

# Party Trade Union Fractions

By William Z. Foster

THE time is at hand when we must give much more attention than in the past to the organization of Party fractions in the trade unions. There are a multitude of reasons why this is so. At the recent sessions of the Enlarged Executive of the Comintern, the question of building trade-union fractions was one of those stressed greatly. The coming convention of the Workers Party must mark the inception of a far more intense, systematic, and widespread campaign to organize Communist fractions in the labor organizations of this country.



FOSTER

The necessity for building fractions in the trade unions is fundamental. The normal growth and functioning of our Party, not to speak of its one day leading the proletariat in the revolution, depends to a very large degree upon our extending our influence in the trade unions and in one day capturing the leadership of the masses of workers in them. The trade-union fractions are one of the chief means for winning this influence over the organized toilers. The Comintern lays the utmost importance upon their thorough organization in all countries.

Trade-union fractions are the instruments through which the Party carries out its policies in the unions. In all the struggles of the organized workers, in their strikes, in their efforts at united political action, in all the bitter problems confronting them, our Party must not only have clear-cut programs corresponding to the workers' interests, but it must also have the mechanism for putting them into action, for calling them effectively to the attention of the organized workers, and for taking the leadership of these workers in the actual struggle. This can only be had by a thorough-going organization of all the Communist forces in the trade unions, by a highly developed system of fractions.

Our Party members must always act as a unit in the unions. This can only be accomplished through the fraction system. As it is now many of our comrades seem blissfully oblivious of this need for a common program and common action. They go along single-jacking, with policies of their own. Consequently the Party's interests in their unions are compromised in many ways. Often there is the intolerable spectacle of Party comrades coming into open conflicts with each other in the unions regarding questions of policy. There have even been cases where Party members got themselves lost in inter-union jurisdictional wars by adopting the points of view of their respective unions and by making war upon each other in a manner that was almost as foolish and heated as that of the ordinary trade union members. Cases in point of recent occurrences were in the food trades and shoe industry in New York, and in the fight now going on throughout the country between the Journeymen Tailors and the Amal-

gamated Clothing Workers for the control of certain classes of shops in various cities.

Such a short-sighted policy is, of course, out of the question for our Party members. The Workers Party is the Party of the working class. Consequently its interests far outrun the petty jurisdictional claims of any trade union. In such a war between unions the Party policy is to intensify the movement for amalgamation as a final settlement of the difficulty, and to demand local united-front movements between the quarrelling local unions as temporary expedients to bridge over the situation pending its ultimate solution. But the only way in which our comrades can get to understand this policy and to effectively apply it is through a well-developed trade-union fraction organization. Trade union fractions mean discipline, uniform policies and real power for our Party in the labor organizations.

One of the great problems confronting the Workers Party is to bring larger numbers of the membership into the trade unions and to stimulate the activities of those who are in the unions. A well-ordered system of fractions will contribute much to this end. Wherever the Party has its forces well organized in the unions this very organization will in itself react upon the Party to bring ever larger numbers of the eligible members into the trade unions. In addition to the many other important reasons why trade union fractions are necessary, this one, the induction of the proletarian members of our Party into the trade-union struggle, must not be lost sight of. Our practice must have as an inflexible rule that every Party unit shall stimulate and be responsible for the functioning of the trade-union fractions in its sphere of activity.

As things now stand our Party has a not inconsiderable fraction development in the trade unions. It will compare favorably with that of a number of well-established European parties. But the whole work is just in its infancy. As we shall see further along, one of the difficulties we have to contend with is the common tendency to confuse Party trade-union fractions with non-Party T. U. E. L. groups. This confusion must be liquidated and the whole question of Party trade-union fractions cleared up in the minds of our members.

## Relations of Fractions to Unions and Party.

In constructing fractions the general lines of trade-union structure should be followed. This method enables the Party to exert its influence intelligently and immediately upon every legislative and executive branch of the trade-union movement. The fractions must be permanent (for regular locals and other constant organization forms) or temporary (for conventions, special committees, etc.) just as the nature of the movement requires. The essential thing is that the fractions be so formed that the Party can bring its pressure to bear freely and directly upon all trade-union organs. Fractions must be established in all trade unions, regardless of whether they are craft or industrial in structure, independent or "regular" in affiliation, conservative or

radical in tendency. Wherever there are masses of workers organized in trade unions, there the Party must have its active and well-disciplined fractions.

