

# The AFL-CIO Merger

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IN THE FIRST WEEK of December, in New York, organized labor in this country will take a tremendous stride forward in the merger of the AFL and CIO. These two bodies, which have pursued separate paths since the historic split of the AFL in 1935, have agreed to combine their forces. This will create a federation of some 15,400,000 workers, the largest trade union body, by far, in the capitalist world. It is topped in general only by the vast Soviet trade unions with their 40,000,000, and possibly also by the swiftly growing trade union movement of People's China.



The new AFL-CIO merger will give organized labor in this country a vastly increased potential of strength. On every front of the class struggle the labor movement will have enhanced possibilities for success in pushing the demands of the working class.

Labor will be in a far better position, with its added bargaining and striking power, to fight for wage increases and bettered working conditions; it will be enabled more effectively to tackle the still great problem of organizing the unorganized, especially in the South, and, of very big significance, the merger will also enormously increase the prestige and power politically of organized labor, and thus open the door to putting an end to the present shameful situation, where the working class in the country has only a handful of representatives in the various local, state, and national legislative bodies throughout the U.S.

of course, count upon the hostility of the monopoly capitalists. They will leave no stone unturned — in line with what they think they can get away with under the present circumstances—to undermine and cripple the united organization and to weaken or destroy its effectiveness for the workers in general. The bosses see in the new unity of labor a potential threat to their privileged class position as the real rulers of this country and also to the continuance of the present rich flood of profits.

The workers build trade unions as class fighting organizations, and despite all bourgeois blather to the contrary, the merged federation is fundamentally a fighting body. The main difficulty in the way of its developing this quality to the maximum, however, comes from within, from its own ultra-conservative top leadership. It is already clear that this type of labor leader — example, George Meany—will continue on to dominate the new federation. Such men, with huge incomes — and often themselves capitalists—are a hindrance, not a help to the labor movement. Their ideology is hardly to be distinguished from that of employers. Their presence at the head of the labor movement is proof positive of the powerful capitalist influences still at work in the ranks of organized labor.

The negative side of the otherwise generally constructive merger is, therefore, that the proposed constitution of the new AFL - CIO would even more deeply entrench this type of leadership in control. The draft constitution still further lessens trade union democracy, as against even that weak variety prevailing previously in either the AFL or the CIO. In the proposed organizational set-up, the rank and file are squeezed out practically altogether from representation in the national conventions and from control

over the actual making of decisions and policies by the organization. This lack of democracy, in situations of serious struggle, could work out with disastrous consequences.

IT IS CLEAR, therefore, that the left and progressive forces should have a two-phased policy towards the merger. First, they should heartily support the fusion itself and strive to give it a progressive program — in the sense of a more active fight for better wages and living conditions for the workers, in cultivating an active campaign of organizing the unorganized on a broad scale, in guaranteeing the economic, political, social, and trade unions rights of Negro workers, in developing a program of political activity in line with the strength and needs of the working class, and in aggressively cultivating a program of world peace and peaceful co-existence.

Second, the left and progressive forces should also make a most vigorous fight to democratize the present ultra-conservative constitution proposed for the merged organization. Modifications are needed in this draft which, as it now stands, would give the Meany and other reactionaries a stranglehold in the new organization. Such a constitution could only be a millstone about the neck of the new organization. It is imperatively necessary, therefore, that the draft constitution be systematically democratized, looking forward generally to giving the rank and file representation in the conventions, leadership, and policy-making of the organizations. Organized labor in this country needs not only unity, but unity based upon a progressive economic and political program and upon trade union democracy. Only if these facts are borne in mind can the new trade union merged achieve its great potentialities.

THE NEW federation can,