The Needle, Shoe and Leather, Textile, and Eastern District Conferences

By Wm. Z. Foster

WHEN the Needle Trades Section of the T. U. E. L. met in national conference in New York City, May 5-6, it was the first time in American labor history that the rank and file elements of all the trades in this industry came together to consider their problems upon an industrial basis. Every important needle trade center in the United States and Canada was represented; likewise every trade in the industry except the United Garment Workers. Some ninety delegates were in attendance, coming almost entirely from local leagues. Had the representation been based upon local unions a conference three or four times as large could have been had.

From beginning to end the conference was crowded with work. Little time was wasted in useless argument or bickering. Phil. Aronberg of Chicago was chairman. The conference opened by hearing a series of reports. Joseph Manley, Eastern District organizer of the League, reported on the formation of the National Needle Trades Section and the calling of the conference. Secretary Foster outlined the national situation generally, and urged that amalgamation be pushed through to victory in the near future. After him came Ida Rothstein who reported on her recent organizing trip for the National Needle Trades Committee. She told of conditions as she found them in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Indianapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, Toronto, Rochester, Montreal, Boston, and New York. She stated that practically the entire industry outside of New York is strong for amalgamation and that everywhere the left wing is growing in power and organization. Then Joseph Zack, Secretary of the Needle Trades Section, reported in detail on the condition of the unions, the state of the industry, and the growth of the left wing movement among the needle trades. He outlined a program of militant action to solve the growing problems of organizing the unorganized, the piece-work, contractor, and standard of production systems, the growth of "open shop" sentiment among the employers, etc. Finally Rose Worth, delegate of the T. U. E. L. to the 2nd Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions, reported on the action of that body. She had particular stress upon the two great international problems of securing a united front on the industrial field, as against the disruptive tactics of the Amsterdammers, and the establishing of such relations with the Communist International as would bring all revolutionary elements into the Red International. She emphasized the need of a militant international of clothing workers throughout the world.

The conference transacted a vast mass of business covering a wide range of subjects. An elaborate organization thesis was adopted providing detailed plans to organize the local needle trades leagues, care being exercised to follow the natural groupings and tendencies of the unions themselves. The Freihet, New York daily labor paper, was endorsed and its stand in the recent slugging cases in the Furriers' Union was commended. A rousing endorsement was given the Russian revolution. Support was given to efforts of the Russian unions to secure admission to the various international federations of the respective industries. The conference voted to affiliate to the International Clothing Workers Propaganda Committee of the R. I. L. U., and to send a greeting to the revolutionary needle trades workers of the world. All needle trades local unions were urged to become affiliated with their local central labor councils and to become active in them. The famous "Chicago resolution" on amalgamation of all the craft unions into industrial organizations was adopted unanimously. Independent working class political action was endorsed and all militants urged to have their locals and internationals represented at the July 3rd conference called by the Farmer-Labor Party. The Friends of Soviet Russia, the Labor Defense Council, and the Russian-American Industrial Corporation were all supported. The general needle trades program adopted at the first national conference of the T. U. E. L. was re-
affirmed after making slight changes. Plans were laid to put on a big campaign to get readers for the LABOR HERALD and to build up the Sustaining Fund of the League. Efforts will also be made to raise at least $10,000, through entertainments, donations, etc., to carry on the work of the Needle Trades Section as well as possible a bulletin will be published in several languages. During the coming year plans will be prosecuted to complete a system of shop delegate organization and to build up the ranks and file of all unions. A program of action was adopted offering practical advice for working among the masses. It follows in part:

We appeal to workers who accept our program in whole or in part and regardless of their political views. We must guard, however, against semi-administration men and aimless kickers. Such elements are a discredit to the League. The character of our members must be irrefutable as judged by our conception of loyal unionists.

Our campaigns in the unions must be based upon real concrete issues which effect the interests of the workers in their daily struggle. The criticism of union officials and policies must always be on a constructive note. We should stress issues rather than personalities.

