extent the merger will be beneficial to the working class will depend upon the degree to which the left and progressive forces in the labor movement strive to shape and model it into more constructive channels. This is the major thing that the workers must realize about the unification proceedings now going on between

the leaders of the two big labor federations.

NATURALLY, it takes strong pressures to overcome bureaucratic interests and narrownesses and to bring about such a big merger in labor's ranks as that now being consummated. Some of these pressure forces are:

1. The widespread, if not militant, rank and file demand for labor unity in the face of the growing economic crisis.

2. The Taft-Hartley Act, right-to-work laws, and other anti-labor legislation, which demands a stronger fighting policy from the organized workers.

3. The developing hostility of the Eisenhower Administration to the trade unions and consequently the greater need for united political action.

4. Internal pressures within the respective bureaucracies, with McDonald of the Steel Workers Union virtually demanding the merger under a threat otherwise to disrupt the CIO.

5. A belief on the part of reactionary forces that if the workers can all be combined under one head, it will be much easier to cramp them into the service of American imperialism's warlike foreign policies. In fact, according to the joint statement of Meany and Reuther, the united purpose of the new organization would be to mobilize the working men and women of this country to fight against "the challenge of Soviet Communist totalitarianism" i.e.,

to support the truculent foreign policies of the U. S. State Department.

THE TENTATIVE proposals of the merger contain a number of shortcomings. The protection proposed for Negro workers (without mentioning the name Negro) is altogether inadequate. The absence of a strong non-raiding clause is also a shortcoming, and it opens the door to conflict among the organizations.

The statement that craft and industrial unionism are equally important is absurd and can easily lead to jurisdictional collisions. There is also no indication that the new organization will have in it some elements of improved trade union democracy, which both the AFL and CIO seriously lack.

The attempt to put the industrial unions in a department by themselves is both artificial and impractical.

The merger proposals also have the serious omission of not seeking to draw the Railroad Brotherhoods, UMWA and independent industrial unions and other labor organizations (up to 1,500,000 workers) into the contemplated united organization. The clause proposing a witch-hunt against Communists and other left-wingers can cause disunity in the labor movement. And in measuring out representation in the high executive posts of the new organization, the

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CIO gets considerably the worst of it.

The greatest weakness of the unity proposals, however, is their failure to include policy measures, corresponding to the new strength and responsibilities of American organized labor. The progressive forces should fight for, at least:

(1) A definite economic program to shield the workers from worsening economic conditions and growing mass unemployment, a program which should not rest upon armaments production for creating employment.

(2) The initiation of a sharp struggle for Negro rights, against growing McCarthyite fascism in this country, and in defense of the seriously-menaced Bill of Rights.

(3) The development of a genuine peace program for labor, one that would free the labor movement from its present tragic situation of following sullenly along after the warlike foreign policies of the State Department—policies written and carried out by the worst enemies of the working class.

(4) A great drive to organize the unorganized, especially in the South.

(5) The opening up of new perspectives of independent class political action for 1956, by intensifying the struggle within the Democratic and Republican parties, and by heading towards the eventual goal of launching a great labor-farmer party of the workers and their political allies.

Organized labor now has numerically a tremendous political base, and will be able to serve as the foundation of a great independent party. It is stupidly absurd for the trade unions, with 15,000,000 organized members to go along, dragging after the tail of the Democratic Party bosses and allowing the bourgeois leaders to kick them around and to almost completely deny the workers any political representation in the various local, state and national legislative bodies of the U. S.

WITH ITS NEW STRENGTH and unity, American organized labor must now begin to look forward towards achieving its historic position as the leading force in the American nation. Organized labor and its normal political allies—the Negro people, the poorer farmers and the lower middle-class—constitutes

the great majority of the American people. Labor cannot possibly, without disaster, allow national leadership to rest indefinitely in the hands of big business and other reactionary elements.

Totally inappropriate, therefore, to say the least, was the recent statement of Meany, from the Miami meeting of the AFL executive council, as reported in the daily press, to the effect that organized labor in this country has no desire to write the laws of the nation or to shape its foreign policies. This was one of the most servile statements ever made by a responsible labor leader in this country.

In the new labor unity, if it goes through as is, the CIO unions will in all probability find themselves, willy nilly, in the position of bringing constructive pressure from the left. That is, they will certainly have to defend their organizations and the progress they have made during the past years from attack by the stubborn and reactionary craft unionists of the old AFL clique. Many of the progressives in the CIO will be unable to swallow the political reaction of the Meany group. Already there is strong opposition in CIO ranks to various features of the merger proposals. Many AFL forces will share these sentiments. This situation of a developing opposition, tending towards progressivism, may, in fact, become one of the most valuable features of the current merger.

Those elements, both inside and outside the labor unions, who are planning to misuse the merged labor movement as a tool of the State Department to further its imperialist foreign policies, with the help of the Meanys and Reuthers, will be in for a surprise and a disappointment. Many conditions are shaping up in this country (including a sure attack by reactionaries upon the newly merged unions) which are demanding more and more insistently that the labor movement take a more vigorous fighting line. Every progressive force in the country should work to this end. The merger must not be allowed to result in a deeper paralysis of the labor movement by the agents of the State Department. On the contrary, it must develop into a great renaissance of the trade unions, industrially, politically and ideologically.