The fraction system must start in the shops and follow the trade-union structure to its highest ramifications. Where there are shop committees (and the shop-committee movement will eventually take on impetus in this country) trade-union fractions must be organized in them. Among the membership of every local union the Communists must organize themselves into a group which acts as a body upon all problems coming before the organization. If there are Communists on the executive committee of a given local union they must act together as a fraction, though in close connection with the general Party fraction of the union. The same principle applies all along the way. The Communist delegates from the various local unions in a given trade or industry to a corresponding district council or joint board likewise form themselves into a fraction, and also those on the executive committees of such councils or joint boards. The Communist delegates to all central labor councils must take the same course. In the executive boards of railroad system federations, miners' districts, international unions, federations of international unions (A. F. of L.), and in conventions of state federations of labor, international unions, and of the labor movement as a whole, when Communist representatives reach these bodies they must combine themselves and act as organized units, their fractions in each case being temporary or permanent, as the situation dictates.

The trade-union fractions are not full-powered Party units. They do not collect dues, nor have they voting power in the Party. They must not be confused in structure or function with shop nuclei. The fractions are Party organs for working in the trade unions. The shop nuclei are the basic structure of the Party. They collect dues and legislate upon and execute Party policies in all institutions in their sphere where the Party is carrying on activity. They affiliate directly to and form the basis of all higher Party units. The trade-union fractions, on the other hand, are specialized for work in the trade unions. They do not affiliate directly to the higher Party units. They are controlled by the Party through the industrial departments and committees of its national C. E. C. and the local units.

The trade union fractions must be well-organized, with a regular secretary or committee at the head of each. The fractions of the lower trade union units receive their direction from the higher fractions and Party units. To illustrate by starting at the bottom. The general fraction in the shop committee is, as a general rule, led by those members who are also members of the executive committee of the shop committee, the whole being directed by the shop nucleus. The fraction in a local union is, so far as practicable, headed by its members who belong to the leading committee. The same principle with modifications to be discussed later, applies all the way to the top of the movement. All the fractions in a given trade in one city get their leadership from the Communists who are delegates to the district council of that trade. These, in common with the leaders in all other local groups, are directed by the fraction in the local labor council. This important fraction is in close connection with the local committee of the Party and receives its instructions therefrom.

On a national scale a like principle prevails. The local

fractions in the respective industries take their lead on national policies from the Communist fractions in the executive boards of the international unions where such may exist, or from specially organized national committees where there are no Communists in these boards. The national trade or industrial fractions are to take their lead from the fraction in the council of the whole labor movement when there is Communist representation there, or failing that, from a general trade union committee. All these national fractions stand in close relationship with the Industrial Department of the Party which directs and supervises all their activities.

Two important principles are involved in fraction organization. One is that the fractions take their policies and leadership from the Party organs of corresponding degree. But although well-disciplined and controlled fractions are necessary to the Party's progress care has to be exercised not to overdo this control. They must be given the utmost freedom possible in order to develop their vitality. Two dangers must be guarded against: one is over-control of the fractions, and the other is letting them run wild with autonomy. The second important organization principle to be noted is that as a general rule the leading body of a given fraction consists of those comrades who are members of the corresponding leading trade union committee or council; as, for example, the fractions in a city take their general directives on local matters from the fraction in the central labor council and, through it, from the Party. The aim of this system is to establish direct contact with the various trade union organs. But the principle must not be mechanically applied, especially now when our fractions are weak and small. To do so would wreck the whole fraction organization. The fractions and the party in general must, while applying the foregoing principle so far as is practicable, always elect or appoint to leading positions in the fractions such comrades as are necessary to make them function effectively.

Proceeding along these same general lines, the trade-union fractions of the Young Workers League, which are organized into separate units, must work in organic connection with the Party fractions. Mutual representation must be assured in both bodies from the lowest to the highest, so that the youth fractions work in perfect harmony for the general program of the Party units; the latter, in turn, must give all possible aid to the special demands of the youth in the industries and the unions by supporting the campaign of the Young Workers League to abolish all discriminatory clauses against young workers.

## Relations of Fractions to the T. U. E. L.

The Trade Union Educational League being a non-partisan organization of the left wing of the labor movement, the Workers Party forms definite Communist groups within it. These are trade-union fractions. With comparatively few exceptions, they are identical with the Party fractions in the trade-union units. The exceptions are where the trade unions have committees which have no counterparts in the League, and vice versa. The Party does not build two sets of fractions, one for the trade unions and the other for the League. The same Party fractions serve for both organizations. Otherwise endless confusion would result.

