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# EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS

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## CLASS STRUGGLE POLICY IN THE RISE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

by Tom Kerry



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## Introductory Note

The following are three talks on Art Preis' *Labor's Giant Step* (New York: Pathfinder Press, second edition, 1972, \$3.95), given by Tom Kerry in 1965. Kerry, born in 1901, joined the Communist League of America, a predecessor of the Socialist Workers party, in 1934. He participated in union struggles as a member of the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's, Watertenders, and Wipers Union, the Seafarer's International Union, and the National Maritime Union.

Kerry is a former national organizational secretary of the Socialist Workers party, editor of the *Militant*, and editor of the *International Socialist Review*.

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# Class-Struggle Policy in the Rise of the Labor Movement

## Three Lectures on Art Preis' *Labor's Giant Step*

By Tom Kerry

### Lecture One

The text for this series of lecture-classes is the book by Art Preis entitled *Labor's Giant Step: Twenty Years of the CIO*. The book was published in 1964 by Pioneer Publishers, the forerunner of Pathfinder Press, and is listed as a standard item in the catalog of the latter publisher.

It is, without doubt, the best history of the Congress of Industrial Organizations up to the merger of the CIO with the American Federation of Labor in 1955, which established the present AFL-CIO.

And, I might add, it is the only genuine Marxist account and analysis of the great labor upsurge of the 1930s out of which the CIO rose. Art Preis did an enormous amount of research in preparation for the writing of the work, and years of checking and rechecking of his material to provide an unassailable factual record of the events he describes.

It's rather difficult to use a book of this magnitude as a text for a short lecture series. That was my problem in trying to determine what form the presentation was to take.

I assume that almost everyone here has already read the book. If not, I would suggest that you do. Instead of following the chapters and divisions in the book, I intend in these talks to concentrate on some of the central problems raised in the book—its major thesis, and its analysis of the dominant trends and tendencies. So you'll have to read the book to fill in the details of the historical development.

### Class Struggle: Motive Force of History

The central thrust of this study of the rise of the CIO, as I understand it, is once again to test the validity of the Marxist contention that the working class is in our epoch the fundamental instrument of social progress. That has been challenged by various and sundry tendencies, not only today but in the past.

We must be able to grapple with those tendencies that contest the Marxist premise—that is, that capitalist society is divided into classes; that the two major contending classes are the capitalist class and the working class; that between these two major classes in society there is an irreconcilable conflict of interests that constantly manifests itself in one way or another and to one degree or another; and that the resultant class struggle is the motive force of history. That's our basic premise.

Because of the position of the modern working class in

capitalist society, it is compelled to enter into struggle on all social levels, culminating in the political struggle for power and the establishment of a workers state, the transitional regime to a socialist society.

Those reading the book will note that this is its central theme, its thesis. Preis begins with that affirmation in his introduction. The introduction sums up his evaluation of the validity of the Marxist concept as tested in the actual experiences of the struggle. You'll note that the incidents related are actually tests of the validity of the Marxist concept of the class struggle as against the concept and practice of class collaboration.

### A Critic Who Writes Off Labor

Among those I want to take up who have placed a question mark over the historical role of the American working class, and not the worst by any means, is Scott Nearing. Maybe some of you have read his comments on *Labor's Giant Step* in the January 1965 issue of *Monthly Review*. Nearing concludes with the following two paragraphs:

"*Labor's Giant Step*," he says, "was written before the 1964 election campaign during which the AFL-CIO unions gave almost unanimous support to the Johnson-Humphrey ticket, which had widespread backing from the military-industrial complex.

"Labor officialdom has settled down into the camp of the military-industrial oligarchy which owns and manages the key sectors of the American economy—in the author's words 'the camp of labor's enemies.' If labor's giant step," Nearing concludes, "made the headlines thirty years ago, it merits little more than a footnote in 1965."

It's a rather cryptic conclusion, but if I understand Nearing it's a variation of the theme that the union bureaucrats have become fat, satisfied and contented; that there is therefore no profit in looking to the labor movement as a vehicle of social change, let alone social transformation. And although Nearing doesn't spell it out in so many words, the implication is that we must look to some other forces, unnamed and unidentified, to effect such change.

You will note that the criterion for his rather dolorous judgement rest on the fact that the labor officialdom supported the Johnson-Humphrey ticket in the 1964 campaign. This ticket also had the support of what he calls the military-industrial oligarchy. That is, class collaboration on the political arena makes some strange bedfellows. This may be disheartening but it is nothing

new; Nearing cannot claim originality in discovering this lamentable fact.

In *Labor's Giant Step* you will note that Preis time and time again pillories the leadership of the CIO for failing to recognize that the class struggle is as operative in the political as in the economic (trade-union) fields. Preis repeatedly flays the union officialdom for engaging in class-collaborationist policies on the electoral arena.

Also, Nearing apparently identifies the labor *movement* with the labor *officialdom*, which is a common error. It's true that the labor officialdom has settled down in the camp of the military-industrial oligarchy, but it does not follow that the class struggle has thereby been eliminated as a factor, and the decisive factor, in social change.

### James Weinstein: Nostalgia for Early Radicalism

In the same issue of *Monthly Review* there is also a review by James Weinstein, an editor of *Studies on the Left*, of Harvey O'Connor's recent book *Revolution in Seattle*. O'Connor's book, which is subtitled *A Memoir*, is an interesting and informative account of the radical movement in the Pacific Northwest from the turn of the century to the period immediately following World War I. The high point of the account is a detailed exposition of the Seattle general strike of 1919.

Weinstein's review of O'Connor's book consists of a nostalgic backward glance at the American socialist movement of the years before World War I, up to 1912, when the Socialist party with Debs as its candidate polled some 800,000 votes in this country. He is convinced that the movement of that period was in every way superior to anything since and, I repeat, nostalgically voices the feeling that our problem today is to somehow get back to the model socialist movement that existed prior to 1912.

Weinstein is so enamoured of that pre-1912 model that he tends to depreciate the tremendous advance made—both in consciousness and in organization—by the American working class in the 1930s, as he weighs the two on his scale of values. In his view the pre-1912 radicalism was the period of revolutionary flowering, compared to which the '30s counted for very little. Here is concluding paragraph:

"If there is anyone around who still thinks that the 1930's was the red decade of this century a reading of *Revolution in Seattle* will dispel that illusion." Preceding that sweeping observation is a rather ambiguous comment that I find quite puzzling. He says "Even so, his [Harvey O'Connor's] book is valuable in giving the lie to those historians who assert the irrelevance of American radicalism in the years from 1912 to 1924."

I don't know what he means by that. I don't know why he selects the years 1912-1924 or who the historians are that contend that American radicalism was irrelevant in precisely those years.

If there's any one thing that we may accomplish in this discussion of the American labor movement, I hope it will be the understanding that the American labor movement developed dynamically from its very early period to the present day; that it established its capacity to organize and conduct class battles, the likes of which this world has seldom seen. And that far from exhausting its potential as the most powerful revolutionary factor in the historical development, the American working class is today the only decisive vehicle for basic social transformation. Rule

that out and you rule out the perspective of socialism as a realistic alternative to capitalist barbarism.

So let's go briefly into the background of the development of the organized labor movement in this country and see if there's any connection between the early developments—long before 1912, the Seattle developments, World War I, the postwar period, the Great Depression, the organization of the CIO—and the present situation in the labor movement.

In case James Weinstein doesn't know it, the American labor movement, prior to the organization of the American Federation of Labor, engaged in some of the most violent, dramatic, and militant class battles ever seen.

During the great railroad strike of 1877, for example, the railroad workers attacked and burned the rolling stock on railroads up and down this coast. They actually put the torch to the city of Pittsburgh, and federal troops had to be called out in order to quell the uprising. That certainly rates with the great class battles of the century.

In 1886, there peaked the tremendous movement for the eight-hour day, fought from one end of the country to the other. This militant struggle for the shorter workday gave rise of the celebration of May Day as a workers' holiday throughout the entire world, when the Second International in 1894 established it as an official labor holiday.

Then there was the railroad strike of 1894 led by Debs, the big mine strikes in the West, and many other labor battles that certainly entered into the consciousness of the American working class in its most primitive period.

### Gompers and the AFL

One of the characteristics of the labor movement in that period was its politicalization. It was a political movement. It was organized to a great extent by immigrants from Europe and native political rebels from the United States.

When the AFL emerged successfully from its conflict with the Knights of Labor and established a national organization in 1896, it wrote this declaration, the preamble of its constitution:

"A struggle is going on in all the nations of the civilized world between the oppressors and oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor, which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the toiling millions of all nations if [they are] not combined for mutual protection and benefit."

Now that's the language of class struggle! A division exists between capitalists and labor; this division will result in conflicts, and will become more intensified; therefore, it is necessary to organize to defend the working class against the onslaught of capitalism.

Now, ironically enough, this section of the preamble remained in the constitution of the AFL until the formal reunification took place between the AFL and the CIO in 1955. It was jettisoned in the unity convention. The retention of this preamble until 1955 did not mean that the leadership and philosophy of the AFL remained true to those principles. We all know that they didn't. And words in a constitution or its preamble, no matter how weighty, are not the determining factors in the development, evolution, growth, or decline of an organization.

From the beginning, the American Federation of Labor under Gompers eschewed the tactic, strategy, and policy of independent political action. They attributed all the

difficulties, the schisms, the differences and disagreements in the labor movement, to the internecine struggles of the conflicting political tendencies: the Socialists, the Populists, the Greenbackers, and other political currents at the time. In reaction to this the AFL established a policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies," or as Gompers put it, "no politics in the unions and no unions in politics."

Gradually over the years the craft unions of the AFL won recognition from the employers, not only as representatives of a section of the union movement, but also as a stabilizing factor in American class society. The tremendous expansion of American capitalism in the period following the Civil War enabled the American capitalist class to buy the support and adherence of a privileged section, the labor aristocracy. In return for this recognition the organized labor movement acted as a damper on the development of organized struggle by the vast majority of workers in the rapidly expanding industrial sector that arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The shift from the concept of class struggle to class collaboration is set forth graphically in the biography of Samuel Gompers by Bernard Mandel, which is one of the best that's been written on the subject. It is not only a biography of Gompers, but encompasses a history of the American Federation of Labor. You may recall that Bernard Mandel wrote an article in the Spring 1964 *International Socialist Review* on the civil rights struggle. He has a much better grasp than any of the academic labor historians, and a much greater sympathy for the struggle of the workers than the so-called objective academicians.

### From Class Struggle to Class Collaboration

Here I want to take note of the attitude expressed by Gompers on the question of organizing workers in the mass-production industries. This attitude was not peculiar to Gompers. It became the common view of the whole AFL leadership and even of a section of the radical movement. Gompers had been sympathetic to socialism in the early stages of the labor struggle. He even went to Europe at one time as a representative of the AFL to a congress of the Socialist (Second) International. Socialists were very prominent in the early American Federation of Labor and remained so until the outbreak of World War I.

Bernard Mandel notes the change in the Gompers philosophy. "In his colloquy with the socialist Morris Hillquit [in 1899] before the [U.S.] commission on industrial relations, Gompers refused to say that labor's struggle was directed against the employing class as a whole. . . ." Prior to that it had been the position, as set forth in the preamble that there existed a conflict between capital and labor.

