

PROBLEMS OF ILLINOIS LABOR

LEADERS OF STATE LABOR MOVEMENT CONTINUE TO THE RIGHT AT HIGH SPEED

SECOND ARTICLE.

IN his report to the Illinois State Federation of Labor convention held at Streator, Ill. recently, President Walker painted a rather dismal picture of the future of labor while at the same time stating, which he undoubtedly thought rather gratifying, that there had been fewer labor disputes in the state during the last year than previously—only 84 strikes throughout the state, whereas in 1917 there were 282, in 1917 there were 267 and in 1920 there were 254. He said nothing of the fact that fewer labor disputes in this instance signify a failure by organized labor to utilize the favorable situation for aggressive organization activities. The losses sustained by the various unions, both in membership and organized positions, during this period were completely ignored by him. President Walker predicted a period of decline in the industrial activities for the future, but without suggesting any measures whereby labor could fortify itself or giving the slightest lead for militant fight against the open shop, which is again threatening the unions.

Injunctions.

IN this same report President Walker also claimed that there had been less injunctions during the past year because of the injunction limitation bill. Yet injunctions have been issued against the Chicago Retail Clerks' Union by the notorious Dennis E. Sullivan, who also imposed fines and prison penalty upon members of that union for picketing and declared the injunction limitation act unconstitutional. An injunction has been issued against the culinary crafts, covering some 150 Chicago restaurants, prohibiting any efforts of organization. An injunction has been issued against the machinists on strike in Chicago, not to mention the fact that some fifty members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union were thrown into prison to serve various terms for maintaining their union rights against an injunction in 1924. While many resolutions have been adopted against such usurpation of power by the courts, the labor leadership of Illinois did nothing to keep these labor prisoners out of jail save to beg the good friend of capital, Governor Small, for a pardon. Governor Small, of course, lived up to his oath and his pledge to the republican party program and this back-door politics gained nothing for the workers, while it certainly strengthened the employers.

ON the question of the injunction the Illinois State Federation of Labor convention resolved, "That the campaign of education shall be continued to enlighten our membership and the decent citizens of our state as to its dire possibilities." These possibilities are well recognized by the organized capitalists and their tools, the injunction judges. They are taking advantage of it, while the labor leaders completely fail to measure up to the requirements of the situation.

Free Books.

THE convention further voted for free text books for schools, better salary for factory inspectors, better and more compensation laws. It voted support for the retail clerks, attempted to terrify the employers with their unfair lists, and voted to support the new tax amendment to the constitution, which has already been adopted by both houses of the state and will be submitted to a referendum at the elections November 2. Support was

expressed for these quite worthy, and quite harmless objects, while speeches were made every day for the union label.

One real issue, that of organizing unorganized workers, came up and was slightly discussed, but the net result was merely the adoption of a resolution relative to the automobile industry resolving to "look for the union garage shop card."

In its attitude towards relations with or the sending of a labor delegation to the Soviet Republics, the reactionary leadership became particularly revealed. It attempted to place the Soviet Republic on a parallel with the fascist dictatorship, which exists by the foul murder of thousands of workers and destruction of their organizations.

Drift to Right.

STEP by step, the Illinois State Federation of Labor has during recent years gone completely to the right. It has made a considerable swing since 1919, when Duncan McDonald became its president for one year. Subsequently, John Walker stumped the state as candidate for governor on the farmer-labor party ticket at the same time that Len Small was put on the unfair list by the Central Labor Council at Kankakee. Now the turn is completed and the union leadership has formed a solid alliance with the stinking, corrupt Len Small machine.

This leadership gave full endorsement to Frank L. Smith, so-called friend of labor, prior to the exposure of the hundreds of thousands of dollars contributed for his campaign by the utilities corporations. The exposure proved a concrete example of the outright buying of political candidates of the old parties by the big capitalist corporations. Incidentally, it also laid bare one of the greatest combinations of big business, dirty politics, and crime all united to perpetuate and strengthen the capitalist system. The choice of the Illinois labor leadership was the alliance with this combination, through Frank L. Smith and Governor Small, to the Crowe-Barrett organization, notorious for its labor union busting activities, for its violent gunplay and election steals.

Maintain Alliance.

THE exposure, however, has not as yet brought the repudiation of this alliance or the endorsement made. On the contrary, several of the leaders insisted on and actually attempted to maintain their endorsement, but it met with such strong opposition from the Brennan and beer supporters who had become strengthened and encouraged by the growing dislike for the once celebrated Volstead act and wanted to promote their own choice. The situation shortly before the recent State Federation convention held possibilities of a conflict within the leadership between these two forces. But the lid was clamped on tight. A compromise had been effected based on the endorsement of candidates for the Illinois legislature only.

The Moribund Progressive Party.

