

ARTICLE

## FLASHLIGHTS OF THE I.W.W. CONVENTION, 1906.

II.  
CHARLES E. MAHONEY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**AHONEY should need no introduction to the readers of *The People*. He is the intellectual luminary, the well-ballasted, well-balanced syndic, the solid-minded mufti, the cool-headed “war reporter,” who got so completely scared out of his wits, at the sight of the solid and determined front of the industrialist delegates, arrayed against his craft Union and reactionary minority, that, in a convention of not half that total number of delegates, he saw “about 200 members of the S.L.P.” who tried to run things. This may be considered quite enough to give an idea of the caliber of the gentleman. Indeed it does throw light upon a wide area of his make-up. Like most men, however, Mahoney consists of several “areas.” In order to appreciate him fully, the other “areas” of his make-up should also be brought into light. The man is not only a character study, the study of him helps to clarify the situation in the convention. A few instances will illustrate the point.

It was the morning of the second day of the convention. For all practical purposes that was the first session, the previous day having been consumed mainly with calling the convention to order and adjourning to allow the Committee on Credentials time to work. On that morning session of the first day the Committee made its report. The convention had adopted on the previous afternoon an order of procedure intended to counteract the wrongful act of the then President in appointing a Committee on Credentials with men on it whose own seats were contested, besides a member of the G.E.B., Cronin, whom he knew the convention

had no confidence in. Such an act, besides being arbitrary, showed either bad judgment, or a deliberate intent to smash the convention from the start. The procedure adopted by the convention was eminently fair: it provided for the organization of the convention with only those delegates against whom no objection was raised either by the Committee on Credentials, or by any of the delegates seated. The small number of delegates, who centered around the completely convicted McCabe, and of whom Mahoney, along with Sherman, Kirkpatrick, Cronin, McMullen and McDonald, were but the understrappers, made an effort to overthrow that procedure. McMullen led the fight. Shaking his finger at the convention, like a school master talking to a lot of children, he said: "You shall not organize that way; understand that well; we shall not allow you to; you must organize as the Committee on Credentials says, or you shall not organize at all; understand that well. I represent the Western Federation of Miners; the delegates of the miners will not consent to any other procedure. You must organize as we tell you—understand that well!" I answered McMullen. With my points, accented by the emphatic and unquestionable approval of the vast majority of the convention, both in regard to members and in regard to votes, I spurned McMullen's arrogant assumption to dictate to, or to decree his will upon the convention, and I point-blank questioned his authority to speak for all the miners' delegates. McMullen collapsed like a dishclout.—Not intending to make any special flash-light article of McMullen, I may here digress for a moment to record a humorous, and significant incident withal, in connection with this delegate. On another and similar occasion, when McMullen found himself routed by the determined and clear-headed majority of delegates and votes, he dropped a remark that evoked a roar of laughter at his expense. With the face of a hen that has hatched out swans, and is all in a flutter at seeing the daring of her suppositious brood, he exclaimed: "I've been at many other conventions, but never have seen any one act like this!" The irrepressible laughter, evoked by these words, together with the appearance of the man who uttered them, was not a little increased in the immediate neighborhood of where sat Delegate Markley, who, with inimitable Irish wit and the well known Irish brogue, observed in an undertone: "Listen to the bone-ya-a-rd makin' a noise."—But to return: Seeing McMullen's discomfiture, Mahoney stepped forward to the rescue, and he did so in a

manner so characteristic that it deserves mention as illustrative of traits, or “areas” in the man’s make-up. Things were obviously going against his set. McMullen’s attempted browbeating tactics had failed, Mahoney endeavored to play upon another human weakness. He tried the “sentimental racket.” With his head down—he rarely looks one in the eyes—and in a deep basso voice, he introduced himself to the convention as “the representative of Charles Moyer, who is now languishing in an Idaho jail, the victim of a capitalist conspiracy.” The manoeuvre fell as flat as McMullen’s. The convention gave Mahoney clearly to understand that it was no weak kitten to be played upon. In behalf of Moyer, the victim of a capitalist conspiracy, the convention was ready to go as far as he who went furthest—probably infinitely further than the Mahoneys ever would; but that no spectacular dragging of poor Moyer from his jail, and clanking his chains, would be tolerated to unman the convention into submitting to a ring rule. Being in no mood either to be browbeaten by McMullen, or to be swayed from the path of duty by the veneration which Mahoney sought to attract to himself at the cost of the suffering of others, the ring was brushed aside, and the procedure, adopted the previous afternoon, was upheld by an almost unanimous vote—545 to 3.

