

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR CONVENTION

St. Louis, Mo., November 21.—(Editorial Correspondence.)—For two years the head officials of the American Federation of Labor have been backing and filling on the internal strife of the Electrical Workers. They have finally been forced to take a stand, and the men who forced it are men who have given the labor movement the best years and the best efforts of their lives. They are men who have grown weary of watching a conterie of men evading and paltering in order to protect a bunch of sycophants. They spoke with no uncertain voice last week, and as a result the convention rose up and forced the executive council of the Federation to get ready to either fish or cut bait.

At Toronto the McNulty faction, secure in its recognition by the Federation, agreed to arbitrate and appointed its members of the arbitration board. McNulty took the floor and declared that he was a prophet, and wound up by saying that Reed and his followers would play double. The arbitration board was appointed. At its fourth meeting, just as it became evident that an agreement would be reached, Frank Duffy, the McNulty representative, resigned and refused to longer serve. McNulty, the man protected by the Federation managers, renounced arbitration and would have no more of it. The other two members went ahead and submitted a report to the effect that a joint convention should be called and the rank and file allowed to settle it. The Reed faction was willing and ready. The McNulty-Collins faction refused to agree. Duffy, although on his own declaration no longer a member of the arbitration board, was allowed to submit a "minority" report, and also to submit a "recommendation" for settlement that was simply that the Reed faction lay down and let McNulty and Collins wipe their feet upon it. The "recommendation" was greeted by jeers.

The report of the arbitration board was not allowed to come to a vote in convention but was sent to a special committee of fifteen. But even this committee, appointed by the authority that has kept the McNulty-Collins faction from petering out entirely, was not allowed to report on the arbitration board's report. In sheer desperation Jim Duncan of the executive council took the floor and asked that the whole matter be referred to the executive council. This was done only after John Walker, Tom Lewis, Andy Gallagher and others had ripped the administration up the back for its delay and evasion. The cry of "socialism" was raised by the McNulty-Collins faction in order to obscure the issue, but it has failed. The majority of the Electrical Workers are in the Reid-Murphy faction because they were not allowed any voice in the management of affairs, McNulty and Collins arrogating the right to run things to suit themselves. And in this they were backed up by administration officials who love to talk of "fair play" and "autonomy" and the "referendum."

I know something about this fight in the ranks of the Electrical Workers. I know that President McNulty and Secretary Collins agreed to a convention three years ago after having been backed into a corner by the rank and file and the executive committee. I know that after promising to call a convention Collins went down to Massachusetts and prevailed upon a little local to threaten to enjoin the convention, and that he got a written opinion from a lawyer to the effect that the convention would be illegal if held, for which opinion Collins paid \$500, and which opinion was based upon the one-sided story that Collins told. I know that the rank and file held the convention and ousted the officials who had refused the rank and file any voice in the management of affairs. I know that at Denver both sides agreed to amnesty pending a settlement and that before the ink was dry McNulty violated it by issuing checks against what had been agreed upon as a sacred trust fund. I know that Grant Hamilton, an organizer of the Federation, spent his time and the money of the payers of the per capita tax in working for the success of the pliable McNulty and the plausible Collins. I know that after solemnly agreeing to submit to arbitration the McNulty bunch quit like yellow dogs when they saw a chance that a settlement would be reached. I know that the Reid-Murphy faction stood up to the rack like men and were ready to go through with arbitration, even if it went against them. And I know, and thousands of other unionists know, that all this cry of "secessionists" and "socialism" and "rebels" is made for the purpose of obscuring the issue and preserving the smooth working of a steam roller that is merciless when it goes against those who are willing to stand up and demand a square deal for everybody.

The executive council of the Federation has evaded the issue just as long as it can. It must now come clean. The "Reids" have called the hand of the council by offering to submit all of its case immediately and abide by the result, asking only that it be allowed to

face the McNultyites. The McNultyites have fewer than 87 locals and fewer than 10,000 adherents. The Reids have 350 locals and more than 18,000 adherents. And the 18,000 are charged with having seceded from the 10,000. The 10,000 are protected, and when threatened with danger immediately cry "socialism" and scramble under the skirts of the administration. And two or three powerful organizations with jurisdictional fights on their hands refuse to tote square for fear that the Reids will prove the justice of their cause and thus make "secession" popular when the rank and file get tired of being ruled by a ring that refuses to heed appeals for justice.

The faction that agreed to arbitration and then giggered back is still recognized by the Federation, while the side that showed its willingness to arbitrate and is still willing, are called "rebels" and refused recognition. The central bodies that seat "Reid" delegates are deprived of representation in Federation convention, although their per capita tax is received and receipted for. Other central bodies are disrupted because of the presence of "Reid" delegates, although there are no McNulty locals with five hundred miles, the disruption being brought about by the organization of new central bodies by organizers paid out of Federation funds. The building trade councils in many cities are disorganized and emasculated because of a trouble that could have been settled in a convention of Electrical Workers three years ago and could be settled in convention now.

And all this chaos and trouble and dissention brought about merely to vindicate and protect the administration! It is high time the rank and file of affiliated unions be made cognizant of the facts in the case. It is high time that men like Walker and Lewis and Gallagher speak out. And it is high time that justice be done, the trouble settled and the American labor movement be relieved of a trouble brought about solely by the refusal of the head officials of a great and growing organization to allow the membership at large to have a voice in the management of its internal affairs.

All this cry about the socialists trying to capture the offices of the Federation is purest tommyrot. Gompers will be re-elected president by a practically unanimous vote. By the way, the Associated Press report that Gompers had read our colored friends and brothers out of the labor movement was a plain and unadulterated lie—like most of the Associated reports on topics concerning organized labor. Gompers did nothing of the kind. On the contrary he urged the organization of colored men and stood by the American Federation of Labor's policy of not discriminating between wage earners on account of creed, race or color.

That the socialists are cutting ice in the Federation must be admitted. And it is because the socialists are always on the job. They are a lot of thinkers. Democrats and republicans are usually born—socialists make themselves by thinking for themselves. And a few thinkers usually raise hell in a convention where a majority are content to take orders from a few administrative officials.

The trouble is that the whole system of representation in American Federation of Labor conventions is wrong and unfair. The carpenters and miners control practically one-third the votes in a convention, while a delegate representing a state Federation of from 50,000 to 350,000 members has but one vote. The carpenters and miners can combine and logroll and virtually control things. We talk about "representative" government in the American Federation of Labor—and we've got about as much of it as Hades has of ice water.

The fact of the matter is, the American Federation of Labor is ruled by a practical autocracy—governed from the top down instead of from the bottom up. We are ridden, not because the officials want to ride us, but because we are better off for being ridden. Representation should be by states, each state being allowed representatives in proportion to the total number of members of affiliated unions, provision being made that representation shall be equitably divided as to trade affiliations.

There are rumblings in the internal mechanism of the Federation, and while these rumblings are sought to be drowned out by yelling "socialism" the effort will be vain. When the men who pay the per capita tax get wise they will insist on having a cleaning up and a renovation.

It has been my pleasure to attend several conventions of the Federation, but St. Louis takes the cake for having provided the poorest conveniences. The promised hotel rates did not materialize; the convention hall, stuffy, poorly lighted and inadequately heated, is four miles from the nearest hotel of good standing. The

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