

THE WAGEWORKER



VOL. 6

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, NOVEMBER 13, 1909

8 PAGES

NO. 32

WORKERS MEET UNDER "UNION JACK"

Interesting Account of Proceedings of Convention now in Session at Toronto

GOMPERS IS TRYING OUT "CANNON RULE"

Using "Steam Roller" on Delegates who are Friendly to Electrical Workers---Machine is Apparently well Oiled

Toronto, Canada, November 10.—For the first time in all of its twenty-seven years of history, the American Federation of Labor is holding an annual convention under the folds of the Union Jack. A large majority of the members of the Federation are citizens of the United States, and of course a large majority of the delegates to the convention are citizens of the republic over which floats the stars and stripes, so it is that it seems a little strange to the most of us to see floating everywhere a flag that is not our own. Here and there we see a flag of the United States that some one has flung to the breeze in honor of the visitors, but the Union Jack floats everywhere. The great convention hall is fairly smothered in the red flag of Great Britain, and the only flag of our republic is one that is stretched across one-half the background of the stage.

There is one thing, however, that is familiar, and that is the grand old tune, "America." However, our Canadian cousins over on this side of the line call it "God Save the King," and under the circumstances we let it go at that. So far as the eye can see there is not a bit of difference between these Canadian towns and the towns of our own country. Were it not for an inquisitive lot of gentlemen at the border, who are known as customs house inspectors, one would not know where the United States left off and Canada began. If Toronto's streets were a little dirtier, the police a bit more officious and inclined to show their authority, and the saloons a whole lot more numerous, we who live south of the border would have every reason to believe we were in Omaha or Kansas City. As it is, the clean streets, the giant "bobbies" who are courtesy itself, and the absence of the familiar signs of "buffet," "cafe" or "bar," convince us that we are in Canada, where the people have an instinctive respect for the law, and where drinking is largely confined to tea, 'arf-an'-arf and ale.

Leaving Lincoln Friday evening, I arrived in Chicago Saturday morning, and there the delegates and visitors en route for Toronto began meeting. It was at the Dearborn street depot that I met Fitzgerald, Reid, Murphy and Potter of the "seceding" electrical workers. There also was Charley Fear of Joplin, Mo., O. P. Smith of the Indiana State Federation, "Big Ike" Hornbrook, the iceman of Evansville, Ind.; Editor Stewart of the Cedar Rapids, Ia., Tribune; Al Urick, president of the Iowa State Federation of Labor, and others too numerous to mention. About all we talked of between Chicago and Toronto was the case of the Electrical Workers. Urick was representing the Des Moines central body, and didn't know whether he was going to be recognized or not. Stewart was representing the Cedar Rapids central body, and he was up against it because the body's charter had been revoked because it dared to stand by the loyal electrical workers of that town. Pouchot of Des Moines, representing the Iowa State Federation of Labor, knew that he was up against it because the Iowa charter had been revoked because that splendid body of fighting unionists had refused to throw out the representatives of the only organized electrical workers in the state. It was a delegation of "insurgents" who were fighting mad.

We arrived in Toronto Sunday morning and most of us registered at the Grand Union hotel—first, because it was the first good one we came across, and, second, because it came nearer fitting our purses than the King Edward or the Prince George. King Edward wanted \$6 a day for a very ordinary room and "eats," while Prince George asked the same, with rooms not quite so good and a table

that was full of silverware and a lot of flunkies ready to do anything for a tip. We let the Federation officers stop with George, while we stopped at a place where we only have to pay \$2 a day.

The room of the Lincoln delegate—which is the humble writer—promises to be long remembered. It is No. 101, and it is in there that the "insurgents" and "secessionists" have been holding their meetings. The first one was Sunday night, and among others in attendance were James Reid, president of the "seceding" Electrical Workers, Murphy, the secretary-treasurer, Potter of the executive board, Fitzgerald, second vice president, and other I. B. of E. W. officials; Urick, president of the Iowa State Federation, myself, president of the Nebraska State Federation; Egan, of the Ohio State Federation, and a score of others. Practically every man with the exception of the electrical workers, was a delegate, but only two or three, the writer among the number, from bodies holding charters. The rest were from bodies whose charters had been revoked. The meeting was for the purpose of framing up some way of getting the fight on the convention floor. We laid a smooth plan and Monday morning we were at Massey hall in a body.

Alas, for the plans of men! The man who was to make the first motion when the credentials committee had finished, either took stage fright or got cold feet, and before we could fill the breach President Gompers had run the steam roller over us. Without giving us a show for our white alleys, a lot of splendid union men, representing strong, militant union bodies of the west, were unceremoniously dumped in order to make room for the representatives of 5,000 electrical workers who have been hanging to the coat-tails of Gompers, Morrison, Duncan and Grant Hamilton.

O, it was a handsome specimen of the steam roller! And the way the machine worked would have done credit to Judge Wright, against whose arbitrary decisions President Gompers a little while later was so bitterly inveighing. And the machine which worked "automatically" when it worked in favor of the executive council, didn't turn a wheel when it was against the interests of the council.

Of course we had to meet some more and frame up another plan. The truth of the matter is, the Reid faction of the electrical workers is up against a stone wall. The McNulty crowd had kowtowed to the executive council, and for months the best organizers of the Federation have ignored the real needs of the general workers in order to spend all their time hammering union men who have stood loyally by the electrical workers who insist that they, not the executive council of the A. F. of L., shall say who their officers shall be.

They may be able to strangle us; they may be able to muzzle us so far as the Toronto convention is concerned, but simple truth demands the statement that if the present system of tactics is pursued a few months longer, the labor movement in America will receive a setback that will take a decade to overcome. It does not look good to see the victims of judicial tyranny exercising the same sort of tyranny that they so loudly denounce. Yet Judge Wright's actions were not more arbitrary than have been the actions of Secretary Morrison during the past four months, nor more arbitrary than the decisions of President Gompers last Monday morning.

