

The Duty of the AFL Council

by William Z. Foster

THE masses will do well to look with sharp suspicion upon the latest Gallup poll which, by putting Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio in the Republican column, in substance would pronounce Dewey the leader in the race for the Presidency. In this crucial political struggle no trust or confidence whatever should be placed in such polls, which can, and doubtless will be used deliberately to sway public opinion. One thing they do make clear, however, is that the opposition to Roosevelt is extremely strong, far more so than in 1932, 1936 or 1940, and that if he is to be re-elected, his supporters, particularly the labor movement, must dig in and work politically as never before.



Among the many things necessary for organized labor to do in order that it shall exert its maximum strength in the campaign, is for the AFL executive council to come out with a clear and definite endorsement of the Roosevelt-Truman ticket. The council's present attitude of non-endorsement, under the pretext of carrying on the Federation's traditional policy of not endorsing candidates for the presidency, is untenable and very harmful to labor and the Roosevelt cause. For it must be realized that although the top AFL leadership has a minimum of personal and political prestige among the great masses of the workers in the unions, nevertheless the failure of the executive council to endorse the Democratic standard-bearer, operates seriously to disorganize and cripple the trade union political support of Roosevelt.

Balking the Will Of Its Membership

It gives every reactionary a vantage ground from which to conduct his disruptive work. It was, for example, the pretext under which the leadership of the Central Trades and Labor Council of New York City recently sidetracked a resolution calling for the endorsement of Roosevelt, by referring it to the legislative committee, where it is to be kept indefinitely on ice, despite the fact that probably no less than 80 per-

cent of the workers in the New York unions are heartily in favor of Roosevelt.

There was a time when the Federation leadership was justified in not endorsing presidential candidates, but that time has long since passed. In the early days of the labor movement, when the trade unions were weak, when neither major party had a program advantageous to labor, and when hordes of corrupt politicians were seeking to use the labor movement to further their greedy personal and class interests, it was correct for the trade unions to hold to the general policy of not endorsing political candidates. This protected them from internal factionalism and corruption, although, all too often, the leaders circumvented the policy of the unions by giving their personal endorsement to reactionary and corrupt candidates.

AFL Council Must Break With 'Tradition'

But now the situation is profoundly changed. The trade unions have grown enormously in size and political understanding. And one of the tickets now in the field, Roosevelt and Truman, does represent the most vital interests of the workers and the whole American people. Clearly, therefore, it is in the most fundamental interests of the unions to do their utmost to secure the reelection of Roosevelt. With the overwhelming majority of the AFL membership in favor of Roosevelt, the possibility of internal disruption occurring over his endorsement (one of the early dangers to organized labor) is entirely out of the question. In 1924, the AFL executive council, under the pressure of the union membership, saw fit to endorse the presidential candidacy of LaFollette; in 1944, the need

and urgency of speedily supporting the candidacy of Roosevelt is incomparably greater.

The organized reactionaries who are trying to elect Dewey want nothing better than to keep the AFL from rallying its 7,000,000 members behind Roosevelt. If they can succeed in thus crippling the AFL politically, the election of Dewey would be practically assured. The executive council's policy of non-endorsement plays right into their hands. This is no longer a non-partisan policy; it is pro-Dewey. That is why Woll, Hutcheson, Bugnizet and Republican labor leaders in the executive council and elsewhere in the labor movement are such ardent champions of it.

Bulk of Federation Expresses Its Stand

In its present policy of not endorsing Roosevelt, the AFL top leadership, as usual, is not expressing the will or the interests of the millions in the AFL unions. The latter definitely want Roosevelt endorsed and supported. If they could vote on the matter, undoubtedly they would vote overwhelmingly to give Roosevelt the Federation's fullest support. Already 15 state federations, several international unions, and scores of city central bodies, despite the executive council's opposition have come out openly in support of Roosevelt, and their number will be greatly increased as the campaign progresses.

Even the Federation executive council can be compelled to yield to the will and interests of its membership under democratic pressure. This has happened in the past, notably in the case of unemployment insurance and other social legislation, and it can happen again in the present instance.

Worth Repeating

DR. JOAN McMICHAEL, an industrial doctor in a large London factory, discussing the government White Paper on postwar plans gives a British labor view of Health in Industry in the London Daily Worker (July 12 issue):

Workers everywhere will welcome the proposals in the White Paper which are to provide a free and complete medical service for everyone. But they will want to know why the Government, which has in actual practice established a Medical Service in its own factories under the Ministry of Supply, should have failed to include proposals for such a service for the whole industry. . . . Every worker recognizes the need for improved control of such industrial risks as silicosis in mining, dermatitis from contact with numerous irritant substances, and chemical poisoning arising from handling new solvents and other chemical substances.