

The A. F. of L. Convention

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

THE 47th convention of the American Federation of Labor finds the labor movement in a deepening crisis. More than ever the class-collaboration policy of the Green-Woll bureaucracy is demonstrating itself to be utterly unfit to build the political and industrial movement of the workers.

The past year has dealt severe blows to this policy. Although it has been a period of high industrial activity, the unions have not succeeded in organizing the unorganized, save in the cases of a relatively few skilled workers. This failure to build the movement in a period of so-called prosperity is one of the most striking signs of the bankruptcy of the official policy of the A. F. of L.

The cringing "union-management cooperation" schemes, B. & O. Plan, etc., have not saved the unions from the open-shop attacks of the employers. As this is written, the United Mine Workers are engaged in a life and death struggle, the employers seeking desperately to destroy this once powerful organization. And Willard, the great champion of the B. & O. Plan, shows where he stands by endors-



Wm. Green, President of the A. F. of L.

ing the program of big capital to introduce the ten-hour day on the railroads.

The Watson-Parker Law, the outstanding expression of the no-struggle policy of the "Higher Strategy of Labor" and hope of the bureaucrats, is proving itself such a millstone about the necks of the unions that even the upper officialdom are beginning openly to condemn it as a menace to the labor movement. The fight against this law will go on with increasing tempo.

Trade union capitalism received a body blow in the collapse of the boasted of B. of L. E. financial institutions, which exposed the squandering of millions of the workers' money by grafting officials and brought to light more clearly than any other incident in recent labor history the deep decay of the trade union officialdom.

The lickspittle political policy of the Green regime, in keeping the workers officially tied to the two old parties, has only resulted in a fresh series of governmental attacks against the unions. Never was there such a broadside of injunctions and hostile legislation directed against the unions as now. The newly exposed corruption in the New Jersey Federation of Labor shows the poisonous effects of the alliances between the officials of the unions and the capitalists, developed largely by the Gompersian non-partisan political policy.

The position of the labor movement is that of a general retreat before the attacks of the militant employers. The surrender policies of the reactionary bureaucracy, instead of protecting the workers, simply stimulate the employers to make fresh assaults upon the workers' organizations and ideology.

The Tasks of the Convention.

In the face of this crisis, the convention is confronted with the most elementary tasks for the building of the labor movement. First, the direct strengthening of the unions themselves by the organization of the unorganized, by the amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial unions, by the democratization of the unions and the development of an honest and aggressive leadership.

Then there is the burning necessity to break the

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alliance between the trade union officialdom and to establish a mass labor party. Until this is done the labor movement must flounder helplessly in the grip of reaction.

The rejection of the general class-collaboration policy of the bureaucracy and the initiation of a militant program to resist wage cuts, to increase wages, and to shorten the workday and work-week, is fundamental. This carries with it a repudiation of the B. & O. Plan, and similar schemes for speeding-up of the workers in industry. It also means the rejection of trade union capitalism and the illusions connected therewith, and the severance of the labor banks from the trade unions.

Finally, to indicate only the basic lines of policy necessary for the rejuvenation of the trade union movement, the convention, were it awake to the necessities of the workers, would launch a systematic struggle against American imperialism. It would condemn the growing campaign for the militarization of the workers, arouse the workers to the danger of a new world war, and join hands with the workers of the world for defense of the Chinese and Russian revolutions, and for the establishment of world trade union unity.

These are the burning necessities of the movement. They are indispensable in order to equip the workers politically and industrially to struggle against powerful American capitalism. A progressive convention would inevitably build upon these general lines.

What the Convention Will Do.

It is not hard, however, to forecast a very different line for the A. F. of L. convention. It is practically certain that the ultra-reactionaries in control of the trade union movement, corrupt to the core, will do nothing of their own volition to change the course of the labor movement from a defensive retreat to a victorious advance. And the mass pressure is not at present great enough to force them along the line of progress. The convention bids fair to be one of the most reactionary yet held by the A. F. of L., despite the growing alarm among the bureaucrats at the manifest failure of their class-collaboration policies.

Doubtless the convention will cling to the main line of Green and his co-reactionaries. It will nauseate us with appeals to the employers to join with the labor leaders to company unionize the trade unions and to turn them into mere adjuncts of the profit-making machinery of the capitalists. It will smear over the scandalous corruption in the labor movement, exemplified recently by the B. of L. E. and New Jersey Federation situations, and will pour out its eulogies upon the corrupt politicians with whom the bureaucrats stand in illicit alliance all over the country. It will waste its time in the never-ending futile jurisdictional disputes. It will adopt the customary empty crop of resolutions regarding the organization of the unorganized. It will be the usual joy-ride, mutual admiration affair for the upper leadership and it will wind up by re-electing the old gang to power.

