
JOHN L. LEWIS AND THE WAR

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IN THE maintenance and strengthening of national unity, indispensable for winning the war against the Axis, the organized labor movement has a vital role to play. As the main mass organization of the working class, the most clear-sighted and dependable anti-fascist section of our nation, they have to be the very backbone of our people's war effort in all its phases. The great bulk of the unions' members and leaders are actively supporting the Government, but sinister forces of defeatism within labor's ranks, the chief spokesman of which is John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers of America, are seeking to confuse the workers regarding the significance of the war, to disrupt labor's developing unity, and generally to weaken the labor movement's influence in the fight against Hitlerism. Lewis is beginning to use the U.M.W.A., with its 600,000 members and its vast influence, as an instrument to sow chaos in the ranks of the workers and generally to undermine the nation's war effort.

Prior to America's involvement in the war, Lewis was affiliated via his daughter Kathryn to the notorious isolationist-appeaser America First Committee. When Hitler's le-

gions crossed the frontiers of the U.S.S.R. on June 22, 1941, this action extended the war onto a world basis and at the same time transformed it into a people's war by the United Nations, a just war of national liberation. The only effect of all this upon Lewis, however, as upon the America First Committee appeasers in general, was to intensify his opposition to the war. Similarly, when the Japanese treacherously attacked at Pearl Harbor, Lewis, instead of rallying to the defense of his country, adopted the characteristic America First Committee line of lip service to the nation's war effort as a cover-up for a real policy of opposition to the war. From isolationism, he developed into defeatism.

True, Lewis has formally endorsed the war. But his endorsement has the same hollow ring as the stand of Hoover, Landon, Lindbergh, Norman Thomas and Company. Thus, at the June, 1942, Board meeting of the U.M.W.A., when Lewis was under heavy mass pressure because of his failure to back up the war, he made a long speech explaining why he had not been more active in the war effort, but he uttered not a single word in condemnation of Hitler. His state-

ment of "endorsement" was simply to the effect that inasmuch as the country, against his advice, has got into war, he, as a loyal citizen, had to support it. Lewis' actual policies, however, give the lie to this thin gruel of an endorsement and are clearly of an anti-war character. His latest pledges of support for the war have no more sincerity than those he made right after Pearl Harbor. Philip Murray was 100 per cent correct when he stated in the recent sharp exchanges with Lewis that the very heart of their controversy was that he is for the war while Lewis is against it.

This emphasizes a first task that the coal miners face, namely, to put their great union squarely on record in support of the war. The rank and file should speak out clearly, repudiating the weasel-worded "endorsements" of John L. Lewis and let the whole nation know that the coal miners understand the menace of Hitlerism; that they are out to help destroy it root and branch in 1942, and that if Lewis does not like the pro-war line of action he is at liberty to devote his slippery services to other quarters where they will be more appreciated than among the workers.

It is characteristic of un-reconstructed America Firsters that they merely tip their hats to the nation's war cause and then proceed in various ways to block the development of the country's war effort. In carrying out this devious policy, Lewis has to operate especially smoothly. This is because the overwhelming majority of his membership are wholeheartedly in favor of

the war, so that if they could perceive clearly the anti-war character of Lewis' policies they would soon remove him from his office as President. This cunning hypocrisy and double-dealing on his part make it doubly necessary that his various policies and activities be analyzed in some detail.

Lewis Wars Against the Roosevelt Administration

Whether one is for or against the war can be pretty much determined by his attitude towards the Roosevelt Administration and its policies. The simple fact is that the present Government, with the entire resources of our nation under its control, is waging a militant war against the Axis, and the whole complex of its foreign and domestic policies are directed towards the destruction of Hitlerism. President Roosevelt is in the real sense the Commander-in-Chief of the American people in this just war. Hence all those forces out to destroy the Hitler menace must needs support the Roosevelt Government actively. The C.I.O., the A. F. of L., the Communist Party, and other pro-war groups and organizations are correct, therefore, in giving the present Administration, and specifically President Roosevelt, wholehearted support—of course, with constructive proposals and criticism.

