
THE C.I.O. NATIONAL CONVENTION

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

THE sixth national convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, held in Philadelphia beginning November 1 and speaking in the name of its 5,285,000 affiliated members, was a win-the-war convention in the most literal sense of the word. The 600 delegates, capably led by Philip Murray, by their decisions greatly strengthened our national war effort and gave a correct lead to the labor movement as a whole. The C.I.O. convention spoke, not alone in the interest of its own members and of the great mass of the A. F. of L., but of the whole nation. Its decisions were on a far higher plane than those of the A. F. of L. convention held a few weeks before in Boston.

The C.I.O. convention met in a critical moment of the war. In the sphere of military action the offensive of the United Nations was growing—the great advance of the Red Army was tearing the vitals out of the Nazi army, the big air offensive was shattering Hitler's home cities, the anti-submarine campaign was succeeding, the attack in Italy was progressing, and the pressure against Japan increasing. Meanwhile, in Moscow, the three Foreign Secretaries, Hull, Eden and Molotov,

were holding their fateful conference, upon the success of which depended victory in the war and the hopes for a democratic peace. On the American home front, however, the situation was critical. In Congress the defeatists and profiteers, insolent after many months of successful opposition to the Administration's domestic policies, were busily carrying on their fight against all measures of economic stabilization and were chattering away endlessly about the toothless Connally resolution on foreign policy. In the industries the workers were displaying widespread discontent at the rising costs of living, and the whole body of coal miners were on strike.

The C.I.O. and the War

The C.I.O. convention, faced by this complicated and difficult situation, whipped out a clear and sharp line of all-out support of the war. Every problem was considered and every policy worked out upon the basis of whether and how much it would contribute toward a United Nations victory. In Philadelphia, as was not the case in Boston, there was no mere formal endorsement of some war policies and opposition to many others of vital character,

but a whole-hearted expression of the workers' patriotic will. In this respect the convention displayed a high degree of unity.

It was in the spirit of the war offensive that the convention carried on its work. It gave ringing support to the closest cooperation among the anti-Hitler allies, stating that "coalition warfare of the United Nations is the key to our victory," and that "the issue before the United Nations is the decisive, full-scale invasion of Europe." In the very midst of its sessions, public announcement was made of the content of the pacts signed at the Moscow Conference. This great world event, which indicated, among other vital matters, that some definite agreement had been arrived at regarding the second front, was hailed enthusiastically by the C.I.O. delegates in session.

The convention gave a strong endorsement to the Administration's conduct of the war, although there was considerable criticism of its failure to stabilize our economy and thus prevent the present rise in living costs. In this general respect Philip Murray, in his report, clearly expressed the stand of the delegation:

"We pledge our continued and undivided support to our Commander-in-Chief, in fighting men, in production, and in patriotism to enable the United Nations to smash forward with the coalition offensive that has been initiated to an immediate destruction of the fascist Axis."

One of the sharpest expressions

of the C.I.O. convention's win-the-war spirit was its ringing re-endorsement of labor's no-strike pledge and its sharply implied condemnation of John L. Lewis. The convention stated clearly and definitively:

"The C.I.O. hereby reaffirms its solemn pledge without any qualifications or conditions that for the duration of the war there must not be any strike or stoppage of work. Each member and each leader of organized labor must make it his responsibility to discharge with scrupulous care this sacred obligation. Any leader of organized labor who deliberately flouts this obligation and any employer who seeks to provoke or exploit labor are playing into the hands of our enemies."

Walter Reuther, still smarting from his failure to capture the recent Buffalo convention of the United Auto Workers with his defeatist-tainted factionalism, was unable to bring his harmful policies into the C.I.O. convention on any issue.

