

# Teachers Convention Adopts CIO Referendum, Organizing Plan

The problem of the CIO was the outstanding issue of the 21st Convention of the American Federation of Teachers held at Madison, Wisconsin, August 23-27, 1937.

At its 1936 convention, the AFT had expressed its adherence to the principles of industrial unionism, protested the suspension of the CIO unions by the Executive Council of the AFL and called for the unification of the labor movement. The New York and Philadelphia delegations, coming to this convention with resolutions for immediate affiliation, found themselves opposed by the Chicago delegation which pressed just as firmly for retaining the present AFL affiliation.

## Move Toward CIO

While the question of immediate affiliation was not put forward at the convention, a resolution was passed which marks an advance of the Federation in the direction of affiliation to the CIO. This resolution provides for:

1. Reaffirmation of its previous endorsement of the principles of industrial unionism;
2. A referendum of the membership on the question of affiliation to the CIO, to be held at the discretion of the Executive Council not before February, 1938;
3. An investigation, prior to the referendum, of the structure, dues, contracts, autonomy, etc., of the CIO in its relation to labor and the significance to the AFT of CIO affiliation in regard to organizational campaign, national and local legislative campaigns and its general program as a CIO affiliate;
4. Protest against the suspension of CIO unions by the Executive Council of the AFL;
5. Refusal to pay the special per capita tax proposed by the Cincinnati conference of the AFL;
6. The introduction of a resolution into the 1937 convention of the AFL, calling for a conference of all bona fide unions, AFL, CIO, Railroad Brotherhoods and genuine independent unions, for the purpose of unifying the American labor movement.

The minority resolution called for postponement of the whole question until the 1938 convention, where delegates would come specifically instructed for or against affiliation. The majority resolution carried by a vote of 285 to 227.

## Convention Pro CIO

The general sentiment of the convention was one of sympathy for the CIO. This was shown very clearly in the vote for Jerome Davis for president. In his opening speech, Davis very decidedly set the tone for the convention in favor of the CIO. He was elected by a vote of 321 as against 183 cast for George Stillman of Chicago, the candidate of the anti-affiliation bloc.

However, a large number of delegates pressed for continuing AFL affiliation because of local conditions, such as dependence upon AFL central bodies for support of teacher legislation, the absence in many localities of any CIO bodies to work with, the danger of upsetting campaigns for election of pro-labor school boards by the injection of the CIO-AFL controversy and the general fear that the "average" teacher would be afraid to join a CIO union. It was in view of these local problems that the CIO forces agreed to the referendum rather than press for immediate affiliation.

## Three Rival Groups

The convention forces fall roughly into three groups struggling for control: The Chicago group which, due to the amalgamation of the locals in Chicago and an attendant upsurge in organizational work sent a larger delegation than ever before; the New York-Philadelphia group, including the large WPA local of New York, which, with a scattered support from the rest of the country, especially the West Coast, constituted about one fourth of the convention; and between them, acting as the balance of power, the large Ohio delegation which wavers between support of Chicago and support of New York. On the CIO question the Ohio delegation split, accounting for the close vote on the resolution.

The Chicago delegates, together with more than half of the Ohio delegation represent, in the main, the conservative elements of the Federation. Strictly speaking the AFT has no reactionary elements, with the exception of a few individuals who represent only themselves.

The conservatives resent the New York "radical" line—they wish to remain a staid professional organization and organize teachers on a purely "union" basis, keep on good terms with their local central trades bodies and not seem too radical for what they call the "average" teacher. They believe that it is unnecessary, and even dangerous, to bring up such issues as War and Fascism, Spain and independent political action too sharply. However, when obliged to decide on these issues, they usually—and much to their own surprise—find that they have no real disagreements with the present line of the "radical" New York-Philadelphia group.

## Peoples Fronters

The New York-Philadelphia group, with the exception of a small minority in Local No. 5, represent the present line of Stalinism. In the AFT, as in other trade unions, it has but one aim—to gain organizational control by whatever means possible in order to add one more organization to the building of a People's Front in the United States. They straddled the CIO issue last year, and, although in control of the American Teacher, official organ of the AFT, engaged in practically no educational work to further CIO affiliation.