The logical necessity of backing up President Roosevelt and his Administration in order to win the war is so obvious to the mass of the people that even those elements that are lukewarm towards the war, or

even opposed to it, find it convenient to cover up their real policies with half-hearted endorsements of the Roosevelt Administration. Thus, the Republican National Committee, which certainly wears no medals for anti-Hitlerism, felt compelled to pledge support to President Roosevelt, as did also, with painful reluctance, Hoover and Landon, meanwhile keeping up their sniping at the Government's policies. The endorsement by Willkie, a real supporter of the war, was genuine, although marred by obviously factional criticism.

Now Republican John L. Lewis also finds it necessary to allow his Executive Board to give a tongue-in-cheek support to President Roosevelt. Nevertheless, his anti-Roosevelt position remains definite. For a long time before Pearl Harbor, as the country well knows, Lewis waged a violent feud against President Roosevelt. Organized labor believed the statement of R. J. Thomas, President of the United Auto Workers Union, made at the Executive Board meeting of the C.I.O. in June, to the effect that Lewis' endorsement of Wendell Willkie in the 1940 elections was coupled up to a proposition that he, Lewis, should become Secretary of Labor in the event of a Republican victory. And the American people also believed the assertion of Philip Murray that at the time of the C.I.O. convention in Detroit Lewis proposed that Murray join him in "fighting the foreign policies of the President of the United States." After Pearl Harbor Lewis, by his silence, deliberately allowed

the country to understand that his opposition to the President still continued. Moreover, not only did Lewis not give support to the many war proposals submitted to Congress by the President, including the 7-point economic program, but his personally-controlled *Mine Workers Journal*, under the editorship of a cynical defeatist, has kept up a constant, typically fifth-column sniping attack against Roosevelt and his policies. Lewis' removal of Philip Murray from the office of Vice-President is designed to terrorize pro-Roosevelt forces in the U.M.W.A., which is another phase of Lewis' opposition to the government. Lewis is further displaying his opposition to Roosevelt by giving open or covert support to defeatist candidates in the developing elections. Thus, in Illinois Lewis' agent, Ray Edmundson, President of District 12, U.M.W.A., worked demagogically to help the defeatist candidate "Curly" Brooks, in defiance of the State A. F. of L. and C.I.O. bodies, both of which were supporting the win-the-war candidate McKeough. Likewise, in the Pennsylvania primaries, Senator James Davis, a defeatist who lost, was known to have Lewis' tacit support.

All this Lewis opposition to the Roosevelt Administration constitutes, in plain English, sabotage of the nation's war effort. It is aid and comfort to the fifth column, which means to the Hitler Axis. It also sacrifices the immediate economic interests of the miners; because only if the President's seven-point anti-inflation program is sub-

stantially adopted can the rising cost of living be checked, and the miners be saved from a catastrophic drop in their living standards.

The coal miners should insist, by the action of their local unions and otherwise, that the U.M.W.A. nationally take a clear-cut position in support of the present Administration and President Roosevelt, who are commissioned by the American people to conduct the war! They should demand that their officials give whole-hearted support, not only in word but in deed, to the war policies of the Government, and they should see to it that in the developing Congressional elections the whole force of their union is thrown against defeatist candidates and in support of candidates who favor waging the war to victory over Hitlerism. The coal miners are overwhelmingly in favor of actively supporting the Roosevelt war Administration, and they should compel Lewis and his associates either to carry out their will or to give up their union posts.

