

EDITORIAL

The A. F. of L. Convention, the Strike Wave and Trade Union Perspectives

The 53rd annual convention of the American Federation of Labor convened at a turning point in the life of the labor movement when the resurgent forces of new life, thrust forward by the powerful impulsion of the class struggle, are beginning to push their way through the dry crust and restraining forms of conservative trade unionism.

The new masses who are sweeping into the trade union movement, heralding their arrival by tumultuous struggles, are without any direct representation at the convention. The strike wave, the great, new, vital and determining factor in the labor movement, lacks an authentic spokesman there. But this dread spectre is present all the time and dominates the proceedings.

The Real Program of Roosevelt

The real design behind the benevolence of the Roosevelt administration towards union organization was brought out more sharply and clearly at the convention. They want a trade union movement that will be an instrument to restrain the workers, to prevent strikes and to suppress and outlaw the strikes that do occur.

The New Factor in the Labor Movement

But the outward manifestations at Washington are by no means an accurate reflection of the situation within the A. F. of L., and still less of the present-day labor movement in its broader aspects. Against the policy and intentions of the capitalist politicians and their labor allies, as revealed at the Washington convention, the new outstanding developments must be considered—the influx of hundreds of thousands of new workers into the unions, the formation within a few months' time of 500 new federal unions, the insistent demand for the industrial union form of organization to meet the needs of the newly organized masses.

They are an essential part of the "proceedings" of the 53rd convention of the A. F. of L. And in addition to that, the thunder of the strike wave outside the door also belongs in the record. An appreciation of the present situation in the trade union movement, and of the A. F. of L. convention as a distorted reflection of it, is possible only if these factors are taken into account and given due weight and importance.

All of this is projected on the basis of a strike wave of such dimensions as has not been seen in recent times and which, in our judgment, is only a curtain raiser of what is to follow. The bosses and their political and trade union agents apparently have the same opinion. They have enunciated their program at the A. F. of L. convention. The labor movement itself, that is, the real movement of the masses, has not yet worked out an estimation of the perspective and a program of its own.

insurgent militancy of the strike wave are especially portentous as to what is to follow if the workers fail to get satisfaction of their demands.

Trade Unionism - - After the Collapse of the NRA

And this, in our opinion, is precisely what is going to happen. The attempt of the Roosevelt administration to "plan" industry on a basis of capitalist private ownership is inevitably doomed to a resounding collapse, and that very probably in the near future. With that, and with the failure also to satisfy the expectations of the workers which were aroused by the ballyhoo campaign of the NRA, will come a tremendous disillusionment of the workers and a rapidly increasing tendency, on their part to resort to more aggressive struggles; to rely on their own strength and organization.

Then, as has already been clearly intimated in the threatening speeches of Roosevelt and Johnson at the Washington convention, the benevolent mask of the Roosevelt administration will be taken off. The unions they encouraged, and even coddled, as long as they thought they could serve as "harness" will meet open opposition from the government.

The capitalist attack against the trade unions as organs of struggle will be carried inside the unions. Green, Lewis & Co. will be called upon to purge the organizations of their militant elements and restore the unions to conservative and respectable docility.

New Struggles within the Unions

The trade unions, swelling into larger proportions by the influx of new members on one side, will witness wholesale expulsions and splits, engendered by the reactionary bureaucracy, on the other. Insurgent workers who insist on striking—the "horses" that "refuse to work in harness"—will meet the condemnation of the labor bureaucracy.

The fact that already today hundreds of thousands of workers are streaming into the trade unions is in itself a fact of incalculable significance. The workers are on the move. That is what is new, that is what is important in the situation. The trade union is the first and most elementary form of working class organization, for which no substitute has ever been invented.

The Task of the Militants

This movement of the masses into the trade unions can be seriously influenced only from within. From this it follows: Get into the unions. Stay there. Work within.

