

By Dwight Macdonald

# SPARKS IN THE NEWS

For four days I have spent most of my waking hours—and a few of the sleeping hours as well!—at Irving Plaza listening in on the second national convention of the Socialist Workers Party. Although I am not a member of the S.W.P., as a regular contributor to the Appeal, I was invited to sit in on the sessions. It was an enlightening, and heartening, experience.

From the convention I carried away chiefly an impression of youth—the average age of the delegates was announced as twenty-eight and a half years—and seriousness. This was no convention of middle-aged cafeteria-table Marxists, splitting fine points of dialectics over the coffee cups. In fact, the convention seemed to indicate that the S.W.P. has struck its roots far deeper into the American working class than I had supposed. These were for the most part working class leaders—in steel, in auto, in rubber, in the maritime field, among the unemployed. There were also, of course, a number of middle-class delegates as well—teachers, journalists, even an accountant or two.

But whatever their class origin, the delegates all quite clearly took with the utmost seriousness the sharpening crisis of American capitalism and the imminent threat of war. The high point of the convention, in many ways, was Cannon's brilliant speech on the war question, and the discussion from the floor that followed it.

The convention revolved around a central axis: the problem of changing the S.W.P. from a propaganda-discussion sect into a mass party, how to turn the party's face toward the masses. The level of the discussion was extremely high, and a great many excellent suggestions and illuminating bits of data came from the delegates' comments. So far as I could see, the sessions were conducted in completely democratic fashion. I was particularly interested in the discussion on the press, with its constant hammering on the point that the Appeal must be written in simpler language, that its articles must be shorter, more concrete, and that it must be changed from a journal of comment into what Burnham called "a campaign paper", concentrating its fire on certain definite objectives. Much the best suggestion seemed to me to be that there should be more letters and news stories from workers in the field, and less journalistic comment written in the editorial office. The responsibility for the lack of original material from the field is hard to place. The Appeal staff pointed out that their correspondents out of New York just didn't write in usable stuff, while, on the other hand, comrades from Chicago and from St. Paul charged that the Appeal had failed to print what they had sent in. Whatever the reasons, the lack of first-hand stories from the field is the glaring weakness of the Appeal today.

## Two Dangers

The convention illustrated pretty well the two great dangers in this transformation of the S.W.P. into a mass party. On the one hand, there are still some bad hangovers from the old propaganda-sec days, not so much in the rank and file as in the top leadership. The sessions, for example, all began from forty-five minutes to almost two hours late. On Tuesday, the last day, when many extremely important items on the agenda had not yet been taken up, the session, scheduled for ten a.m., did not begin until ten minutes to twelve. As a result, the unemployment discussion was cut so short, as to be of little value, and the convention never did get around to several important items on the agenda. There was not the slightest reason, except sloppy management, that the report on unemployment could not have been presented as scheduled at ten.

I am told that at the last convention, in Chicago, meetings began promptly on time. The atmosphere of New York doesn't seem to demoralize the bourgeoisie—so far as I know, banks open promptly at nine and close promptly at three, and directors' meetings begin on the dot—but it has a terrible effect on the leaders of the S.W.P.

In the old days, punctuality was a minor virtue: it didn't make much difference whether an all-day discussion on the nature of the Soviet state began on the minute or not. But in an active mass party, punctuality is a minimum requirement. How can people make a revolution who can't even make an appointment?

The other danger comes from just the opposite quarter. If the top leadership is, understandably enough, not yet free of the attitudes of the old discussion-group days, the new rank-and-file is open to another disease. It was expressed in more than one contemptuous allusion to "petty bourgeois intellectuals". It also came out in a tendency to set the rest of the country in opposition to New York City—a false and fatal antagonism. Several speakers seemed to think of New York as a nest of sterile, isolated, long-haired and long-winded intellectuals for whom every honest worker can have nothing but contempt. This anti-intellectual, anti-New York attitude—which unhappily finds some real justification in the hangovers from the party's sectarian past I have mentioned above—seems to me to be the rankest sort of Philistinism. I see nothing immoral about brains. On the contrary, a party obviously needs all the brains, both practical and theoretical, it can command. To damn all theoretical intelligence because intellectuals have their typical weaknesses, is to throw out the baby with the bath.

It remains to be seen whether these defects will be remedied. The intelligence and seriousness of the delegates, and their closeness to the masses—all this seems to promise that they will.

# A. F. L. Head Raps New Deal Ruling On W. P. A. Strikers

(Continued from Page 1)

The system which obtains in Nazi Germany and which even now, Mr. Hodson, regardless of what you evidently privately think about the Nazi set-up, dare not publicly and openly approve.

