

The A. F. of L. Convention

By Maurice Spector

Of organized opposition there was an almost complete absence at this year's convention of the American Federation of Labor in Toronto. Neither the Left Wing nor the so-called Muste progressive group were in evidence. The internationally notorious hierarchy of "business unionism" reigned supreme and unchallenged from the floor. Yet the old hard-boiled arrogance of which Gompers was the incarnation, seemed noticeably shaken on occasion. As much as it would like to, the bureaucracy of the A. F. of L. can as little as Mussolini succeed in putting a stop to the class struggle. Fighting exploitation bravely and desperately, the awakening of the South at Gastonia, Marion and Elizabethton, became by virtue of their role the sort of opposition that could not easily be ignored, proclaiming more forcefully than a hundred resolutions, the bankruptcy of the bureaucrats.

This bankruptcy is becoming so flagrant and obvious that it begins to make the wiser heads of the American bourgeoisie feel uncomfortable. The Scripps-Howard press carried so pointed and well-informed an editorial attack on the A. F. of L. failure to function as a labor organization, that it made the officialdom wince, stinging that would-be statesman Green into public recrimination. The attitude of the liberal press is understandable. It regards "moderate" trade unionism as a safety-valve, a bulwark against revolutionary movement, a pillar of capitalist society. If the A. F. of L. ceases even to perform the duties of "moderate" trade unionism, and merely duplicates the activity of the National Civic Federation, or say, the American Legion, the Left Wing is given a clear field in which to proceed with the militant organization and leadership of the working class. The activities of the Communists in Passaic, New Bedford, and more recently in Gastonia have made a considerable impression on the more far-sighted circles of the possessing classes.

The liberal view was echoed on the floor of the convention by the "old-war horse" Furuseth and by Fitzpatrick of the Vaudeville Actors. Furuseth taunted the officialdom with having become soft and comfortable and made a veiled attack particularly on J. L. Lewis, for the latter's cowardly attitude in the 1919 strike when he refused to fight the federal injunction on the ground that "we cannot fight our government". In the interests of "the sound A. F. of L. philosophy" Fitzpatrick called for an injection of some of the spirit manifested by "the fanatical Communists who are willing to suffer, bleed and die for their unsound philosophy". He was also of the opinion that "our mission is not to found banks and life insurance companies, but to be the refuge of the desperate workers who have no other place to turn."

Under the lash of the Southern events, the bureaucracy had to conduct the necessary manoeuvres to save its face. The convention resolved to raise funds immediately from the international unions and to call a conference within thirty days to map out an organizing campaign into the southern states. Past experience teaches us to accept these gusty resolutions of the machine with a good deal of salt. Similar gestures were made in 1927 in connection with the Pittsburgh coal conference, and at divers times in connection with organizing campaigns in the automobile industry. Green and Company are not over-joyed at the militancy of the Southern workers. In the very midst of discussing the southern situation, Green raised his voice to warn them that "they must not lightly go on strike" expecting the A. F. of L. to pour millions in to help them.

The labor bureaucrats have no stomach for the class struggle. Their ideal is to "sell the trade union movement" (their phrase!) to the boss peacefully, as one businessman to another. Their hearts are in class-collaboration, in "union-management cooperation" in banks and in life insurance companies. They are seriously concerned not about fighting the injunction but in the graft of jurisdictional struggles. Their own security and salaries are first charges on the organization. Militant wage struggles or struggles for unionization disturb the even tenor of their lives and are as far as possible to be avoided. It is with real relief that they welcomed the turn in the needle trades situation that temporarily gives the Rights the upper hand and Schlesinger-Dubinsky were congratulated for having "wiped out the vestiges of Communism" among

the fur workers and garment workers. Incidentally it was broadly hinted that negotiations are under way for the admission of Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Sidney Hillman would fit in nowadays and could even teach the others a few tricks of his own about the scientific exploitation of the worker.

The bureaucrats were right in their element listening to Sir Henry Thornton of the Canadian National Railway deliver a eulogy of union-management cooperation of the B. and O. Plan. Sir Henry, whose salary has just been boosted to \$90,000 a year, had little difficulty in proving that "cooperation" was very satisfactory—for employers. It brought greater efficiency and higher production, of that there could be no doubt. He discreetly omitted to add that it brought no corresponding increases in pay, no improvement of conditions, or greater regularity of employment. As a matter of fact, just about the time Thornton was dilating on cooperation, more men were being laid off in the Canadian National Railway yards.