Another incident, revealing another “area” in Mahoney’s makeup{,} occurred in the course of a scathing speech, in which Heslewood was lashing those delegates of the miners, who, though claiming to be I.W.W. men, were lining up with men like McCabe, an upholder of craft Unionism, who, besides, objected to the motto at the head of the constitution—“Labor is Entitled to all it Produces.” With language that made the reactionists writhe, Heslewood declared that such men had no business in the convention, and had come there under false pretence. The cowhiding administered by Heslewood was to the point; Mahoney was in the chair—Sherman alternated with him almost exclusively; he felt the strokes, as one by one they cut him across the face; unable longer to contain himself, and with utter disregard of the dignity and duty of the office he was then filling, Mahoney interrupted Heslewood saying: “The delegate will discuss the motion!” Quick as flash came the retort from Heslewood in a thundering voice—“I AM discussing the motion, and if you interrupt me again I shall discuss YOU.”—Needless to say Chairman Mahoney interrupted Heslewood no more.

A third incident, illuminative of still another area in Mahoney's make-up, is led to by the one just narrated. Mahoney was oftener in the chair and at longer spells than Sherman, being called thither by Sherman. Among the things that brought home to me, and I doubt not to more than one other delegate, the danger of a President, and the urgent necessity of the abolition of the office, was the brutality and utter indecency with which Mahoney wielded the gavel. Were it not for the cool determination of the convention to rescue the organization from the pirates who held it by the throat, the convention would have broken up in disorder. Mahoney steered in that direction. That danger was a direct result of the existing constitutional provisions regarding the presidential office. According to the old constitution, not only did the I.W.W. have a president, not only was the President ex-officio the chairman of the convention, but, even in case of others being nominated for his place by the convention, he held over until his successor was elected by the general vote of the membership and qualified. Accordingly, an incumbent President, wholly mistrusted and held unfit, could not be got rid of, so long as that presidency existed. The incumbent might be found guilty of all the crimes of the decalogue, he might be convicted of treason to the organization, his crimes might be so obvious that, even if he had some friends in the convention, they could not poll for him a vote large enough to bring him within the necessary three highest nominees to go to the general vote of the membership—and yet such a man would retain his seat, he would HOLD OVER UNTIL HIS SUCCESSOR WAS ELECTED, and would thus have a prolonged lease of life to stab the organization at its vitals. Such a state of things placed the organization wholly at the mercy of one man. The utter repulsiveness to democratic principles of such a state of things was brought home to the convention by the substitute chairman whom Sherman placed in the office—Mahoney. Conventions should elect their own presiding officer. Even such a presiding officer can be removed if a convention finds him unsatisfactory. Under the old constitution nothing of the sort could happen. The President, being ex-officio chairman of the convention, had the convention at his feet; and, as in this instance, if it happened that the President felt he was not himself unfit enough for the office, he and he alone could appoint his substitute, and appoint a worsener. He did so. Mahoney as chairman was a caricature of all that the office stands for—he

was undignified, he interfered in the proceedings, he bullyragged his opponents, he allowed the members of his ring full latitude to carry out their program of delay. The convention was helpless. So long as the office of President existed the convention was at his mercy. Swiftly, orderly, in decent manner did the convention proceed after the abolition of the presidency. That abolished, the convention could and did choose its own chairman—St. John—and then it did business. To no slight degree the exhibition of irresponsible recklessness on the part of Mahoney in the chair sharpened the axe that chopped off the presidency. With the abolition of the presidency the convention cleansed itself of Mahoney and Mahoneyism.

A delegate who knows Mahoney well told me this of him: “It is this way with Mahoney: If someone gets to him, tells him so and so, and so and so, and leads him up to a conclusion, it matters not what proof may be brought to prove that the steps by which he was led to the conclusion were all false, he does not remember those steps; he only remembers his conclusion; and he can’t be budged. He is bull-headed.” If this is so then Mahoney is a mixture of two qualities{,} one bad—stubbornness, the other good—loyalty. Such a person may be as harmful as he may be beneficial to the Labor Movement. It all depends upon the quality of those who first approach him. If knaves approach him first and lead him to a conclusion, his conduct will be loyal to knavishness; if those who lead him to a conclusion are honorable men, then his loyalty will be to honorable ends. Such a man’s conduct is set on a hair trigger. There is no telling which way he will shoot. All that can be hoped for in behalf of Mahoney is that the good quality for which he is given credit—loyalty—may so develop as to dwarf and suppress his bad one, a stubbornness that amounts to blockishness.

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