"I would remind you, honorable Commissioner, that the only difference between the Nazi system and the system that we now face through a combination of Congressional action and your vile ruling is that the Nazis have concentration camps for those who refuse to lower their standards to an indecent level, with the compensating factor, however, that even in the concentration camps food is not generally denied to the poor victims held there.

"I would also remind you that in our nation, as in others, it is not and has not been for centuries the practice to refuse food even to the worst of criminals.

## Unemployment a Crime?

"Under your interpretation of your duty, as you see it, decent American citizens whose only crime seems to be the inability to find non-existent employment in private industry are to be placed in a category below that of murderers, thieves and other felons of the worst sort.

"Mr. Hodson, your action is absolutely without a scintilla of justification. Your edict is a challenge to all those who sincerely believe in decent American standards of living.

"In taking this action you have earned, as you so richly deserve, the contempt of every right-thinking American in the City of New York."

Hodson's threat was reported in the press as follows:

"Welfare Commissioner Hodson lost no time in announcing that persons who refused to accept the 'scab' wages fixed by Congress would not get home relief."

# WORKERS' FORUM

## NEW OFFICERS DON'T GO OVER WITH LOCAL 117

Dear Comrade:

The spirit of revolt among the cloak-makers which led to the sweeping of the entrenched administration out of office manifested itself at the installation rally of the new officers recently. For the first time in years the president of the International was interrupted, heckled, jeered and finally forced to stop his speech.

It was a strange meeting in many respects. The flower-decked platform contrasted strangely with the tense mood of the audience. The officials of the union parading on it felt themselves at the mercy of the rank and file. One after another the ousted officials of Local 117 ran the gauntlet of irony and derision. The apologetic speech of ex-manager Levy did not save him. The defeated chairman of the Local, Zuckerman, who started out innocently, "The past eight years in which I held office were the happiest years in my life," was interrupted by general laughter and the question "How much did you get a week?"

The biggest "reception" was saved for president David Dubinsky when he tried to explain away the plight of the cloak-makers by government statistics. Some of these figures were very instructive, e.g. that there are 7,000 cloak makers in Brooklyn and 5,000 in the adjoining area working for the New York jobbers at half the wages that the New York worker gets. This explains why the seasons last only a couple of weeks, that is, the jobbers need the New York shops during the rush period only when the out-of-town shops cannot take care of the orders.

The uproar started when he quoted the Labor-Board that the cloak makers have the highest hourly earnings in the country. "What about annual earnings" was the general cry. The unemployed cloak makers and the semi-unemployed were in no mood to listen to the apologetics of union leaders whom they hold responsible for their plight. Dubinsky, rattled and disconcerted, stopped in the middle of a sentence, packed his papers and asked the secretary to call the roll of the elected officers. He returned after a couple of minutes this time without his papers to give some free advice to the new officials.

The extent of the revolt was revealed by Dubinsky when he showed the figures of the elections show that a shift of a few hundred votes could have brought an entirely new administration. As it stands now, part of the administration slate was elected. Also some disgruntled union officials and of bureaucrats who saw in which direction the wind was blowing and joined the opposition. The rank and file elements who were the driving force behind the opposition movement were nosed out by a few score votes. President Dubinsky congratulated himself on that fact.

The meeting ended with the speech of the newly elected manager Kaplan. He was not received over-enthusiastically but the workers are willing to give him a chance to see what he can do while they keep a

watchful eye on him all the time.

Member of I.L.G.W.U.

## THE CASE OF A JOBLESS WORKER

Dear Comrades:

I have just returned from a trip as a member of a grievance committee from what my worker friends tell me was Germany, and my well-to-do friends tell me was Doylestown Bucks County, one of the wealthiest counties in the United States. Bristol, which is its largest town, is the home of patriotic Joe Grundy, former U. S. Senator, President of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association and owner of the largest mill in the county. Grundy always has the welfare of his workers at heart and keeps watch over them for fear that they will earn too much and then go out and eat so much that their stomachs are liable to swell to such proportions that Uncle Joe would be compelled to shell out a few pennies to increase the size of his factories so as to house these expanded constitutions. Very benevolent fellow, this Uncle Joe. He just recently donated \$5,000 to his staunch Republican friends for the good work that they are doing in the county and the state of Pennsylvania.

