

# The Machine Shop of The Revolution

By Earl R Browder

WHEN it was announced recently that the American Federation of Labor was launching a campaign to organize the steel workers, it was stated that "reds" would not be tolerated unless they kept their mouths shut. This communication was read in the meeting of a machinist's Local Union in Chicago, whereupon a militant rank and file member arose and said: "That is an impossible condition. A revolutionist cannot keep silent."

A profoundly true statement! But any hasty generalization from such a fact, to the effect that revolutionists do nothing but talk, would have been wiped from the mind of anyone present at the Second General Conference of the Trade Union Educational League. That gathering opened its session in the Labor Lyceum, Chicago, early on the morning of September 1 and closed the next night at 8:30. During the thirty-six hours the delegates (103 of them were present, out of 143 credentialed, from cities scattered all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coasts, and from Canada to Mexico) gave an exhibition of work, with a minimum of oratory, that would have gladdened the heart of Henry Ford himself, if it had been turning out motor cars instead of revolutionary tactics and programs.

It was a council of war—of the class war. Like all such councils today, it faced the double problem of organizing the masses against capitalism and uniting the militant spirits against the labor fakers. The Conference laid plans for achieving industrial unity of the workers, through amalgamation of the now divided craft unions into powerful industrial organizations, and politically through federating all workers' organizations, economic and political, into a general Party of farmers and workers. On the other hand it worked out the tactics needed to prevent the reactionary Gompers' machine from splitting the labor movement further, and from driving the militants, as is being attempted, out of the unions. In both respects the League conference clarified the issues and united the left-wingers upon definite programs. The League had summoned the militants from all over the continent, to combine their wisdom and experience gained in a year of work since the fundamental program was laid down in the First Conference. Here in one room were most of the men and women who, during the past year, had led the movement which in that short time had become the most respected by the conscious rank and file of Labor and the most feared by the capitalists and labor fakers.

It is too bad that this short article cannot tell everything that the Conference accomplished. Not that there is any secret about the proceedings, for they are published in full in THE LABOR HERALD for October, with all the documents. Some tens of thousands of militant trade unionists will carefully study every word that came from the Conference. They know that these words are dynamic, that the decisions, the course of action outlined, will profoundly affect the labor movement, the nation, and the whole world situation.

The meetings were open to the public, and the do-

uments are published for the world to read. In spite of the "yellow dreadful" detective stories going the rounds of the capitalist press about the secret "reds," any old broken-down Sherlock could have sat through every meeting that made plans for the revolutionary movement of America. No doubt within a year the proceedings now published will be solemnly unearthed by Burns, published in the Chicago Tribune as a great exposure, and made the basis for another appropriation from Congress to save the Constitution. We hereby offer Mr. Burns a free copy so that he can make the exposure now, if that is not too ungracious.

The Trade Union Educational League came into existence as a protest against the complete lack of policy and leadership in the trade unions. Militant rank and file members all over the country were in revolt against the pitiful craft unionism of the Gompers clique, and against the even more pitiful "non-partisan" political policy which delivered Labor to the Capitalist parties. They found their protests futile; they were smothered by the wet blanket of organized officialdom. Expression they must have, and when the Trade Union Educational League came along with its ringing message of industrial unionism through amalgamation, the Labor Party and the other vital measures of its program, the left-wing of the trade union movement rallied to its leadership.

And now these militants have made of the Trade Union Educational League the greatest institution of its kind in the world. It is a training school, and a machine shop; it takes these raw militants and turns them into "engineers of the revolution" with a shop to work in. When these practical engineers gather in conference, practical results are sure to come out of it. And the meetings were really much like a gathering of technicians. No oratory, but lots of realistic, practical discussion of real practical problems—and always, at the end, detailed methods of solving the problem under discussion. The personnel of the delegation corresponded to this general atmosphere; plain men and women—a large majority native Americans—and all fighters.

A dramatic and romantic story about the gathering would be nice to read, and still nicer to write. But such a story would hardly be in keeping with the Conference itself. It was about as romantic as a machine shop. Of course Bob Minor says that a machine shop is a most romantic thing. It may be, to those whose imagination is vivid enough to personify the forces behind the machine, and to picture the world-changing results that flow, for example, from the shops that produce the gasoline engines of modern civilization. In this way did the Conference fire the imagination and enthusiasm of all the revolutionary technicians who took part in its work. They saw the Conference as a great factory, efficiently and smoothly producing the engines of the revolution that will change the whole structure of society—the militant trade unionists with organization and program fitted to lead the working class to victory over capitalism.