We should not criticize and foster mistrust against paid officials just because they are officials. Such criticism is definitely inadvisable for some of our best union members to accept positions as paid officials, thus permitting the job-hunters to manage and control the affairs of the unions.

We must always strike to strike our views before the masses through the official union channels. Extra union men should only be made use of as a last resort.

Our principles alone are not sufficient to win the confidence and following of the workers. We must not make our campaigns on issues, policies, or promises that we will be impossible of fulfillment if we are elected.

Antagonizing our adversaries on petty matters does not serve the best interests of our movement. Differences of political opinion must not hamper our co-operation with other groups in union activity.

Although the conference was fruitful in other important matters, amalgamation was by far the biggest issue. No matter what subject was under debate it would almost surely crop up. This was because, whether the question was one of organization or amalgamation, the number of workers involved was so vast that the amalgamationists were always going to be in a minority. The conference showed itself alive to the issues of the day. By a unanimous vote it adopted the League’s resolution and pledged itself as far as possible to make the July 3rd convention of the Farmer-Labor Party a success. Support was promised the Needle Trades Section and the organizing work in Michigan, California, Massachusetts, etc. The LABOR HERALD was heartily endorsed, and the new National Committee of the Amalgamationists was promised to the various class war prisoners in many parts.

The conference adopted a definite stand against the Cap Makers’ plan for a Needle Trades Alliance, soon to be acted upon by the various organizations. It was denounced as a cheap substitute for amalgamation and about on a par with the brand of federation advocated by Gompers as far back as 1910. It could in no way serve the purposes of needle workers. The inconsistency was pointed out of needle union leaders who oppose as revolutionists, voting for years in A. F. of L. conventions in support of S. F. resolutions for industrial unionsism for industrial unionsism for war prisoners in Michigan, California, Massachusetts, etc. The LABOR HERALD was heartily endorsed, and the new National Committee of the Amalgamationists was promised to the various class war prisoners in many parts.

The big issue of this conference, like that of all others, was amalgamation. The reports of delegates showed that no industry needs amalgamation more than the shoe and leather workers. They are split into at least twenty separate organizations, all warring against each other. Broth er Michael Berry, Secretary of the Amalgamated Shoe Workers, outlined the efforts that have been made recently to consolidate all the independent unions. This movement started out most promisingly, joint conventions of many organizations and plans of amalgamation drawn up. But the weakness of the movement was that it was largely one of officials; the rank and file being little posted. The result was that when the amalgamation movement did not go to suit some of these officials, who were eager to guard their own personal interests, they quarreled, court litigation, and even union officials were not wanting, making a bad situation even worse. Dei Berry had a pocketful of court papers of one kind or another from each of the centers, to prove his efforts at bringing about amalgamation. The conference condemned the officials of the United Shoe Workers for their un-unionlike conduct in sending their men into the factories as leave blank, while the Amalgamated Shoe Workers were on strike. The conference also condemned the action of President Bryan and the United Leather Workers’ International Union, who were sending excited letters all over the country traducing the work of the amalgamationists.

The first national conference of the militants in the shoe and leather industry was held in Boston, May 25-26. The conference, attended by many visitors who were present from all the leading shoe and leather centers of the East. Practically all the important unions in the industry were represented. The meeting was called by J. Kassner, Secretary of the International Amalgamation Committee, assisted by Joseph Manley.

The conference showed itself alive to the issues of the day. By a unanimous vote it adopted the League’s resolution and pledged itself as far as possible to make the July 3rd convention of the Farmer-Labor Party a success. Support was promised the Needle Trades Section and the organizing work in Michigan, California, Massachusetts, etc. The LABOR HERALD was heartily endorsed, and the new National Committee of the Amalgamationists was promised to the various class war prisoners in many parts.
The Second Round at St. Joseph

By C. E. Ruthenberg

June, 1923

T he first round of the thirty-two round battle to be fought at St. Joseph resulted in a draw. The jury disagreed on the question of convicting Joseph Foster on a charge of "bogusly" representing the Communist Party. In the second round the defense got a hard wallop in the verdict of guilty of the same charge returned against him.

