

# Foster Stresses Need of Discipline In Steel Drive

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

## Article II

Another fundamental reason why the organizers of 1919, in the face of stupendous difficulties, were unable to mobilize such great masses of steel workers was because the entire campaign was based upon the strategy of a national industrial movement. Previously, the A. F. of L. had nibbled at the task of organizing the steel workers usually on the basis of the workers in only one locality or even in one craft of one locality. We threw this antiquated system into the discard and proceeded on the basis of attacking the problem of organizing the steel workers simultaneously in all crafts and all localities. The degree that we achieved this national movement was the measure of our success in general.

We recognized two main reasons why the steel campaign should be based upon such a unified national movement: 1) It was necessary in order to bring the full power of all the steel workers simultaneously against the steel trust; 2) It was also necessary psychologically for the steel workers in order to rouse their fighting spirit and self-confidence.

The first of these two reasons for a simultaneous national drive in all steel centers is pretty obvious (at least for everyone but a Gompers or Green), it being perfectly clear that the steel workers cannot possibly defeat the steel trust in any one locality, but must deliver their attack all along the line and develop the maximum power of which they are capable.

Our second reason for a national drive, the psychological one, is more subtle and requires an explanation to those not familiar with the steel

worker and his environment. The unorganized steel workers, much more so than the packing house workers, the rubber workers, etc.,

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# Foster Stresses Steel Drive Discipline

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work and live in an environment that tends to impress upon them a deep sense of their helplessness as individuals. To begin with, the steel workers work scattered far and wide in gigantic mills carrying on tremendous industrial processes in a terrific roar of noise and at great personal hazard, all of which impresses the individual with his littleness. On top of this very important psychological factor, the steel workers in their life generally, run against innumerable other forces which serve to impress upon them the great power of the men who control the gigantic industries in which they work. They see their shop life and standard of living dictated arbitrarily and ruthlessly by these economic masters and they also note how the steel communities, politics, churches, civic organizations of various kinds, etc., are entirely dominated by the almost mythical steel trust. (By a working of the same psychological principle, the steel workers, once they get organized and are able to make a stand against the powerful forces all about them, will develop an especially strong sense of their own power.)

## Awakening Sense of Power

Impressed on all sides thus with a sense of helplessness as individuals, the unorganized steel workers require in order to awaken them to a sense of their economic power, a demonstration by the unions that they are able to cope successfully with these enormous forces which surround him. For the unorganized steel worker, a great national drive in all steel centers, backed by outside unions and utilizing every means of publicity and mass mobilization, furnishes the basis for such a psychological awakening on his part.

It was in line with this double necessity for a national movement that the organizers in 1919 originally proposed a great drive simultaneously in all steel centers. The reactionary A. F. of L. leaders however with no real interest in the work, rejected this plan and holding to the theory that the work must be begun in only one locality, gave the organizers but a few hundred dollars and a half dozen organizers to take up the work. This was a deadly blow. It almost killed the movement at the outset, and restricted the work to the Chicago district. The steel magnates, in order to prevent the movement catching hold in other districts, were enabled to move against us elsewhere (by wage concessions, shorter work day, terrorism, demagoguery, etc.), where the workers were unorganized.

It was only after a desperate struggle for a year that we managed to fight the movement through onto a national scale. During all this struggle, however, we kept the national idea always strongly before the workers. Our entire strategy was based upon this conception of a national movement and the steel workers were getting inspired by it. It is significant that the most powerful argument of the organizers, the one most effective amongst the workers, was not about the benefits they would enjoy if they had trade unions, but about the progress that the movement was making in the various localities. The workers instinctively realized that their movement for organization had to be national in character and we went to the very greatest pains to develop this conception amongst them. Without this strategy of a national movement, we could not possibly have mobilized the workers all over the industry as we did.

## A National Scale

For the C. I. O. organizers, this lesson from the 1919 experience in organizing the steel workers should be clear. The present campaign of organization must be definitely on a national scale. The drive should take place more or less simultaneously in all centers. There must be no dilly-dallying here and there, but a coordinated movement armed with every weapon of publicity, education and organization, and moving forward irresistibly and simultaneously in all important steel towns.

In my book, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, on page 21, I explain this type of campaign as we originally planned it, as follows:

"At the end of three or four weeks, when the organizing forces were in good shape and the workers in the mills acquainted with what was afoot, the campaign would be opened with a rush. Great mass meetings, built up by extensive advertising, would be held everywhere at the same time throughout the steel industry. This we calculated to arouse enthusiasm among the workers and to bring thousands of them into the unions, regardless of any steps the mill owners might take to prevent it. After two or three meetings in each place, the heavy stream of men pouring into the unions would be turned into a decisive flood by the election of committees to formulate the grievances of the men and to present these to the employers."