Lewis Hamstrings the Battle for Production

Another test which shows that Lewis is actually opposed to the war, despite his weak assertions to the contrary, is his dubious attitude towards the question of war production. In this war, with victory so dependent upon the maximum possible production of war materials, it is the bounden duty of the trade unions to take a most active interest in production problems and to do everything possible to increase pro-

duction. Both the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. are doing this. The C.I.O. especially has displayed great production activity. The invasion of the U.S.S.R. was leading inevitably to the full involvement of the U. S. in the war. In the months preceding Pearl Harbor, this fact was becoming daily more evident, and the C.I.O., nationally and its affiliated unions, carried on a big campaign for the Murray Industrial Council plan of joint Government-employer-union cooperation for increased production. The labor-management cooperation committees, later established widespread by head of the War Production Board Donald R. Nelson, after the United States had become a full belligerent, and which have greatly aided production, undoubtedly had their origin in the Murray Plan.

During this whole period, with both the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. profoundly active in regard to the question, Lewis displayed no visible interest in war production problems. Although the C.I.O. unions in the automotive, steel, electrical, metal mining, maritime, and many more industries all came forward with elaborate plans for increasing production in their respective industries, the U.M.W.A. was conspicuous by its silence. Its leaders produced no production plan for coal, nor did they join their voices with those other union leaders in the big struggle of mine labor and the Government to convert American industry from a business-as-usual regime to a war basis. Indeed, Lewis men acted on the argument that, since unemployment still persisted

in the mining areas, there were no production problems in the coal mining industry.

Such a position, of course, had no more validity than similar claims by the business-as-usual managements of aluminum, steel and other companies at the outset of the war, that their existing facilities were adequate to meet the war's demands. The increased demand for coal to meet expanding industry; the drafting of tens of thousands of miners into the armed forces; the migration of large numbers of others into the steel, automotive, and other industries; the shortage of gasoline and oil, which is causing increased use of coal; the growing utilization of coal transportation, and very many other war-born conditions, show conclusively that there are real production problems in the coal mining industry. That, with the progress of the war, these problems will constantly become more intense, is indicated by the fact that in England the Government has been compelled to take over the operation of the coal mines. The Solid Fuels Coordinator, Harold L. Ickes, has already indicated many American coal problems.

At the June meeting of the U.M.W.A. Executive Board Lewis was under heavy pressure from the miners and from the public generally for his failure to support the war. He had therefore to cover up his war opposition with false pretenses along the Hoover, Landon line. Together with his formal endorsement of the war, he also felt compelled to depart from the un-

tenable position that "there are no production problems in the coal industry." So his rubber-stamp majority in the Executive Board adopted a resolution dedicated in part to increased coal production; to produce, in fact, "enough surplus coal to bury the Axis powers."

The latter sounds very definitely pro-war, but the situation demands more than paper exhortations to the rank and file to produce additional coal. Nor is it enough to assert that the miners will remain loyal to the no-strike pledges given to the Government by organized labor in general.* What is absolutely needed is an organized approach to, and definite leadership in, production problems by the union. In the mining industry there should be set up labor-management committees along the line proposed by Donald K. Nelson. The unions should also display the initiative to work out a comprehensive production plan, formulated for the whole industry. The rank-and-file miners and those forces among the union officialdom who are genuinely interested in winning the war, should insist that these things be done. Then the Miners Union will begin to play a truly dynamic role in war production, which it is not doing today under the leadership of John L. Lewis.

* How Lewis actually looks upon the no-strike pledge may be gauged from the way the *Mine Workers Journal* handles the matter. It constantly hints that the war offers a favorable opportunity for strikes. In the December 15 issue, a week after Pearl Harbor, it condemned the statement by Sidney Hillman that "we can no longer have business-as-usual or strike-as-usual." In the February 15 issue, when the steel workers were in negotiation, the *Journal* declared demagogically that "the union shop, involving such big-scale employment, has never been won by mediation or arbitration."

