

Auto Convention Shows Growth

Victory of Bureaucracy Shows Left Wing Need

By a Delegate

The reports of the United Auto Workers Union convention in the capitalist press gave no hint of the spirit, the boldness, the courage and the resourcefulness displayed by the delegates. Some 1100 of them gathered at Eagle's Hall, Milwaukee, on August 23. Their organization in one year had grown from 30,000 members to almost 375,000. The treasury at the first convention had consisted of some \$34,000. The Auditor's report showed on June 30, 1937 a balance of \$428,000. In the brief period of the year since the South Bend convention, the auto workers, by a series of swift, bold and dramatic sit-down strikes had broken down the fear of the auto workers, paralyzed the resistance of the employers, established unions and signed agreements with all of the major automobile and auto parts manufacturers with the single exception of Ford. On the first day of the convention, the 1100 delegates paid tribute to this glorious achievement in a wild, uncontrollable demonstration which continued unabated hour after hour.

Uniformly the delegates were rank and file representatives from the shops, young men, who felt a deep responsibility to the membership of their locals. Not once was the convention called to order but that practically every delegate was in his seat, ready for business. Repeatedly they complained to the chair about the long meaningless speeches of lawyers, governors, politicians, which only interfered with the serious work of the convention. Every motion for special night sessions to complete important business, was greeted with a storm of applause.

Background of the Convention

In the great struggle with General Motors and the state forces of Michigan, President Martin had proved to be just another sky pilot with a "gift of gab". During all of the crucial negotiations with the General Motors management, Martin was in the east, addressing local union meetings.

As soon as the General Motors strike was settled, the Michigan newspapers had abruptly "changed their line" towards the union organization. The previous policy of frankly espousing the open shop was abandoned. Now the papers discovered great virtues in the United Automobile Workers Union. As a matter of fact, the union was the finest thing in the world. The only thing they objected to, for the good of the workers themselves it goes without saying, was some of the "excesses" that the union committed.

Bosses' Advice?

Union headquarters were bombarded with a shower of gratuitous advice. What the union needed was "responsible leadership". What the union needed was to get rid of the irresponsible agitators, discipline its membership and put an end to wildcat unauthorized strikes. Then the union could grow big and strong like the United Mine Workers of America and Homer Martin would unquestionably become another John L. Lewis.

Martin swallowed the oily flattery of the press. The more events revealed his own incompetence, lack of backbone and total inexperience, the more he insisted he was the chosen one to lead the auto workers out of wilderness, and the more determined he became to suppress the opposition of the rank and file, and destroy their democratic rights.

Martin set to work. Using the power of appointment, he gathered all the job hunters, all the opportunists in the union. With ample resources in the treasury, he sent his organizers up and down the countryside in a vicious red baiting campaign to throw fear and confusion into the hearts of the union membership.

Industrialists and the capitalist press were informed that henceforth "Communists" would be expelled, unauthorized strikes would be tolerated no longer.

Martin's Lovestonites

As the rank and file membership grew alarmed at Martin's actions, Martin felt the need of expert advice. Through Charles Zimmerman of the I. L. G. W. U. he secured the assistance of a "brain trust" from the Lovestone group. Munger was appointed editor of the *United Automobile Worker*, several other Lovestonites were placed on the payroll and the Lovestonites began acting as the stool pigeons, the spotters hatchet men, the "theoretical experts" for the reactionary Martin faction. The Stalinists in the union feared that this campaign of red baiting would mean their elimination. With the aid of several of the international officers and two of the executive board members, a national progressive group was organized. Outright reactionaries, union politicians, and anybody who cared first meeting of the progressive to join, were accepted.

The Toledo Meeting

At the first meeting of the progressive caucus held in Toledo some two and one-half months prior to the Milwaukee convention, delegations from Flint, Detroit and other centers reported how local organizations were thrown into turmoil by the red baiting campaign, how local unions organizers were fired and arbitrarily replaced by Martin's henchmen, etc. The purpose of the caucus, it was explained, was to fight these arbitrary acts, re-establish union democracy and the militant policies which had built the organization. Plans were elaborated for an enlarged meeting of the caucus in the near future, and all delegates instructed to return to their localities and arouse their membership to the danger facing the union organization. So far, so good.

Browder Steps In

Then something happened. The Communist Party told its auto people, they had no business fighting Martin. Browder brought the matter up at the plenary session of the Central Committee in June. "On occasion," he said, "we see developments which give rise to great uneasiness when comrades rush into snap judgments on big questions of trade union policy, consider that trade union

leaders have unnecessarily compromised the workers' demands, and from this conclusion pass immediately into a head-on collision with those leaders and those workers who follow them. There were dangerous movements of this sort in the Detroit district in connection with the Chrysler strike". He continued, "Labor generally including us Communists who approach this question with our standards, have every reason to proceed to the particular tasks and problems facing us with great confidence in the strategic line of the C.I.O. leadership and of John L. Lewis".

Before the next meeting of the progressive group, a leading Communist Party member introduced a motion in the Detroit district auto council, that all caucuses be prohibited in the auto union. At the next meeting of the progressive group held in Toledo, the group was re-named the "unity caucus", and a program submitted practically identical with the program of the Martin machine — the so-called Martin-Frankensteen progressive caucus.

It included such points as (1). No caucuses or groups to be allowed in the auto union, (2). Against the influence of "outside organizations" who have members within the automobile union, (3). For support of Labor Non-Partisan League, etc. Those clever Stalinists! They were going to disarm the Martin faction by stealing their program. So determined was this Stalinist crowd to achieve unity with Martin, that in the caucus they fought and finally succeeded in defeating the motions of several Cleveland delegates for the right of members with similar ideas to form groups within the union, for independent labor political action etc. All they asked of Martin was his agreement to allow Mortimer and Hall to remain as vice-presidents of the organization and the retention of the secondary leadership of organizers. At this point, the battle had degenerated into an unprincipled clique fight for union posts.