This categorical restatement of the no-strike pledge is very necessary at this time. There is grave discontent among the workers, due to the failure of the Administration to keep living costs pegged at equivalent levels with wages. Big wage movements are afoot in the steel, railroad and other industries. Determined no-strike policies will be necessary in order to prevent these movements from culminating in industrial stoppages that may injure the production of vital war materials, not to mention their provoking anti-labor legislation and anti-union sentiment among the armed forces

and the broad public. To guard against strikes is doubly necessary now, because, with the prospect of victory looming in the near future, there are tendencies of the Government to relax its economic controls, of employers to intensify their profiteering and anti-labor policies, and of many sections of workers, not feeling as acutely as before the urgency of the war crisis, to try to solve their wage problems by strikes, especially when instigated by irresponsibles of the Lewis type.

The C.I.O.'s Wage Policy

It was no contradiction that the C.I.O. convention, while taking a strong stand against strikes, also adopted a vigorous wage policy. The various speeches, reports and resolutions made it quite clear that the delegates felt that Congress had misapplied the President's seven-point program of economic stabilization, at the expense of the workers. While the farm bloc, dominated by rich agricultural elements, fought to prevent the stabilization of farm prices, and Big Business interests combated every attempt to work out a sound program of taxes and profits control, the anti-Roosevelt Congress refused to legislate against the insatiable demands of these elements. Nor did the Administration fight these forces vigorously enough. Only the wages of the workers have been held stationary, under the strictly enforced Little Steel formula. The general consequence has been that not only has the Administration not succeeded in pushing through its pledged rollback of prices to the levels of Sep-

tember, 1942, but living costs are steadily on the rise and inflation threatens, while wages remain frozen.

In view of this obviously impossible situation, the C.I.O. convention, while continuing its fight to roll back prices and to establish a more equitable tax and profits control system, correctly demanded the scrapping of the Little Steel formula and the adoption of a flexible wage formula, one that will take into consideration increased living costs, lift the restrictions from the N.W.L.B., and will thus provide a sound basis for economic stabilization. In this connection, Philip Murray pointed out the fact that further to keep labor's wages tied to the Little Steel formula would be provocative of strikes. The convention endorsed as justified the wage demands of the 530,000 coal miners and the 1,500,000 railroad workers, and shortly afterward the 900,000 C.I.O. steel workers also submitted their wage demands to the companies.

Although the letter of President Roosevelt and the speech of Vice-President Wallace to the convention deprecated the placing of new wage demands, and although Mr. Davis, head of the War Labor Board, has publicly stated that the Little Steel formula will be maintained, there are indications in Government circles of a growing conviction that a new wage formula will have to be found. Thus, Mrs. Roosevelt, who often foreshadows Government policy, recently stated that she believed the workers have borne a disproportionate share of the war's economic burdens. Moreover, the Presi-

dent has appointed a committee to restudy the cost of living. In the same strain, Mr. Davis himself wrote a letter to Vice-President Wallace (cited in the *New York Times* of November 6), in which he stated:

"As the months flow by and the Board continues to hold wages to the general level of Sept. 15, 1942, we become increasingly conscious of the fact that we are asking one segment of our society to do its part to protect all Americans from the ravages of inflation, while, at the same time, a similar obligation has not been placed as heavily upon the shoulders of some of the other segments of this society."

The Question of Political Action

In the very center of the work of this progressive convention was the matter of united political action of labor and other win-the-war forces. This emphasis was a true reflection of the awakening political alertness of the American working class in the face of the dangerous threat of organized reaction. The delegates were quite aware of the fact that if organized labor is to give maximum backing to the war effort, to protect its living standards, to prevent the Government from falling into the hands of reactionaries in the 1944 elections, and to play a vital role in the post-war period, it must organize itself politically without delay.

In a brilliant speech Sidney Hillman, head of the C.I.O. Political Action Committee, reported on the developing campaign of political or-

ganization and activity. Hillman showed that the political movement of labor must proceed jointly with other win-the-war forces. He said, "We must organize our own forces; we must bring all of the other progressive groups into cooperation and collaboration. This is no C.I.O. program or A. F. of L. program. What affects labor affects all of us." The plan Hillman outlined and which the C.I.O. has already been working upon for several months past, is to mobilize the labor masses through political action committees, either jointly with the A. F. of L. or in parallel action with that body. Mr. Hillman said, "We are opposed to the organization of a third party, surely at this time, because it would divide the forces of the progressives throughout the nation."