Instead, Gompers insisted, "it was directed only against those employers with narrow social vision, and that group was becoming smaller and smaller. The others had learned—and more were learning all the time—that it was more costly to enter into prolonged strikes or lockouts than to concede labor's demands; their attitude toward the workmen changed so that their 'sentiments and views are often in entire accord with the organization of the working people.'

"The expression of this changed sentiment which reconciled the interests of workers and employers, at least

temporarily, was the trade agreement, the formal recognition of standard conditions arrived at through collective bargaining between the union and the company. When that was accomplished, Gompers said, the necessity for militancy on the part of labor passed; 'constructive service' followed, based on the rule of reason. Instead of isolation, mutual suspicion, and antagonism, in which class conflict had its roots, there would be face-to-face discussions between employers and wage earners and mutual respect, making for orderly and peaceful industrial progress. Gompers' trade union policy for the twentieth century," Mandel concludes, "marked the end of the A.F. of L.'s youthful militancy and the beginning of its conservative middle age."

You see, there's nothing much that is new in the general views and outlook of today's labor fakery.

I might add that Gompers regarded the National Civic Federation [NCF] as a prime mover in fostering the policy of class collaboration between capital and labor.

Let me pause here for a footnote. The National Civic Federation was an organization of employers—presumably the more "progressive" employers—those willing to grant certain concessions to the craft unions in exchange for their political support and for their opposition to organizing the unskilled and semiskilled, Blacks, women, and unorganized workers.

It was the main class-collaborationist instrument of Marcus Alonzo Hanna, Senator from Ohio, who was boss of the Republican party at the turn of the century. Hanna saw in the National Civic Federation a vehicle for involving the trade unions in collaboration with the employers to "avoid strikes and conflicts."

On the executive board of the National Civic Federation there sat representatives of the unions and representatives of the employers. On its conciliation board, there were equal representatives of each along with a Catholic priest who was supposed to represent the public. This was the model for the classic tripartite fraud, which became quite common during the subsequent periods of capitalist crisis—especially the war periods, when mediation boards, war labor boards, price-control and wage-freeze boards proliferated.

It was not long before the vaunted "impartiality" of the NCF was put to the test—with predictable results. In 1901 there was the first big general steel strike, which the employers smashed. The National Civic Federation, which was supposed to prevent class conflict, acted like most of these "mediation" boards do—it undermined and weakened the union, and helped the employers break the strike and smash the union.

### Monopoly and the Aristocracy of Labor

Gompers's new attitude toward labor-capital relations was engendered by the same factors that had brought about his acceptance of the monopolies as right and inevitable, his abandoning of the organization of the unorganized, his concessions to craft unionism, his yielding to Jim Crow, his abdication of leadership in the eight-hour movement, and his shift from sympathy to hostility to socialism.

Most important, Mandel says, was Gompers' belief that big business was not only inevitable but practically invincible. The Homestead steel strike, the Coeur d'Alene mine strike, the Pullman railroad strike, etc., had convinced him that unionism could exist in the monopoly

industries only at the sufferance of the employers. He held that they would tolerate unionism only if it confined itself to the skilled trades, treated compliance with contracts as a sacred duty of the workers, repressed labor militancy and radicalism, and was generally "reasonable" in its demands.

"This industrial policy," Bernard Mandel affirms, "was made possible by the rapid growth of industry and its tremendous strength. Business could afford to pay higher wages to a small number of skilled workers so long as the great body of unskilled workers was unorganized.

"In no other country in the world was there such a large gap between the wages of skilled and unskilled labor, and the gap was constantly widening. From 1850 to 1910 some of the skilled trades increased their wages threefold while reducing their hours from ten to eight, while common labor only advanced its wages fifty to a hundred percent without any reduction in hours.

"Capital was thus able and willing to share some of its profits with skilled labor in order to eliminate guerrilla warfare and violence, while the conservative labor leaders would co-operate to combat radicalism and keep the masses of workers unorganized.

"In some cases this agreement was explicit, in others it was tacit, and in still others it was induced by bribery, corruption, and open collaboration. Gompers," he adds, "was personally incorruptible, but he closed his eyes to such policies when they were cloaked under the name of the American Federation of Labor."

So, we see in the pre-AFL days the eruption of tremendous class battles when the employers resisted unionization, even by the craft unions. With the growth of industry and the violent struggles that erupted from time to time, the capitalists finally became reconciled to granting recognition to a very thin layer of the American working class, in exchange for collaboration on the political arena and in preventing the organization of the workers in the mass-production industries.

The material base of the labor bureaucracy is set down quite practically by Mandel. The wages of the skilled workers rose 300 percent and the hours were reduced from ten to eight, while the unskilled and semiskilled workers continued to work a ten-hour day and in the steel industry a twelve-hour day, and their increase in wages was only 50 to 100 percent. This growing disparity was the basis on which there developed the aristocracy of labor and the labor bureaucracy which persisted and continued right down to the day of the formation of the CIO.

The growing conservatism of the AFL and its campaigns against the radicals in the union, i.e., the socialists, led to the division in the early socialist movement between the reformists and the revolutionists, a division that took place throughout the world socialist movement.

## **The IWW: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism**

It also led to another peculiar development, the birth of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Wobblies. The IWW at first was part of the socialist movement. It wasn't until 1905 that they went on record against what they called "political action." The big division in the early socialist movement, was between the reformist parliamentarians who placed their main emphasis on electoral activity, and the militants who advocated more direct

action. The militants favored participation in politics, but independent class politics of a more militant type.

In the IWW, the reaction against the opportunism of the reformist parliamentary socialists was so great that, combined with a revulsion against the conservative, hidebound AFL bureaucracy, it led not only to a rejection of all "political action" but to a decisive break with the existing trade-union organization, that is, the American Federation of Labor. The IWW then proceeded to form its own independent, "revolutionary," industrial unions, in direct competition with the AFL.

While the Wobblies first tried to organize workers in the more industrially advanced sections of the country, they later abandoned such efforts and concentrated on the most exploited and oppressed workers in both East and West: the textile workers in the East; the lumber workers, maritime workers, and miners in the West.

One of the great historical contributions made by the IWW was the introduction of the industrial form of organization, that is, organizing every worker in a given industry into the same union. The early revolutionary socialists subscribed to this view. The industrial form of organization was the indispensable medium to organize workers in the new mass-production industries. Experience had driven home the lesson that trade unions could not be viable instruments of defense against the employer or effective instruments for the promotion of the interests of the workers if divided along craft lines.

Where the IWW went wrong, very wrong, was in their attempt to promote the concept of building *revolutionary* industrial unions. There was a fatal flaw in the basic concept, which served to nullify many of their most heroic exploits in the field of union organization and strike leadership.

To be effective, a union must open its doors to all workers in any given plant or industry. The trade union is the most elementary form of the workers' united front. The workers have one overriding interest in common: the sale of their labor power by the hour, day, week, or piece to the owners of the means of production at a rate high enough to maintain a decent standard of living. The capitalist owners seek to buy labor power at its cheapest rate, to depress wages to the subsistence level and even below.

In this conflict the unions are actually engaged in struggle with the employers over the division of the national income, i.e., over the wealth created by the working class as a whole. It's what the "progressive" Walter Reuther would often refer to as the struggle over the division of the pie. The larger the slice appropriated by the employers, the smaller the piece reserved for the workers, and vice versa.

Let me repeat: To be effective a union must seek to organize all workers' on the job, regardless of race, color, creed, level of class consciousness, or previous condition of servitude. The act of giving a worker a red card that automatically certifies him or her as a member of a "revolutionary" industrial union has little or no meaning to the worker involved. That is not how revolutionary workers are created.

It must have been a very frustrating experience for the talented and dedicated IWW agitators, propagandists, and organizers, who led and won some very important strike struggles. When they went off for other battles in other areas of the class struggle, the union was left in the hands of workers recruited in the course of the strike-organizing

fight, the overwhelming majority of whom were decidedly not revolutionaries. The inevitable result was that these unions would soon revert to the traditional reformist, AFL-type of conservative "bread and butter" unionism.

James Weinstein seems to exalt what he dubs the "militant nomads." That's what he says we have to go back to—the "militant nomads." The "militant nomads" who constituted the major base of the IWW were workers in those industries that employed casual labor, seasonal in character: migratory agricultural labor in the West, the logging industry in the Pacific Northwest, fishing, and maritime, both seamen and longshoremen, etc.

It wasn't through choice that they became nomads. They had to conform to the working conditions imposed by their employment. As they do to this day. The migrant agricultural workers had to follow the crops from one area to another, up and down the coast and inland. Fishing took place in different seasons of the year. So did the harvesting of timber in the logging industry. And these were among the major industries in the West at that time; the West was not industrially developed until later in the twentieth century, with the outbreak of the First World War and the following period.

There is a grain of truth in Weinstein's romantic infatuation with the so-called militant nomads. Because they had no ties, no family responsibilities, they tended to be more independent and aggressive. They had little fear of "losing" a job as they could always pick up and go on somewhere else. And they tended to be more rebellious. The IWW had its greatest success in organizing this sector of the American working class.

### Impact of Russian Revolution

After the First World War, there occurred a development of enormous consequence in the history of the world labor and socialist movement, the Russian revolution of 1917. With the Russian revolution the Socialist parties throughout the world split right down the middle. In this country the split in the Socialist party occurred in the year 1919.

The early Socialist party in this country was a very primitive, nonconformist grouping that included all kinds of diverse elements. There were the genuine Marxists, who were a small minority. There were the reformists, the parliamentary cretins, the "sewer socialists," who constituted the right wing. In the very early period the utopian socialists played a role. There were the vegetarians, the "Christian socialists," free-love cultists, and all kinds of people in opposition to the capitalist system. They all flocked into the Socialist Party, where they found a sympathetic milieu in which they could function. At that stage in its development the American Socialist party was truly of the "all-inclusive" variety.

The Socialist Party was a decentralized party. Each state organization had virtual autonomy. The SP exercised very little control over its membership, especially over the activities of its membership in the unions—either union leaders or rank and file. Hundreds of "socialist" papers were published throughout the country in all areas and by the many diverse elements who operated within the general framework of the Socialist party.

The crowning weakness was that the Socialist Party was never conceived of as an instrument for leading a socialist revolution, except by its Marxist left wing. The concept of a combat party, of a disciplined organization

led by professional revolutionists, was first developed by Lenin. The greatest defect in the Seattle general strike, from which Weinstein evokes such nostalgic yearning for a return to the good old days of the "militant nomads," was precisely the lack of a Leninist party. The reason that the strike developed as it did and ended as it did was the inability of the diverse radical groupings to fulfill the role of a disciplined, organized, Marxist revolutionary party, with a consistent line for the leadership of that tremendous struggle.

Following the Russian revolution the dividing line in the Socialist movement throughout the world was the position taken on the Bolshevik revolution. The reformist wing was against the Bolshevik revolution, although it sometimes dissembled its views on this. The revolutionists split and formed the early Communist parties.

