
The American Labor Alliance for Trade Relations With Russia.

A document in the Comintern archives: f. 515, op. 1, d. 36, ll. 1-18. Alternate copy: d. 84, ll. 1-18.

In October of 1919 a group of Russian men and women with their children gathered at Washington Square in New York City to form a parade up Fifth Avenue. They had come to ask America to remove the economic blockade that had been placed on a country from which most of them fled during the Tsar's regime. Their banners told simply how the children and women of Russia were suffering. They asked Americans to send milk to the babies. They called on the United States Government to lift the blockade.

Within two or three minutes after the parade had started up Fifth Avenue, the mounted police of New York City was hurled into the crowd. Children were ridden down; women were sent scurrying into shops and men were beaten down.

A week later a group of American women, calling themselves The American Women's Emergency Committee formed a similar parade on Fifth Avenue as a protest vs. the treatment of Russians in America. Every woman wore a "Lift the Blockade" insignia and each carried a banner demanding that the State Department take action at once on the blockade question. Mounted police were sent again forth to terrify the American women. They lined up solemnly as the parade started out, finding that these were American citizens — many of them of national repute — they rode down Fifth Avenue as an escort to the parade.

For a year the American Women's Emergency Committee brought all the pressure it could upon the Administration in Washington and upon the State Department to get the blockade lifted. They asked to be allowed to send relief to Russia without avail, and finally in October 1920, they decided to call on American labor to do what European labor had long since done.

A committee of representatives from the Emergency Committee, the Farmer-Labor Party, and the

Socialist Party was called together to organize a conference. A temporary executive committee was formed under the name of the Humanitarian Labor Alliance, through the cooperation of these organizations that was made up largely of members of the American Federation of Labor, and a conference was called for November 21st, to which all local unions of the city (AF of L and Independent) were asked to send five delegates.

The conference was attended by 512 delegates representing the Emergency Committee, the Farmer-Labor Party, the Socialist Party of New York, over one hundred local unions of the AF of L, and other labor organizations. The list of organizations represented is attached herewith (See A) and represents seven international labor organizations including the International Ladies' Garment Workers, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the International Association of Machinists, the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers Union, the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, the International Fur Workers, the International Brotherhood of Stationary Firemen.

A resolution was passed at this conference calling for the lifting of the blockade on Russia and demanding that the State Department take action at once for resumption of trade between this country and Russia.

Another resolution was passed calling on labor throughout the country to join in the fight for lifting the blockade....

Plans were drawn up for a campaign of organization and education among the workers of the country, and a permanent executive committee was elected by the delegates with instructions to communicate with labor bodies throughout the country and to call on labor organizations to hold mass meetings everywhere to create public opinion against the blockade. This

committee includes only representatives of labor unions....

A collection and pledges which amounted to nearly \$2700 was taken up from the delegates to finance the beginning of the campaign and to cover the expenses already incurred in calling the conference.

The speakers at the meeting were Edward I. Hannah, then president of the Central Federated Union of New York, who acted as chairman; James H. Maurer, President of the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor, who pledged the support of his entire organization in the campaign for trade with Russia; Timothy Healy, International President of the Stationary and Eccentric Firemen's Union, and representative last fall of the AF of L at the British Trades Union Congress; Joseph Schlossberg, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; Abraham Lefkowitz, of the Teachers Union of New York; Sidney Hillman, President of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; and Joseph D. Cannon, of the Western Federation of Miners.

The following week the executive committee met in the offices of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, where officers were elected. The name was changed to the American Labor Alliance for Trade Relations with Russia. Timothy Healy, President of the Stationary Firemen, was elected Chairman. The Vice Chairmen elected are Jerome T. DeHunt, of the Brotherhood of Railroad and Steamship Clerks; Arturo Giovannitti, Secretary of the Italian Chamber of Labor; Sidney Hillman, President of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; and William A. Maher, of the Masters, Mates and Pilots. Other officers are Treasurer, Abraham Baroff, Secretary and Treasurer of the International Ladies' Garment Workers; Secretary, Alexander Trachtenberg, of the Associated Teachers' Union.

The executive committee secured the services of a national organizer, Duncan McDonald, former President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor, who at once started through the Eastern and Middle Western states to speak before Central Labor Bodies in the larger industrial towns and before local unions generally, calling on them for cooperation with the Labor Alliance Committee in New York.

Stories were sent out thorough the Federated Press and through the mails to labor papers throughout the country...

At the same time Timothy Healy, who travels much of the time for his International organization, undertook to speak before labor bodies wherever he goes. He has won the cooperation of some of the largest labor bodies, and through his work in Washington, won the entire support of the International Association of Machinists, which represents over 350,000 workers.

