


The Shop Crafts Revolt.

By H. M. Wicks

 FOUR hundred delegates from the United States and Canada, representing various railway shop crafts, held a three-day convention in Pulaski Hall, Chicago, Sept. 25, 26 and 27. All the crafts employed in the railway shops, consisting of carmen, boiler-makers, machinists, sheet metal workers, electrical workers, maintenance of way men and even the clerks, were represented by delegates.

The purpose of the convention was to devise means of dealing with the reactionary officials of their organizations who had refused to call a strike for wage increases for journeymen from 65 cents to 85 cents an hour and for helpers from 45 to 65 cents an hour, after over 90 per cent of the organized crafts employed in this industry had voted for the strike. The officials of the unions entered into an agreement with the government for an increase of four cents per hour for a period of three months. At the end of that time the proposition was to be again brought before the unions for action. The three months' clause was inserted in order to give President Wilson "sufficient time to reduce the cost of living."

Many stormy discussions took place on the floor, and during the first two days there was much talk of secession from the craft organizations and the formation of a union representing the federated crafts. Finally a resolution was presented for the establishment of a dual organization, which was defeated by a very narrow margin. The debate on this resolution brought out the fact that most of the delegates were opposed to the reactionary A. F. of L., but when it came to any definite solution of the problem of dealing with that machine there was no unanimity of opinion. Although the convention was presided over by men who had been expelled from the organizations affiliated with the A. F. of L., the principal argument against a dual organization seemed to be that as that organization had been a shelter for them in the past, they should not destroy it, but endeavor to "repair" it; so it would be a more efficient "shelter" in the future. Speeches comparing the A. F. of L. to a house with a leaky roof, and suggestions as to how to proceed to repair the roof, drew applause from most of the delegates on the floor.

After the attempt to put through the dual organization resolution failed the convention became more and more conservative, and the speeches, which had been of a mildly radical tinge in the early sessions, took on the character of any pure and simple craft union convention. Their one grievance was finally disposed of by passing a resolution to call a strike for November 1, in case their demands were not granted.

Conspicuous among those who assisted the convention toward reaction were a number of Socialist Party workers, under the leadership of one John Collins of Chicago, representing the New York Central Shop. Instead of trying to formulate a program of revolutionary organization, this Socialist introduced a resolution asking that a message be sent to the president of the railway employes'

department at Washington asking his immediate resignation. This idiotic motion was tabled amid the laughter of the few men there who understood the class struggle.

A number of resolutions were introduced, and on Saturday the resolution committee combined them into one resolution embodying the following demands:

1. That the rank and file be given the right to vote on the election of officers of the American Federation of Labor.

2. The right to decide its policy by popular vote.

3. The immediate resignation of all labor representatives from government commissions.

4. The immediate release of all conscientious objectors and political prisoners.

5. Withdrawal of all military, financial and moral support to any faction in Russian affairs.

6. Nationalization of all vital industries under the Plumb plan.

7. The inauguration of a national cooperative system of distribution.

8. A policy of economic group action on the political field.

9. The formation of a national political party representative of the two great economic groups of farmers and workers.

The representatives of the labor politicians who are busily engaged in the organization of the Labor Party were there and secured the endorsement of their party. The co-called Socialist delegates put up no argument against it, some of them even favoring it.

On Saturday morning, after endorsing the strike of the steel workers and the policemen's strike at Boston, a communication was read from the Triple Alliance of the transport workers, railway workers and miners of Great Britain, which offered a wonderful opportunity for revolutionary propaganda and education had there been anyone on the floor capable of presenting the arguments. The communication declared that the organized workers of Great Britain had heretofore devoted themselves exclusively "to economic and industrial action of the workers," but that their recent experiences had taught them the necessity for political organization against the state of the ruling class. They illustrated their political activity by calling attention to preparations being made for a mass strike against intervention in Russia and against conscription. The communication concluded by expressing the hope that the workers of this country would not permit America to be the stronghold of capitalist reaction.

The reactionaries were immediately on the floor, and stated that, while they endorsed such action for Britain, there was no necessity for such action in this land of democracy. All the speeches on the communication from Britain emphasized the fact that the railway shop crafts were not in opposition to the policy of the government, and that they were all

patriotic citizens who would never think of using their industrial organizations for political purposes. The chairman of the resolutions committee recommended the endorsement of the demands of the Triple Alliance in Britain, and added that "those demands are not the demands of this body." The convention finally agreed to send greetings to the strikers of Great Britain.

The only other subject that aroused a great deal of heated discussion was the resolution asking for amnesty for political and industrial prisoners. A number of reactionaries contended the endorsement of such a resolution would be an insult to the "patriotic Americans who fought in France," and that a real American labor organization should be in favor of long terms in prison for those who "obstructed the operations of the government during the war." A few mild mannered radicals secured the floor and spoke in opposition to that sentiment, but not one of them mentioned the possibilities of using the mass power of the workers for the liberation of political prisoners.

The convention was a disappointment to many who expected firm and intelligent action against the reactionary policy of the A. F. of L., and it was clearly apparent that in principles and tactics it was absolutely dominated by typical trades unionists, who were temporarily disgruntled at the action of certain groups of their officials.

Steel and Life.

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more than the greater accumulation of capital, which means the ever greater demand for tributes of profits! Because if the greater production were consumed by the workers, without exaction of profit, that would be for capital to commit suicide. There is only one way to end the vicious circle, and that way is to end the taking of profits.

An organized working class is arising, conscious of its destiny to rule society. Its demands for the fullness of life must quickly become the demand for a workers' industrialism, freed from the profit cancer.

It is out of the immediate struggles, like the steel strike here and the railroad strike in England, that this power and understanding of the workers must develop. There is a manhood and courage on the part of the strikers which asserts itself against tremendously favored opposition.

The unrest of today is the birth pangs of the new civilization. There is yet to be an Age of Steel, when the ruddy ore shall be converted into the building of the dwellings of free workmen.

The carriers of the new civilization are the "hunkies" who live in the miserable shacks, and who work from dark to dark. The truth will lead them out of the darkness into the sunlight, the truth of their class power and of their way to freedom.