

Five Vital Conferences

By Wm. Z. Foster

DURING the latter half of November there were held five meetings of militants, inaugurating movements destined to play most important parts in the near future of Organized Labor. These were conferences looking to the establishment of National Industrial Sections, or educational committees, in the Textile, Clothing, Printing, Food, and Boot and Shoe industries. They were organized by Joseph Manley, Organizer for the T. U. E. L.

Friends and enemies alike admit freely that the Trade Union Educational League has made a tremendous showing in the short time it has been in operation. But the most remarkable thing is that the League has achieved these results with only the barest skeleton of an organization. As yet the League consists of hardly more than general groups of militants in the various industrial centers carrying on the work of regeneration in a necessarily planless and unorganized way. The National Industrial Sections, upon which will fall the burden of the task of systematizing the work in the respective industries, have not yet come into existence, save in the railroad industry. The encouraging fact is that if the League has been able to accomplish so much with so little organization it will surely make astounding progress when its real machinery, the National Industrial Sections, get under way in the near future.

The National Industrial Sections will be the backbone of the Trade Union Educational League. They are a recognition of the fact that the reactionary trade union bureaucracy are a national machine whose leadership and policies can be defeated only by national movements of the militants. Little can be accomplished upon a local basis, which is the present status of our movement. What must be done is to map out programs and to set up national educational organizations in all the industries. These will unite the militants everywhere and enable them to sweep ahead victoriously against the reactionaries. At its National Conference the League recognized this fact and instructed the National Committee to get the National Industrial Sections into action as soon as possible. The following described conferences were the first steps in that direction:

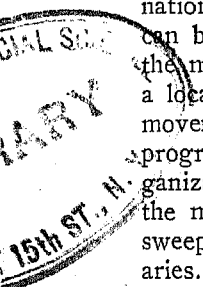
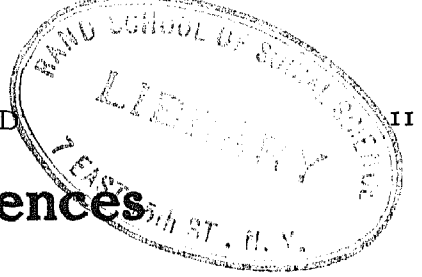
The Textile Industry

The first of the conferences related to the textile industry. It took place in New York on November 19th. A group of militant workers from several of the textile unions participated. The

first thing done was to survey the industry generally to determine the state of unionism therein. This was found to be fragmentary enough. Of a total of about 1,000,000 workers in the textile industry only 100,000 are organized. Approximately half of these are in the United Textile Workers, which is affiliated to the A. F. of L., while the rest are scattered through a score or more of independents, among which the principal organizations are the American Federation of Textile Operatives, Amalgamated Textile Workers, Mule Spinners' Association, Amalgamated Lace Operatives, Brussels Carpet Weavers, Tapestry Carpet Workers, Knit Goods Workers, Art Square Weavers, National Loomfixers' Association, Associated Silk Weavers, One Big Union, Friendly Society of Engravers, Wool Sorters and Graders, Full-Fashioned Hosiery Workers, etc., etc. In August, 1922, an alliance was completed between the nine first-mentioned of these independents. It is called the Federated Textile Unions of America.

The confusion in the industry, from an organization standpoint, is unequalled in the United States. Besides the flock of craft unions, there are several industrial organizations, including the United Textile Workers, American Federation of Textile Operatives, Amalgamated Textile Workers, and One Big Union, not to mention the I. W. W. and W. I. U., both of which have a certain following. The welter of unions has developed in the course of many years largely by a splitting-up process. Originally the United Textile Workers was predominant in the industry, but because of the shameful mismanagement of the notorious John Golden, secession after secession took place, until finally the present demoralized condition has been arrived at. The long continued dualism of the rebels has also been a big factor. Instead of the militants standing their ground in the old unions and fighting the bureaucrats there, their tendency has been to abandon the field and to launch new organizations.

The conference delegates were unanimously agreed that this multiplicity of organizations spells defeat for the textile workers and that means had to be found to crystallize all existing organized bodies into one militant industrial union. But the big question was how this could be done. Two courses of action lay open. First, the League could throw its support to one of the existing industrial unions and help it try to kill off or absorb all the rest, or, second, it could



start a drive to consolidate them all upon a genuine amalgamation basis. Faced by this alternative, the conference was not long in choosing. The first course would be a dog-cat-dog policy, which is essentially the one now prevailing. It would mean war to the knife all around and hopeless division in the ranks of the textile workers for an indefinite period. So the second course was determined upon. Taking a non-partisan stand, the League militants will appeal directly to the rank and file of all the organizations to call a halt to the present chaotic condition and to unite their forces into a general amalgamation.