The place we visited is called an assistance office, where we took up the case of Mr. Pfaff, a farmer, cigarmaker, and concert violinist, who graduated from Pennsylvania State College with special mention of his proficiency in The Drainage, Beekeeping, Silo's, Commercial Fruit and Potato growing and Poultry keeping.

Evicted from Farm This man, a Republican, started to work in a cigar factory at the age of thirteen and worked at the trade for seventeen years, saved his money and bought a farm. In 1925 he planted 973 fruit trees. In 1932 he sold 3528 baskets of peaches. In 1934 a Democratic politician appeared and represented himself as a Secret Service Agent trying to find out why the farmers are losing their farms. He got all the information he wanted, and then left.

About six weeks later he appeared again and ordered Mr. Pfaff off his farm because he said that he had bought the farm. Mr. Pfaff refused to leave. The next day this man appeared again with a 325-pound bully and gave Mr. Pfaff a clubbing, then went and had Mr. Pfaff arrested and thrown in jail for seven days without the benefit of counsel or bail. Mr. Pfaff was then told by the authorities that he had to go to the poorhouse or else they would send him to the insane Asylum. He preferred the poorhouse from which he escaped several days later. While in jail they tried to sell him dope and liquor.

Denied Relief Mr. Pfaff has tried to get relief since 1936. But the only answer he got was that he should live off somebody else, and that because a lunacy commission had examined him, he could not get relief. He tried to get an appointment to see the Head Director without an appointment, with several pretty girls trying to bar his way by hanging on to his coat-tails. He talked to the Director, but

# "SWP and Negro Work" Resolution Adopted by the National Convention

The American Negroes, for centuries the most oppressed section of American society and the most discriminated against, are potentially the most revolutionary element of the population. They are designated by their whole historical past to be, under adequate leadership, the very vanguard of the proletarian revolution. The neglect of Negro work, and of the Negro question by the party is, therefore, a very disquieting sign. The S.W.P. must recognize that its attitude to the Negro question is crucial for its future development. Hitherto the party has been based mainly on privileged workers and groups of isolated intellectuals. Unless it can find its way to the great masses of the underprivileged, of whom the Negroes constitute so important a section, the broad perspectives of the permanent revolution will remain only a fiction and the party is bound to degenerate.

The S.W.P. proposes therefore to constitute a National Negro Department which will initiate and coordinate a plan of work among the Negroes and calls upon its members to cooperate strenuously in the difficult task of approaching this work in the most suitable manner. Our obvious tasks for the coming period are (a) the education of the party, (b) winning the more advanced Negroes for the Fourth International, and (c) through them and the work of the party in wider fields influencing the Negro masses to recognize in the S.W.P. the only party which is genuinely working for their complete emancipation from the heavy burdens they have borne so long. The winning of Negroes to our movement on a revolutionary basis is, however, no easy task. The Negroes, suffering acutely from the general difficulties of all workers under capitalism, and in addition, from special problems of their own, are naturally hesitant to take the step of allying themselves with a small and heavily persecuted party. But Negro work is complicated by other more profound causes. For reasons which can be easily understood, the American Negro is profoundly suspicious of all whites, and recent events have deepened that suspicion.

## Negroes Often Deceived

In the past, the Negro masses have had disastrous experiences with the Republican and Democratic parties. The boasted benefits that the Negro as a whole are supposed to have received from the New Deal and the Democratic Party can easily be seen for the fraud that they are when it is recognized that it is the Democratic Party of Franklin Roosevelt which by force and trickery prevents the Negroes from exercising their votes over large areas in the South.

The Communist Party of the U.S.A. from 1928 to 1935 did win a number of Negroes to membership and awakened a sympathetic interest among the more advanced Negro workers and intellectuals. But the bureaucratic creation of Negro "leaders", their subservience to the twists and turns of the party line, their slavish dependence on the manipulations and combinations of the C.P. leadership, were seen by interested Negroes not as a transference of the methods and practices of the Kremlin bureaucracy in Moscow to America, but merely as another example of the use of Negroes by whites for political purposes unconnected with Negro struggles. With the latest turn beginning in 1935, the C.P. has become openly a party of American bourgeois democracy. Not only to expand, but merely to exist in this new milieu demanded that it imitate and practise the contradictory discriminations inherent in that society. The Negroes, very sensitive to all such practices, have quickly recognized the new face of the C.P. beneath the mask of demagoguery with which it seeks to disguise the predicament in which it finds itself, and the result has been a mass exodus from the party (80 per cent of the New York State Negro membership) and a bitter hostility to the C.P. which reached a climax when well-known former members of the C.P. testified against it before the Dies

Committee. Once more the Third International has struck a deadly blow at the American working class, this time by destroying the confidence that was being slowly forged between the politically advanced sections of the black and white workers.

