

May 1, 1937, Finds Labor in New York Is on the March

By
Rose Wortis

*For Trade Union Unity—
Workers Turning to C. I. O.
Movement to Make the City
a 100 P. C. Union Town*



The organized workers of New York who will come out in the tens of thousands to demonstrate on May Day will have good cause for celebration. Great achievements can be recorded by the workers of New York since May, 1936. In the old established unions, such as the needle unions, painters, marines, food, shoe, and even in the more conservative unions, such as teamsters, carpenters (where Hutcheson's referendum outlawing the Communists was rejected by the majority of the locals in New York State) a new spirit reigns today.

The United front of the workers, which has proven so successful in repelling the Fascists in France, Belgium, and other European countries, particularly on the battle front of Madrid has also changed the face of the most important trade unions in New York. Many unions, for years dominated by reactionary and racketeering elements have now taken a new lease of life under the leadership of progressives, supported by the mass of rank and file. In place of the old friction and division, we now see the united front of various elements working side by side to consolidate the gains, and fortify the strength of the unions. This unity enhances the general trade union movement, particularly the struggle for the organization of the unorganized under the leadership of the C.I.O.

This united front on the economic field has also found its expression on the political field in the formation of the American Labor Party, which during the last elections succeeded in rallying close to 300,000 workers under its banner and is likely to play a very important role in the coming Municipal and State elections in our city and state, and also in its support of Roosevelt's measures to curb the Supreme Court.

This spirit of militancy, this urge to struggle for better conditions is now beginning to penetrate new sections of the working class in our State. For the first time since the big strike movement of 1936, which involved close to 200,000 workers, we see a real stirring amongst large sections of unorganized workers in New York State, particularly our basic industries. The victory of the CIO in the automobile and steel industries had an electrifying effect on the hundred of thousands of unorganized workers in New York State.

THE CIO DRIVES

From the very beginning of the CIO drive, the New York workers had their eyes turned toward this movement. The settlement of the General Motors strike was a signal for action to thousands of unorganized in New York, immediately followed by a series of sit-down strikes and victories. Only a cursory glance at the advances made in New York state in the past three months will show how ripe the situation is for making New York a 100 per cent union town, and to what extent the present leadership of the A.F. of L. has hindered the movement for organization.

The last Convention of the State Federation of Labor had turned a deaf ear to the call of the progressives to utilize the strength of the hundreds of thousands organized workers in order to bring the message of organization to the unorganized. The CIO, supported by the progressive trade unions, has undertaken this long neglected task with gratifying results.

Since last May Day there have been organized in our state locals of steel, auto, and textile workers. The General Electric of Schenectady is today negotiating with the Union. In N. Y. C. the movement for organization and strike is spreading, embracing manual as well as large sections of white collar and professional workers. In the laundry industry which employs large numbers of Negro workers, as well as in transit, Western Union and Utility the workers are organizing and fighting for better conditions and recognition of their unions.

The growth and progress of the labor movement in N. Y. C. found expression even in the Central Trades & Labor Council, for years considered a stronghold of the reactionary forces in the A.F. of L. This was particularly evident in the action of the Central Trades in filing the Green letter for suspension of the CIO unions. The leadership of the Central Trades knew the strength of the progressives, and knew that the delegates are determined to keep the trade union movement of New York united. Throughout the entire State of New York there was not a single Central Trade & Labor Council in any of the cities wherein the Green expulsion letter did not meet with the same fate. It was either filed or completely rejected, showing the great desire for unity on the part of the workers.

SPIRIT OF MILITANCY

This new spirit of militancy has expressed itself in increased interest on the part of the organized labor movement in general political problems, particularly in legislative activity. For the first time in the history of New York State did we find crowded rooms at the public hearings of the State Legislature on the various labor and social legislative measures, such as the child labor amendment, attended by hundreds of trade union delegates; the bills dealing with the eight hour day for hospital workers; the anti-Labor Wadsworth bill, and numerous other measures pertaining to Labor's interests. It is also evident by the mass support given to trade union resolutions in favor of President Roosevelt's Supreme Court reform proposals.

Labor in New York has also recognized that the struggle in defense of its own economic and political interests is closely linked with the struggle against Fascism on an international scale, and has therefore responded most enthusiastically in support of the people of Spain, who are bearing the brunt of the fight against Fascism. The trade unions are actively participating in all activities in support of Spain through the North American Committees, and the Trade Union Committee for