*Inactivity on War Tasks
in Mining Areas*

A further expression of Lewis' failure to support the war is the notorious lack of organized civilian war work in large numbers of mining communities. In such areas the Miners Union bears a heavy responsibility for giving general leadership to the population in the organization of local civilian war activities of all descriptions. But no incentive for leadership of this kind has been forthcoming from the national office of the U.M.W.A. About the only sign it has given that it realizes a war is on is the issuance of desultory appeals to the membership to buy war bonds and stamps, an activity which could hardly be avoided in any event. As for the many other forms of war work—relief, civilian defense, salvage of materials, war propaganda, etc., practically nothing is being done by the Lewis office.

The miners, by their own initiative and by pressure upon their national and district officials, should put an end to this deplorable situation. In every community the Miners Union should take the lead in organizing the manifold war activities. This would enormously strengthen the war effort locally and at the same time enhance the prestige of the union. It is a matter also for cooperation by patriotic city, state and national public officials with the union. If Lewis refuses to mobilize the union in support of the war, the job will have to be taken in hand by the miners themselves. It is high time that the U.M.W.A. went all-out for the war.

Lewis' Red-Baiting Campaign

Another sinister sign of Lewis' anti-war attitude is his present campaign of Red-baiting against the Soviet Union and against the Communist Party. Find a fifth columnist and you will always find a Red-baiter. The aim of such people with this line is, on the one hand, to drive a wedge between the United States and her strong ally, the Soviet Union, by sowing slander and suspicion against the U.S.S.R., and on the other hand, to undermine national unity by raising the cry of Communism against everything progressive. This is the attitude of Hoover, Dies, Hearst, Fish, Gerald K. Smith, Father Coughlin, Norman Thomas and of every other defeatist in the country. It is the line that serves Hitler, because it tends to divert and break up the attack against him.

Lewis displayed his characteristic America First hostility towards the U.S.S.R. when, together with 14 Republican appeasers, including Hoover, Landon, Fletcher, Dawes, etc., he signed a statement condemning the alliance between Great Britain and the Soviet Union, made upon the occasion of Hitler's invasion of the U.S.S.R. This statement, which also condemned the extension of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union, declared that "the Anglo-Russian alliance has dissipated that illusion" of this being "a world conflict between tyranny and freedom." If Mr. Lewis and his fellow Soviet-baiters have been less vociferous of late upon this subject it is because of the U.S.S.R.'s great popularity

among the American people, who realize that the heroic fight being made by the Red Army is also the fight of the United States.

Lewis, however, feels freer to use the red herring of Communism in his striving to paralyze the war effort of the trade unions and the Government. At the June meeting of the Executive Board of the U.M.W.A. he loosed a blast of Red-baiting against Philip Murray, denouncing him as a "Communist," to provide a pretext for removing him from his office as Vice-President of the Miners Union, and probably finally to expel him under the anti-Communist clause of the U.M.W.A. constitution. The Board resolution stated "that the Executive Board demands immediately of Philip Murray, President of the C.I.O., that he at once publicly renounce his allegiance to and his support of Communism; that he discharge from the employment of the C.I.O. those Communists now on the payroll, and that he cease to employ Communists as agents and representatives of the C.I.O."

This resolution, which follows almost word for word the accusations made by Benjamin Stolberg and other professional Red-baiters against Lewis when he was the head of the C.I.O., is a masterpiece of insolence and cynicism. To assert that the lifelong Democrat, Philip Murray, is a Communist is ridiculous, and as for the matter of Communists being on the C.I.O. payroll, Murray exposed Lewis's demagoguery when he stated: "every man on the C.I.O. payroll was put there by John L. Lewis and worked

for him for nearly six years."

Lewis is an old hand at Red-baiting. Over a period of years he expelled several hundreds of militants from the union and the industry on charges of Communism, because they dared oppose his autocratic rule. For a time, during the formation of the C.I.O., he made a show of cooperating with the progressives and Left-wingers, knowing that the support of these militants was a fundamental condition for organizing the mass production industries. But now, to further his anti-war line, Lewis has recourse to the Hitlerite tactic of Red-baiting.