The IWW was originally invited to become part of the Third International, the Communist International. They did send representatives to the Second Comintern Congress, if I'm not mistaken, and Lenin wrote a special appeal inviting the IWW to become part of the Third International. He appealed to them as the most aggressive, militant, combative revolutionaries in the radical movement in this country. But their ingrained doctrinairism over the question of politics, led them to refuse to become part of the new, developing world revolutionary movement. Because they failed to recognize the tremendous example and importance of the revolutionary victory that established the first workers state, their subsequent collapse was inevitable.

Each of these conflicting currents, although not decisive in size or weight, played a tremendous role at crucial turning points in the history of the American labor movement. The Seattle experience of 1919 is an example.

### General Strike in Seattle

Seattle was unique in many respects. The Seattle labor movement in the period leading up to the general strike of 1919 opposed the class-collaborationist policy and line of the national AFL. They were for industrial unionism and against craft unionism; they were for political action and against the Gompers policy of no politics in the unions; they invited the collaboration of all sorts of prosocialist and antisocialist tendencies, in the freest, most democratic organizational form that the union movement had known in this country.

This unique development was due to a number of exceptional factors. For one, a wave of utopian socialists had colonized the area and established a number of utopian colonies. The state of Washington is a wonderful place for utopian colonies—a fine climate and geographically on the furthestmost boundaries of the western frontier.

The first *daily* socialist newspaper was established in Seattle. The first *daily union paper* was established in Seattle and published by the Seattle Labor Council. And not only was it published by the council, but it competed successfully with the two capitalist papers and had a circulation equal to that of its two capitalist competitors.

And, of course, the first city-side general strike occurred in Seattle. It occurred in Seattle because the radical leadership of the labor movement arose out of the tremendous battles led by the IWW, because of the presence of socialists in the leadership of the unions,

because of the widespread circulation of radical ideas through the widely read labor and socialist press, etc., etc. There were literally dozens and dozens of socialist newspapers published in the area, meetings, magazines, books, activities of all kinds.

The Seattle general strike was an expression of labor solidarity unexampled up to that time. The strike began over a dispute between the shipyard workers and the government. In this situation the labor movement faced the federal government as a direct antagonist. On the surface it appeared to be a strike of the shipyard workers against the employers for economic and trade-union demands. But the shipyards in Seattle were purely a wartime product; they were built as a wartime measure to meet the needs of American capitalism to expand its merchant marine in World War I. They were completely dependent upon subsidies from the government. Their labor policy was established by Washington, where a government shipping board ruled over the whole maritime empire built by the government in the period of the war.

But in 1919 the war was over. There was no further necessity for the government to build more ships. In fact, their problem was how to get rid of the ships that had been built during the period of the war. So they seized upon the dispute of the shipyard workers in Seattle to teach the working class a lesson, and as a means of warning the workers throughout the entire country that the wartime "honeymoon" was over. Therefore, when the employers agreed to settle with the Central Labor Council, the government intervened and vetoed concessions designed to settle the strike. The Seattle general strike was called ostensibly for the purpose of rallying support for the demands of the shipyard workers.

With the exception of one other union, there were no economic demands made by the other unions. It was at this critical point that the union leadership exhibited its greatest confusion and committed a fatal blunder.

A general strike called as a protest demonstration directly involved in a dispute—this time with the federal government—under the given circumstances could only be an action of limited duration. However, carried away by the emotional surge of justifiable indignation and anger at the union-busting role of the government, the Central Labor Council called a general strike in the city of Seattle without defining its limits or setting a time of duration for the action.

Let me digress for just a moment. You know, some of our New Left windbags, together with any number of our hyped-up "leftist" sects, are addicted with "general strike-itis" and call for a "general strike" at the drop of a nosegay. Of course, no one pays any attention, but that just spurs them to shriller exhortations. Being constantly in orbit, intoxicated by the rarified atmosphere of outer space, their verbal radicalism is usually in inverse proportion to their size and influence in the labor movement. The more impotent the grouplet the harsher its ultimatic braying for the "general strike" as the solution to all problems. Which only confirms the astute observation of the sage who affirmed that the harshest sound is the braying of an ass!

Let me make this clear: I intend no invidious comparison between our current crop of long-eared "leftists" and the leaders of the 1919 Seattle general strike. The latter were genuine leaders of a surging mass movement, at that time far in advance of the labor movement of the rest of the

country. Rejecting the Marxist theory of the state, the syndicalists in the leadership of the Seattle union movement viewed the general strike as the apex of the revolutionary struggle for workers power.

On the other hand, the socialists and the pure-and-simple trade unionists had in mind a general-strike-protest demonstration to pressure the government into approving concessions made to the shipyard workers. But to avoid a semantic confrontation and dispute, the precise nature of the general strike was left vague and unresolved. The result was utter confusion in the conduct of the action.

## Social Dynamite

A general strike is social dynamite with a burning fuse. The question immediately arises: Where does the power of decision reside in matters concerning the life of the city? Who is to police the city? The cops are not viewed as "friends" of the strike; to the contrary, their role is that of chief strikebreakers for the boss class. The union strike committee must establish its own police force. How is the city to be fed? What institutions are to be permitted to remain open? And who is to supervise those permitted to operate? It is impossible to detail here all of the problems that are immediately posed.

Alongside the regularly established governmental power and its apparatus, there comes into existence the general strike committee with its apparatus, to establish a form of dual power. The dynamic of the dual power is that more and more the strike council is compelled to take over the functions of the state. A situation of dual power cannot, by its very nature, exist for long. It must be resolved by the hegemony of one or the other of the great contending classes. One or the other must prevail.

From the beginning the strike leaders sought to defend themselves against the charge that they had any intention of seizing state power. They ridiculed the charge and with good reason. The very idea of seizing power in a single city was dismissed as an utopian adventure. Seattle was far in advance of the rest of the labor movement. The strike action elicited sympathy from other sections of the working class throughout the country, of course, but there was no extension of the general strike even to cities contiguous to Seattle. Tacoma had a partial "general strike," while other major cities on the Pacific coast remained unaffected.

An indication of what contradictions the leaders of the strike were in was their action in suspending publication of the daily union newspaper. Their reason? Because, you see, in calling upon all the printing-trade crafts to join the strike, it "would not be fair" to continue publication of the union paper while their "competitors" were shut down. The result? First, the printing-trades national officialdom countermanded the strike call and ordered their members to remain on the job. Second, the two capitalist rags, published without hindrance, began bombarding the community with false charges, inflammatory rumors, falsification of the strike issues, etc., while the strike committee restricted itself to the publication of a small strike bulletin.

It was only on the third or fourth day of the strike that it was decided to resume publication of the daily union paper. By that time it was already too late. The initial momentum had been frittered away, the strike was weakened and gradually abandoned.



The general strike fizzled out, although the workers went back as an organized group. The strike was officially called off, and all the unions went back as a body. In fact, some of the unions that had returned to work earlier came back out when the leadership announced it was going to meet on the question of establishing a unified time to return to the job. They then went back to work, at the time decided by the strike committee.

The Seattle general strike of 1919 was probably the peak, so far as organization and consciousness was concerned, in the development of the American labor movement up to that time. I underscore the fact that in the development of this consciousness, the utopian socialists, the Marxists, the IWW, the native militants, were clearly the ideologues. They were the ideological source of the concepts that assumed organized expression in the strike and fashioned the character of the entire Seattle labor movement.

### Legacy of Seattle

In the book *The General Strike in Seattle* by Robert L. Freidhiem, a typical professorial product, the thesis is advanced that the main weakness of the strike was that it alienated the middle class. If the unions had won the sympathy of the middle class, he claims, then things would have been different. He also blames the strike for the reaction which swept the country under the Palmer Red Raids, the witch-hunt in which the government spearheaded a drive to smash those unions that had succeeded in establishing themselves during the period of the war.

Here's what he says: "The first major general strike in the United States ended quietly at noon on February 11, 1919. Somewhat sheepishly, Seattle's workers returned to their jobs in shops, factories, mills, hotels, warehouses, and trolley barns. The strike had been a failure, and they all knew it. In the days ahead they were to learn that it was worse than a failure—it was a disaster. Now, they were glad simply to return to work, leaving their fellow workers in the shipyards still out on strike."

It was "a failure," it was "a disaster," and to it he attributes the subsequent ills and ailments of the American labor movement.

It is true that after 1919 there was a tremendous wave of reaction. There was a witch-hunt and the government spearheaded an attack upon the American labor movement in which strikes were broken and unions were smashed. In 1921 it was the government that smashed the maritime strike and broke the maritime unions, which later arose again in a more militant form out of the 1934 strike on the West Coast.

Was the Seattle strike such a failure? In the immediate sense, the strike failed to achieve its objective: to win the demands of the shipyard workers. But the Seattle shipyard workers were in an untenable position. The federal government didn't give a damn whether the shipyards were temporarily strikebound or stayed closed forever. In fact, they afterwards closed them down anyway. They had no need for more ships, and were determined to utilize the dispute to teach the organized labor movement a lesson. The immediate outcome of course was unfortunate. But the strikers went back as a body, and there was no victimization of any of the strike leaders.

The lessons of the Seattle experience, which Freidhiem

and others like him fail to understand, entered as an important component into the subsequent development of the CIO through the 1934 Pacific Coast waterfront strikes. As a matter of fact, the next city-wide general strike in this country was the San Francisco general strike of 1934, in which the longshoremen and the maritime workers on the Pacific Coast fought it out with the employers, the state and city government, the cops, and the federal government, and succeeded in winning their essential demand, which was union recognition.

Who were these workers on the waterfront in 1934, whose tremendous victory was a precursor to the organization of the CIO? The IWW on the Pacific Coast was fairly strong in the maritime industry through their Marine Transport Workers Local 510. At that time, the Stalinists, who were still in their ultraleft Third Period binge, had organized the Marine Workers Industrial Union—their own union of revolutionary, "communist" workers. The Wobblies had their own union of revolutionary, "syndicalist" workers. But these workers were among the "militant nomads," many of whom had gone through the Seattle experience, which had its repercussions up and down the coast.

In fact, many of the leaders of the 1934 maritime strike were from Seattle. Harry Lundeberg, who became the leader of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, first achieved prominence as a strike leader in Seattle. He was one of the leaders in the Seattle waterfront strike of 1934. He came down to San Francisco, the headquarters of the SUP, and led the movement that booted the old AFL fakers out of office. These worthies were literally kicked down the stairs and out of the union, and the strike activists established a militant seamen's union in 1934. Harry Bridges, the longshore strike leader, was an Australian syndicalist, under the influence of the Stalinists.

The coast-wide strike of the seamen and longshoremen on the Pacific coast, which reached its peak in the San Francisco general strike of 1934, was led primarily by workers who had previously gone through the earlier struggles in the Pacific Northwest. These were organized in, or under the influence of, one or another of the radical political parties or "revolutionary union" organizations.

So you can see how the stream was fed, how consciousness developed, how the lessons were assimilated, and how, although the radicals were relatively few in number, their ideas found expression in tremendous class battles.

