

The Chicago Federation of Labor Fights Labor Party Despite Militants

By ARNE SWABECK.

When the movement toward a national labor party in America gathered real momentum for the first time, in 1919, a chill went down the spines of the leaders of the two dominant capitalist parties and of the reactionary labor leaders who were still following the outworn political custom of "rewarding their friends and punishing their enemies."

This movement held real potentialities. It became a ray of hope to large working masses.

Change of Front of Federation.

The Chicago Federation of Labor did pioneer work in this field. The labor party was practically formed under its tutelage. Yet today the federation, or at least its official leadership, has both in theory and practice completely repudiated the labor party idea.

Why this change? Is there less need today than then for a labor party? This is not the case. The suppression of the workers' rights has if anything increased. The centralization of power in the capitalist government has gone on apace. The failure of the primitive "non-partisan" policy of the American Federation of Labor has been continually demonstrated. The political weakness of the American labor movement was never greater. The answer is that the official leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor has taken a big swing to the right.

Trend Toward National Party.

In October, 1918, the Chicago Federation of Labor began by submitting the question of the formation of a local labor party to a referendum vote of its affiliated local unions, numbering some 300,000 members. Eighty-five per cent of the unions responded favorably. In November of the same year, the Cook County Labor Party was formed, with Morton L. Johnson, a well known militant, as its first secretary.

The following spring, the Cook County Labor Party participated in the mayoralty elections, entering John Fitzpatrick, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, as candidate for mayor. The official count credited him with 55,900 votes. During the same period, the Illinois Labor Party was formed and events moved rapidly. On September 25, of the same year, the National Freedom Convention took place in Chicago, with 300 delegates in attendance, and on Nov. 22, the first convention of the National Labor Party convened with 1,200 delegates. These delegates had been sent by trade unions and local labor party groups in response to the call based on the following program:

1. Restoration of civil liberties.
2. The national ownership and democratic management of the means of transportation and communication, mines, finances and all other monopolies and natural resources.
3. The abolition of excessive land ownership and holding land out of use for speculative purposes.

Labor Struggles in 1919.

Naturally, this remarkable progress had its basis in the gigantic events of the class struggle, from which it received its impetus. Beginning from a local scale some of these events during the period from the Chicago spring elections in 1919 to November of the same year were as follows:

Eight thousand workers, mostly unorganized, were on strike in the big Crane manufacturing plants. Several thousand workers, mostly unorganized, were on strike in the big Harvester Manufacturing plants. Several thousand workers, mostly unorganized, on strike in the Argo Corn Products Refining Co., several strikers shot by sheriffs and gunmen. Eighteen hundred Chicago firemen

quit in a body, strike not being permitted, but remained after securing a wage increase. All City Hall clerks, on strike, obtaining a wage increase. The dress and shirt makers struck. The Chicago actors struck, and also the carpenters, both groups winning their demands. A strike completely tying up the city street car system. During practically this whole period, the campaign to organize the Chicago stockyards workers went on in full swing, reaching its high point during the last two weeks of June, when 8,000 workers were brought into the union. Shortly thereafter came the bloody race riots, instigated by the packers in their efforts to crush the union organization drive. Police and soldiers were stationed throughout the yards, but were forced to withdraw by the strike of the young union.

Nationally, events of even greater magnitude took place during that same period, as, for instance, the Boston police strike, the strike of 100,000 railroad shopmen, the campaign to organize the steel industry and the big steel strike, the miners' strike on November 1, with the notorious Anderson injunction and the cowardly retreat of John L. Lewis.

Nationally, events of even greater magnitude took place during the same period, as, for instance, the Boston police strike, the strike of 100,000 railroad shopmen, the campaign to organize the steel industry and the big steel strike, the miners' strike on November 1, with the notorious Anderson injunction and the cowardly retreat of John L. Lewis.

Labor Party Developments.

The political awakening followed in the wake of these events. Labor parties were formed in South Dakota, North Dakota, New York, Indiana and elsewhere. The national Freedom Convention, formerly mentioned, met in Chicago to demand the reestablishment and maintenance of political and civil rights and the release of all political prisoners. Chicago became at that time the birthplace of the American Communist Party.

The Masses Press Forward.

The tremendous pressure by the working masses, as shown by these gigantic events, was the real factor in bringing the movement to a head. The leaders rose on the crest of that wave, continually pressed onward. The Chicago Federation and its leadership recognized the signs of the times and did not falter. The Gompers administration was practically impotent in the face of this movement. The forces of capitalist reaction had been compelled temporarily to give way.

In its Labor Day editorial, the New Majority, official organ of the Chicago Federation of Labor, made the following statement:

"...workers everywhere have turned their thoughts toward freedom.

"Union men are awakening to the fact that the struggle for wages, hours and local shop conditions, while essential, is not all there is to labor's cause. They have seen the workers seize freedom in Russia, by taking over control of their government and industry...."

The Labor Party Convention.

