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Progress of the Amalgamation Movement

By Earl R. Browder

WHEN a few months ago the Trade Union Educational League launched its campaign for amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial unions not even the most optimistic could have foreseen the tremendous response on the part of Organized Labor. The situation is more than ripe for industrial unionism, and the workers realize that readily when the program of the League is laid before them. State federations, city central bodies, local unions, independent unions, and international craft unions galore have gone on record for amalgamation since our campaign started. It has been a veritable landslide towards consolidation of the workers' ranks.

The State Federations Act

The amalgamation movement has gone particularly strong among the state federations. Almost every one of them that has met since the inauguration of the campaign has gone on record in favor of industrial unionism through amalgamation. The movement has taken on such impetus that it has run far beyond the immediate membership of the League. Consequently many organizations may have adopted the proposition without our getting to hear of it. So far reports have come into our office from League militants of six important state federations that have endorsed amalgamation. These are Washington, Wisconsin, Indiana, Nebraska, Utah and Minnesota.

Just as this issue of THE LABOR HERALD goes to press word arrives at our office that another State Federation has joined the amalgamation movement. At its regular convention in Battle Creek on September 21, the Michigan State Federation of Labor adopted a strong resolution for amalgamation of all industries. Reactionaries of the Gompers type fought the proposition to a standstill, but when the vote was taken all voted in favor of it except two delegates. Who is next?

Long one of the most progressive state federations in the country, the Washington State Federation of Labor went on record at its recent convention in Bremerton in favor of consolidating all the craft unions in the respective industries. This was due primarily to the activity of militant League members. Shortly afterward the Wis-

consin State Federation of Labor, another progressive body of long standing, also adopted a similar resolution at its regular convention. And now comes the Indiana State Federation of Labor and does the same thing at its convention, which was held early in September in Marion, Indiana. The amalgamation resolution was submitted by the Indiana State Conference of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers of America. It declared "the only solution for the situation is the development of a united front by the workers through the amalgamation of the various crafts so that there will only remain one union for each industry." The reactionaries fought the proposition, submitting a minority committee report against it. But after a sharp fight they were defeated, and the majority, or amalgamation, report was adopted.

Not to be outdone by its live sister Federations in other states, the Nebraska State Federation of Labor also adopted the amalgamation plan at its convention in the early part of September. Again the reactionaries, supporters of Sam Gompers, were on hand to block progress, but to no avail. The proposition was adopted unanimously, except for one vote. One of the resolves reads:

"That the Nebraska State Federation of Labor, in Convention assembled, hereby urge the American Federation of Labor and the various international unions in each industry into conference for the purpose of devising ways and means of so amalgamating the unions that there will remain but one union for each industry."

League members are active and influential in the Utah State Federation of Labor, and when that body met in convention at Ogden, on September 11th to 13th, they raised the amalgamation question strongly. Understanding the need of the situation, the Federation adopted a straight amalgamation resolution, calling for the complete industrialization of the whole labor movement. Copies were ordered sent to all affiliated organizations.

The Fight in Minnesota

Important as the foregoing victories for amalgamation were, they pale beside that one at the convention of the Minnesota State Federation of

Labor held in Crookston in the latter part of July. Organized Labor throughout the State knew that the proposition was going to come up. Hence both reactionaries and progressives mustered in force at the Convention. Sam Gompers had his henchmen there to see to it that nothing was done that might modernize the labor movement. Defenders of his reactionary principles were Secretary-Treasurer Hays of the Typographical Union, President Manning of the Label Trades Department, and Organizer Paul Smith. Chief among the fighters for amalgamation were the militants from Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the shopmen's delegates from the various railroad centers.

From the beginning of the Convention the gathering quivered with expectancy anent the coming struggle over amalgamation. And when finally the resolution came before the house the battle began in earnest. The reactionaries, following out their usual tactics, tried to discredit the proposition by smearing it all over with "red." Organizer Smith, in particular, viciously assailed the project as the work of the Trade Union Educational League, and threw against it all the thunder of the American Federation of Labor. But it did him little good, and the reactionaries who lined up with him. The amalgamationists were able to so completely carry the Convention that when the aye vote on the resolution was taken it fairly shook the building. And it shook all the fight out of the reactionaries, because not a single one dared to vote against it. It was a victory to cheer the heart of every militant worker and to give him renewed faith in the labor movement. The last part of the resolution reads as follows:

"Whereas, the manifest solution for this problem is to develop a united front of the workers in each industry by the organization of industrial unions having full jurisdiction over all crafts employed in any industry, and

Whereas, this change involves serious re-arrangements of the workers along new lines, a process of rational education must be carried on in order that interested unions may effect this transformation voluntarily and without contention or friction, therefore be it

Resolved, by the 40th Convention of the State Federation of Labor, that this fundamental change in the form of labor organizations be recognized and approved, and that the officers of the Federation assist in promoting discussion and education amongst the rank and file, so that this transformation may take place at the earliest possible date, and that the locals in every industry confer with each other for the purpose of developing a method of facilitating this change."