The General Executive Board of the Machinists Association not only has endorsed the work of the Labor Alliance but has made use of much of the propaganda literature issued by the Alliance and has sent a long letter to every lodge of the Machinists in the country calling on them to adopt similar resolutions to those of the Alliance and to call upon the Central Labor Bodies of their cities to do the same. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Machinists Union has organized a mass meeting of labor bodies similar to that held in New York and presented the resolution demanding trade to the Central body, representing 175,000 workers, which passed it unanimously and appointed a representative to act with the New York Committee in all its work.

The entire state of Pennsylvania has been circularized with a similar appeal from James H. Maurer, President of the State Federation of Labor of Pennsylvania, and from Illinois has come a letter from John H. Walker, President of the State Federation of Labor, stating: "I want you to know that I believe that the Soviet Government of Russia should be recognized — that our government should be helping it rather than trying to crush it. The trade relation and other relationships between civilized people should be established between us and them, and that insofar as circumstances will permit me to I am willing to go the limit to bring these things about."

Letters and resolutions of endorsement have been pouring in for the last month from labor bodies of all parts of the country....

Following a trip to Washington made by a representative of the Alliance, when she interviewed several prominent United States Senators, among them Senator Borah of Idaho; Senator France of Maryland; Senator Norris of Nebraska; Senator Johnson of California; Senator Cummins of Iowa, all of whom favor trade with Russia, it was decided to hold a mass meet-

ing in New York to demand that the blockade be lifted. At about this time the deportation of Ludwig C.A.K. Martens was ordered and the blockade meeting resolved itself into a protest against the deportation of Mr. Martens. The American Women's Emergency Committee, the Civil Liberties Union, and the soviet Russia Medical Relief Society cooperated with the American Labor alliance in making the plans for this meeting, which was held on January 2nd [1921] at Madison Square Garden.

Over 10,000 workers attended this meeting and two resolutions were passed, one demanding the resumption of trade with Russia and the establishment of all forms of communication with that country; the other protesting against the deportation of Mr. Martens....

The speakers at the meeting included Senator Joseph I. France, who placed a resolution demanding trade with Russia before the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee last February, and who has now called again for a hearing on that resolution; Frank P. Walsh, formerly chairman of the Industrial Relations Commission and also chairman during the war of the War Labor Board; Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch of the American Women's Emergency Committee; Benjamin Schlesinger, President of the International Ladies' Garment Workers; Capt. William Maher, of the Masters, Mates and Pilots; William H. Johnston, President of the International Association of Machinists; Joseph Schlossberg, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; and Timothy Healy, of the Stationary Firemen, who acted as chairman of the meeting....

Following the meeting Senator France met a group of the Executive Committee and made rough plans for a hearing on his resolution to be held in Washington during the month of January, to which he asked that the Alliance end representative to speak.

The date of the hearing has since been set for Wednesday, January 26th. A committee of leading labor leaders of the country has been asked to attend this hearing as speakers and a call has been sent to all

central labor bodies and to all the local unions of New York City asking them to send official delegates. In addition to this the American Women's Emergency Committee has been asked to send representatives to the hearing to place before the Senate Committee a record of their experiences with the State Department in their attempt to get relief into Russia.

As for further plans of the Labor Alliance, it is expected that the resolution introduced by Senator France will be favorably reported out of the Foreign Relations Committee, in which case there will follow a debate of the question of trade with Russia on the floor of the Senate and a thorough airing will be given to the Russian policy of the present Administration. In case the resolution is not reported out of committee, there is still the possibility of getting a Senate investigation into the question, in which event members of the Russian Soviet Bureau in this country would undoubtedly be called on again to testify and all other groups would also be called into the investigation.

There has been little apparent opposition from labor to the organization of the Labor Alliance for Trade with Russia. The American Defense Society, which is financed by a group of financiers of no great importance and of somewhat British tendencies, issued a telegram to the Governors of all states calling on them to repudiate the Alliance and to organize "Citizens' Committees" in all towns to combat any attempt of the Alliance to call mass meetings or to work with labor. It also accused the Alliance of "working falsely under the name of labor." This telegram was answered with a letter from the Alliance which set forth the names of labor leaders and labor organizations that had formed the Alliance....

If Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, has continued his fight against resumption of trade with Russia there has been little result noticed, unless he was behind the action taken by the Central Trades and Labor Council of New York, where after a motion made by Mr. Healy, a resolution was passed declaring for trade with Russia, but a clause was added stating that this did not in any way declare for the Soviet form of government.

*Edited by Tim Davenport. References to appendices deleted, marked with ellipses.
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