## Negro Nationalist Tendencies

Furthermore, the awakening political consciousness of the Negro not unnaturally takes the form of a desire for independent action uncontrolled by whites. The Negroes have long felt and more than ever feel today the urge to create their own organizations under their own leaders and thus assert, not only in theory but in action, their claim to complete equality with other American citizens. Such a desire is legitimate and even when it takes the form of a rather aggressive chauvinism is to be welcomed. Black chauvinism in America today is merely the natural excess of the desire for equality while white American chauvinism, the expression of racial domination, is essentially reactionary. Under any circumstances, it would have been a task of profound difficulty, perhaps impossible, for a revolutionary party composed mainly of whites to win the confidence of the American Negro masses, except in the actual crises of revolutionary struggles. Such possibilities as existed, however, have been practically destroyed by the C.P. Today the politically minded Negroes are turning away from the C.P., and Negro organizations devoted to struggle for Negro rights are springing up all over the North and East, particularly in Harlem. The nationalist tendencies of the Negroes have been fortified, and in addition to the poisoning of racial relations by capitalism, the S.W.P. has now to contend with the heritage left by the C.P. and the pernicious course it is still actively pursuing.

## For a Negro Organization

The S.W.P. therefore proposes that its Negro members, aided and supported by the party, take the initiative and collaborate with other militant Negroes in the formation of a Negro mass organization devoted to the struggle for Negro rights. This organization will NOT be either openly or secretly a periphery organization of the Fourth International. It will be an organization in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working class program corresponding to the day to day struggles of the masses of Negro workers and farmers. Its program will be elaborated by the Negro organization, in which Negro members of the Fourth International will participate with neither greater nor lesser rights than other members. But the S.W.P. is confident that the position of the Negroes in American society, the logic of the class struggle in the present period, the superior grasp of politics and the morale of members of the Fourth International, must inevitably result in its members exercising a powerful influence in such an organization. The critical support of such an organization by the S.W.P. does not in any way limit the party's drive among Negroes for membership, neither does it invalidate the necessary struggle for the unity of both black and white workers. But that road is not likely to be a broad highway. Such an organization as is proposed is the most likely means of bringing the masses of Negroes into political action, which though programatically devoted to their own interests, must inevitably merge with the broader struggles of the American working class movement taken as a whole. The S.W.P. therefore, while recognizing the limitations and pitfalls of a mass organization without a clearly defined political program, and while retaining its full liberty of action and criticism, welcomes and supports any attempt by Negroes themselves to organize for militant action against our common oppressors, instructs its Negro members to work actively towards the formation and activity of such an organization, and recommends to the party members to follow closely all such manifestations of Negro militancy.

## MEN AND WOMEN OF LABOR

# OUT OF THE PAST

By EMANUEL GARRETT

## WILLIAM MORRIS

(March 24, 1834—October 3, 1896)

William Morris became a Socialist at the age of 49.

At this time Morris was already famous as one of the outstanding poets of England. He was also widely known as an artist who had revived a dozen different art-crafts—fine printing, tapestries, textile designing, household decoration, etc. He was wealthy and respected.

Yet, at the height of his career, Morris astonished his friends and "the public" by casting his lot with a small obscure political group and throwing his enormous energies, as well as his wealth and reputation, into their work. This group was the pioneer organization of the British Marxists, the Social Democratic Federation, led by H. M. Hyndman.

## Not a Dabbler in Socialism

Morris joined the S.D.F. in 1883. His artistic friends thought he joined as an artist dabbling in politics as a diversion. But Morris soon showed he was no mere dabbler in Socialism.

He joined the movement as a rank-and-file Jimmy Higgins. For two years—during which his literary work lapsed—he crowded his days with street-corner speaking in Hyde Park and in the proletarian quarters of London. He called it "street-preaching" and he painfully sought to develop himself as a Socialist agitator for the masses of workers. He was a frequent speaker before workers' groups, and on occasion his reputation gained him entree to middle class organizations where he lectured the white-collar audiences on the necessity of working-class socialism. He was involved in the Trafalgar Square riot of the late 1880's.

It was against his own desire that he was drafted onto the leadership of the S.D.F. and became a member of its executive committee, for he himself recognized that his bent lay in the direction of propaganda work among the masses. Moreover, he cheerfully admitted that he knew little of Socialist theory. And this indeed was one of the reasons for his split with Hyndman and the S.D.F.