Before any serious development of a revolutionary organization can be expected in America this penetration of the trade unions must begin in earnest. The militants who undertake this task now, after all the discredit brought to the name of Communism by the Stalinists, will labor under a double handicap. The complete and unchallenged supremacy of the reactionaries in the trade union leadership; the weight of the government and of all capitalist propaganda and repressive forces on their side; the popular hostility to Communism and the relationship of forces in general—these circumstances alone will constitute huge obstacles at the beginning.

The labor fakery will start new expulsion campaigns against the radicals the movement their influence is felt again in the mass movement. It is folly to think that the task of penetrating the mass trade unions, under the given conditions, and of reconstituting a vigorous Left wing within them can be accomplished with brass bands playing and banners flying. Quiet and persistent work, and loyal cooperation with all progressive-minded workers who want to build fighting unions—this simple prescription stands first in order. The rest will follow.

We give no pledge to refrain from revolutionary activity in the unions or to turn our backs on "outlaw" strikes. We leave such trade union tactics to opportunists and traitors. It is our aim, on the contrary, to be with the masses, especially at the moment of their sharpest collisions with the capitalists, whatever form these collisions may take. In order that this association with the revolting masses can have a fruitful revolutionary influence, it has to begin now by an entrenchment of the militant and class conscious elements in the A. F. of L. unions and the formation of a Left wing within them.

Notes of the Week

SAID THE MAD HATTER

When you hear about the great need of killing 1,000,000 hogs to help the Drive toward Prosperity, you will, no doubt, look up and wonder. A sneaking suspicion will grow within you that there is something cockeyed with a system that requires such waste to keep going.

You look around you. Eleven million hungry men are still pounding the pavements, unemployed. The bright fellows in the government's brain trust keep on tinkering up all kinds of plans to keep the grain crop down, to curtail the live stock. They have to. The leaders of this system that we call capitalism tell them we have too much.

That's the big trouble with us. We have too much. That is why eleven million men must starve.

Odd enough, every worker will admit to himself, and keep wondering, but sometimes the mad hatters of capitalism carry their crazy talk and topsy-turvy ideas so far that the worker can't just stop with mere wondering.

The other day, for instance, Mr. Gerard Swope, a big bun among the boss class, the head of General Electric and a member of the NIRA board, was caught thinking aloud. He was comparing the NIRA with the Russian five year plan. Said Mr. Swope:

"The Soviets started from scratch. They had no industry, no financial structure, no problems of overproduction such as we had to deal with.... Their economic problem is comparatively easy."

The Soviets, under Lenin and Trotsky, took over a country forlorn, neglected and backward, the ruins of an empire misruled by medieval despots. Its industry lay in ruins and devastated, the wreckage of a criminally futile and disastrous war. A hostile capitalist world surrounded Workers' Russia. When that world could not put it down by force of sword, the international boss class tried to cut off Russia's credits, its sources of economic life. It was still another attempt to throttle it. In the cockeyed world of Mr. Swope.... "Their economic problem is comparatively simple", but....

"But over here we have an overdeveloped economic and industrial pattern.... That has been a colossal task with which Russia never had to be bothered."

The United States entered the world war a debtor nation. It came out of it the outstanding creditor nation, the dominant world power. Its industries surpassed in wealth and technical progress those of all other countries. Its rulers became the real dictators in a war-ridden Europe. Its resources—unlimited. A whole world stood ready to do its bidding. It had everything. "That has been a colossal task with which Russia never had to be bothered."

Help! We've got too much, cries this loon. And you've got to do more than just wonder this time. Because there is some reason in his madness this time. Says Mr. Swope—of the Soviets:

"When they need more coal they expand their mines, put more men in them and produce. The same is true of mills and other industrial structures." They do the job.

But over here, in NIRA America, "with all the natural (?) human jealousies that go with it," "different groups strive for different advantages, and in many cases with little regard for the general good."

Here you can't do the job. You've got all the tools and all the materials, but you can't do the job. "Different groups strive for different advantages, and in many cases with little regard for the general good."

Mr. Swope knows his capitalistic greed, the system of profit and greed, of wasteful competition and industrial anarchy.

