

# The A. F. of L. Convention

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

IN Detroit on October 4 will open the 46th convention of the American Federation of Labor. It finds the 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 1919-23, still continues. The reactionary trade union bureaucrats, intent only on protecting their own petty group interests, have 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 "new wage policies," B. & O. plans, Monroe Doctrines of Labor, Watson-Parker laws, trade union life 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 of a mind to do this it would have to revamp the policies and personnel of the organization from top to bottom. The T. U. E. L., in its statement addressed to the convention, has indicated what must be done to really put the American labor movement on its feet as a fighting organization.

First, the very basis of the 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 developed a militant fight on all fronts in defense of the workers' standards of living and to make fresh conquests from the employers.

In carrying thru this fundamental change of policy a whole series of measures are necessary. In the forefront stands the gigantic task of organizing the millions of unorganized workers. This touches the very heart of 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 unions cannot hope to be a real factor in the economic and political life of the country. To bring in the masses of unorganized workers, especially the unskilled in the great basic industries, is the major task now confronting the labor movement. Upon its achievement depends the development of all real power and progress of organized labor.

But there are many other problems of a burningly urgent character awaiting solution. The breaking of the present alliance of the trade union bureaucracy with the old capitalist parties and the formation of a labor party constitute a task the importance of which can hardly be overestimated. The alliance with the old parties poisons the trade unions with corruption and class collaboration. It's a dagger in the heart of the labor movement. The establishment of a labor party will represent a tremendous step forward by the American working class.

Besides initiating a labor party and launching widespread campaigns for the organization of the unorganized, the convention should carry thru a whole series of other measures and movements, such as a declaration in favor of nationalizing the railroads and coal mines, the repudiation of American imperialism root and branch, a war to the finish against company unionism, active support of the British mine strike by money and an embargo upon coal, real efforts should be started to defeat the injunction evil and to secure the release of all political prisoners, the fight to save the miners' union should be made the concern of the whole labor movement, steps should be taken to eliminate the poisonous corruption with which the labor movement reeks, Negro workers 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 recognition of that country, the whole labor movement should be thoroughly centralized and placed under rank and file control.

ing of all opposition to this policy. This means more class collaboration and more war against the left wing. Concretely, the convention will support the class collaboration drift by extending its blessing to all the newer



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This is the line of action necessary to revivify the trade union movement, to give it the life and power not only to resist the attacks of the employers but to deal smashing blows against these exploiters.

## What the Convention Will Do.

HOWEVER essential the foregoing program 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 new and more "friendly" relations with the employers, and to the ruthless smash-

forms of trade union capitalism and the B. & O. plan. It will not reject even the scandalous Watson-Parker law. It will continue the firm alliance with the capitalist parties and seek to strengthen it. Against the left wing it will apply the iron fist. It will seek to condemn left wing leadership in the needle and textile industries. It will continue its war against the Soviet Union (altho' this time, under heavy pressure, it will have to consider seriously the sending of a delegation to that country).

Aside from putting into effect this general policy of surrender to the employers and of war against the left wing, the convention will be of the usual stupid quality. The conventions of the A. F. of L. are notorious the world over for the low level of their business and discussions, from a working-class standpoint. A serious analysis of present day society and the problems of the working class would be altogether unintelligible to the body of delegates. They look upon the convention principally as an enjoyable

vacation. When the delegates can tear themselves away from the systematically organized constant round of pleasure and dissipation long enough to spend a few hours in the convention hall they will waste their time by listening to stupid twaddle from capitalist politicians, priests and employers; they will wrangle endlessly over asinine jurisdictional quarrels between the various unions, adopt a still-born resolution or two about organizing the unorganized, or the release of political prisoners, or the "value" of the union label, and they will finally wind up by electing the same old gang to control the A. F. of L. and by selecting some other summer resort or "wet" town wherein to hold next year's convention. If anything progressive, not to say revolutionary, gets by the convention it will be a seven day's marvel.

## The Road to Progress.

THE situation in the United States would be a dismal one indeed if the blackly reactionary A. F. of L. conventions truly reflected the understanding and aspirations of the working class, or of even the organized section of it. But this is notoriously not the case. The A. F. of L. conventions do not represent the rank and file. They are dominated by a hard-boiled bureaucracy, which in many instances maintains itself in power with ruthlessly autocratic measures in the face of widespread rank and file opposition and discontent. Who, for example, will attempt to say that the John L. Lewis clique represents the viewpoint of the country's coal diggers? Or that Hutcheson is a true representative of the carpenters? The growing revolts in their organizations answer these questions. And what is true of Lewis and Hutcheson is also true of the great bulk of the bureaucrats who make up A. F. of L. conventions. They do not represent the viewpoint of their union membership.

The rank and file, under the pressure of low wages, long hours, and ruthless speed-up systems, want to make their unions into fighting bodies. This they have shown times innumerable in the inner union struggles in the miners, carpenters, machinists, needle trades, etc. But this is not to say that they are class conscious or revolutionary. The great bulk of organized labor rank and filers are what may be vaguely classed as "progressives." They want to struggle against the employers and the reactionary bureaucrats, but they have only the most hazy ideas of how to go about it. They are disorganized and demoralized. The so-called progressive leaders are weak, programless, and sickly tools of the firm-willed right wing reactionaries.

No intelligent left winger will expect much of a progressive nature to be accomplished at the coming bureaucracy-packed A. F. of L. convention, nor will he be disappointed if nothing is done. He must look elsewhere, among the masses, for progress. And the situation is increasingly promising. The masses of workers are gradually reviving from the slump they fell into after the big defeats of 1919-23. They are turning an ever more ready ear to the propaganda of the left wing organized in and around the Trade Union Educational League. Even the collapsed "progressive" leaders are beginning to show some signs of revival and of organized opposition to the right wing. Signs of this are the opposition slate to the Lewis machine in the miners' election and the formation of the trade union delegation to the Soviet Union in spite of official condemnation by the A. F. of L.

The broad policy of the left wing in the present situation is clear. It is to mobilize the rank and file masses in the unions around the basic slogans outlined in the T. U. E. L. convention program, to stiffen up the progressive forces generally and to make united front movements with them on minimum programs against the right wing and the employers. If the left wing will concentrate upon this policy and apply it intelligently and militantly, it will not be long before there will be some surprising shatterings of the old bureaucracy. It is the way to progress in the labor movement.

## Safe and Sane in Spite of Sherwood

"Russia is the only country in the world where man no longer exploits man." Sherwood Eddy, International Committee, Y. M. C. A.

The American Federation of Labor denounces the whole Communist philosophy which is superimposed on the Russian Soviet government." Resolution of forty-fifth annual convention of the A. F. of L.

*Stoop and stuff your mouth with glass-hot sand,  
Reach, and scorch your fingers on the gridiron of the sky.  
Do not sear your eyes with staring for a fertile land,  
But surrender to the heaving heat and die.*

*An oasis in the desert? Some bespeak it.  
Their bones are all about you. Look and learn  
It is better, far, far better, not to seek it,  
But to parch here, and to bleach here, in your turn.*

*Their bones may serve as milestones to the mountains?  
Mirages! Close your vision to their call,  
And your ears to distant fluting of the fountains.  
Your hope is here to perish—that is all.*

—J. S. WALLACE.