To put this program into action the conference selected a provisional committee to carry on the educational work. This was named the General Amalgamation Committee for the Textile Industry. It has since met and mapped out a plan of industrial unionism, providing departments for the principal divisions of the textile industry, Wool, Cotton, Silk, etc., and sub-departments for the respective crafts. This amalgamation plan will be printed and then submitted to every union in the industry, A. F. of L. and independents, for their consideration. And to those who are acquainted with the attitude of the organized mass these days the power of such an appeal is at once evident. It is safe to say that before many months have passed the new movement will have created a great demand for a general amalgamation in the textile industry, a demand that will sweep all opposition before it. Dualism, the curse of the textile workers, is doomed. Solidarity and industrial unionism through amalgamation are the new watchwords of the textile industry.

The Clothing Industry

Perhaps the most important of the several conferences was that of the needle trades. It was held in New York on November 22nd. The meeting was of a representative character, comprising 40 delegates from Shop Delegate Leagues in the following organizations and industry branches: Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Waist and Dress Makers (I. L. G. W. U.), Cloakmakers (I. L. G. W. U.), Capmakers, Millinery Workers, Furriers, and Journeymen Tailors. Two of the delegates came from Philadelphia, the rest were local.

In the clothing industry a splendid opportunity presents itself for the realization of many features of the League's program. The workers employed there are by far the best educated in the whole labor movement and they are ready for real progress. A tremendous body of sentiment exists for industrial unionism, the shop delegate system, affiliation to the Red Interna-

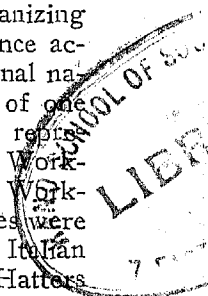
tional of Labor Unions, active support of Russia, a more militant conception of the revolutionary task, and all the other left policies, advocated by the League. The situation is ripe for a great move upward and onward by the clothing workers.

But as yet, so far as the industry as a whole is considered, this splendid sentiment is very little organized. There are many League branches in the industry, but these are mostly local and of a craft character. In nearly all the big needle trades centers will be found these groups, mostly called shop delegates leagues, in the respective trades carrying on a more or less detached and desultory movement in favor of the League's policies. The need of the situation is to crystallize all these local bodies into one sweeping national movement which will at once include all crafts and every locality.

It was to satisfy this need and to place the left wing movement in the needle trades upon a national basis that the New York conference was called. Joseph Manley, Eastern District Organizer for the League, presided. When he and others had presented the necessity for organizing the League groups nationally the conference accepted the suggestion at once. A provisional national committee was selected, consisting of one delegate from each of the organizations represented, except the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies' Garment Workers, which were allowed two apiece. Places were provided also for two delegates from the Italian League groups. Although the United Hatters were not represented at the conference, they were considered to be part of the general needle industry, and efforts will be made to have their militants select a member for the national committee. The new organization calls itself the Needle Trades Section of the Trade Union Educational League.

The conference instructed the provisional national committee to launch an active campaign of education immediately in all the unions. To this end it will draft a plan of a departmentalized industrial union for the industry based upon the shop delegate system. This will then be submitted to the various international and local organizations for their consideration. An intense campaign for amalgamation will also be started in all branches of the industry. To facilitate this educational work joint committees of all the needle trades will be set up in the various clothing centers. If possible a representative of the provisional national committee will be sent out to organize these educational committees.

The conference was full of enthusiasm. Every one present recognized the need for united ac-



tion in the needle trades and also that the plan of the League offers the best means to achieve such unity. It will be strange, indeed, if the newly organized Needle Trades Section does not become a great factor for progress in the clothing industry before many months have passed. The times are overripe for its policies. Craft unionism and Amsterdamism are altogether out of place in the ranks of the militant needle trades workers.

The Printing Industry

Another most important conference was that of the printing trades militants, which was held in New York on November 23rd. About a score of active workers, of all crafts, were present. The object was to further the League's program nationally, and especially to take active steps towards bringing about one union of all the printing trades.

As developed in the conference discussions, the situation in the printing trades is very favorable for militant propaganda, particularly with regard to industrial unionism. Several factors have combined to open the eyes of printing trades workers generally to the necessity for one union in their industry. An important one was the great open shop drive of the employers. Not only has this tested the last ounce of strength of the respective organizations, but it has also shown clearer than ever the weakness of craft unionism. As the unions, under terrific pressure from the employers, have betrayed each other in the usual craft fashion, even the blindest have been able to see the folly. The necessity for united action has stood out like a mountain. Another most important factor was the breakdown of the old bureaucratic machine in the International Typographical Union by virtue of years' long hammering from the progressives and radicals. That has let a little daylight into the situation, and given progress a toehold. The general consequence from the effects of the great open shop drive and the successful revolt in the I. T. U. is that a broad-sweeping movement for industrial unionism has sprung up throughout the entire printing trades.