This type of campaign is still valid. It is essentially the correct approach to the organization of steel workers although not to be applied in a blus-prim fashion. The C. I. O. has the resources to put it into effect, and if it learns from the experiences of 1919, it will do so.

## A Disciplined Movement

In organizing 500,000 unorganized steel workers for a united national fight against the steel trust, the question of union discipline is of vital importance. We found this out in 1919, and our experience in this matter should be instructive to the C. I. O. organizers, notwithstanding their broad experience in trade union struggles.

As I have already stated, the strategy of the 1919 organizers was to extend the movement from the Chicago district which it was limited at the start by the A. F. of L. stupidity and treachery, onto a broad

# Lewis Pledges

C.I.O. LEADER ON

## Contrasts Workers

WASHINGTON, July 7.—A call to organize industrially, a pledge to support any movement to form unions among the 30,000,000 unorganized American workers, and defiance of the concentrated oligarchy of American finance capital featured John L. Lewis' speech over a nation-wide radio hook-up last night.

Lewis is chairman of the Committee for Industrial Organization, comprising twelve unions with over a million membership, devoted to the theory of industrial unions for the mass production industries. Lewis spoke particularly on the steel drive now beginning, and answered the recent declaration of the American Iron and Steel Institute. His speech in full is as follows:

I salute the hosts of labor who listen. I greet my fellow-Americans. My voice tonight will be the voice of millions of men and of women employed in America's industries, heretofore unorganized, economically exploited and inarticulate.

I speak for the Committee for Industrial Organization, which has honored me with its chairmanship and with which are associated twelve great national and international unions. These unions have a membership in excess of one million persons who to a greater or lesser degree enjoy the privileges of self-organization and collective bargaining.

They reflect adequately the sentiment, hopes and aspirations of those thirty million additional Americans employed in the complex processes of our domestic economy who heretofore have been denied by industry and finance the privilege of collective organization and collective participation in the arbitrary fixation of their economic status.

## Barriers Will Burst

Let him doubt who will that tonight I portray the ceaseless yearning of their hearts and the ambition of their minds. Let him who will, be he economic tyrant or sordid mercenary, pit his strength against this mighty upsurge of human sentiment now being crystallized in the hearts of thirty millions of workers who clamor for the establishment of industrial democracy and for participation in its tangible fruits.

He is a madman or a fool who believes that this river of human

national scale. The steel trust, with an opposite strategy, tried to disintegrate and prevent the development of the national movement by having it waste its strength in a series of hopeless local strikes.

The 1919 organizers resolutely fought against the development of such local strikes. This was a supreme test of their discipline and that of the rank and file, because not only were such dangerous strikes fomented by the steel companies through wholesale discharges of workers, provocations by undercover men, and various forms of terrorism; but what was even more difficult, many workers, impatient to hit back at their oppressors, were inclined to walk into their trap by demanding local strikes. It was one of the greatest achievements, however, of the 1919 organizers that these disruptive local strike tendencies were overcome without serious losses, and the movement gradually developed onto the national scale which finally enabled it to mobilize 365,000 workers in the great strike of September 22, 1919.

## Discipline in Johnstown

The bitter struggle in the highly strategic steel center of Johnstown illustrates the great importance of discipline in organizing the steel workers. There the Cambria Steel Company tried with all the means at its command to force a local strike, discharging over 3,000 workers in its efforts. Three times the local workers, harassed beyond endurance by these attacks, voted for a local general strike, but each time we were able to convince them of the folly of such a struggle. Johnstown, one of the earliest points to organize, was far in advance of the rest of the industry in the Pittsburgh area. Had the 22,000 workers there struck, it would have been impossible to rally the rest of the steel workers to strike in support of them. They could not have won alone, and the whole campaign would have suffered a major if not a decisive defeat.

With the slogan: "Johnstown must be held at all costs," we called upon the workers to stand fast and maintain their lines in spite of every provocation. This they did heroically, although the unions were almost cut to pieces under the attacks of the company in the ensuing period of several months that elapsed before the rest of the industry caught up with Johnstown in point of organization. This was a great victory for trade union discipline, and when the great strike took place, the Johnstown workers struck so completely that, as they said, "there was no one left in the plant to blow the whistle."