I shall stop here to conclude the first of our lecture-class series with a brief summary and extrapolation of the development, which will further underscore the validity of the thesis elaborated in Art Preis's book, *Labor's Giant Step*, that the impetus for historical development and social change is provided by the dynamic of the class struggle.

What happened in the 1934 maritime strikes on the West Coast was also true of the Toledo Auto-Lite strike and of the Minneapolis truckdrivers' strikes. All of these events were precursors of the CIO. In Toledo the movement was sparked by radicals, members of the American Workers Party, who were moving in the direction of Trotskyism and later fused with the Trotskyist Communist League of America in 1935 to form the Workers Party.

These three great eruptions were an adumbration of the subsequent battles that marked the development of the CIO in the period from 1935-1937. Through the lessons of these events Art Preis again confirms the validity of the

**Marxist premise that the concept, the methods, and the application of strategy and tactics of the class struggle, were primarily responsible for creating the leadership, the consciousness, the movement that established genuine trade unionism in this country for the first time since the inception of the early labor movement.**

**This development was interconnected and intertwined with the historical development of the entire American labor movement from the very beginning. Each successive**

**plateau can be traced to its roots in previous struggles, each going through a certain cycle and each emerging on a higher level.**

**In our lecture-class next week we'll discuss the period from the beginning of the Great Depression of 1929 to the actual formation of the CIO and the role of the radical tendencies in affecting the development of that historic movement.**

## Lecture Two

Last week we discussed the Seattle events of 1919, which culminated in the Seattle general strike. Contrary to the opinion expressed by some commentators, who characterized the strike as a complete and utter catastrophe, we learned that the consciousness engendered by the strike entered as an important component into the development of the labor struggles in 1934, and the rise and development of the CIO.

The government continued its strikebreaking role throughout the entire period. It played an especially repressive role during the 1921 depression. In the seafaring industry, for example, the unions had collaborated closely with the government during the entire period of the war. The industry was supervised through a tripartite board, composed of representatives of the union, the employers, and the government. This Shipping Board established Sea Service Bureaus, which functioned as hiring halls for seamen, under government administration.

In the seamen's strike of 1921 the government intervened as strikebreaker and union-buster. As subsidized employers, the shipowners were able to operate and earn a handsome profit. When, however, the shipowners indicated a willingness to grant the demands of the union, the government intervened and threatened to withdraw the subsidy of any shipowner that did so. That was enough to "persuade" the shipowners to reject the demands of the union. As a result, the unions were smashed in 1921.

Thereupon the shipping board's Sea Service Bureau's hiring halls became what the seamen called "fink halls," denying employment to union men and screening out union militants.

The longshoremen had what they called a "blue-book union," a company union. They were required to carry papers from this company union—a "blue book" or "fink book"—and the bosses determined who could and who could not work on the waterfront.

These two union-busting devices—the fink book and the fink halls—were hated by the seamen and the longshoremen on the Pacific Coast and were the major targets of their strike action in 1934.

### Background to 1934 Strikes

A question arises at this point: Why did the West Coast waterfront erupt in 1934, long before the East Coast waterfront was affected? With the exception of the longshoremen, the East Coast seafaring unions didn't become part of the radicalized union movement until 1936, two years after the general strike in San Francisco and the organization of the militant longshore and seamen's unions on the Pacific Coast.

This development can be traced to the phenomenon we discussed last week as manifested in the Seattle labor struggles—the influence of the radical tendencies in the labor movement of the Pacific northwest. The IWW was

strong on the West Coast, especially in the logging, agricultural, and seafaring trades, among what was designated as casual or transient labor.

The socialists were strong, especially in the Pacific Northwest and in California. In the maritime field, for example, the IWW had organized the Marine Transport Workers, a "revolutionary" industrial union. The Communist party, which was then in its ultraleft third period, had organized its "revolutionary" union, the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

Another factor which contributed to the eruption of the maritime strikes on the West Coast was the relative homogeneity of its labor force, in an industry most often characterized by the dispersal of its seagoing personnel. Four elements contributed to this peculiarity: (1) the Steam Schooner trade; (2) the Alaska trade; (3) the Hawaiian Island trade; and (4) the Intercoastal trade.

The Steam Schooners specialized in carrying lumber from the Pacific Northwest to other ports on the West Coast. The men plying the ships in this trade were also "specialists" in that the sailors functioned as combination longshoremen and seamen. In port the sailors would work the cargo and at sea they would sail the ships.

The Alaska trade was based on the salmon fishing and canning industry. Fish cannery workers and supplies would be transported to Alaska during the fishing season and the canned fish would be transported to Seattle for transshipment around the world. While in Alaska the seamen would work in the fishing and canning end of the industry.

The Hawaiian Island and Intercoastal trade involved relatively short trips. Taken all together, these peculiarities of the shipping industry on the West Coast at that time contributed to the greater homogeneity of the maritime labor force and simplified the task of union organization when the conditions ripened for labor's historic upsurge.

So it was no accident that the eruption took place first in the major seaports on the West Coast—San Francisco, San Pedro, Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland. And in this eruption—a forerunner of the explosive CIO movement then in its incipient stage—the radical element, the conscious element, played a leading and in most cases a decisive role.

The new leaders of the rejuvenated unions came up from the ranks in the very course of the strike struggles. They were, in most cases, radicals of one kind or another. While the common demand in this period was for union recognition, the pace of union development and union gains was uneven. The 1934 Pacific Coast maritime strike, which began as a longshore strike and culminated in the San Francisco general strike, registered some significant gains for the dock workers—but very little for the seamen.

The longshoremen won the six-hour day. They won joint control of the hiring hall by the union and the employers, in which the union later was able to establish its

dominance so that longshore crews would be hired to work the ships on a rotation system.

The system of hiring was always a key question for longshore and seafaring labor. With incidental exceptions, longshore gangs were hired to work the ships until the cargo was loaded or unloaded. Their employment then ceased. The process was then repeated. Seamen signed shipping articles for one complete voyage and return to their home port. That terminated their employment unless they signed on for another voyage. It was this system that stamped maritime labor as "casual."

This had always been a source of conflict and corruption on the waterfront. Many learned dissertations had been published on the subject of "decasualization" of maritime labor over hundreds of years in the various maritime powers of the world. Their dilemma was how to devise a system that would eliminate the inherent defects of casual labor without turning control of the hiring process over to the workers themselves. This solution, of course, was rejected in advance by the ruling class—until the 1934 longshore strike on the West Coast compelled the shipowners to agree to a compromise plan, that of a hiring hall under joint control.

### 'Job Action'

Although they were out for the entire period of the longshore strike in 1934, the seamen were forced to return to work with no tangible concessions. They got no contract. They did not get union recognition. They got no hiring hall. That is, they got none of these things in writing, on paper, duly signed, sealed and delivered. But they got them all, nevertheless, through a device originated by the Wobblies in the woods of the Pacific Northwest. It was called "job action." Or what was then known as "striking on the job."

The Wobblies had a principle about not signing contracts with the employers. Instead, they would establish their own conditions of work through struggle on the job for immediate demands. For example, while working in the woods they would quit for lunch at 12:00 noon and not resume work until 1:00. They would demand better food. They would insist upon better working conditions, etc., etc. If these were not forthcoming they would "strike" on the job and production would decline sharply. It was a devilish sort of tactic because they continued to get paid, you see, while the boss didn't get production.

Another of their tactics was to work "according to rule." One of the rules in the woods was that all tools had to be returned to the tool shed after the completion of the day's work. In a dispute the Wobblies would interpret the rules literally. Not only did they return their hand tools, but they also began to dismantle the large stationary equipment. In fact, they had to knock off work an hour or so early in order to carry it back, piece by piece, to the tool shed.

Another rule was that all jobs were subject to supervision by the foreman or pusher. Although most of the men on the job were skilled loggers and many had long experience in the woods, they would wait until the foreman came to tell them precisely how to do a certain operation—a job they had probably done a thousand times before. The rule said supervision, so they quit work until they got it. It was impossible to supply personal supervision for a whole crew, so most would stand around for hours waiting for the

foreman to come around and tell them what to do and how to do it. This usually proved a very effective means of inducing the employer to meet their demands. They won some important demands by what they called "striking on the job," or "job action."

The seamen on the Pacific Coast were familiar with this tactic and employed it to good effect. As a matter of fact, it was not until the ninety-nine-day strike of 1936-37 that the seamen "officially" won control of the hiring hall with a written provision incorporated into their collective bargaining agreement.

After the 1934 longshore strike the seamen went back to the ships without a contract, that's true. But they had gone through a militant struggle that transformed the union from top to bottom. And they decided that all men assigned to fill vacancies aboard West Coast ships would be shipped through the union hiring hall—or else! Or else they would be given the choice of departing voluntarily and peacefully or of being not too gently escorted off by the ship's committee.

Each department aboard ship—deck department, engine department, stewards department—would elect its own job steward, or delegate. Each delegate would check the men coming aboard ship to fill vacancies to make sure that they had a shipping card signed by the dispatcher in charge of the hiring hall. It was in this way, through the application of the tactic of job action, that the union hiring hall was established and enforced before there was a written agreement. The only way the shipowners could get men to fill vacancies was to call the union hiring hall, for no others were acceptable to the men aboard ship.

Needless to say, it requires a great deal of discipline and solidarity to effectively carry through such actions. It was common participation in the great strike struggles that provided the cement that bound the men together into a disciplined body of militant fighters. The same tactic was applied to most of the grievances that arose during that stormy period. There was no codified grievance procedure as exists today in most unions—a grievance machinery designed to delay, procrastinate, and bury most grievances under a first, second, and third stage process, usually ending with a so-called "impartial" arbitrator. Grievances were settled on the spot by job action. If not, the ship would not sail. And that could prove rather expensive for the shipowners. So grievances were usually settled to the satisfaction of the crew without too much delay.

Even at that time it didn't all come easily. Some shipowners and some ships officers who stogged for the shipowners attempted to resist. One of the ironies of history is that if it were not for the 1934 maritime strike, it is extremely doubtful whether Earl Warren would have become Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Warren became prominent, gained his reputation, and acquired a certain notoriety as the prosecuting attorney for Alameda County, California, when the leaders of the Marine Firemen's Union were framed, prosecuted, and imprisoned for allegedly killing a fink engineer on a ship anchored at an Oakland pier.

It was Warren's prosecution of these union leaders that gained for him the political prominence that was later parlayed into his election as governor of California and then his elevation to the Supreme Court as Chief Justice.

## 'Third Period' Stalinism in Maritime

There were historical accidents, too. Historical accident always plays a role in developing historical necessity. The two are intertwined and interlinked. One such "historical accident" was the development of the Communist party as a major factor in the early CIO. And at one time they exercised an important influence in the entire CIO movement.

Now why was that and how did it happen? Up to 1933, from 1929 to 1933, Communist party policy was dictated by its "third period" insanity, as those who have studied the political development of the Communist party well know.

The "third period" was proclaimed by Stalin after the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, held in 1928. Although the Congress had taken an altogether different tack, its line was sharply reversed by Stalin. According to Stalin's "theory," the "third period" was to be the final period of capitalism. The next stage was to usher in the victory of socialism. Therefore, every strike, every struggle, was viewed as the beginning of the revolutionary conquest of power. Therefore, in the Stalinist schema, there could be no united front with social democracy or any other tendency.

