The A. F. of L. Convention

BY W. M. FOSTER.

IN Detroit on October 4 will open the 46th convention of the American Federation of Labor. The A. F. of L. has organized labor movement in a real crisis, ideologically and organizationally. The victorious employers are on the offensive on every front. They have shattered the unions on the railroads, in the mines, and in many other basic and key industries. The retreat of the unions, begun during the great struggle of 1919-21, still continues. The repressive trade union bureaucracy, intent only on protecting their own petty group interests, has abandoned all semblance of a fighting policy and are seeking to subordinate the unions to the employers by multiplying class collaboration schemes in every sphere, such as the new wage pause plans, Monroe Doctrine of Labor, Wall Street workers' insurance, and the like. They are company-unionizing the American labor movement.

What the Convention Should Do.

In the midst of this far-reaching crisis the A. F. of L. meets in convention, ostensibly to take stock of the situation and to adopt the measures necessary to safeguard the workers' interests. Were the convention actually minded to do that, it would have to revamped the policies and personnel of the organization from top to bottom. This, of course, the convention has indicated, has indicated that most of the four serious errors put the American labor movement on the road as a fighting organization.

First, the very basic policy of the bureaucracy must be changed. Instead of class collaboration there must be class struggle. Instead of a policy of crawling to the employers and giving up all resistance, there must be a policy of a militant fight on all fronts. Second, the workers must be made the main standards of living and to make fresh conquests from the employers.

The third fundamental change in policy—a whole series of measures—will arise from the giant task of organizing the millions of unorganized workers. There is no getting away from the weakness of the trade unions. So long, as at present, only a fraction of the workers are organized, and these mostly skilled workers, the unorganized will be a real factor in the economic and political life of the country. The million unorganized workers, especially the unskilled, are the great mass of the workers and is the major task now confronting the labor movement. Upon its achievement depends the ultimate success of the American Federation of Labor and the progress of political power and progress of organized labor.

But there are many other problems of a burning urgency character awaiting solution. The situation of the unorganized workers present alliance of the trade union bureaucracy with the old capitalist parties and the formation of a labor party constitute an important issue in which can hardly be overestimated. The alliance with the old parties pot poses the trade union corruption and class collaboration. It is a dagger in the heart of the labor movement. The establishment of a labor party will require a tremendous step forward in the labor movement.

Besides initiating a labor party and labor stoppage and progress for the organization of the unorganized, the convention should carry thru a whole series of other defensive movements, such as a declaration in favor of nationalization of the oil and coal mines, the repudiation of American imperialism, support and a war to the finish against company unionism, active support of the communists strike by strike and an embargo upon coal, revere efforts to keep the peace, the kick out of all political organization of the workers and to subordinate the class war to the class war. A big battle against the right wing of the labor movement, something that cannot be limited to a few upon a few, powerful corruption with which the labor movement is riddled. This should be admitted freely to all organizations, the A. F. of L. should support world trade union unity, send a delegation to the Soviet Union and demand the full economic and political independence of that country. If the movement labor movement should be thoroughly centralized and placed under rank and file control.

This is the line of action necessary to revive the trade union movement, to give it the power and control to resist the attacks of the employers but to deal smashing blows against these exploiters.

What the Convention Will Do.

However essential the foregoing programs may be for the building up of the American trade union movement it will nevertheless get short shrift at the Detroit convention. It is safe to state that hardly a single plank of it will go into effect. The reactionary bureaucrats controlling the A. F. of L. have other plans in mind. They do not want to make the A. F. of L. into a real fighting machine; they want to degrade it into an auxiliary of the industrial and political organizations of the employers. Their whole program at the convention will go in this direction.

The serious business of the convention will be directed to setting up saw and more "friendliness" relations with the employers, and to the ruthless smash-