But, like in the clothing trades, this movement lacks rank and file organization. The whole thing is too much upon an official basis. Letters from McParland of the I. T. U. to the heads of the other printing trades unions asking their opinions about amalgamation are not enough. What must be done is to build backfires behind these unwilling brothers. Widespread movements must be developed among the rank and file of their organizations. Otherwise the industrial union agitation will be quarantined and confined pretty much in the I. T. U. where it began and now

flourishes. This was the experience in the metal trades a number of years ago when the Machinists' Union went on record for complete amalgamation. Instead of the militants reaching out to the rank and file of the other organizations and winning them over to amalgamation, they contented themselves with instructing their own officials to negotiate with the officials of the remaining unions. The natural result was that, inasmuch as the heads of the other metal trades organizations refused to go along with it, the amalgamation movement was restricted to the Machinists' Union and eventually came to naught. And the same thing will happen in the printing trades if the same method is followed. Above all, amalgamation is a rank and file movement and the first condition for its success is rank and file demand for it in all the organizations concerned.

Recognizing these facts, the New York conference went on record to launch a general campaign for amalgamation in all the printing trades organizations everywhere. As the means to this end it endorsed the methods proposed by the League, which are now becoming recognized as standard for such educational work. First, a national committee shall be erected; second, a definite plan of amalgamation shall be drawn up and presented to all the organizations in the industry for their adoption; third, local committees of printing trades workers shall be organized in all printing centers to popularize the program among the broad masses of the rank and file; fourth, a journal shall be established to propagate the principles of the movement. At the last convention of the International Typographical Union a provisional national committee was organized to advocate amalgamation throughout the printing trades. The conference voted to support that movement. The delegates generally were convinced that one union in the printing industry is a prospect of the immediate future, and the conference ended with a determination to push the work of education and solidarity unremittingly.

The Food Industry

The food industry conference took place in New York on November 24th. A score of militants were in attendance, coming from many A. F. of L. locals of the Butchers, Bakers, and Hotel & Restaurant Employees, and also from the Amalgamated Food Workers. A splendid spirit prevailed. From the discussions it developed that with regard to economic power and solidarity the unions in the food industry are in a bad way. Only a very small percentage of the enormous army of food workers are organized, and these are hamstrung by craft unionism, dual

unionism, and reactionary leadership. There are five principal unions in the broad industry, including the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees, the Bakers and Candy Makers, the Brewery Workers, and the Amalgamated Food Workers. The first four are typical A. F. of L. craft unions, while the latter is an independent industrial union with its stronghold in New York and vicinity.

The meeting was unanimously of the opinion that the present situation of the workers' unions in the food industry is intolerable. So long as the A. F. of L. crafts remain in separate organizations, and so long as the present bitter war goes on between the old unions and the new one, there can be no real power developed to pit against the employers. The determination of the militants assembled was to end this disastrous state of affairs and to head for the creation of one union, under progressive leadership, for the entire food industry. The way to achieve this, it was recognized, is not to plunge into the present fratricidal struggle by helping the craft unions to fight the independent organization, or vice versa, but to start a general amalgamation campaign among the rank and file of the organizations, so intense and widespread that it will compel these bodies to lay aside their jurisdictional fights and craft prejudices and to amalgamate whether the reactionary part of the leadership wants it or not. With the various craft and industrial union factions in the industry once united a great drive could be put on to organize the unorganized masses of food workers. To express the sentiment of the conference the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved that we, the food workers organized in the Trade Union Educational League, pledge ourselves to work for amalgamation of all existing unions in the food industry so that one powerful industrial organization of the entire industry can be established, being convinced that this is the only effective way to fight the bosses.

The conference selected a committee to work out a practical plan of amalgamation which, when completed, will be referred to the rank and file of the entire industry for their endorsement. This committee will also submit a proposition, at a future conference, to organize a provisional national amalgamation committee for the whole food industry. The November 24th conference is pregnant with promise. It marks the beginning of a great movement for solidarity among the food workers and is destined to be a red letter day in the history of their unions.

The Leather Industry

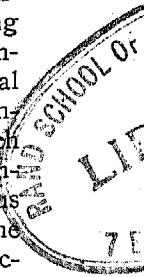
The conference of the militants in the leather

industry took place in Boston on November 25th. There were present active workers from the general leather industries of New England, including members of the A. F. of L. and independent organizations.

The conference resolved itself into a long discussion of the situation in the industry. From this it was made clear that the workers suffer from the usual evils of dual unionism, craft unionism, and reactionary leadership. Only a minority of the workers in the industry, and these boot and shoe workers principally, are organized. These are divided into three main organizations, the Boot & Shoe Workers, the Amalgamated Shoe Workers, and the United Leather Workers. There are also a number of smaller crafts. The Amalgamated Shoe Workers are an independent union that was formed a few months ago by an amalgamation of several independent organizations. The Boot & Shoe Workers and the Amalgamated are dual to each other.