C. P. Has to Fight

At Milwaukee itself it finally dawned on the Stalinists that they must either fight or they were licked and on their way out. Hastily the "unity group" was re-named again, the "unity and democracy group. No longer were speeches made about there being no differences between the unity group and Martin-Frankensteen. Against their own will the Communist Party combination was compelled to fight, however timidly, however inadequately against the Martin-Frankensteen bureaucracy.

Now the delegates proved eager to fight for democratic rights and for the aggressive policies which had built their union. Time after time Martin was stopped cold in his attempts to wield the gavel and run the convention in the high-handed manner characteristic of labor conventions. Repeatedly the Flint, Detroit, Toledo and Cleveland delegations, all on their feet, would refuse to let Martin go on until some opposition speaker received the floor or until the point of order was recognized.

Lewis Man Boosed

The delegates showed more determination and fight than has probably ever been shown in any labor convention in recent years. Ora Gassaway, personal representative of John L. Lewis in this convention, was twice boosed by

the convention when he attempted to use the prestige of his position to back some reactionary move of the Martin faction. So white hot was the general temper that Martin throughout the convention did not dare chance any open attacks upon the sit down strike or the so-called "unauthorized strikes", but again and again was forced to play up to the militancy of the convention. A resolution introduced by Cleveland Local 217 upholding the sit down strike, was passed by the convention unopposed by the Martin machine.

Lewis Arrives

On Friday, the fifth day of the convention, Lewis himself finally arrived in Milwaukee. But he did not stay long in town. He found at the convention the same specter that had haunted him years back in the United Mine Workers, and Lewis was not in a position today to ruthlessly slug the opposition out of existence. After a tactful diplomatic oration, he quickly left Milwaukee, leaving precise instructions with Dubinsky and Gassaway that he wanted an agreement reached on the Executive officers that night and the convention must be adjourned the following day.

Late into night the negotiations between the unity group and the Martin forces continued, with Gassaway and Dubinsky in the role of mediators. An agreement was finally announced—seven officers, three from each side with one so-called independent. The Communist Party leaders were jubilant. In reality the "victory" was a defeat. The president has all the powers, the vice-presidents have practically none. Three quarters of the new gen-

eral Executive Board are Martin supporters.

Like all phony compromises, it was short-lived. Saturday, shortly after the installation of the general officers, the convention again broke into bedlam over some bureaucratic ruling of Martin and from then on an almost constant uproar continued until Sunday night when the convention was hastily adjourned.

Militancy Diverted

The delegates fight for democracy, for rank and file control, for a militant policy of struggle to preserve the union against the bosses—all this was channelized by the Communist Party strategists into a fight for a couple of union posts. Martin still retains in many cases even greater power and control than he held before the convention. His bureaucratic campaign, he has already announced, will continue with even greater determination.

The convention, however, revealed superbly the auto workers' ability to fight, their determination to preserve the union, the militancy they are capable of. Several of the leading rank and filers realized before the convention was over that the Communist Party and the right wing Socialists, did not want to, and were not capable of organizing or leading a fight of this kind.

Plans are already under way to build a new group in the auto workers union, on the genuine basis of principles and policies, to oppose the reactionary Martin clique and to build the auto workers union into a fighting organization for the class interests of the automobile workers and labor as a whole.

Browder and LaGuardia

By Fore and Aft

Hard on the heels of the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune, Earl Browder has now announced officially the Communist Party support of La Guardia for re-election. It must be admitted that this was not much of a surprise. However, some others of La Guardia's friends feel that Browder really ought to have waited for official action until after the primaries—they are afraid that some of the La Guardia Republicans will be embarrassed slightly by the wholehearted embrace of the La Guardia Communists.

Browder's official statement is in the best People's Front manner. In political content of course, the arguments are identical with those used during the national election campaign last year in justifying "indirect support of Roosevelt. "Defeat Landon-Liberty League-Hearst!" was the slogan then; now it is, "Defeat Tammany!" "Forward to the victory of the people over Wall Street!" shouted Browder over Station WINS.

But last year the People's Front line in the United States had not yet been devoted to its fuller stage. A Communist candidate still appeared on the ballot, even though he was forgotten in the campaign. The Stalinist members themselves were not yet prepared to swallow a completely open capitulation.

Today the further step can be taken. Israel Amter, New York State Chairman of the Communist Party, declares: ".....the New

York State Committee is refraining for the first time in its history from running a Communist Mayorality candidate. The Communist Party will throw the full weight of its influence behind the American Labor Party's candidate for Mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia." (Amter's emphasis.) And are the Stalinists giving "critical support" to La Guardia? Not a bit of it. No such half-way measures for Browder. "The ticket offered is such a serious effort; it satisfies all the conditions which we demand."

"The significance of this election," states Browder, "is even international." And in saying this Browder is entirely correct. In supporting the capitalist candidate, LaGuardia, in this election, Browder is carrying out faithfully the international line of the People's Front, is putting through in the given national and local conditions the same policy of treachery and betrayal which now strangles the fight of the workers in Spain, China, and France. It is not in the least an accident that at the same time that the *Daily Worker* comes into the open with its support of La Guardia, it carries on an openly chauvinistic campaign with respect to the Chinese events, virtually advocating war by the United States against Japan, and promising in advance complete support of such a war. Indeed from the fundamental class point of view, the policy of support of La Guardia is an inseparable link in the general class policy which leads direct to support of the coming war.