All working class tendencies that opposed the Communist party were stigmatized as one or another kind of fascist. The Wobblies were stigmatized as "syndicalist fascists," the socialists were stigmatized as "social fascists." The Trotskyists, of course, were just plain "Trotskyite fascists." And so forth and so on.

Then, on the basis of this "third period" prognosis, the Communist parties throughout the world proceeded to split the trade union movement. In this country they pulled their people out of the AFL and set up their new, pure, "revolutionary" trade union formations wherever they would gather a few dozen people together. That's how, for example, there came into existence the Marine Workers Industrial Union. On the waterfront, that was the CP "revolutionary" trade union.

The so-called "third period" lasted until about a year after the victory of Hitler. The Comintern then began a turn away from "third period" ultraleftism toward the theory and practice of people's frontism. It took them about two years to complete the turn.

The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International wasn't held until 1935. At that Congress the policy of the "people's front" was enshrined as official Stalinist dogma on a world scale. But they had already begun to make the turn prior to the Seventh Congress and the shift became manifest as early as the year 1934.

### Stalinist Flip-Flops

The turn away from third period ultraleftism to people's front opportunism coincided with the upsurge in the labor movement in this country in 1934-36. When they made the turn toward people's frontism the Stalinists sent their people back into the AFL. When the CIO movement developed within the AFL—before the official split had taken place—they became the most vigorous proponents of "unity," that is, against splitting the AFL.

It is seldom recalled and little known today, but the CP *opposed* the formation of the CIO. They swore they were still for industrial unionism, but above all they were for

"unity," which they defined as remaining within the AFL, come hell or high water. But that would have made the CIO absolutely impossible, as even a cursory examination of the development would indicate. It was an untenable position and didn't last very long. The only possibility of building the CIO was by splitting from the AFL, whose leadership was determined that there would be no real industrial organization of the mass production workers.

On the West Coast, for example, the longshore union remained affiliated to the AFL International Longshoremen's Association. The seafaring unions had been expelled from the AFL in January 1936. After having their charters revoked they remained independent. The seafaring crafts—the Marine Cooks and Stewards, the Marine Firemen, and the Sailors Union of the Pacific—were all independent. Harry Bridges of the International Longshoremen's Association [ILA], who followed the Stalinist line, at that time advocated a policy of opposition to joining the CIO. He called for the seafaring unions to return to the AFL. All, of course, in the sacred name of "unity."

What the demand for "unity" within the AFL amounted to, in fact, was a call for abject capitulation. The seafaring unions had been expelled for cleaning house of the tin-horn bureaucrats who had been riding herd on the seamen for years. These labor skates were not just voted out, they were literally kicked out, physically ejected, booted down the stairs and out the door. In their place the militant strikers had installed men off the picket line as their union officials.

To advocate that these unions crawl back into the AFL meant to force back upon the seamen the hated leeches who had been bodily removed as an act of emancipation and elementary hygiene. It was out of the question. Even though larded over with the CP's usual crooked, twisted, double-talking "unity" formulations, the very suggestion was enough to spark a revolt. Not only from the seamen in general but also from the Stalinist ranks.

Remember, the ranks of the CP had just been dragged through the "third period" ultraleft binge. They had been indoctrinated with the view that the AFL was nothing but another variety of fascism. The call for "unity" with the AFL at the expense of the gains made by the seamen was medicine too bitter for them to swallow. Even more unpalatable was the abject surrender of the principle of the industrial form of organization involved in the "unity" gambit advanced to justify a return to the hated craft-union-dominated American Federation of Labor.

Realizing they had zigged when they should have zagged, the Stalinist tops made a sudden switch. From AFL patriots they executed a 180-degree turn and became CIO boosters. This time historical necessity, which provoked the turn, sparked another historical "accident" which left its imprint upon subsequent developments.

For the turn was executed at the precise moment that the independent seafaring unions were in the process of holding a referendum vote on affiliation to the CIO. John L. Lewis had made a tentative commitment to name Harry Lundeberg director of the West Coast CIO in the event the seafaring crafts voted to affiliate. Lundeberg, secretary of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, represented the militant, anti-Stalinist wing in the maritime unions.

Well, just before the ballots were to be counted, Lewis announced that Bridges rather than Lundeberg had been

named CIO director on the West Coast. When this occurred, the seafaring unions impounded the ballots and burned them. It was a foregone conclusion that the overwhelming majority had voted for the CIO. But they were not about to place themselves under the "directorship" of Harry Bridges, not by any manner or means!

I designate it an historical accident, because if there had been no sudden turn by the CP, followed by an unforeseen "doublecross" by Lewis, the whole subsequent development would have been different. To this day there has been no unity in the maritime industry. The seamen on the East Coast are divided between the National Maritime Union and the Seafarers International Union, although both are now in the AFL-CIO. On the West Coast we now have all the seafaring unions in the AFL-CIO. The longshoremen, expelled from the CIO during the anticommunist purge in 1949, remain independent.

In 1938, AFL President William Green and the AFL Executive Council backed off from their previous adamant position, liquidated whatever AFL unions still existed in the industry, and turned the charter over to Lundeberg and the Sailors Union of the Pacific. The AFL established a new international union, the Seafarers International Union, which proceeded to also organize seamen on the East and Gulf Coasts in competition with the CIO's National Maritime Union, which was at that time run by the Stalinists. Later on the Marine Cooks and Stewards, who had been in the CIO for a time, and the Marine Firemen, who had been independent, were also formally organized into the AFL Seafarers International Union

### **The Fight Against Government Intervention**

The hostility and antagonism between the Bridges-Stalinist group and the Lundeberg group, and they could roughly be defined along those two broad lines, was based upon the attitude of these two tendencies toward government intervention. It was one of the principled questions that divided them. And it was by no means an academic question. It was a fundamental question for the unions in the maritime industry. Because of their previous experience and because many of the Lundeberg group had come out of the IWW—Lundeberg himself was a syndicalist of the European type, not an IWW syndicalist—they had great hostility toward any form of government intervention.

They had gone through many bitter experiences. They went through the 1919 Seattle experience. They went through the 1921 experience when the government acted as spearhead of the union-busting campaign that broke the seamen's strike. And so they wanted no part of any government intervention.

When the Stalinists made their right turn towards people's frontism, they espoused the idea and embraced the practice of class collaboration. As I say, at least at that time, they rarely did things half way. They quickly became the foremost supporters of Roosevelt and his "New Deal" administration. The whole issue came to a head during the 1936-37 seamen's strike, which has gone down in history as the ninety-nine-day strike.

The strike had been called by the seafaring unions to win union control of hiring, the union hiring hall, and a number of other economic demands.

Prior to the termination of the strike a bill was introduced and passed in Congress called the Merchant

Marine Act of 1936. The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 established the present subsidy arrangement, providing an operating subsidy for American shipowners to compensate for the differential in pay between American and foreign seamen, and a construction subsidy for the shipyard owners to equalize the differential in pay between American shipyard workers and shipyard workers abroad. But that's not all it did.

The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 had appended to it the Copeland Act. The Copeland Act provided for a devilish contrivance called the Continuous Discharge Book—a self-screening device that became known as the "fink book." Every seaman would be required to carry the fink book, a record of employment in which was cited the length of service in the employ of previous shipowners, the reason for termination of such employment, a record of conduct from the time of hiring to the moment of discharge—all such "pertinent" information to stereotype the individual seaman.

This fink book was to be presented whenever a seaman sought employment. By merely looking at the book the shipowner representatives could immediately tell whether they were dealing with a "troublemaker" or with a seaman who had a "clean" record, especially in regard to union activity. This scheme was devised to weed out the militants from the ship's crew.

This precipitated a struggle in the maritime industry over whether the seamen should take this book or not. The Merchant Marine Act was not to go into effect until January 1937, the beginning of the new year. The seamen had been on strike during this period for their economic demands. The strike was won when the shipowners granted their demands. The seamen were prepared to return to the ships. But then the government declared they could not sign on unless they carried the fink books.

The Lundeberg group said, "No, we don't take the fink book." ; "Well," the Stalinists asked, "does that mean you strike against the government?"

"You can interpret it any way you wish," said Lundeberg, "we are not going to take the fink book." Meanwhile the Stalinists kept clamoring, "You can't strike against the government." When asked, "Does this mean you are advocating that we take the fink book?" they invariably replied, "No, we are against the fink book—but you can't strike against the government!"

### **Stalinist Doubletalk**

Let me pause here for an aside. When it comes to committing semantic mayhem on the English language, the Stalinists have no peers. Language is one of the fundamental acquisitions of humanity, creating the possibility of communication, the basis of all education and knowledge. In the lexicon of Stalinism language is employed, not as the art of communication, but as a means of obfuscation. The model for the doublespeak about being against the fink book but at the same time insisting that "you can't strike against the government," was the ploy first used by Earl Browder in his 1936 campaign as presidential candidate of the American Communist Party.

Then in the process of making the turn toward people's frontism, the CP line was to support Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal. But not long before they had included FDR in their roster of "fascists." It presented them with a knotty political problem.

The knot was unravelled by a bit of semantic twisting that has served as a model to this very day for the Stalinist hacks. Roosevelt's Republican opponent was Alf Landon of Kansas, a nonentity with all the dynamism of an arteriosclerotic clam. So, the central slogan of the Browder campaign was: "Landon must be defeated at all costs!"

When asked: "Does this mean that you urge the voters to cast their ballots for Roosevelt?" Browder replied, "No, it just means that Landon is the main enemy and must be defeated at all costs!"

From the Roosevelt-Landon contest of 1936 to the Lyndon Johnson-Barry Goldwater electoral imbroglio of 1964 involved a span of nearly 30 years, but there were several parallels. One was the electoral landslide of the Democratic Party candidates in both contests. The second was the application of what has become known as the "Browder twist" of the Stalinist hacks.

In 1964, the ineffable Gus Hall was the top Stalinist guru. Let's listen to his "logic" in defense of Lyndon Baines Johnson against the "main enemy," Barry Goldwater.

In a pamphlet entitled: "The Eleventh Hour—Defeat the New Fascist Threat!" Gus Hall declared that a close defeat for Goldwater would not be sufficient. "Therefore," he opined, "the aim of the people's democratic forces can be nothing short of a smashing defeat for this ultra-Right reaction." Did this mean that Hall and company urged the people to vote for Johnson? Horrors, no! It only meant that Goldwater "must be defeated at all costs." Or as Hall put it in his own inimitable, oily way: "Our Party will join with all democratic forces to defeat the ultra-Right Goldwater coalition, while at the same time we will not endorse the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party." Who then should the people vote for in this confrontation between "fascism" and "democracy"? "We," replied Hall, "are going to join in the fight for any candidate who stands with the people on the issues of this confrontation." Make sense of it those who can! But the verbal gymnastics of the Stalinist twisters have become so integral a part of their political juggling act that few are fooled except those who stand in need of such rhetorical fig leaves to cover their naked betrayal of working class principle.

