

# The Electrical Workers' Controversy Discussed

Mr. Fisher, an official of the McNulty-Collins faction of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was given an opportunity last Sunday afternoon to address the Reid local of this city. He appeared in joint debate with Grand Treasurer Sullivan of the Reid-Murphy faction, and as a result the assembled electrical workers were given an opportunity to hear an eloquent lot of crimination and recrimination. Very little light was shed on the causes leading up to the present unfortunate condition. Mr. Fisher confined himself to personal attacks on Mr. Sullivan, and Mr. Sullivan was, perforce, compelled to defend himself. But Mr. Sullivan took occasion to refer to some of the history of the present squabble, and from the reception he received it was quite evident that Mr. Fisher had not made any converts to his side of the case.

Mr. Fisher gently steered away from anything that would tend to throw any light upon the causes leading to the disruption. He might have told a lot, but he showed better judgment in avoiding that phase of the question than he did in consenting to meet Sullivan in joint debate.

The facts of the matter are these: The rank and file of the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers had lost confidence in their leaders—McNulty-Collins—and wanted a convention called to remedy what appeared to them to be abuses. McNulty and Collins, evidently fearing that they would be called to account, managed to stave off the calling of the convention for months. Finally a meeting of the executive council at Springfield, which was largely attended by the rank and file members, compelled the calling of a convention. Collins, grand secretary, then paid \$500 of the Brotherhood's money to a lawyer for an opinion of the effect that such a convention would be illegal if held. Then he prevailed upon a little local in Massachusetts to protest and file proceedings to prevent the convention. But the convention was held at St. Louis, and was attended by some delegates now members of the McNulty-Collins locals. The St. Louis convention declared the offices of McNulty, Collins and others vacant and proceeded to elect the present officials of what is known as the Reid-Murphy faction.

Through some influence, not difficult to fathom by one who is aware of the jurisdiction fights constantly waged in some of the big internationals, the McNulty-Collins faction has managed to retain recognition by the American Federation of Labor.

The Denver convention of 1908 took cognizance of the matter and proceeded to take hold of it in an effort to settle it. Unfortunately M. Grant Hamilton was put in charge, and Hamilton has succeeded in making a bad matter very much worse. As a disorganizer Hamilton has made a very enviable record since the Electrical Brotherhood trouble came up. The factions at Denver agreed to put the money each held in a trust fund, and not to draw thereon until all differences were settled. Before the ink was dry on this agreement McNulty gave checks against it to pay the expenses of his own delegates to the Denver convention. He secured the endorsement of Secretary Frank Morrison on these checks and they were then cashed. Reid protested the checks and they were returned to Morrison to make good. This little incident is mentioned merely to show that there may have been some reason other than thoughts about the welfare of the labor movement that impelled certain labor leaders to suddenly get busy revoking charters before the Toronto convention a year later.

At Toronto the matter was again taken up, and it occupied a major portion of the time of the convention. Finally it was decided to leave the matter to arbitration. Both sides agreed to this. Reid selected A. L. Urick of Des Moines to represent his side, McNulty selected Frank Duffy to represent his side, and John P. Frey was selected by President Gompers to act as the third man. This committee met as soon as possible after the Toronto convention and began its attempts to settle the difficulty. Just as it seemed possible that a solution was about to be reached, Duffy resigned as a member of the arbitration board and McNulty immediately served notice upon President Gompers that he and his faction would no longer be parties to arbitration.

At St. Louis the matter was again brought to the fore. Mind you, now, Duffy, by his own motion, was no longer a member of the arbitration board. But when the majority members made their report, Gompers allowed Duffy, no longer a member of the board, to submit a "minority report."

Bear in mind that the whole matter had been left to this arbitra-

tion board to settle. The majority members, Frye and Urick, submitted their report, declaring it as their firm opinion that the only way to settle the matter amicably was to hold a joint convention and let the rank and file settle it after mature deliberation. This was cheered to the echo by the Reid faction, but received in utter silence by the McNulty-Collins faction. The report of that arbitration board should have been acted up by the convention in line with all former precedent. But President Gompers referred it to the adjustment committee and then to a committee of fifteen to be appointed by Gompers. This was such an evident attempt to again palter and evade that the same delegates again arose in protest, and the fight waxed hot. Finally, fearing that the matter was about to get away from them, Jim Duncan, a member of the executive council, arose and made a motion that the whole matter be left to the executive council for final adjudication. This put the responsibility squarely up to the men who had sought to avoid it for twenty-six months, and the convention readily agreed. And there the matter stands today.

At Toronto it was hinted that the whole fight was between men anxious to hold lucrative jobs and handle large funds. President Reid asked for and was granted the privilege of the floor. He offered then and there to put his resignation in the hands of President Gompers, together with the resignations of every official of the so-called Reid faction, provided the McNulty-Collins faction would do the same, and then let the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' locals as then constituted in both factions, select the new officials for an amalgamated Brotherhood. Did the McNulty-Collins faction agree? Not much! They knew what would happen to them in case that course were taken.

At St. Louis President Reid readily agreed to the suggestion of holding a joint convention, or two conventions in the same city on the same date with committees from each to consult and frame up a line of action. Did the McNulty-Collins faction agree? Not much! Hiding behind the skirts of the American Federation of Labor Collins let out a roar about "law and logic and sophistry" that sounded queer in the ears of those who have studied the labor movement in most or all of its phases.

The Reid faction is in existence today because the rank and file of the Brotherhood had lost confidence in their leaders, and that their confidence had been betrayed is best evidenced by the fact that their officials refused to allow a convention to be called, and that those same discredited officials are to this day afraid to leave their side of the case to a decision of the rank and file of the membership in the two factions.

These are some of the facts that Mr. Fisher did not see fit to give to the Lincoln local in his remarks last Sunday afternoon.

Pat Ford of Omaha accompanied Mr. Fisher to Lincoln, ostensibly for the purpose of hastening a settlement of the trouble, but really for the purpose of trying to stir up dissatisfaction by telling the men that the McNulty electrical workers now at work on the new Union Pacific building in Omaha were getting \$1.50 a day more than the Reid electrical workers of Omaha. He also stated that No. 22 of Omaha would go over to the McNulty-Collins faction in a body this week, and that two-thirds of No. 165 would do the same thing. This was an intimation that the Reid locals would change affiliation merely to get a little more pay. Mr. Maupin was asked to make some remarks on the subject and stated that in his opinion any man who would change affiliation merely for the purpose of getting a little more pay was an almighty poor union man to start with. Mr. Maupin then told briefly the history of the case as outlined above.

Mr. Fisher was given a courteous hearing, but in conversation with the men afterwards the writer had no difficulty in seeing that Mr. Fisher had not made any inroads upon the Lincoln local.

Mr. Ford promised that there would be no Reid locals in Nebraska inside of a year. He also told them that he controlled the labor movement in Omaha, and that what he said went.

The most pleasant feature of the meeting and its after talk was the compliments paid to the Lincoln unionists upon their handsome Labor Temple. Some interesting comparisons were drawn between its appearance and the appearance of labor headquarters in some other cities not a million miles away. Messrs. Fisher and Ford returned to Omaha Sunday evening, and Mr. Sullivan left for Cedar Rapids, where he will attend a meeting and then return to his headquarters in Springfield, Ill.