On the issues of War and Fascism, they find themselves in complete agreement with the liberal and conservative forces. On the question of independent political action, they accepted without a word of criticism the resolution of the Milwaukee local calling for the building of Farmer-Labor-Progressive movements in the various States which will include the "Progressive" (pro-New Deal) sections of the Democratic and Republican parties. Why should they criticize? It is their line.

Mary Grossman, in the Legislative Report, says: "I trust rather than in the looming split in the Democratic Party, we will take our place with the progressive forces against the reactionaries so that we may see this new year the birth of a party—let it be named what it will—that will represent truly the farmer-labor power of our country. Let us repudiate at the next election those who have betrayed us, no matter what

their formal political tinge, and support those who have battled side by side with us for measures that would insure our industrial democracy." In other words, the old outworn AFL policy of reward your friends and punish your enemies.

## Main Fight Organizational

The real fight of the New York-Philadelphia group took place on the questions of organizational control. Their crude attempt to force the convention "by a show of hands" to freeze their control of the American Teacher for another year raised so much resentment that they were forced to agree finally to a motion to refer the whole matter to the Executive Council.

They were determined to elect to the WPA vice-presidency a candidate whom they could control completely and for that reason criminally confused the real issue before the convention: a campaign for a federal system of adult education which would absorb and make permanent the WPA teaching projects and open a tremendous field for many more unemployed teachers than WPA could possibly employ under the present precarious set-up. In spite of a solid bloc of about 125 delegates, they received a decided set-back as far as these two questions were concerned.

It is interesting to note that the expression of minority opposition in the New York City delegation was a decided thorn in the side of the leadership of the C.P. bloc and we may expect a decisive move against proportional representation in Local No. 5 this coming year, such as was carried out prior to the convention in WPA Local No. 453.

## Socialist Role

The Socialist forces in this convention were small. However, they played a role entirely out of proportion to their actual numbers. On organizational matters particularly, the strategy of Maynard Krueger with the Chicago and Ohio groups resulted in swinging toward Socialist candidates the support of those groups who were, disgusted and repelled by the crude and obvious attempts of the C.P. bloc to again organizational control. This can, in no way, be interpreted as basic support of the principles of Socialism.

## Left Socialists Act

It was only the determined efforts of a small group of left-wing Socialists within the S.P. caucus that made it possible to voice in the convention the only opposition to the betrayal and confusion of the War resolution, giving the revolutionary analysis of the causes of war and showing the futility of reliance on Leagues of Nations, Kellogg Peace pacts and Peoples' Peace Congresses; and to speak out clearly against the infamous Farmer-Labor-Progressive resolution by giving the clear line of independent political action of the workers seeking to ally to themselves the lower middle class, farmers and liberal professionals on a working class program.

The left wing delegates made a vigorous protest against the practice of leaving the most important political, social and economic problems facing the labor movement today to the last session of the convention, where the majority decisions were pushed through with no adequate discussions. The left wing laid the basis for a campaign of open and full discussion of all points of

# Tarou Indicts G. P. U. Before Commission

(Continued from page 7)

ed over to the G.P.U. and executed.

## Suicides

In 1927, in Erivan, after such threats from Tatian, the secretary of the control commission, the capitulator Tonow (I do not remember his name exactly) went home and blew out his brains. He had three children under eight years of age, an old mother, and a wife. He was the sole support of the family. This incident received public notice at the time. The newspaper, *Kharurdeit-Ayastan*, published on the third page an article by the secretary of the control commission, Tatian, with the title: "Unwilling to Betray (the Opposition), Commits Suicide". This article was passed by the censor. The issue was put on sale. Upon receiving the paper, the secretary of the C.C. ordered its sale stopped at once and the replacement of this article by a simple announcement of the suicide of the capitulator. But it was too late; more than half of the copies had been sold. This event casts a glaring light on the suicides of other, more prominent, party members such as Joffe, Lominadze, Tomsky Khandjen, and others.

