

The State AFL Convention

By Rose Wortis

The convention of the New York State AFL, which convenes in Rochester, N. Y., on Aug. 19, will face many pressing problems. There is much concern among AFL workers over the paralyzing effect of the "do nothing policy" of the leadership on the burning issues of the day. The voice of the 1,500,000 workers is not felt in the affairs of our State.

The offensive of reaction against the living standards of the workers has hit the thousands of AFL workers in the building trades, railroads, etc. These workers who in the past have been among the most highly paid now have been reduced to the lower categories of wage earners as a result of the wage freeze during the war. The weakening of price control and skyrocketing prices will further reduce their living standards.

Despite the opposition of the top leadership of the AFL to any form of militant struggle in defense of living standards AFL members have not taken the attacks of the employers lying down. The strike of the longshoremen, tugboat men, AFL seamen and the wage movement of workers in numerous other industries show that the AFL, just like the CIO, is ready to fight in defense of their living conditions.

LEADERS' ROLE

How is this militant spirit of the workers reflected in the leadership of the State Federation of Labor which speaks for one million and a half workers? What has been the role of the state leadership in these important struggles? What is the record of achievement with which they are coming to the convention? The officers of the State Federation of Labor as well as the Central Trades not only failed to give leadership in the strikes for higher wages but they sabotaged the strikes.

Where the workers were not sufficiently organized to take the situation in their own hands as the case in the building trades (with the exception of the painters) the movement for higher

wages was dissipated and wage freeze agreement forced on the workers.

In the struggle on other vital issues such as price control, housing, veterans needs, etc., the leadership of the State Federation of Labor miserably failed to live up to its responsibilities. It has followed a "do nothing" policy. Every approach of the CIO and other progressive forces for united action was met with hostility.

Of the 150 bills introduced by the State Federation of Labor, only two of any significance such as extension of Workmen's Compensation to domestic workers and increased minimums and maximums in compensation were passed as a result of a compromise. Two other bills were in the main directed against the CIO. This is the pitiable record of the leadership of the State Federation of Labor in the past sessions. In face of this record, the Legislative Bulletin still speaks of the "sym-

pathetic interests of the Governor" and expresses the pious hope that more favorable action will be taken at the 1947 legislature. All vital measures were killed by a Republican legislature with the blessings of the governor.

The problem as far as the convention is concerned, however is not only the adoption of a correct program but also leadership to translate the program into life. When we read the records of the past four conventions, we find the program adopted is generally progressive but it remains only a matter of record and not a guide to action. The discrepancy between the progressive programs adopted at conventions and the action of the leadership was illustrated most dramatically in 1944 when the delegates enthusiastically greeted Sen. Wagner only to learn that shortly after the convention, the nonpartisan committee endorsed the reactionary Dewey candidate, Thomas Curran.

(Concluded tomorrow)

Worth Repeating

"As for us Communists, we conceive the development of culture only as within the most complete freedom. Freedom for the scientist to seek and discover without fear of seeing his discoveries go to waste if they run counter to one or another special interest. Freedom for the thinker, for the writer, to express human aspirations without having to fear a quarantine, a boycott by the moneyed powers.

"Freedom for the artist to express the joy, the sorrow, the wrath, the love and the hope of man, without having to spare special interests. Freedom for the intellectual to express himself unhampered, without being subjected to the demands of those who, because they have material wealth at their disposal, tend to treat the mind as a commodity." Jacques Duclos, French Communist leader, *Communism, Science and Culture*, International Publishers.

Thomas Jefferson's view of a nation's people: "I consider the people who constitute a society or nation as the source of all authority in that nation; as free to transact their common concerns by any agents they think proper; to change these agents individually, or the organization of them in form or function whenever they please." P 52, Thomas Jefferson, *International Publishers*.