The prosecutors had learned to plant their blasted arguments through the experiences of the first round. They had learned through the same experience that the tactics of the defense in making the direct accusations and statements of Communist principles to the jury was the most dangerous kind of fighting and they planned an interference to prevent the jury from learning what Communists really are fighting for. These methods, and the fact that Foster was not a member of the Communist Party while I admittedly was a member of the Central Executive Committee of the party, explains the difference in the results of the second trial as compared to the first.

The jury was of the same general type as the first. With two important exceptions. There were nine farmers on the Foster jury and eight in the second trial. In the second trial, however, the treasurer of the Benton Harbor Chamber of Commerce, a member of the three remaining was a member of the American Legion; and one of the trump cards of the prosecution was a resolution of the Communist International referring to the strike-breaking activities of members of the American Legion and calling them "the fotsam and jetsam of the war." A new point developed about the Michigan jury system, that in order to qualify as a juror it is necessary to be a real estate owner. This was brought out through the disqualification of a juror whose name did not appear on the assessment lists of the county, although he owned the home in his own name. He explained the emphasis put upon the question asked the jurors, whether they believed that real estate owner rights should be protected against the bad Communists, who it was insinuated, intended to take away their farms from the poor, mortgage lenders.

Assistant Attorney-General O. L. Smith bore the brunt of the work of getting a conviction. It is rumored that he is looking forward to the preference as a reward for his work in prosecuting the Communists. That may well be, for the capitalists are generous to the lackeys who see them well. Smith does that. Whatever outward appearance of playing the game fairly and squarely he maintained during the Foster trial had been rubbed away by his defeat in that case. He played his part in the second trial as the notorious opera of practically all the agents ofchaos, who, as a result of this, were now becoming more and more the greater to their failure to grasp the proper method of attack from the Department of Justice standpoint.

The witnesses came upon the stage to do their turn in regular order. Neff Bridgman was the curtain raiser. He told again how he had gone to Bridgman with his crew of Department of Justice agents, state constabulary officers and deputy sheriffs, armed with revolvers and blackjack, and had found seventeen men lying about on the lawn green enjoying the morning sunshine un molested, in the cottage at the Wolfkeel resort.

He couldn't give any reason for making the raid except that Spolansky of the D. of J. had asked him to. He said he didn't have any warrants nor did he know when any hanging of the State of Michigan was being violated. Under cross examination he tried to explain why he had lined up his seventeen prisoners under shotguns in the second trial as compared to the first. He couldn't give any reason for making the raid except that Spolansky of the D. of J. had asked him to. He said he didn't have any warrants nor did he know when any hanging of the State of Michigan was being violated. Under cross examination he tried to explain why he had lined up his seventeen prisoners under shotguns in the streets of St. Joseph to the city hall, but he failed to make a mess of it.

Following Neff came Esther Mielke, a waitress at the Wolfkeel resort, who seemed entirely unnecessary as a witness and was probably put on to break the monotony.

The Department of Justice then took its turn in the spotlight. Shanahan told about how he had served his country in France; Spolansky repeated his tale of coming to these United States as a poor Russian immigrant and the various vicissitudes of his life up to the time he landed in the sheltering arms of Uncle Sam as a labor spy; Wolf expatiated on his long detective career. As to their part in the Communist raid, every one of them repeated his tale of coming to these United States as a labor spy; Wolf expatiated on his long detective career. As to their part in the Communist raid, every one of them.

The Department of Justice then took its turn in the spotlight. Shanahan told about how he had served his country in France; Spolansky repeated his tale of coming to these United States as a poor Russian immigrant and the various vicissitudes of his life up to the time he landed in the sheltering arms of Uncle Sam as a labor spy; Wolf expatiated on his long detective career. As to their part in the Communist raid, every one of them.

As to their part in the Communist raid, every one of them.