### Victory Against the 'Fink Book'

On the East Coast, the Stalinists, then cheek and jowl with Joe Curran of the CIO's National Maritime Union, came up with a new wrinkle. To make their betrayal on the issue of the fink book more palatable, they gave it a pseudo-radical twist. "Let's take the fink book," they said, "and then, on May First, the international workers

holiday, we will all assemble on the steps of the capitol building in Washington, D.C., and have a big bonfire in which we will burn the books."

Now that sounds militant as all hell, doesn't it? But they never bothered to explain how the seamen sailing the seven seas were to be gathered together in Washington, D.C., on the first of May! Shamefacedly breaking ranks with the West Coast seamen, who were still on strike against the union-busting government fink book, many of the East Coast seamen took the books, with the blessing of the Stalinists, only to turn them in later, after the government was compelled to retreat under pressure of the West Coast seamen's strike.

The victory of the seamen in the fink book fight was no small accomplishment. The unions involved were not very large. The Sailors Union of the Pacific at that time numbered some 8,000. The Marine Firemen had even less, probably 7,000. They were the two unions that carried the brunt of the struggle. The West Coast Marine Cooks and Stewards, then under the control of the Stalinists, followed the CP line but respected the picket lines of the sailors and firemen.

Another factor, of course, was the pressure from the shipowners. Their ships had just been tied up for a period of ninety-nine days. That strike had concluded with a victory for the unions. They were now faced with the prospect of another tieup, perhaps of even longer duration, around the government fink book fight. They pressed for a settlement. Because of the treachery of the Stalinists the striking unions were forced to compromise. They did not take the Copeland book, but as a compromise they agreed to accept a government certificate of identification, which carried a photo and fingerprint of each seaman, and a certificate of efficiency, which was a document certifying to the qualifications of the seaman for the various ratings (jobs) aboard ship that required government examinations.

The Lewis switch from Lundeberg to Bridges on the West Coast, together with the infiltration of the Lewis machine by various Stalinist intellectuals, paved the way for the Communist Party entry, growth, expansion and influence in the early CIO movement, to the point that at one stage they played a major role in the elaboration of CIO policy. This lasted until the post-war and cold war period. This period witnessed some of the most flagrant opportunist zig-zags in Stalinist history, which alienated the union militants and made relatively easy the bureaucratic purge of the CP and their virtual destruction as a force in the American trade union movement, beginning with their expulsion from the CIO in 1949.

But, that is another chapter in the absorbing story told by Art Preis in *Labor's Giant Step*, which will be our subject, along with the role of the Trotskyists, in our next discussion.

## Lecture Three

This concluding part of our discussion shall begin with a brief review of the contribution made by the Trotskyists to the labor struggles of the 1930s. A proper understanding will require a brief resumé of the political development of the Trotskyist movement of that period.

Until 1933 the Trotskyist movement functioned as a faction of the Communist International. Our orientation was toward the perspective of reform of the Communist International. Until the victory of Hitler demonstrated the complete bankruptcy of the C.I., the possibility was not excluded that the Communist International could be reformed and reorganized on the basis of the principles elaborated in the programmatic documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International.

So, from 1928 to 1933 virtually our entire activity was devoted to carrying on a polemic with Stalinism. Our propaganda was directed primarily at the members of the Communist Party.

Our perspective then was not directed toward establishing an independent political organization. We existed and functioned as a faction, *outside the framework of the CP* because we had been expelled from the organization in violation of the principles of democratic centralism that had prevailed in the first period. Until 1933, therefore, we operated as a propaganda group directing our propaganda at the members of the Communist party, trying to win them over to Trotskyism. Those we won over remained inside the Communist party until they too were expelled. The first time they presented anything that could be remotely interpreted as Trotskyism they would be ousted.

With the victory of Hitler, who seized power without serious opposition, our movement concluded that this conclusively demonstrated that the Communist International was dead, that it could not be reformed and would have to be swept away. It was then that Trotsky proclaimed the necessity to build a new international, the Fourth International.

Although first proclaimed in 1933, it was not until 1938 that the founding conference of the Fourth International was held. At the time of labor's upsurge, we had very limited forces throughout the country, small groups of an essentially propaganda character, whose main attention had been directed at the Communist Party

With the proclamation of the necessity for a new international, our entire perspective was changed. The orientation of world Trotskyism was toward the formation of independent parties that would constitute the various sections of the new international. In this country, as elsewhere, we set out to build a party. This period coincided with the critical union developments in both Toledo and Minneapolis.

### Minneapolis and Toledo

In Minneapolis we had one of our strongest groups.

Comrades who had previously been in the Communist party—some of them had been members of the IWW and the Socialist Party before becoming founders of the Communist Party—were able to begin the organization of the Minneapolis coal drivers, as Art Preis reports in his book, and then later of the general drivers union, Local 574.

It was in the course of the Minneapolis Teamsters strikes that the Trotskyists were able to demonstrate that they were adept in action as well as in questions of theory. A common complaint among radicals with whom we were friendly was that the Trotskyists were well versed in theory, but when it came to practical action, well that was another story. They were waiting to be convinced—not by words but by deeds.

As you can imagine, operating as we had been as a faction of the C.I., our members were intensively schooled in all the theoretical questions raised by the Trotskyist Left Opposition in the disputes with the Stalinists. All the basic theoretical questions that arose as a result of the development of Stalinism—the “third period” tactics, the theory of social fascism, etc., etc.—were closely scrutinized and analyzed.

Well, the Minneapolis strikes demonstrated to the entire radical movement that the Trotskyists could not only theorize but act, when the occasion and opportunity for action arose. In Minneapolis, the principles, the tactics, the methods of the class struggle were successfully applied on a mass scale. At the same time, the American Workers Party—the group led by A.J. Muste—intervened through the unemployed movement that they led to smash an antipicketing injunction in the Toledo Auto-Lite strike. The victory in the Auto-Lite strike, which Art Preis participated in and which he describes in his book, was instrumental in the formation of the United Auto Workers and later the CIO.

### Fusion with the American Workers Party

These events tended to bridge the previous barriers and facilitated the unification of the Musteites with the Trotskyists of the Communist League of America. The American Workers Party had previously announced that they were in favor of organizing a new party. We said we were all for that. We entered into a friendly discussion and practical collaboration. The evidence of Minneapolis proved very impressive to many of their militants, as the AWP action in Toledo did to a whole group of our members in the CLA. And that cemented the fusion.

That was the first big advance in the process of building an independent Trotskyist party in this country. The Communist League of America and the American Workers party fused, and established the Workers party. That is the name of the party that resulted from the fusion. Now there were a number of scoundrels who had attached themselves



to the AWP, like J.B.S. Hardman and Louis Budenz, and a number of others who wanted no part of the Trotskyists, and tried in every way to scuttle the fusion.

But we had one big advantage. Our group was politically homogeneous. Theirs was not. The AWP was composed of a number of divergent tendencies. Once we reached political agreement, we had no fear of making the most liberal organizational concessions.

Although our group was larger than theirs we proceeded on the basis of absolute parity, equality, division of party posts up and down the line. We said, we propose complete equality. We don't want any organizational advantage because of our larger size. We were confident enough in our line, in our policy, in our membership, to proceed in that manner, serene in the conviction that we had little to fear. We were convinced the first big events would disclose and develop the differences within the tendencies, and a regroupment would occur based on any new differences that arose. And that is essentially how the unification developed.

So Minneapolis and Toledo were two of the cities in 1934 where actions occurred that served to spark the eruption that later led in 1935-36 to the establishment of the CIO. In both instances it was the most advanced radical groups that spearheaded these movements. The American Workers party and the Communist League of America made no small contribution to the subsequent union developments.

On the West Coast we had very few forces during the maritime upheaval in 1934. Our participation came in a different way, and a little later, primarily in 1936, 1937, and 1938. These years marked another stage in the development of the American Trotskyist party.

## Entry into the Socialist Party

The victory of Hitler not only precipitated a turn on the part of the Stalinists, but also gave rise to tremendous repercussions in the Socialist parties throughout the world. The Communist party and the Socialist party of Germany were the biggest working-class parties in the capitalist world. The German SP was the biggest party in the Second International. The German CP was the biggest party in the Third International, outside the Soviet Union.

And yet Hitler came to power virtually without a struggle. Many questions began to be raised about how this could occur.

The Stalinists claimed that Hitler's conquest of power showed the correctness of their line, as they always did after every defeat. The bigger the defeat the greater the victory they claimed. That was part of Stalin's method.

When the Communist International hailed the Nazi triumph as a great victory for "communism," we said, "This organization is hopeless. The C.I. is a corpse. It is no longer a viable organism."

At any rate, contradictory tendencies were soon manifested. While the CP zig-zagged sharply to the right, sections of the SP began moving to the left, most noticeably in France and in the United States.

A big dispute developed in the Socialist party in this country, culminating in a split. The right wing of the Socialist party split off after the left wing had won a majority. With the split, the SP advanced the idea of building a new revolutionary party, an all-inclusive party, which would not exclude any radical tendencies. Under the

prodding of Trotsky, then in Mexico, the American party began a turn toward entry into the rejuvenated Socialist party.

A section of our party was opposed to the entry tactic. Another section was for it. After a bitter internal struggle a decisive majority was won for the policy of entry into the SP in 1936. The entry was consummated not as a group but as individuals. The "all-inclusiveness" of the SP "lefts" didn't go so far as to admit the Workers party as a tendency. But again, we weren't too much concerned about that, since we knew what the SP was—a combination of factions, diverse groups, and conflicting tendencies, whereas we were a politically homogeneous formation.

There is a tremendous advantage in having a politically homogeneous organization when involved in struggle with a formation composed of heterogeneous, conflicting tendencies. Such formations have a tendency to fly apart under the impact of political events.

We weren't too much concerned about the entry conditions imposed upon us because we knew that in the general political climate of the country and with the superior training and development of our cadre, we had little to fear from the SPers winning over our people to their politics. We had every reason to believe it would be the other way around. We had a more consistent world view, a program which we had developed and tested over a considerable period of time. And there were other, more tangible, advantages.

We had to give up our press as the price of entry. but there was a sympathetic left-wing grouping in the SP that published a paper called the *Socialist Appeal*. So when we entered the SP we had this paper. And then, in San Francisco—the "left-wing" had control of the California organization—we began publication of another paper called *Labor Action*, with Jim Cannon as the editor.

In addition, that was the time, you will recall, of Stalin's Moscow Trial frameups. The fact that we were in the SP was a tremendous advantage in gaining support for the establishment of the Dewey Commission that went to Mexico and compiled the evidence on the trials, later published in two large volumes, which completely exposed their frameup nature.

There were other advantages. For one thing we were able to make connections in the unions that otherwise would have been more difficult. There were certain disadvantages, to be sure, in operating within the framework of an "all-inclusive" hodge-podge in carrying forward our penetration of a dynamic union movement.

We had an altogether different concept of how our members should function in the unions. The SP tradition was to oppose rank-and-file fraction formation in the unions. That they considered as "interference" in the internal affairs of the unions. It was all right, you see, for the so-called "socialists" who were officials of the unions to have their little apparatus, their own little machine, their tightly knit little fractions, but the rank-and-file—that was considered "interference" and was verboten.