Hillman pointed out that the victory scored by the reactionaries in the 1942 Congressional elections was largely due to the inertia and politically unorganized state of the labor movement. He reviewed the major steps that have been taken by the C.I.O. in recent months to remedy these dangerous weaknesses and to prevent an even worse defeat in 1944. Since July 7, he said, conferences have been held in forty states. In many of these conferences A. F. of L. as well as Railroad Brotherhood representatives attended. The comprehensive national plan of organization, unfolded by Hillman, provides for the setting up of fourteen regional offices, and for the establishment of a vast network of labor political committees in states, cities and Congressional districts. Hillman also reported that a fund of

\$700,000 is being raised to finance this broad movement.

The convention responded enthusiastically to Hillman's report, and, beyond question, within the coming months, the C.I.O. will be giving a lead to the most far-reaching political movement ever carried on by the workers in this country. The delegates showed that they were determined to prosecute this great new campaign to build a broad mass political movement in the spirit of the tremendous organizing movements of a few years ago which built the C.I.O.

While the convention, for what it considered to be tactical reasons, did not specifically endorse President Roosevelt for a fourth term, it is clear that the main C.I.O. trend is in that direction. While there was much criticism of the Roosevelt Administration for not paying closer attention to labor's economic demands and for not giving the workers more representation in the war administration, this criticism should not be construed as signifying anti-Roosevelt sentiment. It can and will be so exploited, however, by anti-Roosevelt forces. Significant of the convention's attitude toward Roosevelt, the "Statement on Political Action" says, "More consistently than any other man in public life, President Roosevelt, our Commander-in-Chief, has voiced the objectives of this program and fought for their achievement." The failure of the A. F. of L. in its Boston convention to endorse Roosevelt for another term probably signifies that that ultra-conservative body will not endorse any specific candidate

for President, unless strong rank-and-file pressure is brought to bear upon the leadership. But this is not the case with the C.I.O. Hillman indicated that the C.I.O., either in special convention in 1944 or in a general "convention of all the groups organized politically," would meet and make the necessary commitments on candidates.

It is the job of the progressive forces throughout the labor movement to give the utmost support to the timely and well-planned united political action movement being led by the C.I.O. Special attention must be given to organizing parallel movements among A. F. of L. unions and to bringing these into the closest cooperation with the C.I.O. organizations. As the convention resolution says, "No more important task confronts us today," than the development of united labor political action. This great movement signifies that the American working class is now taking its first decisive steps into independent political activity. It is pregnant with meaning, not only for the workers, but our whole nation. It *must* succeed, for only when it does can the 13,000,000 trade unionists and their families and friends begin to make their political strength count.

National Labor Unity

The C.I.O. convention, realizing the vast importance of united action generally by the workers in these critical times, took a sound position on the vital issue of national trade union unity. The resolution on the

question put the matter briefly as follows:

"Labor unity must encompass first and foremost united action in regard to such measures as total war mobilization, economic stabilization, manpower, anti-labor legislation, and other economic, legislative and political problems.

"The C.I.O. has consistently urged upon the representatives of the A. F. of L. and the Railroad Brotherhoods that the scope of the work of the Combined Labor Victory Committee be expanded and the creation of joint committees on a statewide and local basis be encouraged to establish labor's leadership in rallying the people behind our Commander-in-Chief and our nation's victory."

This intelligent program of united labor action, leading toward eventual organic trade union unity, contrasts sharply with the reactionary line now being followed by the top A. F. of L. leadership. Their idea of arriving at "unity" is by pulling unions, or chunks of unions, out of the C.I.O., by inviting the arch-splitter John L. Lewis back into their own ranks, and by sabotaging united political action. The strength of the C.I.O.'s real unity position lies in the fact that it has the solid backing, not only of that organization's own big membership but also of great sections, probably a majority, of the A. F. of L. membership and lower officialdom. The A. F. of L. top leaders, saturated with ultra-conservatism and hamstrung by defeatism of the Woll-Hutcheson type, may succeed in slowing down the movement for national labor unity, but they cannot possibly halt it.

