
Attempt to Murder Foster!

Gunmen Burst in on Union Meeting and Open Fire on Labor Leader as He Commenced Speaking at Protest Meeting Against Expulsion of Garments Unionists by Perlstein. [event of Aug. 27, 1923]

by Jack Johnstone

Published in *Voice of Labor* [Chicago: WPA], v. 11, no. 616 (Sept. 1, 1923), pg. 1.

Gunmen attempted to assassinate William Z. Foster at a monster mass meeting, held in the Carmen's Auditorium on August 27 [1923], called to protest against the expulsion without trial of the militants from the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union by Vice President Meyer Perlstein.

Foster had just commenced speaking, when suddenly the door to the right of the platform was thrown open and 3 shots fired — all of them at Foster, who owes his life to the fact that the gunmen were so anxious to cover their faces that it interfered with their aim.

The gunmen came up the fire escape and went out the same way. That they were determined to commit murder was self-evident. They climbed up the fire escape, 60 feet to the nearest point of the speaker, and they had their getaway planned thoroughly. The assassins were not apprehended.

This dastardly outrage was the crowning act in a long series of attempts to disrupt the meeting. At the very outset a group at the rear of the hall started a small riot, but they did not succeed in breaking up the meeting. They interrupted the chairman and every speaker, except [Moissaye] Olgin. They had played all their cards before Olgin's time to speak, and they were completely defeated. Not a single one of the audience left the

hall. It was planned to adjourn the meeting at 10 pm, but it did not adjourn until nearly midnight.

This attempt to assassinate "Bill" Foster shows to what extent the reactionaries will go to intimidate the Left Wing element, and how little they understand the movement when they think that by killing Foster they could kill the movement. Foster personifies this movement, but he does not make it. Amalgamation, independent working class political action do not come from Foster. They come out of necessity — from the needs of the workers. This the reactionaries do not understand.

The meeting was originally planned for the small hall in the Auditorium. It had not been advertised to any extent, and it was thought that only the militants would turn out. But the small hall, which has a seating capacity of only 450, was jammed before 8 o'clock, so the large hall was hired, and over 2,000 of the probably 3,500 organized ladies' garment workers in the city of Chicago braved a terrific rainstorm and heard for the first time the story of why the most progressive members of the union had been expelled.

The story was told by the expelled members of how Perlstein had taken over the power of the union, denying members the right of trial. After they heard the story, the following resolution was

read and unanimously accepted.

Resolution.

Whereas, The fundamental principle of labor unions is that the union must include workers of all opinions and be tolerant of the expressions of the same, and

Whereas, Vice President Perlstein is in Chicago conducting a campaign of persecution against several members of the union because of their advocacy of amalgamation, the shop delegate system, independent working class political action, and various other policies distasteful to the administration, and has expelled 7 members, and

Whereas, The excuse he is offering for these persecutions of loyal members, some of whom have belonged to our organization for as long as 15 years, is ridiculous, namely that the Trade Union Educational League is a dual organization, and

Whereas, The Trial Committee that heard the evidence showed its disagreement with the prosecution by voting 5 to 1 in favor of acquittal, and only 11 members out of 35 on the Joint Board voted in favor of conviction — 8 voting for acquittal, 6 being disqualified, 7 not voting, 3 absent, and

Whereas, Vice President Perlstein claims that he is carrying on this persecution upon direct instructions of the GEB, therefore be it

Resolved, That we condemn these expulsion proceedings as contrary to the basic principles of trade unionism and bound to bring the most serious disruption into our organization, and be it further

Resolved, That we request the GEB of the ILGWU to reverse the decision of expulsion and reinstate these members in good standing in the union, and be it further

Resolved, That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to all local unions and Joint Boards of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the GEB.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.