

The A.F. of L. Convention and the Left Wing

by Ben Gitlow

The Jubilee Convention of the American Federation of Labor will open in Boston on October 6, 1930. It will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the organization. The event is bound to be of great importance, especially from an historical point of view.

In the course of fifty years the organization has gone thru many changes. It has now left behind its early history of struggle and organization. As a logical result of the policies of its reactionary officialdom, it has become the seat of reaction within the labor movement.

The development of American imperialism—particularly in the post-war period—has brought about many changes in the organization. Precisely because the A. F. of L. has been an organization largely of skilled workers has it so easily fallen under the influence of U. S. imperialism. The fabulous super-profits of American imperialism made it possible for the capitalists to favor some sections of the skilled workers and to widen the chasm between the skilled and the millions of unskilled and semi-skilled who comprise the large army of the unorganized in most of the basic and strategic industries in the United States. In this process the hegemony of American capitalism over the labor bureaucracy became practically complete. The labor officialdom, by and large has come into the fold of American imperialism. The Greens and the Walls are the direct agents of imperialism in the labor movement, doing the bidding of Wall Street at beck and call.

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The A. F. of L. Convention takes place at a time when the country is in the throes of a very severe economic crisis. The economic crisis has blasted the hollow contentions of American capitalism that it has solved the question of economic crisis and, as Hoover so glibly put it, can insure "permanent prosperity." It has blasted the new "wage theories" of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy that mass production plus high wages are the foundation of American prosperity. It has exploded the myth that mass production, the Ford plan, with its speedup and efficiency labor-saving methods guarantee a good living to the American workers for all time to come. The membership of the A. F. of L. has been very badly hit by the crisis. Unemployment has reached unprecedented heights, wages are being cut, unions are being smashed. With about six million unemployed, with a technological unemployment of over one million driven out of industry by rationalization, with part time employment and "vacation without pay" becoming a more and more prominent feature of American industrial life, with wage cutting the order of the day and capitalist reaction growing day by day, the bureaucracy of the A. F. of L. will find it very difficult at the Jubilee Convention to put conviction into their praises of the rule of American capital, of the policies of collaboration and cooperation with the capitalists. In the light of the prevailing conditions as they effect the workers, including the workers in the A. F. of L. the support of the officialdom for rationalization and for the Hoover economic program will lack positiveness and power to deceive that it had in the period of so-called prosperity.

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The appearance of Herbert Hoover at the Convention will be of great importance. He came to greet the Convention in the name of American capital and to enlist the support of the A. F. of L. for the foreign and domestic policies of U. S. imperialism. Thru Hoover's appearance the Hoover-Green "no strike" pact will receive the official sanction of the A. F. of L. thru the Convention. Thus the stamp of approval will be given to wage cuts, increased speed-up, union smashing capitalist reaction.

In the face of acute unemployment and with no prospects of immediate relief, the statement of William Green, president of the A. F. of L. against any sort of unemployment insurance is a very fitting prelude to the Jubilee Con-

vention and to Mr. Hoover's appearance as a spokesman at a labor gathering. More than anything else, this stand of Green's exposes the anti-labor character of the reigning bureaucracy of the A. F. of L.

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The discontent and unrest among the three million members of the A. F. of L. is growing by leaps and bounds. If it reacted to the prevailing situation and to the conditions of its membership as a labor organization should, the A. F. of L. Convention would present no such picture. The bureaucracy will meet complacently and speak on behalf and in the name of labor without fear of contradiction or opposition. Within the A. F. of L. there is practically no organized left wing or opposition to the reactionary bureaucracy—and this at a time when there exists so much discontent with things as they are and with the course of the bureaucracy. The once powerful left wing has been liquidated by the policies of Trade Union Unity League which, well over a year ago, abandoned left wing activity within the A. F. of L. unions and adopted the DeLeonist policy of building new

unions and deserting the millions of organized workers.

The consideration of the A. F. of L. membership as a reactionary mass and of work in the A. F. of L. as useless is based on the premise that American imperialism is in a position to keep satisfied the three million members of the conservative unions. Such a conception is the very reverse of the truth, especially today, and every development in the labor movement shows this.

What the TUUL has destroyed must be built up again. A harp turn must be made in policy if a militant rank and file opposition is to be developed once more at a time when there is more need than ever for such an opposition movement. The best way to greet the A. F. of L. Convention is to raise the cry: "Back into the A. F. of L. and the existing unions!" "Organize a rank and file movement to oust the reactionary officialdom, to fight for a militant program against class collaboration, and to make the existing unions militant organizations on behalf of the workers!"

On what program shall all progressive and militant trade union forces be united?

On the following immediate program:

1. For unemployment insurance!
2. Against wage-cuts!
3. Against the class collaboration policies of the reactionary officialdom!
4. For amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial unions!
5. Against the so-called "non partisan" policy of the A. F. of L. in political action! For a Labor Party!
6. For the organization of the unorganized!
7. Against militarism, imperialism, and the danger of war!
8. For the recognition of the Soviet Union!