International Labor Unity

The question of international labor cooperation and organization played a big role at the C.I.O. convention. This question has been a burning necessity ever since the war began. It is becoming still more urgent with the improving prospect of victory and the emergence of a whole new series of vital international labor problems connected with the freeing of the occupied countries and preparations for the post-war period. Accordingly, the convention went on record for international unity of the trade unions in all the United Nations. This will undoubtedly involve sending a strong C.I.O. delegation to the world conference of organized labor, called by the British Trade Union Congress, to open in London on June 5, 1944.

The A. F. of L. Executive Council's policy regarding international trade union unity has been completely repudiated by events. The attempt to isolate the Soviet trade unions through the Anglo-American Trade Union Committee has proved a failure. The conservative British labor leader Walter Citrine lent his support to this contemptible project, but Will Lawther, head of the British Miners Union, spoke the opinion of the British working class when he recently denounced the A. F. of L.'s action as "sheer treason to the working class movement." The successful outcome of the Moscow Tri-Power Conference, by strengthening the unity of the United Nations, has sentenced to death the A. F. of L. attempt to surround the Soviet trade

unions with a labor "cordon sanitaire." In the best interests of the workers of all countries, the labor movement of the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, Latin America, the C.I.O., the Railroad Brotherhoods, etc., repudiating the Wolls, Greens and Hutchesons, are moving toward the holding of a world trade union conference. This conference will very probably lay the foundations of a new international labor movement. It will signify the beginning of the healing, in the trade union field at least, of the long-time split in the international labor movement. The A. F. of L. leaders, confronted with this development, now have the choice either of reversing their ridiculous decision of non-cooperation with the Soviet trade unions or of finding themselves isolated internationally. It is to be hoped that many individual A. F. of L. unions, in accordance with their autonomous right, will disregard their leading body's stupid refusal to join hands with Soviet labor and will, like the C.I.O. and Railroad Brotherhoods, send delegates to London.

The Question of Negro Rights

On the burning issue of the rights of the Negro people the C.I.O. convention took a forthright stand. It reiterated "its firm opposition to any form of racial or religious discrimination," commended the work of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, endorsed the C.I.O. Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination, called for prosecution of the Negro-baiters, demanded the abolition of Jim Crow in the armed forces, and pledged itself to fight

for the removal of all economic factors discriminating against the Negro. In line with this policy, the National Maritime Union, upon the motion of Frederick Myers, the union's former representative on the C.I.O. Executive Board, nominated Ferdinand Smith, a Negro, as its new representative.

All this was in refreshing contrast to the evasions and dodgings of the top A. F. of L. leaders at their Boston convention in dealing with the Negro question, the general effect of which was to shield Jim Crow in their unions. It also contrasts with the shamefaced attitude of the railroad union leaders who failed to come before the recent sessions of the Fair Employment Practices Committee and to explain to the country why many of their unions deny Negroes membership, segregate them in Jim-Crow locals, push them out of the railroad industry, and engage in various other discriminatory practices.

In line with its generally progressive stand on national minority questions, the C.I.O. convention condemned anti-Semitism as "treason to America," and outlined a program of relief for Jewish refugees and of punishment for fomenters of race hatred. The convention also demanded the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, whereas the Boston A. F. of L. convention actually insisted upon the retention of this ultra-reactionary legislation.

