Labor's Stake in Nelson Fight

By ROSE WORTIS

(Rose Wortis, for many years an outstanding rank and file leader among the Ladies Garment workers and one of the pioneer builders of the ILGWU, is today confined to her home incapacitated by serious illness. But with the help of many friends she keeps closely abreast of events).



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On Friday, Nov. 11, four days before the now "Famous Nelson Sedition Case" comes up before the U.S. Supreme Court, liberty loving citizens of the Bronx, especially trade unionists, will gather at a mass meeting in Hunt's Point Palace on the Nelshon Case. Case.

In 1954, Steve Nelson, a longtime fighter and prominent leader of the Communist Party of Pennsylvania, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment under the Pennsylvania Sedition Laws passed in 1919 after the First World War.

This trial took place at the height of the cold war hysteria, when McCarthy was riding roughshod over the Bill of Rights and the fundamental American Liberties. He was convicted on the testimony of paid informers, among them Matt Cvetic who has twice been committed to a mental institution. The charges were that he adovcated the forceful overthrow of the U.S. Government, a charge hurled against anyone who refuses to conform to the McCarthy-Jenner conception of Americanism.

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THE 20-YEAR SENTENCE was so outrageous that even during these days of terror and intimidation it aroused considerable concern. The conviction was such a mockery of justice that it was later reversed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which ruled that Federal Laws now on the statute books supersede State sedition laws.

The Coal and Steel Barons, who rule the State of Pennsylvania, did not allow the case to rest. Together with reactionaries and "State Righters" of other states they appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. To our shame, the state of N.Y. is included among them.

The reasons are obvious in the first place, they are determined to get Steve Nelson. Steve comes from a family that has experienced the brutal exploitation terror of the early days of the development of American industry. From his early youth, he worked in the mines, mills and factories to earn a livelihood and help support his family, but this was not his only concern. Everywhere he went, he brought the message of unionism, the spirit of true Democracy to the American workers.

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THOUSANDS of workers will testify that Steve was the first one to talk unionism to them, teach them how to organize, to give them hope and inspiration, which finally led to emergence of a powerful labor movement in the basic industries.

During the great depression in the thirties, Steve helped organize, and led demonstrations of the unemployed for work, relief and unemployment insurance. He did a yeoman's job in raising support for the striking coal miners and other workers, fought in the battlefield of Spain against fascism and proved himself a sincere friend of the Negro people and their struggles for equality.

Steve never stopped to think how these activities would affect his personal fortunes. His thoughts were always with the working class, with the common people. He identified his interests and the solution of his own problems with the workers as a whole.

On the basis of his record, and the contributions he made to the development of the Labor and Peoples Movement, he merits the support of every unionist irrespective of political beliefs, because it is an act of elementary class solidarity to bring freedom to this champion of the working class.

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THERE IS MUCH MORE at stake in the fight for the Supreme Court to throw out the Nelson Case. The Steve Nelson Case presents a great danger to the organized labor movement. If his conviction is allowed to stand, it will open the way for the use of this legislation by the powerful anti-labor forces against the organized labor movement.

As far back as 1919, Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL, characterized this bill as an act "aimed at further curbing the rights of workers and the masses of the people."

It would open the way for the reactionary anti-labor forces in the States to enact labor legislation which they dare not bring before the U.S. Congress.

It would help to validate State anti-picketing laws, imperil the union shop and nullify other gains achieved by labor through many years of struggle.

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IT IS no wonder that even conservative unionists, men and women from the legal profession and from other fields of endeavor, recognize the implications of the Nelson Case and have added their voices and their efforts in the fight to get the Supreme Court to uphold the Bill of Rights.

The workers of New York, who have always been in the forefront in every struggle against reaction, should take the Nelson Case as their own. Our immediate responsibility is to make the Hunt's Point Palace meeting a high point in the drive to defend civil rights.

The Nov. 11 rally at Hunt's Point Palace will be addressed not only by Steve Nelson, but also by prominent fighters for civil liberties such as Prof. Scott Nearing, Nore Stanton Barney (granddaughter of the famous leader of women's rights), William L. Patterson, CRC secretary, and George Blake Charney, one of the victims of the Smith Act.

Help make this meeting a success. Bring your contribution toward the $15,000 fund needed to win this fight.