That was their concept. We had a different view. The dispute hampered our functioning in the unions that we were able to penetrate—but, as I mentioned before, our membership in the SP did open up opportunities to penetrate some of the unions.

## A 'Lesser Evil' Fight in the Unions

On the West Coast, being in the SP helped us to establish contact with the anti-Stalinist maritime unions, especially the section that supported the Lundeberg tendency in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific.

Now here we come to the question of lesser-evilism in the union movement. We often find it advantageous, depending on the situation, to support one or another grouping in the unions that is far short of a class-struggle left wing. On the West Coast, the struggle was between the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists, the latter led essentially by the syndicalist Harry Lundeberg.

The big question, the overriding issue, was the relationship of the government to the unions. We, as well as the syndicalists, were absolutely opposed to government intervention. Both were opposed to the fink book. Both were against the Copeland Act. Both were against any kind of intervention by the government inside the unions. That was the big controversy in that period.

We were for militant action as against conciliation. We were for job action as against the whole process of grievance committees and arbitration. And the Stalinists at that time were whooping it up for the whole gamut of class collaboration both in the political arena and in the union movement. So the lines were sharp and clearly drawn.

Now how did our maritime concentration come about—some comrade asked last week, how do you get into the unions? Well, it wasn't easy at that time, just as it isn't easy today. Remember it was 1936, and while things were a little better than at the bottom of the Depression, there were still ten or eleven million unemployed.

It wasn't easy to get into the unions—unless you had a connection. If you could establish a connection, your path was eased. Through the connection we established with the Lundeberg group we were able to get quite a sizable number of comrades into the seafaring unions. Some of the comrades went into the Sailors Union of the Pacific. I went into the Marine Firemen's Union. And some of the comrades went into the other unions.

Let me take up the role of youth and intellectuals, in the struggle that took place. I recall that at one stage the Lundeberg forces won a majority in the Maritime Federation in the Pacific. This was the organization set up after the 1934 strikes that included all the unions in the maritime industry, regardless of affiliation, to act in solidarity against the shipowners. Some of them had been kicked out of the AFL, some were still in the AFL, and so forth and so on.

In order to get around these jurisdictional barriers to united action, the Maritime Federation of the Pacific was organized with its own newspaper and apparatus, to insure solidarity of action against the employers. The first allegiance of all the maritime workers on the coast was not to the AFL, or even to the CIO in its beginnings, but to their own Maritime Federation of the Pacific, which arose out of the great strike struggles.

Well, at one convention, the Lundeberg forces won a majority. Having won a majority, they took over the editorship of the paper, along with other posts in the apparatus, which placed them in somewhat of a dilemma.

They had no editors. So they came to us for help. We had by that time established a cooperative relationship with them. Do you know that Joe Hansen, who as a young man

had journeyed to San Francisco from Salt Lake City, and who had some journalistic experience, became the editor of the *Voice of the Federation*. This paper represented the membership of maybe 150,000 on the coast, the strongest single federated organization in the entire country.

## 'West Coast Fireman'

I was sent into the Marine Firemen's Union because Lundeberg was having a little trouble with some of his supporters there, and he wanted a few people in there who could stiffen them up a little. I think I had been in the union some three months when the group decided to put out a paper. They began looking around for an editor. And, as I seemed to have the gift of gab, they said, "you be the editor."

I had never edited a paper in my life, and didn't have the foggiest notion of how to begin. But we had an ex-divinity student, a graduate of a theological seminary, Glen Trimble, who had at one time or another edited a paper. He was assigned to help edit this little four-page opposition paper in the Marine Firemen's Union.

I recall how irritated I would get with Glen Trimble—he later left the movement as an aftermath of the struggle with the Shachtmanite petty-bourgeois opposition, whose views he supported—over his attitude toward the mail received daily by our little paper. The official paper of the Lundeberg group in control of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, was called *West Coast Sailor*. We called our 4-page tabloid paper *West Coast Fireman*. Its financial support came from the rank-and-file union members, who sent in letters from all over the world. The first thing I would do every morning was to quickly open the mail to see how much money we had received, from whom, and what letters for publication in the paper were in the mail.

I noticed something strange about the envelopes: there was no postage on them. Each envelope was neatly clipped with a scissors, excising the postage, which was rather conspicuous by its absence. One morning I asked, "Glenn, what is happening to our mail? Someone is tampering with our mail and I'll bet it's the Stalinists. They're cutting the corners off all of our envelopes and peeking at the contents. What do you think?"

"I think not," he replied. "All of the corners clipped off the envelopes had postage stamps pasted on them and I collect foreign postage stamps." And he proceeded to show me a volume some two feet thick full of old, cancelled, postage stamps, acquired by subjecting our morning mail to a razor-sharp guillotine shears especially constructed for the purpose. I was flabbergasted! He seemingly wasn't interested enough to open the letters to examine the contents—but clipped his precious postage and pasted it in his big book and then put the mail aside. I should have known then that he would end up a Shachtmanite.

## Coming of the War

Now this type of situation wasn't peculiar to us out in California. It was occurring throughout the country. In most places the union division was between the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists. The anti-Stalinists were of two kinds. There was the militant variety, and there were the conservatives. With the militant variety of anti-Stalinists, we could make a bloc, enter into collaboration. This happened repeatedly.

This created many openings for us. In fact, the Trotskyists became known as the most expert fighters against the Stalinists. We had been weaned on that struggle, you know. From 1928, when the Communist League of America was established, until 1933—a period of five years—we had concentrated on little else but conducting a running fight with the Stalinists, and so we were very much in demand in that kind of a struggle.

Later on, with the coming of the war, these alliances became impossible, because the war became the dividing line. And we broke with those labor leaders who supported the war. We could no longer collaborate on the old basis. It was no matter of “lesser evilism,” but was a question of principle. So that during the war there were very, very few alliances possible, except at a later stage when the movement against the no-strike pledge developed. And that was primarily a rank-and-file movement against the pro-war union officialdom.

We were able to recruit to the SP during this period, to strengthen the left wing by bringing worker militants into the SP. There were very few when we entered. It wasn't long before differences developed between us and certain temporary allies we had made in the SP. Sharp conflicts arose over the SP's support to betrayals carried out in the name of people's front politics—in the Spanish civil war and also in New York, where the SP's candidate was withdrawn from the 1937 mayoral race and support was given to Fiorello La Guardia, a Republican running on a “fusion” ticket. This was the immediate issue around which the split took place.

Some aspects of the split, as I recall, were rather funny. We had a majority of the active members, but when it came to a vote—it was a vote for delegates to the California state convention, at which they planned to impose all kinds of disciplinary measures upon us, like taking away the right to publish a paper, the right to function as a faction, the right to exchange minutes between branches, and so on—they were able to dig up an imposing graveyard vote.

People appeared whom we hadn't seen from the day we entered. On crutches and in wheelchairs they came, to vote against the “Trotskyist communists”—with the stress on the second word. Some had been members of the Socialist party since 1898, and apparently had been paying dues although they had never come around before. That's the way the right-wing got their majority in California.

But it made little difference because by that time we were through with the entry tactic and were preparing to form the Socialist Workers party, which was established in 1938, the same year as the founding congress of the Fourth International, which adopted the Transitional Program.

### **The Party and the Unions**

Soon after that came the war, which introduced an altogether new and decisive factor in all of the relationships both in the radical labor movement and the union movement. Of course that's another story to which Art Preis devotes considerable attention. In retrospect, I think we did all we could under the circumstances in the labor upsurge of the 1930s. Actually the period was of very short duration. The Trotskyists were of necessity giving top priority to the process of organizing the party. If the CIO development had happened after the formation of the

SWP, we could have gone much further and played a more decisive role in the organization of the CIO.

But you can't quarrel with history. You can, if so inclined, but that won't change anything. All we can do now is to prepare to play a more decisive role in the next period of radical development. And there we have a great advantage over what we had before.

We have a party schooled in all of these past struggles. So far as competition is concerned, we have every right to expect that the SWP will be able to cope with whatever political opponent tendencies exist on the horizon today. We can anticipate a much more favorable relationship of forces than existed then.

Certainly I don't think the Communist party is going to give us as much competition. Then it was a tremendous obstacle, a powerful force which could not be outflanked and which had to be met head on.

I don't think the Socialist party is going to be much of a problem. We can, however, anticipate that there will be no lack of centrist political currents and infantile “leftist” sects. There always are in periods of upsurge.

We cannot anticipate, on the part of the mass of workers, a leap from a low level of political and social consciousness to Trotskyism, the most advanced socialist consciousness. Usually the process takes transitional forms and our transitional program is especially designed to meet the problem. As in the 1930s we shall have to be alert to any centrist groupings, when they do develop, and actively intervene if they begin moving in our direction. What their origin is, their course of development, their composition, will determine our relations to such tendencies, if and when they develop.

### **Reunification of AFL-CIO**

*Labor's Giant Step* covers the period from the rise of the CIO to the fusion convention in 1955, which reunited the labor movement into the AFL-CIO. In the recent period, there have been a number of articles in the capitalist press, written by their labor pundits, pointing out the failure of the labor movement to retain its dynamism; to continue advances that had been recorded in the period of the thirties and forties; and the growing disillusionment during the ten years that followed the reunification in 1955.

At the time of the reunification, many people labored under the illusion that the mere fact of bringing together in one organization some ten million workers organized in the AFL, and—in rough figures—five million in the CIO, would by this very fact impart an impetus to the further development, expansion and growth of the American trade union movement. That hasn't happened!

It hasn't happened for a very good and substantial reason, which they don't even deal with, or don't even consider in their “analysis” of the stagnation of the AFL-CIO in the ten years since reunification.

At the time it took place, we favored the fusion, but pointed out that reunification by itself would solve none of the problems that the labor movement confronted at the time. We said then that the mere addition of numbers was no solution, or no substitute for the adoption of a correct policy and program. Unless the reunification led to a complete reversal of the class collaborationist policy followed by both sections of the labor movement, it could not achieve any result other than the consolidation of the

joint bureaucracy over the union movement, the further weakening of the union movement in relation to the employers, and the continued subordination of the unions to the capitalist state.

One of the advantages held forth by the leaders of the AFL-CIO as the inevitable by-product of the reunification, was the expansion of the organization, both in quantity and quality. High on their list of priorities was an organization drive labeled "Operation Dixie," which projected the expansion of the AFL-CIO into the open-shop South. Another stated aim was the elimination of jurisdictional squabbles that had plagued union progress, and, touted as the most important of all their objectives, the emergence of the AFL-CIO as a political power in the life of the country. Not one of these goals was fulfilled.

As a matter of fact, the reunification actually took place as a defensive measure. If you recall the period prior to 1955, the counteroffensive of the employers after they failed to crush the 1945-46 strike wave took the form of shifting the struggle from the picket lines to the Congress and the state legislatures. In 1947 the Taft-Hartley Act was adopted. Dubbed by the union chiefs as the "Slave Labor Act," it gave the employers a deadly weapon in their campaign against the expansion of the trade union movement.