The miners should put a stop to Lewis's anti-Soviet policy. They should insist that the union give active cooperation to our nation's great war ally. As one important means for strengthening our people's relations with the Soviet and British peoples, the miners should put their union squarely on the record for American trade union affiliation to the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee. The miners should also end Lewis's anti-Communism orgy. They should not only support Murray against Lewis's absurd charges, but also insist that the U.M.W.A. be cleansed of the Lewis poison, of all union-disrupting, pro-Hitler Red-baiting.

Lewis' Pseudo-Labor Unity Drive

A menace to labor's growing solidarity and to the national war effort is Lewis' present demagogic campaign for so-called trade union organizational unity. His proposal that unity negotiations be resumed

where they were broken off three years ago, a proposition for which Hutcheson has managed to secure the endorsement of the A. F. of L. Executive Council, would not lead to unity, but to deepening the division in labor's ranks and, therefore, to weakening labor's role in the national war effort. For there is not the slightest indication that the A. F. of L. leaders have yet come to the point where they are ready to recognize the right to existence of the C.I.O. industrial unions in the basic industries. Such negotiations as Lewis proposes, therefore, could not possibly settle the many jurisdictional claims of the A. F. of L. unions, but would only lead to another and worse stalemate.

Lewis' insincerity in his "trade union unity" campaign is emphasized by a number of other union moves of his, all of a disruptive character. Among these are the raids being conducted by his non-descript District 50, U.M.W.A., against the A. F. of L. Teamsters and Building Trades workers. Then there is his bizarre attempt to organize the farmers into the same District 50—a proposition which at once tends to create bad blood between the farmers' organizations and the unions, as well as to throw confusion in the ranks of the unions themselves. Finally, there is his deliberate attempt to split the C.I.O., by withdrawing the U.M.W.A. upon the basis of flimsy financial and prestige questions.

The response of the C.I.O. Executive Board, at its June meeting, to the Lewis-Hutcheson "trade union unity" proposals is sane and con-

structive. In substance, the C.I.O. resolution calls for:

a. The calling of a national Win-the-War conference by the combined Victory Labor Board, this conference to be made up of representatives from all A. F. of L. and C.I.O. unions and to take up such basic and immediate issues in connection with the war as increased production, political support to those candidates in support of the President of the United States and the war effort, and increased labor participation in the executive and administrative branches of the Government to assure labor's maximum contribution to the war effort;

b. The establishment by the Executive Council of the C.I.O. and A. F. of L. of a United National Labor Council, with "authority to formulate a program covering all issues which may in any way aid the cause of labor and the war program";

c. Cultivation by the United National Labor Council of A. F. of L.-C.I.O. cooperation in the various localities to facilitate the quickest possible victory over the Axis;

d. As mutual confidence develops in the United National Labor Council between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O., discussions shall be developed between overlapping unions with the end of achieving organic unity.

The C.I.O. proposals offer the practical way to mobilize labor's full strength here and now behind the war. They also provide the necessary elementary approach to organic trade union unity, being a continuation and extension of the

healing process now going on between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O., and avoiding the dangers that would come from a breakdown of detailed negotiations over jurisdictional questions. They deserve full support of the labor movement.

To defeat Lewis' spurious "trade union unity" moves is the task of the labor movement in general; but the miners themselves also have a big responsibility in the matter. Among the things they should do to make their union the great force it should be for labor unity and for the maximum national war effort, are: (a) to give active support to the unity proposals of the C.I.O. Executive Board; (b) to block Lewis' attempts to disaffiliate the U.M.W.A. from the C.I.O. and to insist upon their union's regular payment of its per capita tax; (c) to condemn the removal of Philip Murray from his office as Vice-President and to bring about his reinstatement; (d) to discontinue U.M.W.A. efforts to organize farmers into its ranks; (e) to stop District 50's raids upon other A. F. of L. and C.I.O. unions; (f) to reorganize District 50, to transfer those workers not connected with the mining industry into unions corresponding to their occupations.