Central Labor Councils for Amalgamation

If the state federations are awake to the necessities for amalgamation in this hour of bitter

crisis for the labor movement, the central labor councils are no less keen to realize that Labor must consolidate its forces if it is to withstand the crushing drive of the employers. Several score of them have endorsed amalgamation since the League's campaign began, including Minneapolis, Omaha, Milwaukee, Chicago, Lincoln, Joliet, St. Paul, Seattle, Tacoma, Belleville, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Ogden, Salt Lake, etc., etc.

The biggest fight with the reactionaries was had in Chicago at the very opening of the campaign. The amalgamationists presented a resolution, which has since been adopted in whole or in part by labor bodies all over the country. The reactionaries fought this resolution tooth and nail. But their efforts availed nothing, because it was adopted by a vote of 114 to 37. This alarmed the reactionaries exceedingly and they declared they would clean up on the "reds" at the next meeting of the Federation. When this came about the assemblage was packed to the doors and the battle began. It was not long until it was seen that the craft unionists were overwhelmingly beaten. So evident was their downfall that the crowd did not wait for the vote, which this time went 103 for amalgamation to 14 against it.

Alarmed still more by this renewed defeat, the reactionaries made another attempt to defeat the amalgamationists. Mr. Gompers himself came to Chicago, denounced the Federation, the League, and amalgamation generally. His supporters immediately got into action and it was quite evident that they were determined to reorganize the Federation and to seize control of it. But prudence stayed their hand from such rash action. The amalgamation sentiment was too strong for them, many of the largest and most influential trade unions in the city voting hearty endorsement of it. The Chicago labor movement as a whole went squarely on record for industrial unionism in the industries generally.

Among the Independent Unions

One of the most remarkable features of the League's amalgamation campaign is the favorable response it had among the independent unions. These organizations are nearly all secession movements from the old unions, and up to the advent of the League advocated dual unionism almost as a religion. But now they have become infected by the general get-together tendency as stimulated by the T. U. E. L. and they are showing pronounced amalgamation movements.

No industry has suffered more from dual unionism than the textile industry. Now, however, the many unions are awakening to the folly of

warring upon each other and are proposing a general consolidation all around. One of the first steps in this inevitable merging of the many textile union fragments was the formation of the American Federation of Textile Operatives, which joined together several of them. Likewise in the boot and shoe industry, another that has been cursed with secessionism, the amalgamation tendency is showing itself strong since the League began its propaganda. In a convention held in Boston in the early part of June, this year, several of the independent unions joined forces and called themselves the Amalgamated Shoe Workers of America. In this industry, too, the goal, ever becoming clearer to the workers, is a complete consolidation of all the existing unions. The old time policy of constant splitting away and warring to the knife against each other is a thing of the past. The new idea of solidarity, as presented by the League, is the dominant program.

Another striking illustration of the spread of amalgamation sentiment is the project on foot between the American Federation of Railroad Workers and the United Association of Railway Employees. The first of these organizations was the old-time International Association of Car Workers, which seceded from the A. F. of L. many years ago, and the second was an outcome of the so-called "outlaw" railroad strike of 1920. These two organizations are now in negotiations with each other looking towards a fusion. Undoubtedly it will be consummated. This movement has been directly influenced by the general amalgamation propaganda carried on by the League. So far the two organizations, which in the past have been noted for their bitter hostility towards the old unions, have not yet become reconciled to an amalgamation with the railroad craft unions. But this will soon come, as the amalgamation program gains ground in the railroad industry generally.

The *Montreal Labor World* recently reported another consolidation movement that has been greatly stimulated by the League's activity. This is an amalgamation of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, and the International Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks. Conferences will be held between the executives of these organizations as soon as the strike difficulties in the United States are over. The elimination, by amalgamation, of the first of these two unions will do much to straighten out the tangled union situation on the railroads of Canada.

Metal, Clothing and Printing Industries

For 20 years past it has been clear to all progressive workers that industrial unionism is an

trades are to maintain any organization at all. A number of years ago the Machinists' Union awoke to this need and went on record for a general amalgamation of the metal trades unions. But because of the unresponsiveness of the other organizations and the prosperity brought about by the war period, the agitation was dropped. The League, however, has succeeded in reviving it again. In his whirlwind campaign for International President of the I. A. of M., Wm. Ross Knudsen stirred the whole organization to the imperative need for amalgamation. Consequently the militants everywhere are demanding it. Even the official journal of the Machinists' Union has been compelled to make propaganda for the plan.

A stumbling block in the way of all progressive movements in the metal trades in the past was the Molders' Union. The League has woken up this old-fogey-ridden organization also. Just now its militants are making a big issue of amalgamation for the whole metal trades. A referendum is now being taken on the subject of "Shall there be an amalgamation of metal trades national and international unions, thereby forming an industrial organization of all metal workers of the nation?" As never before the live spirits among the Molders are determined and organized to modernize and industrialize their organization. It is safe to prophesy that the amalgamation movement in the metal trades will soon take on such size and impetus as to be irresistible.