Fresh from his "good-will" conversations with Hoover, "fellow-workman" Ramsay MacDonald was another guest to the convention and treated it to a goodly modicum of his swollen and meaningless pacifist verbiage. He was hailed with delight. The A. F. of L. bureaucracy never fails to take its cue from the State Department. Momentarily, American imperialism finds it most advantageous to advance its interests under the guise of the Kellogg Pact, naval disarmament conferences, etc. Meanwhile the antagonism between British and American capital for the shrinking world market is growing and maturing the condition for another world war. In these circumstances, the organization of the working class for resistance to the war danger by exposing its roots in capitalism and imperialism, should be a major task of the trade union movement. Instead, Green and his fellow-bureaucrats play the pseudo-pacifist game of the American Government as they played its war game in the past and will assuredly re-enact the part of the "patriot" Gompers in the future. When Bodenheimer, commander of the American Legion fulfilled his share of the division of labor by appealing for support of greater preparedness, a bigger navy and universal conscription, Green gently chided him for being out of step which does not mean that he himself is not prepared to be as openly imperialist as Bodenhamer when the amenities next require it, say at the Plattsburg manoeuvres.

Comrade Rakovsky's Appeal - - Stalin's Reply

The capitulation of Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smiga has just provoked a decisive reply. Comrades Rakovsky, Kassior and Okudjava have written and circulated an appeal to the Opposition. It is a rather extensive document. It begins with an analysis of the situation in the present period and is then devoted, for the most part, to a severe and unreserved denunciation of the capitulators, Radek and Co.

The appeal has been the object of a profound discussion in the circles of the deported; it has played an important role in the consanguation of the forces of the Opposition. In spite of the difficulties that the Stalinist régime puts in the way of communication between the deported Oppositionists, it is already known that by August 20th more than a half a hundred of the colonies now made up of the "Siberians" have rallied to the appeal of Rakovsky. Among the first adhesions is cited that of Muralov.

Those of our comrades who are at present in the Tcheliabinsky solitary—there are over a hundred of them—declared themselves, with Sosnovsky at their head, unanimously in solidarity with the signatories to the appeal. On the other hand, a draft of a declaration by I. N. Smirnov who takes over, by mitigating them, certain portions of the shameful letter of Radek has been approved by only four colonies of the deported.

I. N. Smirnov has been unsteady for some time now. Gentle and conciliatory by temperament, he constantly strives to create buffer groups in the hope of avoiding any break. In the present situation his efforts are condemned to live in vain. Those who are in touch with him say that he gives the impression of a man bewildered.

The response made to Rakovsky's appeal shows that the repression, aggravated as it has become recently, will not succeed in shattering the Opposition. The press is even obliged to acknowledge tacitly that in spite of some loud capitulations, the Opposition is growing stronger. Thus was announced a few days ago the expulsion in Odessa of 23 members of the Party for "Trotskyism."

Do not allow yourself to be impressed by the clamor that is being made about the capitulations. If there are some who go away, the greater part remain loyal and they frequently receive the reinforcement of newcomers.—N. B. Moscow, September 1929.

Sooner after the receipt of this letter from Moscow, we were informed of the following subsequent developments:

The Stalinist repression did not delay very long. Rakovsky, who was at Saratov, was at first imprisoned and then shipped to Siberia, at Barnaul, where other Oppositionists had preceded him. Barnaul is located on the left bank of the Obi river, about 300 miles or so south of Tomsk.

Christian Rakovsky has again found, under the Stalinist régime, the life that was his before the Russian

No. A. F. of L. convention would be complete without jurisdictional squabbles of mutual charges of corruption. The feature this year was the set-to between Lewis and Fishwick of the Illinois district. Each accused the other of corruption. Fishwick sent a wire to the convention proposing that both Lewis' and his own books be submitted to an audit, to be followed by the resignation of whichever's books were discovered not to be straight. Fishwick could have made this confident offer less from any exuberant consciousness of his own integrity as from an overpowering certitude of Lewis' corruption. Needless to say, Fishwick's telegram was ignored.