## Voluntary Discipline

The 1919 organizers built up this strong trade union discipline in a fundamental way. It was achieved not by merely giving orders from the top and expecting the rank and file mechanically to obey them. On the contrary, it was essentially a voluntary and cultivated discipline. It was created by wide educational work among the rank and file through bulletins, speeches, etc., which explained to the workers the full significance of the strategy of the campaign. It was intensified by the trade union democratic practices (described in the previous article) of the movement which brought the workers into enthusiastic participation. It was further strengthened by the bold action of the organizers in always taking the lead on the striking line in the struggle, all of

sentiment, flowing as it does from the hearts of these thirty millions, who, with their dependents, constitute two-thirds of the population of the United States of America, can be dammed or impounded by the erection of arbitrary barriers of restraint.

Such barriers, whether they be instrumentalities of corporate control, financial intrigue or judicial interdict, will burst asunder and inevitably destroy the pernicious forces which attempt to create them.

## Salutes Own Union

I salute the members of my own union as they listen tonight in every mining community on this continent. From the Warrior River in the Southland up through the great Appalachian Range to the Island of Cape Breton they listen. Across our parched Midwestern plains to the slopes of the Rockies and the Cascades, and to the far Province of Saskatchewan, they are at attention. To them, whose servant I am, I express my pride in their courage and loyalty.

They are the household troops of the great movement for industrial democracy, and from their collective sentiment and crystallized power I derive my strength. In their daily calling the mine workers toil with the specter of death ever at their side, and the women of the mining camps share their Spartan fortitude.

Enduring hardship, inured to danger, contemptuous of death, breathing the air of freedom, is there any one who believes that the men of the mines will flinch in the face of the battle for industrial democracy which now impends in America?

## "Declaration of Civil War"

The American Iron and Steel Institute last week published a full-page advertisement in 375 newspapers, at an estimated cost of \$500,000. Its purpose was to justify the outmoded labor policy of the Institute and to announce the determination of the steel corporations to oppose the campaign now in progress for the organization of the workers in the iron and steel industry.

That statement is sinister in its implications; it is designed to be terrifying to the minds of those who fail to accept the theory that

which tended to educate the masses and to convince them of the sincerity, wisdom and determination of the campaign. Thus, a strong trade union discipline was readily built up among them and which not only carried them through the long struggle of the organization campaign but also stood them in good stead during their heroic struggle in the great strike.

In the present struggle of the C. I. O. to organize the steel industry there will hardly be less need for strong discipline than there was in the 1919 campaign. The steel trust will use every possible means to disrupt the movement and to prevent it marching forward as a united national force. The danger of the present movement being weakened, if not destroyed, through local strikes and other local tendencies, will be real and must be struggled against. A strong trade union discipline is necessary and I have tried to point out some of the elementary methods we used for the building of such a discipline. It is all the more necessary to stress these methods of mass education and trade union democracy, because in general they receive but little attention in the U. M. W. A., the key organization in the C. I. O. drive.

In order to develop the necessary discipline to preserve a united national front against the steel industry, the C. I. O. will do well to make its organizing campaign not only a broad but also a swift one. There is no need to spin out the work of organizing the steel workers over a long period. In 1919 our original plan called for organizing the bulk of the workers in six weeks' time. The C. I. O., if it proceeds vigorously upon a national scale, can astound the country by the rapidity with which this great mass of workers will be brought into the unions. Speed in the organization campaign will solve many problems, but a thousand dangers lurk in hesitancy, delay, or dabbling with the work.

[The next article in this series will appear in two days.]

## 200 Anti-Fascists Get Up to 20 Years In Italian Court

PARIS, July 7.—Despite the victory of Italian fascism in Ethiopia, the repressive measures against anti-fascist and anti-imperialist forces still continues in full force, according to information received by "L'Informateur Italien," an anti-fascist news service operating here.

Sentences ranging from four to twenty years in prison are the rule in the Special Courts which are functioning throughout Italy to put down treasonable activities.

In the months of January, February, and March alone, over 200 anti-fascists were convicted in the city of Turin. In Parma, sixteen youths have just been convicted of setting up Communist organizations and carrying on propaganda against the war. Twelve Communists have just been sentenced in Trieste.

The terror is particularly strong in the "irredentist" regions in the North. In the town of Gorizia, in the Croat district north of Venice, fourteen young Croats and Slovenes have just been sentenced for Communist and Nationalist activity.