

Gompers Attacks the League

By Earl R. Browder

THE standpatters and reactionaries among the officials of the trade unions are deeply stirred by the advent of the Trade Union Educational League. No less a person than Samuel Gompers himself has seen fit, on a special trip to Chicago, to "expose" and denounce the League publicly at a big meeting of several hundred trade union officials. The whole incident grew out of the adoption by the Chicago Federation of Labor, at its meeting of March 19th, of a resolution calling for amalgamation of the different unions in the same industry. This resolution shocked the reactionary officialdom of the labor movement to its depths, and brought a sudden realization of the deep sentiment that exists among the rank and file for this measure. The Chicago Federation is the most important central body in the country, and has a reputation of action and leadership; when it speaks the labor movement listens. In order to understand Mr. Gompers' attack upon the League, it is necessary to review events leading up to and following the adoption of this resolution which has stirred the movement.

The Organization Committee of the Chicago Federation is a live body, and is in closest contact with the problems of organization facing the movement from day to day. It is composed of a dozen of the live wire unionists of the Chicago movement appointed by the Federation. This committee adopted the resolution unanimously, as being the most important step toward beginning a real organization campaign and the only weapon with which to meet the "open shop" drive. It was then introduced into the Federation; immediately a big debate developed, the opposition to the amalgamation program being led principally by Oscar Nelson, vice president of the Chicago Federation. The sentiment of the delegate body was overwhelmingly in favor of the proposal, and the resolution was adopted by a vote of 114 to 37, or a little over three to one. The resolution, after setting forth the vicious attack being made upon the unions, the disorderly retreat now being made, the divisions in the labor movement which cause this weakness, and setting forth the only remedy as the united front brought about through amalgamation of "the various trade unions so that there will remain only one union for each industry," then says: "Resolved, That we, the Chicago Federation of Labor, in regular meeting, call upon the American Federation of Labor as a first step in this direction, to assemble various international unions into conference for the pur-

pose of arranging to amalgamate all the unions in the respective industries into single organizations, each of which shall cover an industry." (For full text of resolution, see THE LABOR HERALD for April, page 12). The fight for the adoption of the resolution was led by J. W. Johnstone and Wm. Z. Foster, and the overwhelming vote in favor of it was taken in a big demonstration of enthusiasm on the part of the delegates.

Immediately an alarm was sounded in the camps of the conservatives. In the two weeks intervening before the ensuing meeting of the Federation all sorts of rumors flew about as to what they were "going to do." The opposition was finally crystallized in the action of two locals of the Electrical Workers, which adopted resolutions saying, in part: "That we . . . refuse to approve or endorse said resolution. . . and that we believe that our labor interests can best be served at this critical time by promoting harmony among the existing trade unions rather than by injecting dissention by advocating industrial unionism . . . that unless the Chicago Federation of Labor refrains from advocating industrial unionism we will stop paying our per capita tax."

Chicago Federation Reaffirms Its Action

The attack of the conservatives embodied in the resolution of the Electrical Workers, was brought up early in the meeting of April 2nd. A great crowd had assembled for the second round of the battle. Nelson again led the attack; while John Fitzpatrick, Ed Nockels, and many other of the best known leaders of the Federation defended the amalgamation resolution. The reactionaries thought to put Fitzpatrick and Nockels in a hole by having them oppose their resolution, which called for "promoting harmony" instead of dissention. Nockels proposed that the progressives accept the Electrical Workers resolution, on the grounds that it had nothing to do with the previous resolution of the Federation. This was done, completely outwitting the standpatters; for the Federation then immediately voted to reaffirm the resolution for amalgamation. It was one of the largest and tensest meetings ever held by the Federation, but when the debate lasted late into the evening, and it became evident that amalgamation was overwhelmingly carried, a great many delegates left, so that the vote was not so large. The sentiment was very accurately reflected in

the figures of 103 to 14, or more than eight to one in favor of reaffirming the former action.

Fossilized Arguments

The arguments used against the amalgamation resolution were very instructive, as illustrating the old guards' ignorance of industrial unionism and their inability to meet the issue. At the first session the opposition tried the usual tactics of labelling the resolution as secession, disruption, and I. W. W.-ism. They appealed wildly to craft jealousies and prejudice, but completely failed to meet the issue raised by this genuine trade union move. The appeal to craftism failed entirely. Nelson shouted to the delegates, "These men want you to have the printers, the pressmen, and everybody in the printing industry united into one union." The delegates shouted back, "That's what we want, too." The floundering about of these standpatters, in their pitiful search for an argument, was a complete demonstration of their inability to meet present problems. Even more, did it show that the bureaucracy of the trade unions has never been forced to meet the question of industrial unionism on its merits. The dual unionists have, up to this time, discredited industrial unionism in the eyes of the rank and file, so that all that was necessary to settle the question was to raise the cry of disruption. But that cry is turned the other way now; the reactionaries are the only ones now who talk about seceding. Of course, the poor old skeleton of the Knights of Labor was trotted out of its grave, and the delegates were assured that it was the true and original industrial union, holding it up as a horrible example. But these old bones were of no more effect than the other arguments. The delegation was made to see the Knights of Labor was not an industrial, but a mass organization.

The meeting of April 2nd brought forth some new arguments. The Trade Union Educational League was brought into the discussion by Nelson, who made a bitter attack upon it and THE LABOR HERALD. He charged that the resolution was the result of a "conspiracy" by the League. With dramatic effect he read an account of the organization of the Chicago League. It was received with great applause by the delegates, scores of whom immediately began to ask when the League would meet again, as they wanted to join it. Nelson also injected a personal attack against Foster, calling him an I. W. W. and insinuating that he was a disrupter. The entire second attack was made up of such personalities, insinuations, and innuendoes. It, too, got nowhere.