The Jubilee Convention of the A. F. of L. will play a truly significant and historical role if the danger of its reactionary, pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist course will serve to arouse and to bring together all those forces of opposition working for rebirth of a powerful left wing opposition movement in the American labor unions!

NEW FORCES FOR OUR GROUP

(Continued from page 2)

the Negro organizer of the Party, Comrade Huiswood, and how a few days later he received an "invitation" from Comrade Briggs to come to "see" him. At the same time rumors began to be spread that Comrade Francis was a "Lovestoneite". At this time, as Comrade Francis points out, "I never saw Comrade Lovestone and therefore could not have held any conversation with him. Neither was I acquainted with any of his supporters or with the main issue of the controversy." Comrade Francis then recounts how attempts were made to discredit him with rumors about his ILLD tour, a campaign which the National Office of the ILLD officially "disavowed". Then came the order from Otto Huiswood, the Negro organizer for the Party, that Comrade Francis "must discontinue work for the ANLC until he had reported to him". This order was issued just before a meeting of the ANLC local to which Comrade Francis had succeeded in getting nine new members. Comrade Francis left the meeting. Thereupon.....)

The ANLC lost nine members. Today it has ten on paper—eight white and two Negroes—and does not function.

(Then followed, as Comrade Francis explains, an interview with Herbert Newton, the national secretary of the ANLC.....)

The interview was fiery to say the least. The comrade promised to write me the next day. I am still waiting for that letter.

A week or two later for special reasons I wrote an article on the Virgin Islands. Certainly, under the circumstances mentioned, I would not send it to the *Daily Worker*. It was sent to the *Revolutionary Age* and accepted. Immediately I received the long delayed reply from the Control Commission to appear at the National Office to discuss my membership in the Brooklyn Party section, in spite of the fact that my membership there had already been rejected!

From the experiences outlined I came to the conclusion that my place is in the CP-Majority Group. There I propose to stay until misleadership and fanaticism be replaced by ability, experience, and common sense in the ranks of the Communist movement in the United States.

ROTSCHILD FRANCIS

September 12, 1930.

A LETTER

Sept. 23, 1930.

Dear Comrade:-

I am sending you 50 cents for the movement. Sorry I cannot send you any more. I am working only 2 to 3 days a week. As soon as the work picks up I will send you more. I will try to collect from friends money for the movement.

L. ARON
Milwaukee, Wisc.

WHAT THE A. F. OF L. WAS ORGANIZED FOR...

Whereas a struggle is going on in all the nations of the civilized world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between the capitalist and the laborer, which grow in intensity from year to year, and will work disastrous results to the toiling millions if they are not combined for their mutual protection and benefit;

It, therefore behooves the representatives of the trade and labor unions of America, in convention assembled, to adopt such measures and disseminate such principles among the mechanics and laborers of our country as will permanently unite them to secure the recognition of rights to which they are justly entitled;

We, therefore, declare ourselves in favor of the formation of thoroughgoing Federation, embodying every trade and labor organization in America, organized under the trade union system.

(From the resolution on the formation of the American Federation of Labor, 1881).

Is There a Change of Line?

About the Trade Union Policy of the Party

In many sections of the Party membership and sympathizers the impression has arisen that the new trade union course of the Party and of the Comintern (or shall we say anti-trade union course) has been undergoing a change in the right direction of late. This impression is striking testimony to the keen desire for a change felt in the ranks of the Communists in this country; unfortunately, however, it is hardly justified by the facts.

The Party comrades and sympathizers who believe a change of course is taking place point to a so-called "right about face" that was supposed to have taken place in the Party policy on the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (at first the TUUL was "against" participating in the ACW elections—then the TUUL decided "for"). They call attention to the recent articles of Johnstone advocating "working in the unions", to the rumors that the RILU Congress is "in favor of working in the unions", and so on. They note the editorial answer to the *Daily Worker* to a silly article of Sam Darcy on the A.F.L. in which answer the necessity for "working in the A. F. of L." is emphasized. And so on...

But, as we mentioned, the appearances are very superficial; unfortunately the old line remains absolutely unchanged fundamentally. What is the objective of Leninist trade union work? To go into the trade unions, to work in and build and strengthen the unions, to win the confidence of the membership, to capture the unions, to oust the reactionary officials, to revolutionize the unions. What are the objectives that the new

Party course puts before those whom it urges to work in the A. F. of L.? We quote from the *Daily Worker* editorial reply to Darcy (August, 19, 1930):

"Revolutionary workers must carry on their activities within the A. F. of L. for the building of the revolutionary trade unions."

In other words the Party line is to go into the A. F. of L. unions to break them up (they are supposed to be "company unions") and to get the members of the unions to join the imaginary paper "revolutionary unions" of the TUUL.

The Leninist view is: Go into the unions to win them! The ultra-left sectarian view is: Go into the unions to smash them!

No greater difference could be possible!

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