

# The Foster-Sigman Letter

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.

In their propaganda to create an atmosphere favorable for the expulsion of the left-wing elements out of the union, the officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union have stopped at nothing to stigmatize the Trade Union Educational League as a disruptive organization. The folly of this charge is completely demonstrated by recent developments.

Some weeks ago I wrote a letter to Eugene V. Debs complaining about the lying statements that had been given out relative to our interview in Terre Haute, Ind. He replied proposing that a conference be arranged to settle the difficulty in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. In consequence I wrote a letter to President Sigman to that effect.

The latter has made absolutely no acknowledgement to me of the receipt of this letter, in spite of the fact that it has been in his hands for almost two weeks. On the contrary, an effort has been made to underhandedly use the letter to discredit the League by making it appear that the League has been defeated and is now begging for mercy. This forces the publication of my letter to Sigman.

Foster's Letter to Sigman.  
Chicago, Ill., Oct. 25, 1923.

Mr. Morris Sigman, President,  
Int. Ladies' Garment Workers' Union,  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir and Brother:

Some weeks ago I had occasion to write to Eugene V. Debs relative to certain statements appearing in the press and dealing with the present controversy in the I. L. G. W. U. over the Trade Union Educational League. In reply, Comrade Debs, at the conclusion of his letter, made the following self-explanatory proposition for the solution of the difficulty, which I quote verbatim:

"Now, in closing let me say that I would like to have this matter adjusted before greater harm is done and before further disaster follows, as much as any one possibly can, and to this end I think you and your associates, represented by a proper committee, of which you should certainly be a member, should meet at committee of the officials of the union, face each other, and in a decent spirit try to arrive at an understanding. I would like very much to be present at such a conference to know the truth about the situation concerning which only the most conflicting reports have come to me."

Realizing that Comrade Debs' proposition was a practical one, I, upon instructions of our National Committee, wrote him as follows:

"First, let me deal with the closing paragraph of your letter, in which you propose the formation of a conference at which the matter in dispute in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union can be threshed out by representatives of the union and of the League, and at which conference you should be present. I think this is a very practical proposal. Our National Committee accepts it wholeheartedly and will be glad to participate in such a meeting at the earliest date. Like yourself, we believe that a stop should be put to this matter before further harm is done. It is very probable that a round-table talk would be productive

of good results. We await your further pleasure in this matter. So far as we are concerned, you have the authority to go ahead with the arrangement of the proposed conference. May we hope, however, that it will take place in Chicago, so that there will not be too much expense involved."

In that part of his reply dealing with the matter of the proposed conference, Comrade Debs wrote to me as follows:

"In my previous letter, I called your attention to the statements of the respective sides engaged in the unfortunate controversy involving the expulsion of your members from the International Ladies' Garment Workers, and the utterly conflicting nature of such statements, and I informed you that I had suggested to the representatives of the Garment Workers that the proper way to arrive at the truth and to a possible understanding would be to have the representatives of both sides meet and go over the situation in detail in presence of one another so that at least the essential facts of the situation might be brought out clearly as a basis for the possible adjustment of the difficulty which menaced the interests of the organized workers. To this proposition you have readily assented and you now invite me to participate in such a conference, preferably in Chicago, if it can be arranged, but unfortunately I cannot, see my way clear to do so in my present situation. The work in which I am engaged on the road and the further work laid out for me during the coming weeks will tax my strength to the limit and beyond it, and I can see no immediate prospect of being able to render service in the capacity suggested by you, and which I appreciate fully implying as it does the confidence you have in me, gladly as I would do so under other circumstances. If it were in my power to do anything to overcome this difficulty and to bring about an understanding and a better feeling, of course, I should deem it a privilege as well as a pleasure to do so, but I have already so much pressing upon me wherever I go that I find it impossible to make you any definite promise of assistance at this time. I am not at all my normal self nor have I been since I left prison, but I am doing the best I can with such strength as I have, hoping that if I can keep within the bounds of moderation, I may be able to recover myself more fully in time and be able to render more satisfactory service to the cause. I am sure you, at least, will understand that if I cannot comply with your wishes in this instance, it is not due to any lack of sympathy and good will.

"In closing, I venture to suggest that you make your proposition for a joint hearing direct to the officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers, and if they agree to a conference, and it is possible for me to be in attendance, health and other conditions permitting, I shall, if desired, gladly render any service in reaching the desired end in my power."

In conformity with the suggestion of Comrade Debs, I am, therefore, on behalf of the Trade Union Educational League, proposing to you that there be a conference arranged between representatives of your organization and ours, at which the general question of the controversy over the League shall be considered. We make this proposition in all good faith, hoping that a way will be found to end the present deplorable situation. We trust that you will accept. Please advise us at your earliest opportunity.

Fraternally yours,  
WM. Z. FOSTER, Sec'y-Treas.