The Organization of the Unorganized

The convention also paid much attention to the important question of organizing the unorganized mil-

lions of workers into trade unions. For this task there is now a very favorable opportunity. Never was the need of trade union organization more manifest to the workers than it is at present. The great new armies of Negro workers, women workers, workers from the countryside, as well as the vast masses of white collar workers, all see the cost of living going up and in consequence feel more and more the necessity of organizing their strength for securing more favorable wage conditions. To bring these new millions into the ranks of trade unionism will be of the most profound consequence to the labor movement and to American democracy. The reported additions of 1,135,386 members to the C.I.O. and 1,081,560 to the A. F. of L. during the past year are proof positive of the readiness of the workers to organize. In view of the C.I.O.'s splendid record in organizing the workers, it may be accepted as practically a foregone conclusion that the enthusiasm and planning generated at the convention will result, during the coming months, in substantial increases in the C.I.O. membership.

Post-War Problems

The convention devoted considerable attention to various domestic problems connected with the post-war period. For, as victory in the war grows more certain and nearer, questions as to how the peacetime economy in this country will be organized become constantly more urgent. In view of the possibilities of victory within the near future, questions now viewed as domestic

post-war problems may well be among the central issues of the 1944 election campaign, not as issues of the future but of the immediate present. The matter of preparing to furnish jobs to displaced war workers and the returning soldiers, once victory has been achieved, already constitutes an issue of acute importance. The C.I.O. is doubly concerned in this entire matter, because the industries in which it functions principally—steel, automobile and aircraft, ship-building, machine, electric, etc.—are precisely the ones that will face the biggest problems in the conversion from wartime to peacetime production. The Post-War Planning Committee, headed by John Brophy, submitted an extensive report to the convention. One of the most important phases of this general problem acted upon by the convention related to provisions for protecting the interests of returning soldiers and sailors, including an endorsement of President Roosevelt's recent proposal for the expenditure of a billion dollars for a well-planned educational plan for veterans and members of the merchant fleet.

In the matter of domestic post-war plans there is need for a common program and for joint action between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. With the workers everywhere deeply concerned about what will happen to our economy at the end of the war, with vast numbers of men of our armed forces placing the question of post-war jobs in the forefront of their thinking, and with both industry and the Government busy with innumerable economic

plans for the post-war period, organized labor must not be caught short on the question. It must have definite plans of its own and stand united to secure favorable consideration for them, once the enemy throws up his hands in surrender. In the developing political movement of the workers the questions of our post-war economy, especially the matter of jobs, must be given increasing attention.

In Conclusion

Besides the matters enumerated above, this fine convention of the C.I.O. dealt with many other issues of major importance, which can only be listed here. Among these were, (a) endorsement of the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill, providing for repeal of the Frey Amendment to more adequate social security; (b) the Appropriations Act to the National War Labor Board; (c) a program of national food production; (d) independence for India; (e) adequate labor representation in the war administrative agencies; (f) appointment of labor attachés to the staffs of American Ambassadors; (g) repeal of state anti-labor legislation; (h) strengthened relations with the workers of Latin America; (i) improved care of working women's children; (j) strengthening of the women's auxiliaries to C.I.O. unions; (k) a centralized war economy, without "any national service legislation"; (l) extension of the right of suffrage to all American citizens over 18 years of age; (m)

abolition of the poll tax; (n) an end to the persecution of Harry Bridges; (o) repeal of the Smith-Connally Act; etc.

The convention unanimously elected, with demonstrations of approval, Philip Murray and the previous body of officers, with the addition, already noted, of Ferdinand Smith to the Executive Board. The convention, having accomplished its purpose of more thoroughly uniting its forces to win the war and the peace, closed amid scenes of enthusiasm.

The sixth convention of the C.I.O. marks a new high stage in the growth of the American labor movement. The A. F. of L. at its Boston convention gave general support to the war, but its political level was far below that of the C.I.O. convention. The latter was an authentic expression of the progressive, win-the-war determination now animating the American working class. And its splendid spirit is not confined to the C.I.O. alone. Much of this same progressive trend is also being shown by various city and state federations and international unions of the A. F. of L., which are increasingly coming into conflict with the conservative and often reactionary policies of the A. F. of L.'s Executive Council. The C.I.O. convention will give a stimulus to progressivism throughout the labor movement. Especially will it spur the movement toward national labor unity, which is so essential for the victory of the win-the-war forces in the crucial 1944 elections.