That is the big difficulty over here. That is what stands in the way of solving the problem in the U. S. A. And Mr. Swope tells you—that's the only thing that stands in the way. In so many words.

-G...n

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Two Congresses «Against War»

The New York Barbusse Movement and the «People's Council» of 1917

(Continued from last issue)

But the final resolution of the New York convention—is that a pacifist document? Merely to ask such a question is to display a vast gullibility. What do the words of this cooked-up resolution matter? Those who voted for it include not only the Stalinists, but persons whose avowed policy is to "promote peace between religious, classes and races" or "who are opposed to every kind of war"—and similar class collaborationist, reactionary pacifist clap-trap. What possible resolution can be adopted jointly by such elements and genuinely revolutionary elements? Nothing but a document of deceit, of sham, a mere collection of words strung together on a Stalinist string to serve as a noose for the militant proletariat and its fight against imperialist war.

The United Front and War So you are opposed to the united front? Not at all. In the first place, a genuine united front, and not an indecent burlesque, would start off with an open appeal by the Communist International for a conference with the Second International, the Amsterdam International, the independent organizations, the syndicalists and the International Left Opposition, to discuss a minimum program—and not to set up a special organization. In the second place, a united front with sincerely pacifist elements can never be organized to fight war in general, or even imperialist war as such. The pacifists are totally incapable of even starting such a fight, and the duty of the Communists is to say so plainly. A united front with such groups can be confined to nothing more than concrete questions of the moment, can be

maintained only for a brief time, and cannot, must not, take the form of a united organization. Anything else means a bastardized "anti-war" movement, a cruel misrepresentation, a deliberate fraud, a wax figure that melts as soon as events warm up a little.

Hasn't that already been demonstrated in less than a year? What did the Amsterdam movement do to halt the progress of Fascism in Germany? NOT A THING? What genuine, virile mass movement is it setting in motion now to ward off the insolent attacks upon the Soviet Union by Japanese imperialism? NONE AT ALL! The truth is that it is bankrupt, as impotent, as misleading as the Stalinist term which brought it into being.

The Left Opposition does not conceal for an instant its attitude towards this monstrosity perpetrated upon the militant working class. Our position towards it is not a new one. It is identical with that of the Left wing a generation ago, which had to combat similar manifestations of opportunism, treachery and bureaucracy in the Socialist parties of that time. We can therefore do nothing better here than to quote with approval the views of the Left wing in the Socialist party with regard to the People's Council sixteen years ago, expressed in the official organ of the Left, The Class Struggle (Sept.-Oct., 1917). With hardly the change of a phrase, it applies word for word to the problem in hand.

The Left Wing in 1917 "The Socialist party in its support of the People's Council has again made a tactical error of the first importance. Indeed, the tragedy of the situation is seen in the circumstance that our party has

practically lost its identity nationally as a force against the war. All its anti-war activity is virtually centered in the People's Council, an organization that does not accept revolutionary action, and the conversation of which, moreover, is strengthened by the party bureaucrats dominant in its management. The People's Council is being used by the Socialist party officials to make votes for the party. This may succeed, temporarily, but its ultimate effect will be to make recruits for the Comintern-Sparto party of "practical" social reform.... It is easy to enthusiastically accept the People's Council. The more difficult task, indispensable, is to cleave to fundamentals and express our own independent action in our own revolutionary way as adherents of international socialism."

Let the fate of the Socialist party and its "People's Council" serve as a grisly warning! The August 4th of the Comintern in Germany already indicates the fate to which the Barbusse movement has been doomed from its inception. M. S.

P. S.—The call for the New York conference started out by welcoming "the step taken by Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair." Not one of these three dragon slayers was even present at the congress! Sinclair is running for governor of California on the Democratic ticket. Dreiser has endorsed the Roosevelt program. Anderson follows in his footsteps. Shouldn't it begin to be clear now where the "heads" of the "historic congress" have been pulling its "body"—to say nothing of its Stalinist posterior? —MAX SHACHTMAN.