The Illinois Progressive Party attempted to hold a conference simultaneously with the convention. It received little support. They are the remnants of the LaFollette movement, which once had labor endorsements galore. Parley Parker Christensen is their nominee for U. S. senator. They are now so few that they have nothing to lose, and yet they did not have enough guts to make a fight for their candidate as against the corrupt twins of "slush fund" fame. There is little hope of any political lead being given

by this group for a real progressive movement, even though several of its supporters claim sympathy for the idea of a labor party.

No Signs of Progress.

THE course of the Illinois State Federation of Labor and its leadership shows no sign of learning from the experience of the movement. The period of "prosperity" has by no means been taken advantage of. Instead of strengthening the movement, it has, generally speaking, become weakened. The policies of the state movement once going toward the progressive direction have undergone a complete turn and are now proceeding backward. The Decatur convention in 1922 was the beginning of the backward change.

The Streator convention reached the peak of reaction. Altho a large delegation was present, labor from the basic industries was conspicuous by its absence. Nothing touching the

vital needs of the movement was given the slightest chance to come before the gathering and only once were the delegates stirred and rose to their feet, namely, when the resolution granting a wage increase to the president and secretary-treasurer from \$5,000 a year to \$6,500 was carried.

Yet there is nothing dismal about the picture presented. Conditions of today are not the same tomorrow. The period of capitalist imperialist bribing of the labor bureaucracy divides the rank and file and the reactionary leadership. At any rate, the needs of the labor movement become ever more outstanding and will also become clear to the rank and file members.

THE present weakness of the trade unions just makes so much more necessary a revival of the militancy of the past, while it also holds the possibilities of the left wing movement of the future if every issue which presents itself is properly capitalized.

CURRENT EVENTS

By T. J. O'Flaherty.

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selves while at the same time helping to prevent the workers from doing anything that would seriously endanger the existing order.

WHEN the American workers are driven by the cruel slave-driver necessity to organize politically in a mass labor party, when the sheep dogs of capitalism can no longer hold them in the folds of the two capitalist parties, then our Greens and our Walkers will follow the flock, but only to lead them into another fold. At the same time, however, the revolutionary wing of the labor movement, represented in all countries by the Communist Party, is on the job and contesting every inch of the way with the labor traitors. While the latter tell the workers that co-operation with capitalism is the best policy for the workers, the Communists point out that too much co-operation with capitalism has left the workers enslaved and that only a break with the capitalist system will free labor from the chains that now bind it, that until this system is overthrown this world will be a huge prison where the body and soul of humanity is fettered to the chariot of greed.

SINCERE but weak-spirited individuals despair of human progress when they see this selling of labor go on year after year. It is not hard to find a man who was formerly active in the radical movement expressing the belief that nothing can be done for the working class, that they are not worth bothering with. Some of those people are now well-to-do. Some are on the bum. One of the latter walked into the office a few days ago. He is now selling razor-blade sharpeners. "The workers are not worth saving," he remarked. A member of the staff replied that our visitor found them worth shaving.

THERE is a lot of philosophy buried here. Evidently this man threw himself into the movement at one time with the consoling thought that he was going to help save the workers. For himself, perhaps he needed no salvation. He could get along fairly well under capitalism. There is no reason why a good soapboxer should not sell Florida or Los Angeles real estate,

start a religion or become a chiropractor. But this particular person found the workers receptive to his message when their bellies were sensitive, but when they had something to fill them with they went to a burlesque show or took a girl to the movies, while the evangelistic soapboxer was developing a nice dose of bronchitis on the street corner, or watching the cockroaches in some filthy jail.

FOR a while the martyr spirit prevailed, but at last the spiritual bone cracked and our evangelist began to hate the working class. And here we find him, either rolling around in his Chrysler or selling snake oil to the citizens of Madison street, whose stomachs are massaged none too kindly by the barbs and darts of alley moonshine. He has lost all hope, he is another unit of human wreckage that goes down in the struggle. But what about the successful ex-radical who loses faith? Where is his compensation? Happiness is an elusive fairy, but it is very questionable if those who have lost the only worthwhile purpose in life can be compensated by money for the loss.

SEVERAL columns could be written on the baffling question: Why do some people follow the thorny path that leads to physical suffering without either the prospect or desire to better their own material conditions? The few have been persecuted in all ages because they refused to accommodate themselves to the legal class requirements of the rulers of the day. Yet the masses, who either ignored their trials or joined their masters in persecuting them, were the beneficiaries of their sufferings. Thus progress hobbles along.

PARADOXICAL tho it may seem to many, days of prosperity are not days of mental ease for the radical—under capitalism. Those are the days that try souls. It takes more than the spirit of an evangelist or an anti-vaccinationist to stand up under the spectacle of a labor leader driving a rivet into the keel of a capitalist battleship or another labor leader buying orange groves in Florida with the money of union members, either freely given or involuntarily, with the consoling thought that as long as they were getting theirs they could afford to let him have ten times more. A knowledge of history is what will keep you from flying off your base and out of the abyss of pessimism, from which, like hell, there is no redemption.