## His Own Experience

To give a more concrete example, I shall recount my own experience. In April, 1934, from

view on these problems both in the American Teacher and in the local magazines.

## Stalinists-Conservatives Knife Krueger

With the exception of the contest for the presidency, the elections of the convention revolved, not so much around issues, as around the question of control of the Executive Council. Krueger was eliminated from the Council, not on the CIO issue, but because the AFL Chicago group and the C.P. group combined against him, the former because of his opposition to the lifting of the charter of Local No. 5 three years ago, and the latter because of his ability to recognize and block their moves for control. With one or two exceptions, the contests for posts were between candidates who were all CIO.

## Composition of Executive

Of the fifteen members of the Executive Council elected at this convention, four are definitely Stalinist in tendency, four are Socialists (it is very doubtful whether they will act as a solid block) three are definitely AFL and the remaining four are doubtful, but will probably divide evenly between the CIO and AFL tendencies. The Council has a majority for the CIO affiliation, but on organizational questions it would be impossible at the present to predict any permanent set-up.

## Organizing Campaign Planned

The convention made a great stride forward in adopting unanimously a proposal of the old Executive Council to initiate a nation-wide campaign of organization of teachers, with the sending out of paid organizers to sections ripe for organization, the funds to be supplied by an assessment of one dollar on each member of the Federation.

This, should result in a real growth of the Federation and the attainment of the perspective of doubling its present membership of 22,000 by the next convention.

my exile, I subscribed to Rakovsky's first telegram calling for the unity of all proletarian, communist and revolutionary forces in the struggle against Fascist aggression. Even at that time, despite my many long years of experience with Stalinist persecutions, I believed in the communist character of the Central Committee, and I thought that, in the face of the impending danger of world fascism, the C.C. would necessarily go halfway to meet Rakovsky's telegram. I was profoundly mistaken. Stalin proved to be not at all concerned with the working-class movement; what mattered to him and his partisans was first of all the protection of their interests and personal privileges. The question of unity of the revolutionary communist forces was replaced by another question: that of Trotsky and the Trotskyists.

## A Fatal Error

Taking advantage of Rakovsky's first and fatal error, the G.P.U. developed its offensive. It was the same for me as for Rakovsky, although I was not such a well known Oppositionist. After the telegram in which I joined in Rakovsky's appeal, I was summoned to the local section of the G.P.U., where they asked me what I had to say about my convictions, whether I considered them counter-revolutionary or not. I replied that I considered my convictions authentically Marxist and revolutionary and that no one could prove them to be counter-revolutionary. The head of the G.P.U. tried to prove, without success, that my opinions were counter-revolutionary. Observing that he was getting nowhere, that I firmly defended my convictions, the head of the G.P.U. pressed a button. An orderly appeared. "You are not leaving the Opposition; you are defending it," he said to me, making a sign to the orderly to take me out.

It was a clearly, sunny oriental day. To me it seemed black as midnight. "All is over," I thought. "The telegram about my abandoning the Opposition has already been sent." My comrades were avoiding me and looking upon me as a traitor, although I was betraying nothing and nobody. "They consider me a traitor." That thought gnawed at my heart and soul. Yet I had wished only to leave the Opposition honorably. How could I have been so mistaken? Rakovsky's telegram had led me into a trap.

## Terrible Plight

How could a leader as intelligent as Rakovsky have failed to see the real face of the Stalinist bureaucracy? I felt I was losing my reason. I walked to the outskirts of the city into the fields and threw myself on the ground. I well understood what an enormous mistake I had committed with my telegram offering to leave the Opposition. But it is not such a great evil to make a mistake provided it is corrected. But how correct it? I could find no answer. For one month, until I hit upon a solution, I was unable to sleep at night, I could not eat, grew perceptibly thinner. I would sit in front of my house for hours, thinking, always thinking. My oppositionist comrades in exile noticed this but they refused to enter into any discussion with me.

(Continued next week)