

CHICAGO FEDERATION OF LABOR— PAST AND PRESENT.

By ARNE SWABECK.

MILITANT speeches may yet stir the Chicago Federation of Labor to its depths despite its recent big swing towards strictly old line conservative craft union collective bargaining policies, promotion of respectable schemes of labor banking, labor insurance, and support of successful so-called labor friends on the capitalist party tickets—successful because of their bigger slush funds.

This happened, for instance, at a recent Chicago Federation of Labor meeting when Paul McKenna delivered a ringing message from the British coal miners. He spoke as the representative of a group of strikers, doggedly determined not to succumb to the dastardly attacks of British capitalism. The rebel spirit of the British coal miners struck a profoundly sympathetic note in the Chicago Federation of Labor. As a result the local trade unions are now giving splendid donations to the British coal miners.

Stirring Fights.

STIRRING also have been some of the fights of late, created by the demands of progressive delegates, that the federation adhere to its one time progressive position and adopt the methods and policies required by the growing consolidation and growing militancy of the forces of the employers. However, stubborn opposition and bitter denunciation have been met with by the federation leadership?

The Chicago Federation of Labor in the past established a splendid tradition, but a couple of years ago it was thrown on the scrap heap. Up until then its record was one of leading progressive measures strengthening their ranks. Of course the policy of an organized body is reflected by its leadership, so also with the present change.

Past Record.

AMONG the past activities of the labor movement in which the Chicago Federation of Labor took the initiative and practically the leadership must be mentioned particularly such great undertakings as the organization of the stockyards workers in 1918 and the organization of the steel workers in 1919. The Chicago Federation of Labor in that period was the warm friend and real champion of the political and class war prisoners. It gave real support to the campaign for the freedom of Tom Mooney; even organized mass demonstrations. It gave support to Sacco-Vanzetti. It supported the campaign for the prisoners taken in the raid at St. Joe, Michigan, and other victims of the class struggle.

THE Chicago Federation broke with the policy of Samuel Gompers of support of so-called labor friends within the capitalist parties and launched the labor party of 1918. It gave real support to the splendid parade of 140,000 Chicago workers protesting against the notorious Landis award. It supported the movement for amalgamation of the trade unions. It went on record repeatedly for recognition of Soviet Russia. Even the recent accomplishments of establish-

ing the first labor radio broadcasting station in the country, despite the policies which are now dominating and naturally will be voiced over the radio, shows what organized labor can do.

Wide Influence.

THE influence of the Chicago Federation of Labor has extended far and wide, undoubtedly due to the progressive policies pursued in the past. The rank and file trade union members, the local unions in the whole of the middle west, chafing under reactionary autocracy of the late Samuel Gompers his administration and in many instances the executives of the international unions, found encouragement in the rebel note sounded in those days by the Chicago Federation of Labor.

HOWEVER, when in 1923 the national labor party movement was pushed ahead to accomplish a nationally unified party for the coming presidential elections, but too rapid for its slow development amongst the broad masses of workers, the Chicago Federation of Labor succumbed to the pressure of Samuel Gompers. The labor party organized by them had become part of this movement. The change following the surrender became rapid and complete. The Chicago Federation of Labor now adheres to the reactionary political policy of support of candidates amongst republicans and democrats. The labor party is tabooed.

THE Chicago Federation of Labor went on record to support Frank L. Smith, chairman of the Illinois commerce commission, for candidate for senator of Illinois, whose election was secured thru the immense slush funds made available by the utilities corporations, who depend on this commerce commission for favors—favors detrimental to the interests of the rank and file workers. The Chicago Federation of Labor has completely renounced its support for amalgamation of the trade unions.

No Organizing Effort.

ITS path entirely away from progressive policies is particularly expressed in the attitude of the federation leadership towards the existing drives to organize the unorganized workers. The present prosperity period should be the real opportunity for organization. The federation leadership at the present gives no initiative whatever. In Chicago two organization drives are being carried on, on a local scale, that of the machinists' and of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' unions. The latter have met nothing but expressed hostility from the federation leadership because the International Ladies' Garment Workers are pursuing militant methods of organization. A number of shops have already been signed up and a healthy change taken place since the downward trend following its strike in 1925, when left wingers were expelled from the union by the reactionaries who were then in control.

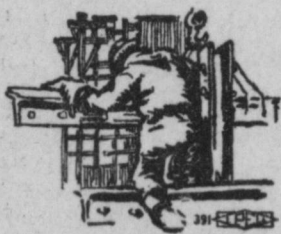
WHEN members of the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, mostly mothers leaving their children behind, were thrown into jail to serve the terms of defying the Sullivan strike injunction, the Chicago Federation of Labor leadership failed utterly to measure up to any past record. Never did it attempt even to put into effect the American Federation of Labor declaration to completely disregard injunctions and openly defy such usurpation of power during the strike. And when the victims landed in jail the federation policy became the one of silence publicly and backdoor dicker-ing with capitalist politicians.

AT the time when mass demonstrations were necessary to arouse the workers to recognize the dangers of the injunction weapon and to help defeat it, this leadership turned its back upon the prisoners and contented themselves with a formal plea for a pardon from Governor Small. When he, as could be expected, failed to act they got busy excusing him, and to further cement their present alliance with the particular corrupt set of politicians of the republican party headed by Governor Small.

Future events will undoubtedly further test the leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor and surely they will ultimately help strengthen the ranks of the militants.

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