In the clothing trades the League's influence for amalgamation is strong and unquestioned. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers has officially endorsed the proposition and the Needle Trades Section of the T. U. E. L. is fighting to make it prevail in the other organizations of the industry. Tremendous headway is being made in the various clothing centers, and one union for the needle trades may be confidently looked forward to as an achievement of the near future.

The International Typographical Union is the standard bearer for amalgamation in the printing trades. At its Quebec Convention a year ago it declared for one union in the industry. The League militants in all the printing organizations are agitating to realize this program. Likewise they are seeing to it that the officials of the I. T. U. are kept moving in the spirit of the Quebec resolution. The Bookbinders' Union has already been won over to the proposition. The chief obstacles now are the personal interests of Matthew Woll, President of the Photo Engravers' Union, and George Berry, President of the Pressmen's Union, two prize reactionaries. Amalgamation and the Trade Union Educational League are living movements in the printing industry.

Amalgamation of Railroad Crafts

Especially effective has been the League's work for amalgamation of the railroad trades. The pressure put upon the unions by the companies has been so intense that the former have been fertile fields for the doctrines of solidarity. The whole body of railroad workers, of all trades, have been permeated and enthused by the amalgamation program. Something of the new spirit coming over railroad workers was evidenced at the Dallas Convention of the Railway Clerks, which declared for amalgamation of not only the railroad trades but of the craft unions in all other industries as well. Likewise the coming together in one union of the Engineers and Firemen is symptomatic of the rapid spread of amalgamation sentiment.

But the real amalgamation movement has centered around the Minnesota Shop Crafts Legislative Committee of which Otto Wangerin is Secretary. This body adopted a comprehensive and scientific plan of amalgamation and scattered it broadcast among the many thousand local railroad unions, asking their endorsement. The response was overwhelming. Many hundreds of locals, of all crafts, have declared their support to the project of joining the 16 standard railroad unions into one united organization. It is safe to say that an overwhelming majority of the rank and file of railroad workers are now in favor of amalgamation. The big job is to register this sentiment in concrete achievement, and

the Minnesota Shop Crafts Legislative Committee has dedicated itself to this task. Steps are now being taken to publish an amalgamation bulletin, which will carry the message of solidarity to railroad workers everywhere. In addition, amalgamation committees will be organized in all the principal railroad centers so as to intensify and crystallize the already existing sentiment. Before long amalgamation will be an actual achievement in the railroad industry, despite the active opposition of the Gompers type of labor leaders.

From the foregoing necessarily brief sketch of the amalgamation movement that has developed since the League started its work, it is strikingly evident that the American labor movement is ready for industrial unionism. A curious illustration of this fact, and a typical example of the materialistic viewpoint our labor leaders hold towards the unions, is the case of a certain well-known President of an International Union, who recently said to a group of his organizers, "Save your money, boys, amalgamation's coming." And the one thing needed to make it come is a determined effort on the part of the Trade Union Educational League militants. In these critical days for Labor the worker who has not put his union on record for amalgamation is asleep at the switch. By that very fact he proves his inefficiency as a militant rebel. Amalgamation is the great issue now before the American labor movement. To the League belongs the credit.

Lessons of the Shopmen's Strike

By Wm. Z. Foster

FOR years past, but particularly since the advent of the Trade Union Educational League, railroad militants have declared again and again that the present system of 16 separate railroad organizations was incapable of putting up a winning fight against the highly organized companies, and we have demanded a general amalgamation of all the unions into one body. The shopmen's strike has given the most overwhelming demonstration of the soundness of our contentions. The whole thing has been a piteous debacle of craft unionism. The companies have played the various organizations against each other just as they have seen fit, forcing some into the strike and keeping others at work scabbing, exactly as they desired. Consequently railroad unionism has suffered enormously all around, if it has not actually been dealt a mortal blow. The shopmen's strike, evidencing as it did the deplorable lack of solidarity between the railroad trades, is an unanswerable argument for

industrial unionism through amalgamation.

Seven unions on strike and nine at work. The shopmen's organizations battling valiantly in face of terrific odds to bring the railroads to a halt, and the other unions faithfully help the companies to keep the roads in operation. What a pitiful exhibition of working class stupidity. Who can defend such a condition? No one. Yet it was exactly the state of affairs that was bound to develop, and the leaders, who have consistently fought every get-together movement between the organizations, deliberately walked right into it. It was the logical and inevitable climax of their contemptible craft policy of each union for itself and the devil take the hindmost.

Some Traitors Unmasked

As the great shopmen's strike began the rank and file of the railroad workers generally were stirred to the depths and wanted to make common cause in the fight. They seemed to realize instinctively that the interest of all were directly