Taft-Hartley was one of the sharpest signals of the debilitating political weakness of the organized labor movement. As we shall see, this political weakness fundamentally resulted from the subordination of both the CIO and AFL officialdoms to the Democratic Party, and their integration into the capitalist state, a process that had already gone a long way in the course of World War II.

### Expulsion of Stalinist-Led Unions

In 1946, with the launching of the cold war, the top leadership of the CIO enlisted "for the duration" in support of Washington against Moscow. It was the cold war that initiated the schism in the CIO between the Communist-party-led unions and the unions led by the labor lieutenants of the U.S. State Department, who had jointly practised "peaceful coexistence" throughout the entire period of the war.

The internal conflict in the CIO erupted after Winston Churchill's "iron curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri. When this was followed by the launching of the Marshall plan, the mobilization of the so-called "free world" under the aegis of American imperialism in a crusade to contain and roll back communism, there was a shift in the line of the Kremlin. The Kremlin executed a pseudo-left turn, manifested in Eastern Europe by scuttling the coalition governments; in China by giving Mao the green light to drive out Chiang Kai-Shek; and in this country by the launching of the Progressive party, that "left" gesture toward a half-break with the American two-party system.

The outcome of the 1948 presidential election played no small part in speeding the expulsion of the CP-led unions from the CIO. The Truman victory in 1948 was a big upset. All of the political sharpies agreed that his Republican opponent, Thomas Dewey, would win by a landslide. The Stalinists and their supporters predicted a huge vote for Henry Wallace, candidate of the Progressive party, that would establish it as the third major political party in the country.

Truman gave everyone an object lesson of the lengths to which a capitalist politician will go to get elected. His radical rhetoric was not only far to the left of Dewey's, but made Henry Wallace look like a pale imitation of a broken-down reformer, peddling puerile, pusillanimous pap. Truman promised something for everybody. Among other things, he promised, in an oath taken by bell, book and candle, that, if elected, he would repeal Taft-Hartley in toto.

The Wallace campaign was based on the creation of a third capitalist party, with a capitalist program. It offered no fundamental solutions to the burning problems of the day, no real alternative to the nostrums and panaceas of the two major capitalist parties, and it was duck soup for Truman, in his demagogic binge, to make hash out of mealy-mouth Wallace. The result was not only a victory for Truman but so poor a vote for Wallace that it marked the beginning of the end of the touted "third party" movement in general and of the Stalinist variety of "third partyism" in particular.

I remember that at the time, we were in the midst of a big fight inside the National Maritime Union. Curran and Company came back from the CIO convention following the Truman victory. The Curranites were jubilant. They felt that they had won a great victory, especially over the CP. This further encouraged the CIO tops to proceed to carry through the expulsion of the CP-led unions and then to proceed to raid their jurisdictions.

### Stagnation of the CIO

From the period of the war, and continuing into the postwar period, the AFL continued to grow at the expense of the CIO. This was a very peculiar phenomenon. The CIO was the more dynamic organization after it split from the AFL, embracing the workers in the mass production industries, expanding rapidly in the 1930s when it assumed the crusading aspect of a broad social movement. But it lost both its dynamism and its crusading spirit as it began to adopt more and more the measures, the policy, the outlook, of the pure and simple business unionism of the AFL.

During the war the CIO tops made their peace with the employers and their political flunkies in government and, along with the AFL fakers, embraced the concept of national unity, the no-strike pledge, the wage freeze and everything else that went with it. And the CIO bureaucracy proceeded to consolidate its power, its control over the ranks, with the help of the government and the employers.

In the period prior to 1948 there had been a number of defections. Several unions that had gone over to the CIO went back to the AFL. In addition there was an expansion of the AFL based on "sweetheart" contracts with employers who sought insurance against CIO organization of their plants. In addition the AFL made a change in its fundamental policy. Where previously it had opposed the industrial form of organization, under pressure of the CIO they were compelled, in many instances, to adopt the industrial organization form.

The International Association of Machinists, for example, was one of the first to organize workers on an industrial basis following the CIO split. They entered into competition with the UAW for the organization of the big aircraft plants, and soon found it was impossible to organize these plants on the basis of craft divisions.

The boilermakers, even during the period of the war, began to organize the new shipyards and found that it was impossible to organize the workers along the old craft union lines. They began to organize large labor units into the industrial form.

In addition, AFL outfits created new forms that sought to create the superficial image of the industrial form while preserving craft privilege. These were the so-called B-type locals. Members of B-locals were given the status of second class citizenship, with all of the duties but few of the rights of those workers who constituted the core of the craft union. Gradually, many of these B-type locals one way or another acquired first class citizenship, and gained rights that only the craft union members had previously had.

As a result of all these factors the AFL continued to grow at the expense of the CIO. After the expulsion from the CIO of the CP-led unions, the numerical relationship between the two at the time of the 1955 reunification was about two-to-one in favor of the AFL.

In addition, new schisms developed inside the CIO. A rivalry between McDonald of the United Steelworkers and Reuther of the United Auto Workers—not based on any policy or programmatic differences, but largely on a power fight inside the CIO—further weakened the CIO forces in the amalgamation with the AFL.

### Labor Politically Crippled

When the AFL and CIO tops proclaimed that unification would strengthen the labor movement politically, they thought exclusively in terms of numbers. They had no intention of altering their fundamental policy of supporting the Democratic party and Democratic party candidates for public office.

In the Truman administration proceeded to ignore the promise to repeal Taft-Hartley, the "labor statesmen" were unable to mount an effective struggle to compel Truman to live up to his pledge. So long as they adhered to their policy of class collaboration, they had no place else to go, and the Democratic party politicians knew that very well then, as they know it now.

What really characterized the entire experience of the thirties, through the postwar period, to the period of the reunification and its aftermath was the failure of the American trade union leadership to take the road of independent working class political action. It doomed them and will continue to doom them to impotent inability to cope with the new problems that have arisen as a result of advancing technology, as well as the old problems that remain as a result of the antilabor legislation still on the books.

After 1948, they quit even requesting of the Democratic party candidates that they abolish the Taft-Hartley Act.

In 1960, you remember, in addition to Taft-Hartley, the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin law was enacted. The union tops then proceeded to endorse Kennedy, one of the authors of this repressive antiunion legislation.

In 1964, all they asked for was repeal of just one section of the Taft-Hartley Act, Section 14B. Section 14B of the Taft-Hartley Act gives states the right to enact the so-called "right-to-work" laws. Some twenty states had previously enacted these union-busting measures, which perpetuate the open shop by legislative decree.

The promise to repeal 14B was incorporated in the

Democratic party platform and was subsequently reiterated by Lyndon Baines Johnson. This all that they got. Another promise! I just noted in the *New York Times* of February 14 an article by Pomfret, a staff member, which he opens by saying:

"The Johnson administration has decided not to ask Congress to act on organized labor's legislative goal, that is repeal of 14B, until other parts of the president's program are closer to being passed."

Now you would think this would elicit an outcry of protest by the labor leaders, but not at all. Pomfret goes on to add, "significantly, the union leaders are not pushing the president for immediate action on 14B. 'It is quite obvious that the president wants to get some other things out of the way first,' said an AFL-CIO spokesman. 'We have no doubt that he will send a communication to Congress in this session but we are political realists. The measures he is pushing are things we want too and we are willing to wait.'"

They, you see, are willing to wait! In the meantime, the Chambers of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, and all the business groups, have mounted an intensive campaign against the repeal of 14B. Johnson avoided presenting it to Congress in order to maintain his consensus, that is, the coalition which elected him by an overwhelming landslide in the 1964 election. Because the moment the repeal proposal is introduced, the coalition will break apart.

So that actually the unions will get nothing while Johnson has already given very substantial concessions to business in the form of ready cash, tax rebates, depreciation, and so forth.

We constantly come back to the same question, how are they going to get out of this impasse? How are they ever going to get into a position to take effective action against the state, that is the federal government, on questions which involve the very life and death of the unions. Of this we can be sure, they are not going to be able to do it so long as they continue their present political line of supporting Democrats for public office.

In another *New York Times* editorial, William Shannon points out what Johnson's policy is, and how he hopes to maintain the coalition intact. "His objective," he says, "is to keep intact the broad coalition that elected him. This involves holding the confidence and goodwill of influential businessmen and of moderate conservatives, without endangering support of the trade unions, the Negroes, the low income voters, the liberal intellectuals, who together comprise the hard core of the Democratic party strength."

This is the problem, how is he going to keep them together? The only way to keep them together is through the policy followed by the labor leaders of keeping quiet about what the Johnson administration *is not doing* to advance the demands of the civil rights movement and the labor movement.

"His strategy," Shannon says, "is to hold liberal support at the cheapest possible price in terms of dollars." He goes on to say, "He has promised the labor movement repeal of section 14B. He assured Dr. Martin Luther King that he is going to make it easier for Southern Negroes to register to vote. And that is all so far as any expenditures of money is concerned."

And then Shannon goes on to add, "as long as he is working for these legislative goals he will be in a good position to resist pressure for more spending which these

groups also desire. Supporters of 'Great Society' programs, such as those to combat the major diseases, to help depressed regions, other than Appalachia, and to clean up water pollution are beginning to complain that the administration is making very little money available to back up its impressive rhetoric."

### The Next Giant Step

The whole content of the Art Preis book, and the many lessons to be drawn therefrom, is the same one that Trotsky draws in his *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*. From the early thirties, when the unions first began to march forward to industrial organization, utilizing the methods of the class struggle to achieve this goal, the question of independent working class political action became decisive.

When, in the latter part of the thirties, around 1936, the Stalinists and the trade union leaders at the head of the movement entered the lists against independent working class political action and for coalition politics, that spelled the beginning of the end of the crusading spirit and dynamism of the CIO.

It led to "national unity" class collaboration during World War II.

It led, after World War II, to the increasing intervention of the government in the internal affairs of the unions, first through Taft-Hartley, then through Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin, the right-to-work laws, and other legislative intervention. More and more every decisive struggle of the unions brings them face to face with the government power.

It places them in a completely disadvantageous position to conduct any effective struggle, so long as they continue

to support the government that confronts them as their main foe.

The whole question of the organization of the South, for example, which they projected as one of the realistic outcomes of the reunification, cannot be solved so long as they retain their coalition with the Democratic party, which is the main agency for the open shop as well as racist discrimination in the South.

Every major strike immediately brings the threat of government intervention. If it doesn't bring intervention prior to the strike, it does so during the strike. And such intervention is always at the expense of the workers involved.

And so when we say that the next wave of radicalization must of necessity take a political form, in essence it means that the labor movement, the workers and their allies, have got to break with the policy of supporting the Democratic party, and engage in class struggle on the political arena, where all the major social, economic, and political questions will be decided. or suffer continued disintegration of union strength and a drastic decline in the workers' standard of living.

At what stage and under what circumstances will this turn occur? That is very difficult to foretell. But as materialists, we are confident that *it will come*, because the material conditions of existence determine consciousness, and the material conditions of the workers inevitably will drive them along the path of struggle.

And of this we can be sure: Past experience of class-struggle battles in American labor history, together with the certainty of a more favorable relationship of forces in the revolutionary disposition of the radical vanguard will illumine the class struggle path to workers power and ensure its socialist goal.