Now Up To Sigman

Now what is Sigman going to do about it? This conference was proposed by Eugene V. Debs, not by us. We recognize that it is the proper step to take and we are willing to take it. If Sigman will not grant this request for a conference, it will demonstrate beyond all question of a doubt that his charges against the League are fallacious and that he does not want a settlement except by the destruction of the left-wing.

It will prove that the real basis of the attack against the League is not that it is a dual union, but that it carries on a militant campaign for amalgamation, a labor party, and other progressive measures that are obnoxious to the Gompers' bureau-

cracy, of which Mr. Sigman is a part.

We resent the assertion that the League is weakening under the bureaucratic attack. If the officials of the I. L. G. W. U. are proceeding upon that theory they are doomed to a bad disappointment. Therefore, as Mr. Sigman has failed to reply to our letter when it was sent privately, we will publish it and see if that gets results.

We are perfectly willing to let the rank and file judge who is right in this instance. The outcome of this affair will demonstrate completely the real destructive attitude of the right-wing officials.

## Facts Show Smashing of Unions Continues

As a result of a visit by Abe Cahan's plenipotentiary extraordinary, Meyer Perlestein, to Cleveland, the Joint Board of the International, which had at a previous meeting decided to "file" the order from the G. E. B. to expel T. U. E. L. members, was confronted with an ultimatum that this action must be taken immediately. In spite of the threat that all those voting against the order of the International officials would be summarily expelled, 9 delegates voted against the ultimatum, 16 voted for it and N. Gross, delegate from Local 26, who had been objected to at a former meeting, was refused a seat in the Joint Board because of his membership in the Trade Union Educational League by a vote of 11 to 10. Cleveland members expect the actual reign of terror to begin in a short time.

After a farcical meeting in Hotel Brewster, Boston, it was decided to expel Shapiro for having distributed a leaflet, and for having the inexcusable audacity of belonging to the League. This was done over the protest of his union, Local 7, which was browbeaten into submission. In the Waist Makers' Union local, a skunk who does the official spying in Boston for the officialdom threatened expulsion unless the decision to donate \$10 to the Jewish Communist daily, "The Freiheit," was reconsidered. In order not to give the union saviors an excuse for breaking the union, the donation was withdrawn. Individual waist makers will make up five times the \$10 and send it to "The Freiheit"—they know the excellent work done for them by that paper in their last strike.

In Chicago, also, Local 100 has been put into receivership by Perlestein. A chairman was appointed by the Joint Board. The sentiment of the membership can be seen by the fact that no three members could be found in Local 100, only the chairman being an outsider, to take the dictatorship, and three outsiders had to be chosen. No meetings will be held for the local until Perlestein feels sure that no oppositional voice will be heard. This pinhead Mussolini has also been instrumental in having members fined anywhere from \$25 to \$50 for distributing leaflets and signing petitions, not at meetings or in the shops, but on the streets! Among those who have been thus fined were Comrades Gaber and Kreingold, Minnie Belofsky, Yetta Hornstein and Philip Houser were not fined but disfranchised for a period of two years.

Union meetings all over the country are rebelling against this backstabbing policy of the reactionaries. At a meeting of Local 9, in New York, a local which contains over 10,000 members, it was decided by a majority of 3 to 1 not to accept the orders of the G. E. B. to expel all League members. This was done in spite of the fervent pleas and tear-shedding of two of the vice-presidents who were imported to present their side of the case—Jake Halpern and Itz Feinberg. In Boston, Local 56, voted not to recognize the union-smashing order to expel the progressives despite the hoarse threats of the upholders of the machine.

Labor Post Speaks for Amnesty.  
Ralph Chaplin, late of Leavenworth Penitentiary, will be the principal speaker in a series of amnesty meetings along the Atlantic coast, under the auspices of the General Defense Committee.

At the first large gathering, scheduled for November 19th, at Cooper Union, New York, the other speakers will be Frank P. Walsh, Harriet Cooper and Scott Nearing.

Chaplin is well known for his book of poems "Bars and Shadows" written chiefly in prison.

Chicago's Open Forum  
Sunday, Nov. 18, H. M. Wicks, well known lecturer on economics and kindred sciences will speak on the timely subject "The Coming Industrial Depression," in Hall No. 210, Capitol Building, 159 N. State St. 8 P. M.

TEN WORKERS SHOULD READ THIS COPY OF THE WORKER; KEEP IT IN CIRCULATION.

## FASCISM!

Has conquered Italy, and threatens the working class of Germany and all Central Europe. It is raising its head in America and, in its various forms, is boldly making a bid for power thru conspiracy and violence. It is insidiously weaving itself into the trade unions of America. In order to combat this menace, Fascism must be understood. The first complete explanation published in America is contained in the news pamphlet,

STRUGGLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS AGAINST FASCISM

By Andreas Nin,  
With an Introduction by Earl R. Browder.

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