John Fitzpatrick was the principal speaker for the resolution at the second meeting. In a few

powerful words he ripped the hide off of the dishonest attacks being made, and placed himself completely on the side of amalgamation. He annihilated the attacks upon Foster, who had been chosen, by Gompers himself, he pointed out, to direct the greatest strike in labor history. Fitzpatrick challenged anyone to show where that task had not been handled according to the very highest standards of trade unionism. When he got through it was not necessary for Johnstone or Foster to say anything; the issue was settled for the Chicago Federation of Labor.

Gompers Gets Into It

After these two defeats one might have thought that the standpatters would lay off for awhile, at least until they had found some way of meeting the issue. But they considered the matter of such great and pressing importance that they could not let it rest. The next one to be heard from was Mr. Gompers himself. He came to Chicago ostensibly to inquire into the building trades dispute. A large meeting of local officials was called in this connection, and for a time confined itself to this question. But the true purpose became evident when Emmet Flood, A. F. of L. organizer, launched into a vicious attack upon all the progressive features of the Chicago Federation of Labor, including the Farmer-Labor Party, the New Majority, and the amalgamation resolution. The Trade Union Educational League and Wm. Z. Foster also came in for a good share of his bitter tirade. Foster was not at the meeting, but was notified of the attack being made and hastened over. He was given the floor, and in a half hour speech he explained the principles of industrial unionism, the passage of the resolution, and the organization of the League. With regard to the League method of organization of minority groups to promote certain policies, Foster showed how this was an established procedure in the A. F. of L., no less a person than Frank Morrison of the A. F. of L. Executive Council being now on the ticket of a Typographical Union "boring from within" organization, the Progressives. He challenged Flood to debate the issues, and demanded of Gompers to say if there was anything in the amalgamation resolution that was contrary to the A. F. of L. laws. Gompers never answered this.

John Fitzpatrick spoke next and defended the resolution and the need for greater solidarity. His remarks were punctuated by vociferous applause. It was quite evident that Fitzpatrick's popularity was high above Gompers', and that the gathering was also for the amalgamation resolution; if another vote had been taken in

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this meeting Gompers would have had another disappointment. Fitzpatrick stood like a rock; he said that the Chicago Federation of Labor was on record for this resolution and would stand or fall by it. There is no man more master of trade union law and custom than Fitzpatrick, and he cleverly pointed out how the resolution fits in with legitimate trade union procedure, as well as corresponds with the present pressing needs.

Then Mr. Gompers spoke. He prefaced his remarks with a few general observations, and then launched into about one hour's denunciation of the Trade Union Educational League, THE LABOR HERALD, and William Z. Foster. The League he called "an organization attempting to dictate the policies of the labor movement;" THE LABOR HERALD was described as "a monumental, brazen publication;" and Foster was named as one who "wants to become the Lenine of America." Mr. Gompers said that the steel strike, which was called by a committee of 24 union presidents, was started against his advice. It was not clear, however, whether this blow was aimed at the 24 presidents or against Foster, "a self-appointed autocrat" who happened, nevertheless, to hold appointment on the steel committee from Mr. Gompers himself. Gompers' arguments against industrial unionism were so weak that few took them seriously.

The Lesson for the Militants

In these events there is a great lesson for the militant trade unionists. If the old officialdom is so interested in opposing the League and its program, this is the greatest possible compliment to the League and a testimony to the correctness of its position. The program of the League touches the heart of the trade union problem; the alarm of the standpatters indicates its effectiveness. For the first time they are forced to face the issue of solidarity on its merits. Hitherto all such movements have been tinged with dualism, and all that was necessary to defeat them was to brand them as secessionism. Although new in the field and just getting started, the League is receiving more attention than did any dual industrial union. Without further ado the rebel elements should understand that their place is in the League. Everywhere they ought to join it at once. Throughout the country the militant trade unionists should get busy immediately, gather together all the progressive elements, spread our education, and raise the slogan in every local union, central body, and international—"Amalgamation or annihilation."

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of the railroaders, of officials as well as workers, and it is absolutely true when a great newspaper of the finance aristocracy, the *Berlin Bourse Courier*, says: "During three years of revolutionary struggle the officials always remained true to the Government. Now they are against the Government and on the side of the revolution. The time of the *putsch* is past, the revolution is now beginning."

Between the reactionary bureaucracy and the workers there is likewise a heavy struggle. In the near future the right-wing elements will be expelled from the officials' organizations, and it will be made impossible for the leaders of the other organizations to again carry on the shameful, treasonable play, which they did in the February days to the advantage of the capitalist Government and the injury of the working class. The Spring of 1922 will bring new and more bitter struggles. The fate of the working class is at stake, and with it that of the present Government and capitalistic system of society.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.

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State of Illinois, County of Cook ss.

Before me a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid personally appeared William Z. Foster, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the The Labor Herald, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1922, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Trade Union Educational League, 118 N. La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.
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2. That the owners are: The Trade Union Educational League, a voluntary association; Executive Board; Wm. Z. Foster, Sec'y-Treas.; J. W. Johnstone, Sam T. Hammersmark, Earl R. Browder, and Jay G. Brown.

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WILLIAM Z. FOSTER, Editor.
 Sworn to and subscribed before me this 6th day of April, 1922.

(SEAL)

RAYMOND J. KENNEDY,
 (My commission expires May 24, 1922)