

Wartime Problems of Trade Unions

(Continued from yesterday's editions.)

By Rose Wortis

The best proof of the need and functions of trade unions as the guardians of the workers' interests and the driving force for increased production recognized even by the more enlightened forces of management is the unprecedented growth of trade union organizations since the outbreak of the war. Without resort to strike both AFL and CIO unions have been strengthened. The latest figures of the AFL and the CIO show an increase in membership of close to 2,000,000 during the past year.

These accomplishments were achieved in face of misconceptions that still exist among some of the more conservative and confused labor officials that unorganized workers cannot be brought into unions because we cannot offer the workers the prospective of improved conditions through unionization.

The figures cited above are the best refutation of the arguments of the "professed" friends of labor who speak of the disappearance of trade union functions. Just ask the

workers of Sperry Gyroscope, of Endicott-Johnson, Wright Aircraft, who voted overwhelmingly for the CIO, or the thousands of workers who have chosen the AFL as their bargaining agency, whether unions have any functions under war-time conditions. One need only have witnessed the tremendous enthusiasm of these workers where the result of the election was announced to appreciate how the workers value their newly-won freedom and self-respect that comes with unionization and the right to have a say in determining conditions and wages under which they are to work.

These union victories will serve to raise the morale of the workers and their readiness to exert themselves to the utmost to increase their contribution to war.

To be sure, there are many unsolved problems, many difficulties facing the unions, arising out of the fact that employers whether private or government take advantage of labor's pledge not to strike (a good example of this we see in the present dispute between the Transport Workers' Union and the city). A contributory factor is lack of representation of labor in government machinery, inefficiency and delay in getting decisions from the

War Labor Board (which we hope will be improved with the setting up of regional boards), deliberate resistance and misinterpretation of government regulations, especially the wage stabilization board (interpreted by many employers and government officials as wage freezing and not stabilization). Last, but not least, a failure on the part of some trade union officials to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and information which will enable them to fight most effectively in defense of the economic conditions under the present set-up.

Comrade Browder posed the question most effectively when he said: "Trade unions today require the most profound study of the decisions made by the boards in Washington, the laws upon which such decisions are based, the precedents established in carrying out these rulings and the experience of the workers in the shops with the result of these rulings.

"Trade union leaders have to become lawyers in the sense that they have to know how to use these regulations in the interests of the workers, because we can be sure that the best legal advice is used by many employers against the workers.

"The trade unions have got to demonstrate their interest in this solution by knowing administrative law better than anybody else."

Of the most basic importance today is the necessity for labor to use its organized strength in the political field. The American trade union tradition of pure and simple trade unionism has been blasted by the war. The solution of the minutest economic problems today are closely linked to the broad political issues.

It is mainly in such unions that have lagged behind on these broader issues that the confusion and pessimism is most pronounced. Unfortunately until very recently there was insufficient leadership and guidance from leading AFL bodies on the press in relation to these new problems. The articles cited above show a growing recognition of the danger of the old approach to new problems. We heartily endorse the statement of Mr. Casey posed in the form of a question, "Are we big enough to do the job and save our members and our unions? I think we are. If we are not then we should get out and make room for men who are."

Labor is beginning to reduce its responsibilities. The announcement

of the agreement of the AFL, CIO and Railroad Brotherhoods and the Farmers' Union for common action on the legislative field has evoked the most enthusiastic response among the workers. Joint AFL and CIO legislative activities are developing in many cities and states. More material is being issued by trade unions on such matters as labor legislation, wage stabilization, such as the CIO pamphlet on wage stabilization, which is a real guide to the unions.

When labor will come to appreciate these new functions, and there is surely no time to lose, it will not only be able to maintain its gains but strengthen them and emerge as a more powerful force in our nation's war of survival.

The leadership of the organized labor movement has called on the millions of organized workers to get into action to break the conspiracy of the defeatists and reactionaries in Congress. This is a clarion call to every trade unionist to which every one must respond. We are called upon to act against our own internal enemies not only in defense of the hard-won rights of the trade union movement but as a patriotic duty in defense of the independence of our nation.