As I write this letter the bulk of the delegates and visitors are taking a trolley ride around Toronto, but a few of us are working away. We are framing up a protest against the seating of the delegates of the McNulty crowd, basing our protest on the fact that the McNulty crowd is not in good standing on account of non-payment of dues. We can easily prove our contention by the files of the Federationist and the constitution itself, but we have every reason to believe that the "machine," which is so insistent upon observing the constitution when it serves machine purposes, will mentally amend it when it best suits their purpose so to do. As Tim Campbell said, "What t'ell is de constitution bechune fri'nds?"

It is pretty chilly up here, but it will require more than weather conditions to explain the "cold feet" of a great many of the delegates who a few weeks ago were so loudly protesting against arbitrary methods. One man who was of the crowd between Chicago and Toronto was going to simply rip things apart as soon as the convention opened. Today he is the loudest advocate of "discipline" and "harmony" there is in the whole convention. But there are a few of us who were here for a specific purpose, and we are going to keep hammering away at it, no matter what obstacles we meet. If the guarantee of trade autonomy means anything at all, now is the time to make it plain.

The convention opened at 10 o'clock Monday morning. The parade was not a big one on account of a drizzling rain. But Massey hall, a splendid auditorium, was well filled when President

Gompers called the convention to order. We had an address from "his lordship," the mayor, and from the secretary to the minister of labor. Both were splendid efforts. The representative of the Dominion Trades Congress spoke briefly, and then the credentials committee reported. The report was all out and dried, and a lot of the western boys, and some from Ohio, Indiana, New York and Michigan, fell outside of the breastworks. The two best state federations in the United States were unceremoniously "dumped," Iowa and Ohio. They had refused to be bulldozed by the executive council and were therefore deprived of their charters. The pleasant bit of fiction whereby the writer was seated as a delegate from the Lincoln Central Labor Union is known to readers of The Wage-worker. And as he is about the only one from the states of Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota who is in sympathy with the "insurgent" electrical workers, he has his hands full.

In the afternoon President Gompers read his annual address. He began at 2 o'clock and finished at 5:45 in good form. The reports of Secretary Morrison and Treasurer Lennon were brief. President Gompers reviewed the famous—or infamous—injunction case, and the way he handed things to the injunction judges was good to hear. He brought the convention to its feet a couple of times by his biting denunciation of government by injunction—and, mind you, this only an hour or two after he had given the convention a sample of arbitrary action that made Judge Wright look like a two-spot. But the "old man" is a scrapper, and despite the package he handed us we love him.

Monday night we headed a delegation before the credentials committee to make another fight, and once more we bumped against the machine and were flattened out in approved style.

Tuesday morning's session was devoted to listening to the report of the executive council. That is, Vice President Duncan spent three hours reading it, while the delegates moved about, conversed and struggled to keep warm in the chilly hall. At noon the convention took a recess until Wednesday morning. This afternoon the trolley ride for some, but for others of us, nothing but work.

I have met a number of prominent workers in the industrial field. Agnes Nestor, president of the Gloveworkers, little, bright as a dollar, and constantly on the lookout for the best interests of her fellow craft workers, is a general favorite. She has promised to visit Nebraska as soon as we can arrange for the visit, and she sent her regards to the splendid little band of union gloveworkers in Lincoln. The Lincoln Gloveworkers' Union is the only union of that craft between Chicago and San Francisco, and of course Miss Nestor is interested in its welfare.

Mrs. Raymond Robins, president of the Woman's Trades Union League, is here, a fit helpmate for her brilliant husband. With means at her command to live on the Lake Shore Drive of Chicago, she prefers to live among the workers and spend her time and means in laboring for their social and industrial uplift. It is an inspiration to listen to her words of wisdom and cheer.

Rev. Charles Stelzle, the machinist-preacher, is a fraternal delegate from the Presbyterian board of church and labor, and he is hail-fellow-well-met with all the delegates, including Jere Sullivan of the Bartenders' Union.

Tim Healey of the steam engineers is hunted up by everybody. If there was ever a worker in the ranks of unionism it is "Big Tim." Bluff, hearty, decisive and as brave as a lion, Healey looks the typical fighter for the cause of the toiler.

Tom Lewis, of the United Mine Workers, the successor of John Mitchell, looks more like a divinity student than a miner, but when he talks he puts more fire into his words than a divinity student would be expected to hand out. Lewis is something of an "insurgent," and everybody is looking to see him spring a sensation before the convention is half over.

"Big Bill" Mahon of the Street Railway Association, is here, there and everywhere, shaking hands and handing out words that make a fellow feel good. As a "cheerupathist" Mahon has it on all the rest of 'em.

Secretary Frank Morrison, who would look like a Catholic priest if he didn't show such a wide expanse of white shirt-front, is the busiest man in Toronto. He has a corps of assistants bigger than President Taft's bodyguard.

Of course Uncle Sam Gompers is the big man of the convention, even if he is built on short lines and wide out. The old man may have a big weight of years on his shoulders, but he is full of fire and energy, and there seems to be a hundred good fights left in him. One doesn't hear at this convention the usual talk about electing his successor. As long as the old man is under court fire he can count on the Federation standing behind him as one man. And if he has to go to jail there'll be something doing in the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

Well, I hear signs of a committee approaching, and that means I must cease these maunderings and get busier on more important work. The convention will probably be in session until the last of next week, and it will be business all the time.

In the meanwhile we are living in hopes that sooner or later we will be able to dodge the steam roller and accomplish something along the lines laid out for us.

WILL M. MAUPIN.