

The League's Labor Party Referendum

By Earl R. Browder

LABOR wants a political party of its own. The truth of this statement has been decidedly shown in the past few months, especially since the referendum went forth from the Trade Union Educational League. The response has been overwhelmingly "Yes" to the resolution: "That we endorse the formation of a Labor Party by the whole trade union movement, to be based upon direct representation from the local unions, and to include as affiliated organizations all existing working-class political parties."

Last month we reported the scope of the referendum ballots were taking. Since that time every mail adds volume to the overwhelming decision. The unions now on record in the League vote extend over 40 States and 47 International Unions. In the thousands of locals in which the issue has been raised, we have been informed of less than a dozen which failed to approve of a Labor Party.

The opposition comes generally from officials. It has been effective in but one way—that of suppressing the issue and withholding the ballot. The following letter is typical of many which we have received:

In regard to the referendum you sent this Local, will say that the secretary did not read it, and as you had sent me one at the same time I took it up at the next meeting. We had quite a time, but after all the discussion not a soul voted against it. Before it was put to a vote, the secretary said; 'I have orders from . . . that no resolution should be read if it does not bear the endorsement of the A. F. of L.' One of the members replied; 'If we wait for Gompers we will wait from now on.' Let me know if you received the ballot, for we want to check up on our officers.

If every local union had a few militants to "check up on" the officials, like this one had, there is little doubt that a few thousand more organizations would be lined up for a Labor Party.

Accompanying hundreds of the ballots have been letters, many of great interest. They voice the rank and file. Brief, and sometimes illegible, they express Organized Labor better than all the official journals. Here, for example, is one from Oklahoma:

I herewith enclose the resolution adopted by Local . . . Maintenance of Way, at our regular meeting today. We long for the time when Organized Labor will control our country.

From a central body in West Virginia, near the scene of the bitter struggle of the miners, comes this:

I have been instructed to convey to you that the trade union men in this valley are practically unanimous in favor of a Labor Party; the few opposed only question as to whether we are ready. God knows that the time

is here and passed, and the sooner something is done the better. More power to your movement.

Of all the unions voting, only one wished to change the resolution proposed. That one was the Bakery Wagon Drivers of San Francisco, who were in favor of a Labor Party but did not wish to provide in the resolution for the inclusion of "all existing working-class parties."

After discussion, the next step is action. As a sample of the manner in which the League Referendum stimulated this process, we quote a letter from Local No. 81 of the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, of Chicago:

. . . It has been unanimously adopted and was forwarded as a recommendation to the Joint Board. We have received information that it has been adopted by the Joint Board and is now in the hands of the locals for approval. Also it was decided to send a communication to the General Executive Board of the International urging them to participate in the July 3rd Conference called by the Farmer-Labor Party and act along the lines of our recommendation.

In cities where the Farmer-Labor Party is established, the interest in the referendum was not so strong because the unions already feel that a beginning has been made. Many resolutions, however, were received from such centers, emphasizing the need for bringing all other political parties of the workers into an inclusive Labor Party.

Many unions, after discussing the resolution in one meeting, postponed action until the following meeting in order to send out a special call for all members to be present. Most of these also ordered from 100 to 500 copies of the League leaflet, "A Political Party for Labor," to place in the members' hands before voting. The attitude of these unions is well stated by the letter from the Machinists of San Francisco, who write:

Kindly send by return mail 200 copies of the leaflet, as the Lodge has deferred action on the Referendum until they can be put in the hands of the membership so they will better understand what they are voting for.

Accompanying a unanimous "Yes" from Ohio, is a note which says:

An A. F. of L. organizer was present and objected to the vote. He said he was for a Labor Party, but wanted the A. F. of L. to take the vote, and not a 'bunch of wildcats.' He was told that Gompers has waited too long, and is too busy worrying about beer.

As interesting as the voices from the rank and file, is the fact that many officials in the labor movement, long trusted lieutenants of Gompers, are feeling the new current stirring the air of the trade unions. Thus J. P. Holland, President of the New York State Federation of Labor, for years a cog in the Gompers Machine, speaking

on April 16th before the Convention of the Hatters' Union, came out squarely for a Labor Party.

Several central labor bodies have taken up the issue and called upon their local unions affiliated to vote upon the question of a Labor Party. This is being done in Salt Lake City and Ogden, while in West Virginia a central labor union is circularizing the entire State. Wherever the central bodies have taken hold, action has been forthcoming. The educational aspect is not neglected, as is shown by the Ogden Trades and Labor Assembly

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ordering copies of the League leaflet sufficient to send one to each local union. But positive action to begin organizational work is also being started.

One of the most energetic beginnings was that made in Toledo. On April 5th, 150 delegates from 39 unions and political groups gathered to form the Workers' Political Congress. On April 17th this had grown to 245 delegates representing 49 organizations. The Labor Party of Los Angeles, formed by 161 delegates from 47 organizations, got away to a flying start. On March 25th, a few days after its formation, the plan was endorsed by the Convention of the State Building Trades Council of California, which sent out a resolution to every affiliated union in the State. On April 4th the Central Labor Council of Contra Costa County, California, endorsed the League referendum and immediately a convention to launch a local Labor Party was called. In a large number of other cities, local conferences have been called, upon which reports are just beginning to come in. New activity is to be seen also in the ranks of the previously-organized sections of the Farmer-Labor Party. The great Pennsylvania Federation adopted the Labor Party resolution in May, almost unanimously; it was

followed a few days later by the Buffalo N. Y. central labor body.

But the center of interest in the movement for a Labor Party has shifted away from the League Referendum. All supporters of a political party for Labor now have their attention fixed on July 3rd, when a Convention has been called in Chicago by the Farmer-Labor Party, to which has been invited the Workers' Party, the Socialist Party, the Proletarian Party, the Socialist-Labor Party, all International Unions, State Federations, city central bodies, local unions and farm organizations. This call for a Convention, which was mailed to the local unions on May 15th, marks the passage of the movement for a united front of Labor against the capitalist parties, from the stage of propaganda to the stage of action.

Every true supporter of independent political action by the working-class will go to work with energy to swing his organization to participation in this convention. Militant delegates to Chicago for July 3rd, will exert every effort toward knitting together the present divided groups into some form of a class Party of Labor, with a program and form of organization that will bring about the vitally necessary solidarity and lead the workers forward to new achievements.

ON THE INDEPENDENT UNIONS

In THE LABOR HERALD for March there appeared an article on the Second Congress of the R. I. L. U., written by Arne Swabeck, T. U. E. L. delegate to that Congress, and dealing in part with the attitude to be assumed regarding independent unions in this country. This was his report as an individual, not the official statement of the League regarding the matter.

In his article Brother Swabeck made a statement contrary to the policy of the R. I. L. U. and the League, as follows: "The American independent unions which adhere to the Red International were told to make an organized campaign for re-entry into the A. F. of L. as organized groups." This inaccuracy he corrected in the May LABOR HERALD.

The policy of the T. U. E. L. towards the independents was fully stated in the April LABOR HERALD, which is, briefly: (1) That where the independent unions are weak in numbers and consist simply of groups of isolated militants, they shall be urged to rejoin the mass organizations, either as groups or individuals, and (2) where the independents are mass organizations everything should be done to build them up, to bring about temporary agreements between them and other unions in their jurisdictions, and to eventually amalgamate all of them into industrial organizations.—National Committee, T. U. E. L.