The convention, instead of beginning to orientate the labor movement towards a definite struggle against American imperialism, will doubtless mark a still more abject surrender of the bureaucrats to the plans of the employers for world conquest. The growing capitalist attack upon the Soviet Union, instead of being condemned will be glorified and supported. The Communists will be held up as the authors of all the troubles and difficulties of the working class. Such, in the main, will be the convention. If any progressive actions are to be taken, they are not yet discernable to the naked eye.

The Perspective.

The foregoing would seem a somewhat dismal analysis to one not acquainted with the labor movement in this country. The American Federation of Labor convention is not representative of the working class, nor of the currents of protest surging through its ranks. It is a gathering of high-paid, reactionary officials. In no country is the central body of the labor movement so undemocratically constructed. At the A. F. of L. convention the rank and file is conspicuous by its absence. The only way a stray worker gets to the convention as a delegate is by coming from some obscure central body or federal union.

Although the A. F. of L. convention may create the appearance that all is serene, deep in the ranks of the working class vast currents of discontent surge. The great masses of workers are exploited bitterly. They work for impossibly low wages, as the general national average of \$29.00 per week for male adult workers amply proves. Passaic indicated what happens when this discontent finds favorable means for expression. The upheaval among the miners, resulting in the defeat of the Lewis administration, is another symptom. Likewise, the bitter struggle of needle workers, in the face of a treacherous officialdom, indicates that the workers are not in step with the class-collaboration policies of the Green bureaucracy.

By the use of autocratic methods, unparalleled in the history of the American labor movement, the upper bureaucracy, aided openly by the employers

and the state, manage to stifle much of the discontent and protest in the labor movement. But they are merely damming it up. The flood is bound to come, especially should the present recession in industry develop into a sharp industrial crisis. Then, in spite of the Greens and Wolls, the trade unions would be flung into the struggle and the doors opened for progressive developments in the labor movement. The hard shell of smug conservatism, coating over the top of the labor movement, as expressed by the A. F. of L. convention, is no real index of the state of mind of the working masses.

EDITOR'S NOTES

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Federation of Labor done to counteract these imperialist policies of the American capitalist class? What policies and concrete acts have the Wolls and Greens produced to stop the offensive of the employers?

It is universally recognized that one of the cardinal tasks of the American labor movement is the organization of the unorganized. Even the Greens and Wolls feel compelled to render a certain amount of lip-service to this question. But what has the reactionary bureaucracy actually achieved in this respect? What has become of the decision of the Detroit convention to initiate an organization campaign among the automobile workers? The answer is: Nothing, because the bureaucracy never took seriously that decision. The only genuine efforts made in that direction have come from the Automobile Workers Union of Detroit which is an organization independent of the A. F. of L.

The organization of the unorganized is at present the acid test for true loyalty to the American working class. And the reactionary bureaucracy of the A. F. of L., despite its official protestations, takes its position on this question on the side of the employers and against the workers. This fact was conclusively demonstrated in the Passaic strike where the organization campaign was carried through by the left wing and progressives in the face of the most damnable opposition and sabotage of the official bureaucracy.

For a period of several years the Communists and the left wing have been warning the American labor movement against the capitalistic ventures of the reactionary bureaucracy in the field of labor banking, insurance and real estate enterprises, etc. The answer of the bureaucrats was more persecution of the left wing. Their own capitalistic schemes they represented as something which was going to work miracles in the improvement of the conditions of labor. These labor banking propositions, together with the "New Wage Policy," were heralded through the labor movement as the discovery of a new path to working class freedom. It was even styled: The Higher Strategy of Labor.

Ask the Locomotive Engineers. They'll tell you. Theirs is one of the oldest and most powerful unions. It was the bureaucracy of the B. of L. E. that was first to start labor banking and other capitalist schemes and to develop them on the grandest scale. What happened as a result would take a book to tell, but the outstanding fact is that this powerful union has been brought to a most dangerous condition by the failures, corruption, incompetence and capitalistic ventures of the champions of labor banking and the so-called Higher Strategy of Labor.

In the momentous question of imperialism, militarism and war the reactionary bureaucracy followed the lead and supported the policies of the capitalist class. The last congress of the Pan-American Federation of Labor offers a brilliant illustration of this point. Woll and Green once more demonstrated their loyalty to American imperialism by defending the domination of Wall Street in Latin America, by shielding the murderous acts of the American marines in Nicaragua, by crushing the opposition of several Latin-American delegates to the outrages of the American imperialists in those countries, etc.

The hostile attitude of the Wolls and Greens to-

