

'The success of the Marshall Plan' from Le Populaire (24 November 1947)

Caption: On 24 November 1947, in an article published in the French Socialist daily newspaper Le Populaire, Jim Carey, Secretary-General of the Congress for Industrial Organisation (CIO), defends the Marshall Plan against the criticisms levelled against it by certain European trade unions.

Source: Le Populaire. 24.11.1947. Paris: Parti socialiste. "Le succès du plan Marshall", auteur:Carriche, Marc.

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The success of the Marshall Plan will be the work of the American working class, not that of Wall Street

Jim Carey was a mere 26 years old when, in 1938, he took over as General Secretary (both an administrative and political post) of the Congress for Industrial Organisation. He has kept his youthful looks. Since the CIO came out in favour of the Marshall Plan, there has been a tendency in some European trade union circles to mount personal attacks on Carey — who has championed the Plan — and, at the same time, to misrepresent the proposals for US aid to Europe.

— ‘The insinuation is that I have never taken militant action and also that I am an agent of Wall Street and the State Department,’ he told me yesterday, when he received me in his room at the George V hotel.

‘The fact is that I have been convicted no less than 27 times for my direct union activity,’ Carey continued, frowning.

— ‘As for those who want to cast a slur on my union organisation, I suggest they come and repeat their loathsome accusations, and we’ll settle the matter between us.’

We hold to the principles of international mutual aid

Carey has been sent by Philip Murray, the President of the powerful CIO, to establish contact with the Executive Bureau of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), currently meeting in Paris.

— ‘American workers’, he told me, ‘are shocked at the scant regard for their goodwill in Europe. So the Marshall Plan would just be a way of allowing US capitalism and Wall Street to take control of the European economy? And we would go along with that? Well, was it Wall Street which supplied the 11 billion dollars lent to the USSR under the Lend-Lease Act? Wall Street and our reactionary brand of capitalism had still not got beyond the “America first” slogan. And they haven’t changed yet. The same people are violently opposed to the Marshall Plan. And the 160 million dollars donated to UNRRA, surely that came from the American people, too? And did we intervene in the internal affairs of Russia, Norway or Yugoslavia?’

Carey’s indignation is real. America’s trade unionists remember the promises embodied in the Atlantic Charter. They have not forgotten the declarations made in February 1945 by their fellow unionists from other countries, meeting to form the World Federation of Trade Unions, in which they called for international cooperation and the assistance of the more fortunate nations in rebuilding the countries devastated by war.

— ‘In throwing ourselves into the task of assisting Europe, what we are trying to do is keep to the very principles of international mutual aid which were agreed by all concerned at that time. If some people now want to renounce those basic principles of international cooperation, they must go all the way and propose to the WFTU that it modify the foundations on which it was built.’

Saving the world’s peoples is to preserve peace in the world

— ‘The CIO’s aims? Philip Murray set them out in a memorandum to President Truman which was very

widely distributed in the United States. They come down to this: “helping peoples in need to raise their standard of living and enabling them to overcome their difficulties, in accordance with democratic methods and free from the pressure of poverty and destitution.”

‘Our Congress decided unanimously,’ stressed Jim Carey, ‘unanimously with the Communists, to support an aid programme which would entail no interference in the lives of the peoples assisted and no economic or political obligation.

‘President Truman approved the Murray memorandum which emphasises that point. To take an example, while we are in favour of free enterprise, we must not ask other countries to return to it. What we want is for the aid to be enough to allow Europe to be self-sufficient at last. It’s not just a matter of talking dollars and cents but of looking at the complete picture, without ever forgetting that world peace is at stake.’

At the WFTU, we are coming to talk wheat, steel and coal

Carey was concerned, in the WFTU’s Executive Bureau, to explain the CIO’s stance. The subject did not figure on the agenda, but it was agreed, on a proposal from Léon Jouhaux, that Carey’s views should be given a hearing.

— ‘I explained’, he went on to tell me, ‘what we wanted, and I asked the union organisations from every country to discuss with us the question of American aid. My remit is to supply any necessary clarification and, above all, to gather any views and suggestions that our comrades from other countries might wish to make. Hence, we shall be seeking out the CGT’s opinion at the meeting of the Franco-American union committee to be held in Paris. I do not want to talk propaganda or ideological battles with Europe’s trade unionists; I want to talk wheat, steel, coal, fertilisers, oil and equipment.

‘My hope is that the union organisations will be ready to put forward objective proposals and will not have determined their position in advance before they even know the facts.

‘And I am asking the WFTU to put American aid to Europe on the agenda for the next meeting of its Executive Bureau.’

And, indeed, it is hard to see how a union organisation wishing to further the interests of the working class could refuse to consider the CIO’s plans fairly and sincerely.

— ‘American workers are well aware’, Carey explains further, ‘that, for them, aid to Europe means delays in the construction of homes, hospitals and schools and higher prices, too, but they also understand that world stability is of more immediate importance.’

And, indeed, the measures to be taken to forestall speculation and price inflation formed part of the demands put forward by the CIO, which manifestly influenced President Truman’s recent proposals to Congress.

American generosity? Of course, we know that, for many people, aid to Europe conceals any number of selfish calculations, large and small. But we also know for sure that, for the American working class, to help Europe is to continue the task of liberation begun during the war.

And it is with all the more joy that we welcome the Marshall Plan now that we know the American working class is at our side.

Marc Carriche