In a given city the Trade Union Educational League has, or is supposed to organize, general left-wing groups in every

local union of, let us say, the Machinists' Union. The Party fractions exist within these T. U. E. L. local craft groups. All the T. U. E. L. groups locally in a given craft combine, and the Party fraction system follows the same line. Then there are local industrial T. U. E. L. groups comprising the militant elements of all the local unions in, let us say, the metal industry, with a corresponding Party fraction covering the same scope. In the National Industrial Committees of the League the same principles apply, the fractions following the League formations even where there are no definitely corresponding trade-union organs. A case in point is in the railroad industry. The League has a national committee covering the entire industry, although there is no trade union council or federation covering the whole industry. Likewise, the League groups often include dual and rival unions in the same industry, and the fractions must follow suit. This brings no confusion into the fraction system. By the fractions following the League's conformation it does not disrupt their direct contact with the regular trade union organs. It merely centralizes them and elaborates their connection with one another and with the unions.

In the present state of development in the labor movement where there are large numbers of so-called progressive workers in the unions who are advanced enough to break with the bureaucracy but are not ideologically at the point where they will affiliate outright with our Party organizations, the Trade Educational League is an historical necessity. It offers a means to assemble considerable masses of these workers in such a manner as to enable us to exert great influence over them. To build the T. U. E. L. into a real mass organization, and thus to bring the maximum of numbers of these discontented workers under our influence in the trade unions, is one of the most important tasks confronting our Party.

A factor working against the accomplishment of this vital work is the tendency on the part of many comrades to confuse the T. U. E. L. groups with Party fractions and to try to employ them as such. They tend to look upon the League groups as Party units, to occupy them with purely Party affairs, and to restrict their membership to Party members. This is a mistaken policy. It drives away valuable non-Party elements and robs the League of its mass character. In the early days of the T. U. E. L., when the trade unionists were militantly fighting against the great "open-shop" drive of the employers, and when they were easily inclined to respond to our lead slogans, this tendency to look upon the T. U. E. L. groups as Party trade-union fractions was not so manifest or harmful. In the big conferences and in the large local groups of the League, of that period, it was a comparatively simple matter for the Communists to meet together separately and to co-operate as fractions, even though they had only a faint idea of the functions of fractions in general as apart from the League.

But when the League was driven underground in the unions and the more timid non-Party elements began to fall away from it, the tendency to identify the League groups with Party fractions, which was then intensified, became more and more detrimental by driving away still more non-Party workers. The tendency was sharply to liquidate the League groups as non-partisan bodies and to actually turn them into Party fractions. This liquidation tendency must be stopped. The way to stop it is, on the one hand, to

build a thoroughgoing system of trade-union fractions, which will handle the purely Party trade-union matters; and on the other hand, to infuse these fractions with a definite understanding of the necessity for the T. U. E. L. on a broad scale and to launch them into an active campaign to construct the League on such a basis.

In the period now confronting it our Party must consider the building of trade union fractions as one of its major tasks. Success in this work means to bring our members into the unions, to clarify their program and to unite them effectively in the struggle against the bureaucrats. It will contribute very much to the building of the T. U. E. L. into a mass organization of the trade union progressive elements, and it will aid in many other ways in consolidating and strengthening our Party in its growing leadership of the working class.

## Capitalist Industry Kills Off More Men Than War

"INDUSTRY still takes an annual toll which puts to shame major battles in the World War," says the Locomotive Engineers' Journal.

"Indeed, in one state, Pennsylvania, more men were killed in industry in 1924 than lost their lives to Spanish bullets during the entire Spanish-American war; while no battle yet fought has numbered 174,000 wounded, the figures for the state of Ohio.

"Pennsylvania continued her unenviable superiority in slaughtering workingmen, with 2,209 fatal accidents. New York was second with 1,109. Others were: Ohio, 999; Washington, 407; Massachusetts, 336; New Jersey, 283; and Minnesota, 221.

"Pennsylvania also took first rank for maiming her workers, with 177,539. In Ohio, 174,454 were injured. Figures for other leaders were: Massachusetts, 60,000; New Jersey, 47,000; Washington, 39,000; Minnesota, 37,000; Oregon, 25,000, and Tennessee, 21,000.

"The figures for the state of Washington, which ranks thirtieth in population, are an amazing disgrace. They can be attributed largely to the criminal carelessness of the logging industry."

Whether it be in war or in "peace," the triumphs of capitalism are built upon the exploitation and martyrdom of the working class.

## The Month's Prize News Story

*By Associated Press.*

PARIS, June 10.—The French Senate was the scene of a heated debate on the question whether Roquefort cheese should only be entitled to the name Roquefort when made from sheep's milk and ripened in the Roquefort caves.

During the debate one of the speakers quoted tributes which he said had been paid to Roquefort cheese by Pliny the Elder and Julius Caesar. No decision was reached.