The reactionary character of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy was well demonstrated in its advocacy of old-age pensions. Not that the adoption of this decision was in itself a backward step; on the contrary. But the fact that so elementary a reform of labor conditions, which exists in one manner or other in numerous countries, could be advocated only after so much sharp controversy and then hailed as a "revolutionary forward step" of the A. F. of L. leadership, speaks eloquently of the deep-seated nature of this leadership's backwardness.

There have been worse conventions of the A. F. of L. than this. It met under the sign of a growing mood of struggle among the workers, which had inevitably to be reflected in the temper of the convention. But the reflection of this mood in Toronto was a perverted one, a distortion, a caricature. Whole oceans separate the speeches of Green on the textile situation in the South and the sharp reality of the struggles there. When the bureaucrats take "one step forward" it is quite certain that the workers have already taken two or three or ten such steps, so that Green and Wolls continue to remain behind the spirit and actions of the workers, always pulling them backward. The failure or refusal to understand this role of the trade union bureaucracy will nurture the baseless illusions about their "regeneration" which have become current in certain "progressive" circles.

The sectarian policy of the Communists and Left Wing on the one hand, and the timidity of the new progressive movement resulted in a total absence of a single voice at the convention that could speak out in condemnation of the destruction wrought by the present leadership in the labor movement, of the ruination of its strongest unions, of the enormous set-backs in numerical strength and influence precisely in this period. It was open season for the bureaucrats of all shades, with no competition present. The work that has thus far been neglected by the Left wing must be begun in earnest.

revolution. Born in 1873, he is to be found successively, beginning with 1890, in all the countries of Europe and everywhere the story is ended in the same way; by expulsion. No country wants to have anything to do with this dangerous agitator. Both Rumania and Bulgaria demand the province where he was born, the Dobrudja, but neither wants Rakovsky. Even as Soviet ambassador to Paris, he was judged undesirable. Briand sent him back to Moscow, and a little while later Stalin deported him to Astrachan, then to Saratov and now to Barnaul, after a short time in prison.

At the beginning of the war, when one of the French pillars of Stalinism today, Marcel Cachin, charged by the French government with a mission, brought money to Mussolini (who had been driven from *Avanti!*) so that he might found the jingoist *Popolo d'Italia*, Rakovsky wrote to Charles Dumas:

"We are and we remain partisans of the good old tactic of the class struggle and we repudiate with all our strength that of class collaboration. We Rumanian socialists wish to remain with revolutionary socialism which was, yesterday, the source of our strength, and we wish to continue in the future the struggle against the war and against opportunism."

Hounded under the Rumanian boyars, the French bourgeoisie, or the Stalinist bureaucracy, the life of Christian Rakovsky is an example of fidelity to socialism.

Our Russian Organ

The first three numbers of the BULLETIN OF THE OPPOSITION, published in the Russian language, have arrived in the United States. They contain the most important documents and writings of the leaders of the Russian Opposition, L. D. Trotsky, Rakovsky, Sosnovsky and many others, in addition to contributions by the Opposition leaders in various countries. Russian readers will want to get this important publication (40 pages). Many of the articles will not appear in the English language, in the *Militant*, for a while yet, and Russian readers therefore have an opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with the program and writings of the leader of the Opposition, Leon Trotsky and others of the Leninist-Bolsheviks.

The third number (October issue) contains a lengthy brochure by L. D. Trotsky, entitled, THE DEFENSE OF THE SOVIET REPUBLIC AND THE OPPOSITION.

The magazine can be purchased through the MILITANT, Box 120, Madison Square Station, New York, N. Y. at 25 cents per copy, bundle rates at 18 cents and subscriptions at \$2.00 per year.

MINNEAPOLIS MEETING

The Minneapolis Branch of the Communist League of America (Opposition) will hold a mass meeting in celebration of the 12th Year of the Anniversary of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution on Thursday November 7th, 1929 at the Labor Lyceum Hall No. 2. All workers are cordially invited.

THE MILITANT

Published twice a month by the Communist League of America (Opposition)

Address all mail to: P. O. Box 120, Madison Square Station, New York, N. Y.

Publisher address: 332 E. 18th Street, New York, N.Y.

Subscription rate: 1.00 per year. Foreign \$1.50

5c per copy Bundle rates, 3c per copy.

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VOL. II NOVEMBER 1, 1929 No. 17.

Entered as second-class mail matter November 28, 1928, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879