

Speech by Wm. Z. Foster at Y. W. L. Convention

COMRADE Chairman and Comrades: I feel it is my duty to say at least a few things here tonight. If it were any other meeting of the Party except the Young Workers League, possibly I would not feel the urge so strongly. But particularly the Young Workers League I believe I should speak to. I should like to refer to some of the things that have been said by Comrades Bedacht and Cannon. It is true, as Comrade Cannon has said, that sharp division has taken place in the ranks of the former majority. The division—I want to try to show you some of the implications of it if I can. The division took place shortly after the receipt of the cablegram from Moscow, upon a proposal of Comrade Bittelman and I that on the basis of the cablegram we should take a minority of the CEC. It seems to me necessary, comrades, in view of the fact that I have been so closely identified with such a very large section of the Party, that something should be said in addition to what Comrade Cannon has said as to the motive behind that motion.

Comrade Cannon has left the impression as to this motion was designed to shirk responsibility of the Party. I want to correct that. I want to say that to shirk responsibility was the farthest thing from our minds. When Comrade Cannon put forth the idea of a fifty-fifty CEC, to me that looked like a highly impractical proposition. Comrades, as I read the decision from the Comintern I understood it to mean this—that the Comintern decision meant just what it said, "that the Ruthenberg group was closer to the view of the Comintern, more loyal to its decisions." In this situation, to my understanding, there was nothing left to do except to turn the control of the CEC over to the former minority. I think that was a 100 per cent correct Communist decision on our part. It was and still is my opinion that, in the face of the decision, to try to hold on to the majority of the CEC or even to set up a fifty-fifty CEC was a wrong policy.

I don't think it can be held against us that we were sabotaging the Party because of our interpretation of the Comintern decision, namely, that it calls upon the minority to take charge of the CEC. Our position was this, that to take a fifty-fifty CEC was not going to facilitate matters. It would put us in a false position and expose us to the charges that we were blocking the Party work. The decision said the minority should control the Party, and we should accept it as such. We had to get ourselves in the proper position in the Party, in the CEC of the Party, which in the face of the decision, could only be done by our taking a minority of the CEC. It is significant that at the very first meeting of the CEC, Comrade Green abolished the fifty-fifty arrangement and gave the former minority a majority.

I repeat, the farthest thing from our minds was to shirk responsibility. Our comrades generally have not shirked responsibility. They have worked diligently since this decision. As for myself, I feel there is at least one thing I am grateful to the minority for, that is, the present majority of the CEC, that they entrusted me with particularly important work—that is, the handling of the needs of the

reference and the handling of the I. L. G. W. U. settlement to a great extent in New York—a very difficult problem—and I tried to put that into good shape and my policies were endorsed by the CEC almost completely. This indicates that they never took any stock in Cannon's argument that I was seeking to avoid responsibility in the Party.

It was not with a desire to shirk responsibility that we made our proposition, nor could it possibly be given the sinister twist of being in opposition to the Comintern. On the contrary it was, we feel, the other section of the group, that were shirking responsibility of the Party in spite of their proposal. Why? Because these comrades, notwithstanding all their talk about sharing responsibility, come forth with a proposition to send all the leaders of their group off to the school in Moscow—Cannon, Dunne, Abern, Bell, Hathaway, Schachtman and Williamson. We argued unavailingly against this policy of theirs. Comrade Bedacht in the committee also impressed upon them that it was impossible for all these leading comrades to go away at this particular time—that they had to stay and help do the work of the Party. If anybody was shirking it was these very comrades who have tried to create the impression that we were avoiding Party responsibility, and to make such a desperate issue of this matter. I don't say that they shirked responsibility intentionally, but the CEC understood it as avoiding responsibility and refused to let them go to Moscow.

Comrade Cannon said that after the decision came I refused to participate in the CEC. Altho that charge relates to my personal attitude I must answer it. His statement is correct and a fact. I can assure you that when I read that decision I was not a bit pleased. When I saw the statement "that the Ruthenberg group is more loyal to the decisions of the Comintern" than our group, it went straight to my heart, because I want to be loyal to the Comintern and as far as I understand its decisions I am loyal to them. When the decision came I said to myself "What value am I in the movement if I am not loyal,—if the position is taken that I am not loyal to the Comintern? If that is the case, of what value am I in the CEC?" It took me only an hour to get over this wrong, but excusable conclusion. I think I recovered rapidly from that subjective reaction.

Comrade Bedacht said much about the army. I noticed that he used the illustration of the army and general staff constantly. In trying to picture Party discipline, he said when the army staff gives the instructions the soldiers must obey. In a sense that's true in our Party as it's true in an army. But there is one important difference not mentioned by Comrade Bedacht. In our Party the discipline is self-imposed. The decisions are arrived at by a common discussion of policy with our higher officers, and the decisions, when they come, are not forced upon us like in an army. They are the result of a common understanding and intelligent co-operation in the various phases of the Party. Like soldiers we must obey the C. I. The higher degree of discipline here is in the Communist Interna-

tional the more effective will be our organization. But we have the right to take up these questions of policy with the heads of the Comintern and that's what we are doing in our appeal. In the meantime, however, we must put the Comintern decision fully into effect. In outlining the Party conception of discipline this right must be borne in mind.