After reviewing the situation from every angle, the conference decided that the proper thing to do in the circumstances was to launch a general amalgamation campaign among the several organizations, to the end that they shall all be combined into one powerful industrial union, which will then be enabled to go forward to the organization of the masses unhampered by ruinous dual unionism and jurisdictional warfare. The prevailing condition of internecine and destructive struggle between the many unions was condemned as fatal to the best interests of the workers.

It was reported that there is some opposition by Amalgamated militants to the League's amalgamation program, because they have acquired the notion that if it is applied in their industry they will have to abandon their present organization and flock back unconditionally under the domination of the reactionary bureaucracy now controlling the Boot & Shoe Workers' Union. But this, it was pointed out at the conference, does not correspond with the facts. First, because the League is advocating genuine amalgamation, not the gobbling up of one union by another. Its plan is to convince the many unions in the respective industries of the necessity for industrial unionism, and when this is done, to bring them together as organized bodies into a new, general consolidation. And second, because the League fully realizes the necessity for progressive leadership in the unions and is bending every effort to this end. When amalgamations are actually brought about, and this involves the selection of new officials, the League militants will be found fighting valiantly to put men at the head of the movement who are capable of lead-



ing it to victory. Far from strengthening the grip of the old officialdom, amalgamation will almost certainly break it altogether. This is because the reactionaries will fight against amalgamation so desperately that when it actually is forced upon them by the rank and file they will be swept into the discard. Consider, for example, what happened in the recent Detroit convention of the Maintenance of Way. Amalgamation spells defeat for the reactionaries, and they realize it 100%. The militants, no matter to what union they belong, should have no fear of it.

The conference commissioned a committee to draft up an amalgamation program for the leather industry. This will be submitted for ratification at another conference of militants to be held in Boston in the near future. At the proposed gathering, now being arranged for, active workers will be present from all the principal boot and shoe and other leather workers' unions in New England. This conference will definitely

launch a national movement to consolidate and invigorate all unions in the leather industry.

In the near future the League intends to organize national conferences of militants in the mining, metal, and building trades, so that general movements for progress may be started in those industries also. It will not be long until each industry will have its National Industrial Section, or educational committee, backed up by hundreds of local committees. There will be a veritable network of militant organization, striving everywhere to modernize and to put life into the labor movement. It is safe to say that once this mechanism gets established and fully into action, the American labor movement will enter upon a period of progress and development now hardly deemed possible. As sure as fate the paralyzing grip of the Gompers' machine will be irreparably shattered, and the whole labor movement be set traveling definitely and rapidly towards its ultimate goal of working class emancipation.

Fighting Industrial Slavery

By Alexander Howat

THE Thirtieth day of September, 1921, is a day that will long be remembered in Kansas, because it was on that day that every mine worker in the State laid down his tools, and the real fight against the Industrial Court Law was on in earnest.

The action taken by the Kansas miners in striking against the enforcement of this so-called Law, was intended to serve notice on the law-makers of this State, that in making laws, the right of the workers must be respected, and that no man, or set of men, regardless of who they may be, would ever be permitted to chain the working class of the Nation to their jobs like slaves. We resolved that we would never surrender the principles of free men; that we would never take a backward step while fighting for a just cause; that we would not betray the workers of the State, and of the Nation; that we would not permit the Industrial Court, composed of a few corporation tools, to rule the miners' union in this District. We held to the principle that the suffering and the struggles of the past should not be in vain, and that the shackles of oppression which had enslaved the Kansas miners for many years, until we were liberated through the strength of our organization, would never again encircle the limbs of the miners of this District, as was intended through the creation of the so-called Industrial Court. We proclaimed to the

people of this country, that we would fight to the last ditch against the Industrial Court Law or any other law that interfered with our constitutional rights as free American citizens, or any law that is intended to make slaves of the wealth producers of the Nation, and in making the fight to uphold the principles on which our Republic is founded, that the people of this country shall be free, and that no form of slavery shall exist, the Kansas miners were willing to make every sacrifice in fighting to maintain these principles.

It was necessary to make the fight in Kansas, because it was here, with their Slave Law, that they first tried to crucify Labor. Little did the miners of our District think, when they began their heroic battle for Industrial Freedom against tremendous odds, that the power and strength and influence of our Union would be used to drive them back to the mines, and to crucify them, as has been done for the past year.

Contrast the difference between the International and the Illinois miners and their officials. All the power of the International was used against the miners of District 14, in their brilliant fight against the Kansas Slave Law; a fight that was the concern of the workers of the entire country; a fight to establish the principle, once and for all, that the workers of this Nation shall be free men and women, and that all the