On Gompers

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misleaders like Gompers and Mitchell, this Civic Federation was an open class-collaboration agency consecrated to the idea of "the partnership of labor and capital", to the settling of strikes at the expense of the workers and to blocking the road to organization of the unorganized. Through this organization and together with the kings and barons of finance and industry Gompers waged a bitter struggle against socialism within and without the American Federation of Labor. As president of this organization he was instrumental in betraying the steel strike of 1901 and numerous strikes thereafter. The membership of Gompers in this capitalist organization and his concurrent presidency of the American Federation of Labor is keenly symbolic of his role of the guardian, the watchdog of the interests of the capitalist class in the labor movement.

Against the I. W. W. this evil genius of labor unleashed the virus of his hatred. That the I. W. W. was championing the cause of the oppressed and challenging the strongholds of trustified capital meant nothing for Gompers. They were reds, "against the government" and he was out to destroy the I. W. W. When the U. T. W. militants acted as strikebreakers at Lawrence in 1912 to stamp out the militant battle led by the I. W. W., Gompers condoned the act. The same at Paterson in 1913 by a back-door agreement with the bosses. With remarkable indifference Gompers ignored the bloody massacre of the striking coal miners in Ludlow Colorado by the Rockefeller interests. Similarly with the St. Bartholomew's night in the copper strike in Calumet, Michigan.

Against Industrial Unionism... Gompers detested the I. W. W. as much for their industrial form of organization, which cut across the lines of craft and encompassed the mass of unskilled, as for their burning creed of class struggle. The consistent policy of Gompers was to divide the organized workers into innumerable segments, to rip the labor movement asunder with wasteful jurisdictional disputes. To this every day the American Federation of Labor is torn by fruitless jurisdictional bickerings—the seed sown by Gompers is still sprouting its rotten fruits.

"Non-Partisan" Politics In politics as in the trade unions, Gompers earned the statue erected to him in Washington. Here he chained labor to the political chariot of the capitalist class—the Republican and Democratic Gold-Trust twins of Big business. By the slogan of "Reward your friends" Gompers made labor the groveling lick-spittle of the political representatives of the bosses. He shielded away from a party for the workers like leprosy, only to maintain a corps of toadying lobbyists who crawled on all fours for favors

from the standpat parties of the master class.

A Recruiting Sergeant For Capitalist War

It was quite appropriate that Gompers should be the recruiting sergeant for the American Imperialist plunderbund holding the American workers in line for the slaughter for profits they were prosecuting in Europe. The capitalists made certain there would be no trouble from the workers when they entered the war by immediately enlisting the only-too-willing services of Gompers. He secured a declaration from the A. F. of L. pledging its support of the government in the war in the event of United States' participation. Gompers was a member of the Council of National Defense created in 1916, and was influential in priming American public opinion to war consciousness.

Prior to and even after the outbreak of the war to make the world safe for bigger and better profits there was a large pacifist sentiment in this country and in the labor organizations. This would never get into the hands of the capitalist heart into the patriotic campaign into driving the workers into the Morgans' carnage. It was the strongholds of trustified capital meant nothing for Gompers. They were reds, "against the government" and he was out to destroy the I. W. W. When the U. T. W. militants acted as strikebreakers at Lawrence in 1912 to stamp out the militant battle led by the I. W. W., Gompers condoned the act. The same at Paterson in 1913 by a back-door agreement with the bosses. With remarkable indifference Gompers ignored the bloody massacre of the striking coal miners in Ludlow Colorado by the Rockefeller interests. Similarly with the St. Bartholomew's night in the copper strike in Calumet, Michigan.

If the war was to be a success there must be a docile, unrebelling, hard working proletariat in the home country and Gompers was the man for that. A member of the War Labor Board he watched hawklike that there be no strikes during the war; and if such broke loose in spite of him, Gompers had a machine to hamstring the workers' struggle for whom exploitation grew more intense in times of war. And for this service Roosevelt is patting him on his plaudits when he says that "it was his (Gompers') patriotic leadership for the unanimous mobilization of the workers in every part of the union which supplemented the mobilization of the men who went to the front". A monument to Gompers in Washington—little crosses on the battlefields of France for the workers who fought for Wall Street's gold.