Morris was second in prominence only to Hyndman in the ranks of the Federation, but he found that he could not work with Hyndman. For that matter, neither could anyone else; for Hyndman brooked no division of his uncontrolled power over the organization. This source of friction was complicated by the existence of an anarchist wing of the Federation, which in 1885 broke away to form the Socialist League.

Morris went along with the Socialist League, and became one of its leaders, in spite of the fact that he disagreed with the anarchists.

This column on William Morris is contributed by Hal Draper. Readers who wish to submit columns on Men and Women of Labor are urged to do so.

ideas. It was not long, therefore, before he found himself in opposition in the Socialist League also, and in 1889 he retired to form a Socialist propaganda group, the Hammersmith Socialist Society. To the end of his days, however, he remained an ardent advocate of the Socialist ideal.

Perhaps no one who has attempted to depict the achievement of that ideal has drawn as attractive a picture of the future Socialist society as has Morris, in his "News from Nowhere." Within his limitations, of course, knowing little of the economic end of the Socialist transformation of society, he emphasized another angle. This was that the new world would be a place where the beauty and pleasure of labor could be developed, where cultural advance and the flowering of the human personality would no longer be hampered by the shackles of capitalism, where art would no longer be something appreciated only by highbrows but where it would become an art for the masses and by the masses.

Morris's "Chants for Socialists," in which he turned his poetic powers to the service of the movement, are also still well worth reading by workers today.

## "Art for the Masses!"

Why is the name of William Morris, which figures so prominently in the history of English literature, also remembered by the Socialists?

Today, when the "cultural front" and the "intellectual periphery" of the revolutionary movement are terms that are bandied about, it is important to point out that William Morris was, if not the first, one of the first artists to join the Socialist movement BECAUSE he was an artist, not IN SPITE OF that fact.

Morris's social and political consciousness was first awakened by his realization that capitalism was not only harmful to the masses who lived in poverty, but also to the development of art and the beauty of life. How could art be healthy when the great mass of human beings had to spend every waking moment thinking of bread and butter, and when only the social parasites could afford to indulge in "patronizing" art? The result was a parasitic art, which was bound to reflect the degeneration of boss-class society.

"Art for the masses!" was the slogan of William Morris. He serves to remind us that the ultimate aim of socialism is not merely to assure bread and security to the worker—that is only the first step—but to make the world a more beautiful place to live in.

After all, is it not a most crushing condemnation of capitalism to realize that after all the ages, the most important problem that still faces mankind is the same as that which faces the lowest animal—how to get the daily mouthful of food?

# Sailors Spike Presidential Order to Hire Fink Crews

(Continued from Page 1)

(Eration of the Pacific, the convention went on record to support the third term for Roosevelt movement. The National Maritime Union, now meeting in convention, will undoubtedly do likewise.

## Roosevelt Called to Act

Very good! If it is true that Roosevelt is our friend, we the seamen will appeal directly to him to speak out in our behalf against the Tories. Could anything be fairer than that? Since he appears to be reluctant to speak, we will make that request. If he is really our friend, he will presumably grasp the opportunity of at least saying something in our behalf.

In a statement issued by Harry Lundeberg, Secretary of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, he makes this request on behalf of the seamen of the west coast and says: "As the situation now stands (in Seattle) there is only one out to settle this entire matter and that is that the President of the United States is the only man who can change the attitude of the Maritime Commission and it is entirely up to him . . . we will see in the next day or two whether Roosevelt thinks more of the Maritime Commission or whether he has any feeling at all for the demands of the thousands of seamen of the Pacific Coast."

ship of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, we told the Maritime Commission that the crumby tubs could stay tied up alongside of the dock until such time that the Maritime Commission was willing to use the same methods of employment as practiced by private shipowners on the Pacific Coast."

## A.F.L. Acts

The Houston convention of the American Federation of Labor went on record to support the position taken by the Sailors Union of the Pacific in this hiring hall dispute. In accord with the mandate of that convention and in reply to a request by Lundeberg, President Green wired the sailors that:

"I regret unyielding position which Maritime Commission has assumed regarding hiring seamen for government ships Pacific Coast. I have repeatedly appealed to Chairman Land to hire unlicensed personnel through union hiring halls. I will call on Secretary of Commerce Hopkins and at my earliest opportunity upon the President and urge action at earliest possible moment as you suggest."

Franklin "I love labor" Roosevelt now has the opportunity of proving his devotion. Those drum beaters for the third term for Roosevelt, "our friend", should rejoice that this opportunity has been provided.

Howard Stump