In striking contrast to traditional "conventions" in this

country, was the absence of anything like a dominating machine in mechanical control of the meetings. Practically every one present had something vital to contribute to the work, and all the others eagerly accepted what was offered. Differences of opinion, because they related to real problems and not to abstract theory, were quickly ground down to adjustment, on the emery-wheel of the Conference discussion. There was no struggle for positions of leadership, yet at one time or another every one was something of a leader. Worthy of note was the action of the Conference in sending telegrams of greeting to all political and class-war prisoners. Typifying the broad policy of solidarity was the one sent to the I. W. W. men in prison, which read:

To General Defense Committee, I. W. W.

The Second General Conference of the T. U. E. L. conveys a fraternal revolutionary greeting to those members of the I. W. W. imprisoned by our common enemy, capitalism, at Leavenworth, Walla Walla, San Quentin, and elsewhere, and pledges the energy of League militants to defeat injunctions, syndicalist laws, and to release their victims.

This message was acknowledged in a splendid spirit by Ed Anderson, Secretary of the General Defense Committee of the I. W. W. The incident shows that the spirit of solidarity is contagious; sectarianism and intolerance, even in the I. W. W., cannot triumph forever. The Trade Union Educational League differs fundamentally from that organization in tactics, affiliations, and ideas, but it always stands for a united front of working-class organizations in the practical struggle against Capitalism. May the influence of the Andersons grow in the ranks of the "wobblies." Two messages came to the Conference from men widely separated geographically and still to a considerable degree separated by political affiliation. They were from Eugene V. Debs, and A. Losovsky, and read as follows:

Terre Haute, Ind., Aug. 31, 1923.

Wm. Z. Foster,  
106 No. La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.

It is with regret that I have to decline the invitation to your Conference on account of other engagements. Please accept my thanks and with greetings to yourself and delegates assembled and hoping your deliberations may be fruitful of all good results to the workers, I am yours fraternally,  
Eugene V. Debs.

Moscow, Aug. 31, 1923.

Trade Union Educational League, Chicago, Ill.

League is entering trying times. Now more than ever activity and fighting endurance should prevail. Wish your Conference great success. Communist greetings.  
A. Losovsky.

In these two messages we have a symbol of the Conference, and of the work being done by the Trade Union Educational League. It is setting up contact, community of ideas, programs and comradeship feeling, Against the choking influence of the Gompers officialdom, the Trade Union Educational League calls for the united front of all militant workers; and the call is being answered.

## Shall We Assume Leadership?

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ciple; but we cannot have several competing labor parties in one country because they have all the same principles of organization. This argument also is basically false. It has as a basis the abstract, ideal labor party which immediately upon its formation embraces the entire working class. This is a Utopian, erroneous, one-sided interpretation of the British experience. This view maintains that because there has been only one Labor Party in England, therefore only one labor party can exist in all other countries. Such a conception brings to mind the virgin birth theory, in that it altogether forgets the natural birth of the Labor Party. Experience shows that labor parties have been built by a political group uniting and organizing under its leadership all or a part of the trade union movement. Thus in England the Independent Labor group of pink socialists organized the Labor Party. In England the Labor Party remained without competition on the political field because among other reasons no other political groups attempted to organize the trade unions under their political influence. The so-called Marxist Social-Democrats were just as sectarian and just as much opponents on principle of the Labor Party, as was our Workers Party a year ago, or like the early Communist Party in Great Britain. It is interesting to note that in 1906, in its year of organization, the British Labor Party had 975,182 members, and the Independent Labor Party only 20,884 members. The proportion, therefore, between the membership of the British Party and its leading political group was even more unfavorable than the proportion between the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the Workers Party. In America, we have a number of political groups which fight for influence within the trade union movement. This attempt to influence the workers is seen in the organization of various labor parties. The Socialist Party tries to form a labor party. The old Farmer-Labor Party tries to form another another labor party. The Workers Party has helped in the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. It is simply dogmatic to decree that it is against the rules of the game for several labor parties to attempt to exist in one country.

## LETTERS from WORKERS TO THE EDITOR OF THE LIBERATOR:

There has been a discussion among a few of us comrades in regards to the "Daily Worker." What we would like to know is this, and since you were in Russia at the time, I think you could best answer it: Were there any daily papers of the Bolsheviki in Russia previous to the October revolution? If so, in what cities and what was the strength of the party in those districts at the time. Will be much obliged for an answer.

O. Y. East Pittsburgh, Pa.

### ANSWER:

Despite persecution and arrests, the leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Party (Menshevik) and the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik) jointly started a legal weekly paper called the Zvezda (The Star) in December, 1910. The Zvezda was suppressed by the