In His Dotage—Fighting the "Reds"

For Gompers the war did not end with the declaration of the armistice in November 1918—not the class war, to be sure; he had long ceased to recognize that. Under the cry that the war was still on Gompers and Lewis, frightened white by the invocation of the Lever Act declaring the coal strike outlaw, drove 425,000 coal miners back to the pits. Gompers did everything in his power to sabotage the great steel strike of 1919 and he finally succeeded in putting the rebellious steel workers "in the corral".

Samuel Gompers spent his dotage in a fitting manner—fighting reds. Here he was the fury of old age incarnated. Part and parcel of the post-war red hysteria, Gompers did his "bit" to preserve "American institutions" from the Bolsheviks. He hunted the Communists and expelled the Left wingers from the A. F. of L.

The American workers will remember this labor lieutenant of the capitalist class with an oath of hate on their lips after the proletariat of this country crosses the pinnacle of power it will write this inscription under the monument in Washington: "Samuel Gompers—the Evil Genie of the American Labor Movement." —GEORGE CLARKE.

Cuban Gov't

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But this victory and the failure of the workers to raise their struggle to the plane of the contest for state power placed the Left wing of the petty bourgeoisie in power. There, of course, they cannot long remain. Below, the workers refuse to be satisfied with programmatic promises which supplement pledges to the imperialist wolves that their souls and property will be respected. The workers are taking over mills and mines as guarantees of their demands for higher pay and better conditions, setting up workers' committees to run them and here and there they are setting up Soviets and organizing a Red Guard. All this constitutes a potential threat to the whole capitalist-imperialist system in Cuba.

This threat has driven the petty bourgeoisie to the right, toward the American "mediators". This is covered up by the protest that the workers are provoking armed intervention. The anti-imperialism of the petty bourgeoisie is not the revolutionary, international anti-capitalist program of the workers; it is the futile, nationalist, hodgepodge of the desperate middle class without a social program and without the resource and ability to guide the destinies of modern society.

In the first period following its assumption of governmental power the petty bourgeoisie made concessions to the workers. The arbitration of strikes which they instituted granted the workers' demands. At this stage of the revolution the petty bourgeoisie saw in the workers allies against the imperialists, levers with which to force concessions for themselves.

But when the workers refused any longer to follow the leadership of the petty bourgeoisie and conducted independent struggles in their own interests the petty bourgeoisie became terrified at the rising spectre of the proletarian revolution. On the other hand, the swift development of the workers' struggles and their increasingly revolutionary character frightened the bourgeoisie who, dissatisfied with the "liberalism" of the government, made and are making attempts at armed insurrection to overthrow the government of the petty bourgeoisie after which they hope to put down the workers. In this they are encouraged by American imperialism.

The fear of the bourgeoisie and the imperialist on the one hand, and the fear of the workers on the other, and the vacillations between these giants reflect the contradictory position of the Cuban petty bourgeoisie. Today, as was inevitable from the beginning, it is swinging to the right against the workers. That is the meaning of the shooting of the Communist demonstrators in Havana and in the interior. That is the meaning of the sacking of the Left trade union center. That is the meaning of the organization of the Caribbean Army and the illegalization, in practice, of the Communist Party. It remains to be seen whether the workers will not drive off the armed students who are moving against the seized mills and mines; and whether the workers, confronting the soldiers cannot win them over. What they need most for that is a correct program and leadership. The influence of Communism is growing. But the failure of the workers to put forward political demands signifies that the Communist Party, halted by Stalinism, is not measuring up to the great tasks that the situation has thrust upon it. —T. STAMM.

== Banquet == To Celebrate the Fifth Anniversary of the American Opposition and the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution on Saturday, Nov. 4th, 1933, 8 P. M. AT STUYVESANT CASINO 9th Street and Second Avenue ADMISION . . . 50c Auspices: Local N. Y. Communist League of America (Opposition) 126 East 16th Street