It was but natural that, under these conditions of militant struggle, the labor party convention which assembled on November 22 in Chicago, with 1,200 delegates from 33 different states, should take a distinct progressive direction. The program adopted condemned autocracy, militarism and imperialism. It demanded the repeal of the espionage law and the establishment of political and industrial equality. It demanded abolition of anti-labor injunctions, reduction of the high cost of living and nationalization of all basic industries, public utilities, natural resources and unused land. It demanded the abolition

of the United States Senate, abolition of child labor, abolition of private detective agencies, establishment of the eight-hour day with a further gradual reduction of working hours and declared for international solidarity of labor.

The Trend Towards Reaction.

When the great steel strike was defeated the employers again gathered their forces and launched blow after blow against the labor movement. The Gompers administration felt the time had come to bring real pressure upon those who had "deviated" in a progressive direction. The labor party, its backbone still the Chicago Federation of Labor, lived for some time. It made another effort to rebuild on a national scale, given real support in these efforts by the Workers Party. It called the convention for July 4, 1923. In spite of successful attendance, it became a last effort. Various factors contributed to this, the main reason being the weakening of the leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor and its cowardly submission to Gompers. The reaction had begun. Shortly thereafter, Fitzpatrick and Nockels signed their names to a complete repudiation of both the labor party and amalgamation. The National Labor Party died.

The Chicago Federation Today.

The Chicago Federation of Labor went back to the primitive Gompers policy. Joining those who advocated and practiced class-collaboration, and with the "red" baiters it sullied its great progressive record of the past. At a subsequent Chicago judicial election, when a special committee had been created to study the then particularly dangerous anti-labor menace the federation endorsed a number of candidates from the republican and democratic tickets—none from the socialist ticket. Some of these candidates were elected and some of them

have since issued injunctions against unions.

The Chicago Federation of Labor, over the opposition of a militant minority, endorsed the candidacy of Frank L. Smith, of Illinois slush fund fame, for United States senator. The last Chicago mayoralty elections witnessed the inglorious spectacle of the federation administration machine and supporters divided into two almost equal parts, one pulling for Dever, the democrat, and the other for Thompson, the republican.

Results of the Non-Partisan Policy.

The last session of the Illinois state legislature furnished many illuminating examples of the results of supporting members of the capitalist parties who style themselves "friends of labor." When bills having important significance to labor were being discussed, these "friends" failed. This is but one side of the picture. More important still is the general political impotence of the labor movement and the arrogance of the employers who feel their power and scent no opposition.

The injunction menace is increasing, the government is more and more openly showing itself as the executive of the capitalist class, taking an ever more direct hand in labor conflicts. Rights once claimed by workers and workers' organizations are disappearing.

New Progressive Forces.

However, growing out of this increased suppression, within the Chicago Federation of Labor as elsewhere, new progressive forces are developing, demanding more militant methods of struggle, demanding a positive political policy expressed in a mass party of labor.

To help develop these new progressive forces is one of the most important tasks of the Workers (Communist) Party.

Crippled Worker, 70, Sends His Bit for Striking Miners

"I'm a cripple, walk with two canes, money scarce, age 70. Don't want anyone to go short on provisions or snug houses to live in, so here is \$1 for the struggling miners."

So wrote a lonely old man living in California to the Workers' International Relief, asking that his name be withheld. It is only one of similar letters that are being received daily by the W. I. R., which is conducting a nation-wide campaign to provide food, clothing and shelter for striking miners and their families in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Colorado. Another letter from a worker in Ohio, who wrote that he has been out of work for a year, contained \$5 and expressed regrets that he was unable to give more.

A National Campaign.

Intensified activity in the relief campaign is announced by the Work-

ers' International Relief. "Though the results thus far have been encouraging," declared Fred G. Biedenkapp, national secretary of the organization, "greater efforts need to be put forth and greater sacrifices made if the striking miners and their wives and children are to be kept from starving and freezing to death. If a poor crippled man in California can give \$1, there are thousands of people throughout the country that can give \$5 and \$10 and more."

The Workers' International Relief is conducting the campaign on a national scale. Contributions are being received at the New York office, 1 Union Square.

Bosses Get \$46,613,378,000 Workers Create in 1 Year

Never before in history has such a golden flood of tribute poured into the coffers of a ruling class as the dividend and interest payments disbursed by American corporations in 1927. Financiers and business observers may chat of narrowing profit margins but the rich should worry. They can idle in luxury in Florida or New York confident that even brief depressions will not interrupt the swollen incomes which provide their pleasures and the extension of their power.

The 1927 return to absentee owners is equivalent to the combined an-

ual earnings of 3,400,000 workers at the average wage paid in the factories during 1927. If split 50-50 between farmers and industrial workers it would have increased their income about 25 per cent.

There is an extraordinary total of \$46,613,378,000 which the workers have contributed in cash to the owners of stocks and bonds in the course of 15 years. Reports of the commissioner of internal revenue show that about 70 per cent of this total went to an upper class representing less than 1 per cent of the country's population.