FREEDOM versus TOTALITARIANISM
The Labor Unions

ONE OF THE fundamental rights of men and women in a democracy is freedom of association. Of all the types of association, the most vital, economically, to the largest number of people is that which binds men one to another into craft or industrial unions. This right of free association into craft or industrial unions is the expression of the individual’s right to control and direct his own life and work.

Under the conditions of modern society, where men must work together at ever larger tasks and in ever larger and more complicated groupings of machines and materials, the individual binds himself to other like-minded men so that his rights may be protected and, when necessary, firmly asserted.

The union is the basis of his freedom, for it is the means by which he guards his individuality and the returns and satisfaction he receives from his labor and from living itself.

Fundamentally, trade unions were conceived as voluntary associations of economically-related workers, united for the purpose of achieving collectively a fair share of the national income.

In any society a variety of forces battle shares of the national income. The principal forces are the state, which requires taxes, the employers, who want profits, and the workers, who want as high a standard of living as is possible to get. Under a totalitarian system private employers are eliminated or suborned, and the state as the employer gets the profits of industry and trade. Theoretically, therefore, the state ought to collect less taxes and the workers ought to get a higher standard of living.

But this has never yet happened under a totalitarian government, because the costs of maintaining the bureaucracy and police necessary for the coercion and intimidation of the worker rise in an exact relationship to the diminishment and exhaustion of the worker’s power to produce. The standard of living declines; the cost and insatiable demands of the state constantly rise. Industrial servitude is the result.

Workers in the United States and workers all over the world hate slave labor. A resolution recently passed by the annual convention of the American Federation of Labor, one of the largest trade union federations in the United States, affords an excellent example of this feeling among American workers. In the strongest terms the federation urged the US government to strive for the release of prisoners of war in all countries.

In democracies organized labor performs a basic role in the development of the society. By negotiation, by conciliation and arbitration, and by strikes if necessary, working people united in trade unions have a decisive influence on how large a share of the national income labor shall receive at any given time.

More than that, organized labor has a voice in the whole political and economic development of a democratic society. Organized labor has a voice because it is the voice of the people themselves. Because labor is basic to the welfare of the society and so recognized, it speaks with authority on foreign affairs, on export and import policies, and on questions of war and peace. Democratic trade unions have true co-determination in every vital action of the state.

The far-flung tasks of trade unions cannot be fulfilled except in a democracy. Nor can the individual worker

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