I believe we have obeyed the decision of the Comintern 100 per cent. We have done the best we could in a difficult situation. I am sure we made the effort to act in the spirit of the decision when we refused to continue on as the majority of the Party. Suppose we had tried to diplomatize with the C. I. and said, "Well, this decision doesn't say we shall take a minority of the CEC, so we shall continue as a majority." Suppose we had done that. Do you think the Party would be in a healthy condition at the present time if we insisted on clinging on to the majority? I don't think it would. I think we took the proper stand in taking a minority. I am sure the Comintern will endorse it. To call it opposition to the C. I. is ridiculous.

Now about the organized campaign in support of the appeal that is charged against us. It is true we have asked the Comintern to review the decision, which is a legitimate and proper thing to do. But with one provision: that in the meantime we put the decision into effect unquestioningly and unequivocally. We have done that, I think. And as far as an organized campaign to develop the Party in support of the appeal is concerned, the thing has been enormously exaggerated, to say the very least. The Party organizations all over the country that we were in control of, and are still to a great extent, as well as the mass membership meetings recently held, have not gone on record for the appeal, nor have we made any effort to have them do so. Comrade Cannon's charges of an organized campaign in support of the appeal is incorrect. It is true that some comrades have made statements that were improper, and for this these comrades must be corrected. I refer particularly to the statements of Comrades Kraska of Boston and Aronberg in New York. I think these statements were inadvisable. But I am sure these comrades had not the slightest intention of admonishing the Communist International. I am sure they are altogether loyal to the C. I. If I have made any incorrect statements, I would want to be corrected about them also.

In connection with this matter, I want to say something about Moscow. Comrade Bedacht said a few things to the effect that some comrades and ex-comrades have slighting opinions of the Comintern and the decisions it makes. I don't think he meant these remarks for me, but probably for anyone to put on the shoe who might find it a good fit. I have the highest appreciation of the C. I. I have been three times to Moscow. I went the first time in 1921 and learned a lot. The second time in 1924 I learned much more. And something else, I think our Party learned a lot on the question of the third party alliance. I am convinced that the leaders of

SPEECH BY WM. Z. FOSTER

(Continued from page 3)

the Communist International, even tho they were five thousand miles away from here, or even six thousand, understood the American situation far better than we did. They were able to teach us with regard to the American situation. The decision which they arrived at in the question of the third party alliance greatly educated our party in the fundamentals of Communist tactics.

A case in point of the wisdom of the Comintern—the second congress of the C. I. We had a delegation over there—Reid, Fraina and others, I don't remember the personnel exactly. The debate was on the trade union question. Our delegation took a dual union standpoint. It was very typical what the Russian leaders said to them. They said: "You say you cannot work in the trade unions in America and you have made a lot of arguments to that effect. We don't know the exact details of the situation but we are certain nevertheless that you can work in the trade unions of America." Experience has proven the correctness of this position, in the trade unions of America. It was the Russian leaders who taught the American Party to work in the unions. It was Lenin and Lozovsky and other Russian leaders who freed us from our infantile dualism and instructed us in the fundamentals of trade union work. We did not understand the first principles of this basic task. The Comintern taught us how to work in the unions.

The last trip I made to Moscow was in 1925. Again we learned many things about our own Party and the American situation. On the question of the labor party—now the comrades of the minority, the former minority, had searched around with a microscope to find every conceivable argument for the advocacy of the slogan, yet we found that the leaders of the Comintern even 5,000 miles away, were able to educate the comrades of the minority very much on the question of the necessity to advocate the labor party. They had more faith in the certainty of a labor party than our comrades. The best arguments were made by Zinoviev, Stalin and Kuusinen, not by the American delegates of the minority, and I think it is not telling any tales out of school to say that when the former minority delegates came to Moscow they were criticized by the Comintern leaders for yielding

too much to us on the question of the labor party.

I am not one of those who say that when you go to Moscow you meet with a lot of men who make hasty factional decisions. Quite the contrary. The leaders of the C. I. are responsible, intelligent leaders, and when they make decisions, their decisions are based upon real facts and their decisions on American problems have been far more intelligent than we have been able to arrive at as a result of counselling among ourselves.

I am not going to say what happened at the Young Workers League caucus. Comrade Cannon pictures a desperate situation. But that is ridiculous. I will pass over that for the present. On my previous trips, I learned much, and the fourth time I shall probably learn a lot more. I do want to say this: every time I have gone to Moscow I have learned much. Once I really contributed something—the first time I went over—the other two times I was defeated, but the second time I was in pretty respectable company—Comrade Pepper, both factions. In all these cases, I have at least tried to correct my policy in accordance with the Comintern and to get in line with the Comintern. On our next visit over there, I will assure you the same thing will happen. I am for the Comintern from start to finish. I want to work with the Comintern, and if the Comintern finds itself criss-cross with my opinions, there is only one thing to do and that is to change my opinions to fit the policy of the Comintern.

Build the DAILY WORKER.

You Can't Afford to Miss Y. W. L. Ball This Saturday Night

The third annual youth ball of the Young Workers League of Local Chicago will be held on Saturday, Oct. 10 at the Roosevelt Hall, 3437 W. Roosevelt Road. Comrades who have attended league affairs need no further introduction to them. They know that a good time awaits them. Admission 35 cents.

That worker next door to you may not have anything to do tonight. Hand him this copy of the DAILY WORKER.