Where Is Lewis Heading?

Time was when the U.M.W.A. was the most democratic union in the U.S. But Lewis, with super-Tammany methods of control, has changed all that. He has choked rank-and-file democracy in the U.M.W.A. and today rules autocratically. It is this stranglehold on the

great miners' union that makes Lewis, with his defeatist program, such a menace to the national war effort.

Lewis has many ways and means of personally dominating the national U.M.W.A. Grace to the undemocratic features of the union constitution, which he systematically caused to be inserted during many years, he exercises a tremendous delegated power of appointment and removal of union officials, and also an autocratic control over the union's huge financial resources. Upon his say-so rests the economic livelihood of virtually the whole officialdom of the union, including those officers elected by popular vote. Together with these regular official powers, he practices a few stunts of his own to fortify his position. Among these are the appointment of relatives to key posts, the use of plug-ugly "organizers" to control unruly rank and filers, etc. And past years have shown him to be cunning and ruthless in "constructing" union conventions and in manipulating union elections to his own advantage and to the detriment of democracy within the organization. But the most glaring example of Lewis' suppression of union democracy is the fact that 20 of the U.M.W.A.'s 36 districts (comprising 71 per cent of the union's total membership) have no regularly elected district leadership. They live under "provisional government," their officialdom being arbitrarily appointed by Lewis. This shameful situation, constantly growing worse, has existed for many years. It would seem to be high time

that the working coalminers broke Lewis' tsar-like control over their union and livelihood, and that they took their organization back again into their own hands. Above all, the districts should be conceded the right to elect their own officers. Especially should the miners be on guard regarding the election (or hand-picked selection) of delegates to the union convention this fall. Lewis would not dominate a truly democratic convention, nor survive a free union election. Democratization of the U.M.W.A. is necessary, not only for the welfare of the coal miners, but also, in view of Lewis' defeatism, for the more vigorous prosecution of the war by the Government.

From the foregoing analysis of his policies it is clear that Lewis is not supporting the war. His whole line tends to weaken national unity and undermine our people's will to fight the Axis. At the same time, it endangers the unity of the labor movement, menaces American democracy, and sacrifices the economic standards of the workers. Philip Murray correctly characterized the U.M.W.A. president's policy when he stated that Lewis is "hell-bent on creating national confusion and national disunity," and "a danger to the security of our nation."

It is absurd to ascribe Lewis' reactionary course simply to an individual quarrel with Roosevelt, to thwarted ambitions, to personal resentment against Philip Murray. The real reason is political. Lewis is following out a defeatist policy towards the war. To this end, he is hooked up with the Hoovers, Landon, Hutchesons, etc., and it is no

accident that Coughlin's *Social Justice* hailed him so enthusiastically. Lewis, like defeatist and fifth-column elements generally, is undoubtedly speculating upon a reactionary Republican victory in this country—through Hitler winning the war outright, through a disastrous negotiated peace, or through mass disillusionment after the conclusion of the war. It is a course that would lead to fascism. But Mr. Lewis and his defeatist cronies, who profoundly underestimate the economic, military and political strength of the democratic forces in the present struggle, will be utterly disappointed and confounded by the outcome of the war and the resultant peace.

Obviously, Lewis' reactionary influence must be combated in the labor movement and throughout the country as a whole. In the foregoing pages there have been indicated some of the measures needful for the miners in order to mobilize their union all-out for the war, to democratize their organization, and to protect their living and working standards. But the fight against Lewis is the task, not only of the miners, but of the entire labor movement. The trade unions of both the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. will do well to beware of the sinister combination of Lewis-Hutcheson forces, and to take steps to break it up. For this executive line-up bodes no good for the labor movement and for our country. The cracking of Lewis' control of the U.M.W.A. and the elimination of his influence in the labor movement are a major task in winning the war and of protecting American democracy.