

Mobilizing AFL Politically

by William Z. Foster

IN the news dispatches of Aug. 16, William Green, president of the AFL, is quoted as calling upon the 7,000,000 members of the AFL to register and vote in the November elections. He also, it is stated, has ordered the formation of some 1,000 state and local nonpartisan political committees in every part of the country, to get all AFL members to register and go to the polls.



These actions by Mr. Green will be hailed by all win-the-war forces, those great sections of our people who are determined to continue the present Administration in office. Mr. Green's move is a step in the right direction, towards mobilizing the AFL politically. But it is only a step, and an inadequate one at that. Many more steps are necessary, if the AFL is to do anything like its full duty and express the wishes of its membership in this crucial election campaign.

For one thing, it is indispensable that the AFL Executive Council at its meeting next week should come out with a clear-cut endorsement of Roosevelt and Truman. Nothing short of this will do. It is a pretty empty program, that of Mr. Green, to call upon the 7,000,000 members of the AFL to register and vote in the elections, without making a recommendation as to whom they should vote for in the vital matters of the Presidency and Vice-Presidency. Especially as the issue is clear as a pikestaff. It is high time that the AFL Executive Council be done with the argument, recently reiterated by that spokesman of the ultra-conservatives, Robert J. Watt, to the effect that when unions support a political party they die. There is nothing in American labor history to support such a ridiculous assertion, nor in European history either. Indeed, in Great Britain, where Mr. Watt hails from, the trade unions have been supporting the Labor Party for 40 years, yet I doubt whether Mr. Watt would pronounce them as being dead.

Secondly, the AFL unions, with few exceptions, also stand in great need of sharpening up their discussion of election issues.

In its August number, the *Boilermakers' Journal* says, "It is the opinion of shrewd political observers that the campaign may prove to be one of the most listless in the nation's history." This is a real danger signal. Listlessness among the voting mass will cut down the national vote in November, and a small general vote would be highly advantageous to Dewey and Bricker.

What must be done, therefore, is to rouse the people to the grave peril confronting them in the elections, and thus induce them to turn out the great Roosevelt-minded millions in the Fall election. The AFL's many local and trade journals have a big task ahead of them to do this, and so far they are making hardly a start at it. The issues at stake are those stated by the President in his acceptance speech—to win the war decisively, to set up an effective world peace organization, and to bring about a postwar economic prosperity. And they should be reflected in the trade union press. They cannot be telescoped into a few matters of wages, hours and labor representation, as is done in the August number of the *American Federationist*.

Such vitally important tasks as registering the millions of war workers and getting ballots into the hands of the members of our armed forces must be dealt with as trade union questions of the first rank. They must be placed on the order of business in local union meetings, shop committees, executive boards, conventions, and every other type of trade union gathering, even as these bodies would handle time-honored trade union economic questions. Only when the AFL unions take up registration and soldier voting in this intensive manner will they accomplish decisively important results.

Really concentrated political, educational and organizational work must be done at the grass roots of the AFL organization, as

never before. In the local unions and shops there should be Roosevelt-for-President committees to conduct the manifold tasks of mobilizing the union and non-union workers politically. In the wards and precincts the unions must be prepared to do the most intensive political work, breaking down their membership lists for registration and door-bell ringing purposes. In the localities the unions should embark on elaborate programs of radio broadcasting, newspapers, advertising and all other forms of political education work.

The AFL unions need also to collaborate freely with all other organizations supporting the Roosevelt candidacy — CIO, R. R. Brotherhoods, veterans, Negroes, women, national groups, farmers, professionals, etc. The traditional political narrowness of the AFL, its hesitancy and refusal to cooperate with other groups, must be overcome at all costs. A broad, nonpartisan approach to the elections is indispensable if the maximum pro-Roosevelt vote is to be registered.

The foregoing are a few of the major paths along which the political work of the AFL unions needs to be improved in the developing Presidential elections. Mr. Green should have given the workers a lead upon these questions. Many AFL unions, like those in the CIO, are now making rapid political progress; but the general AFL pace is altogether too slow, especially in the Executive Council.

This fall will probably be a close election, and almost any important body of voters may be decisive. It is doubly necessary therefore, that every effort be made to bring to the polls in November the greatest possible number of the AFL's many millions of members and sympathizers. But this can be done only by greatly bettering the political work of the unions over anything that they have ever done in the past.

Worth Repeating

FRELING FOSTER in his weekly column in *COLLIER'S*, *Keep Up With the World*, issue of Aug. 19: Medical science in Russia has progressed so rapidly in recent years that a magazine devoted exclusively to this development is being published in New York City for American physicians. Named the *American Review of Soviet Medicine*, it sells for \$1 a copy.