

# Conference Maps Fight For Political Prisoners

## Bill Defining Special Status Is Unanimously Approved by 201 Delegates from 141 Groups, Including 15 A.F.L. Locals

By CYRIL BRIGGS

A broad united front campaign for recognition by the Federal and State governments of the special status, as political prisoners differentiated from common criminals, of workers imprisoned for labor activity and active opposition to war and fascism and jim-crow national oppression, was launched on Sunday by the Conference for the Recognition of the Status of Political Prisoners, held at the Hotel Delano, 108 West 43rd Street.

The conference, attended by 201 delegates from 141 organizations, including A. F. of L. unions, workers' clubs and Negro and white fraternal organizations, worked out plans for an intensive mass campaign to force enactment of legislation by Congress and the various state legislatures for recognition of the principle "that those jailed because of their struggle for economic betterment, or for their political convictions, are not criminals, but political prisoners." It adopted a resolution against American participation in the 1936 Olympics, if held in Nazi Germany, and sent fraternal greetings to Tom Mooney, Clide Allen, framed Brooklyn Negro worker, and to Powers Hapgood and the other Socialist workers recently acquitted in Terre Haute, Ind.

The presence of delegates from fifteen A. F. of L. unions gave dramatic emphasis to the increasing interest of the labor movement in the treatment of persons jailed in strikes and other struggles of the working class.

### Inspired by Herndon

Held on the day that Angelo Herndon, heroic young Negro labor organizer, arrived back in New York from a Georgia prison, the conference was marked by a spirit of jubilation over the tremendous victory achieved by the united front defense of Herndon in having the old slave law under which he was convicted declared unconstitutional. The speeches of the delegates evinced a determination to press the fight for the freedom of Tom Mooney, Charles Krumbein and other political prisoners. By unanimous vote, the conference decided to adjourn at three o'clock to permit its delegates and visitors to take part in the mass welcome at the Pennsylvania Station to Herndon. It also elected an official committee of thirteen delegates to extend its greetings to Herndon.

Sounding the keynote of the conference, Sam Dlugin, organizational secretary of the New York I.L.D., called for the organization of the broadest united front campaign in the unions and other organizations for the passage by Congress and the state legislatures of a bill providing for recognition of political prisoners as such. Copies of the proposed measure, drawn up by I.L.D. attorneys, were presented to the delegates for study and discus-

sion. The delegates were urged to sponsor the measure, and press for its support in their various organizations. The draft was adopted without a dissenting vote.

### "Political Prisoner" Defined

In defining the question of who is a political prisoner, Dlugin included "those arrested in the course of strike activity or against unemployment" and innocent Negroes "arrested and persecuted for no other reason than that they are Negroes."

In short addresses by a number of former political prisoners, the delegates were given a vivid description of the persecution inflicted on workers jailed for labor activities, including savage punishment for the slightest infraction of prison regulations, denial of working class literature and visitors. Among the former political prisoners at the conference were Carl Pavio, representing the Finnish Workers Club; Dan Agalos, A. F. of L. worker out on bail in deportation proceedings started against him by the U. S. Labor Department because of his union activities; Oscar Mannisto and Philip Nicholson, two other workers facing deportation.

Frank Spector, another former political prisoner and one of several workers imprisoned in the famous Imperial Valley case, addressed the conference in the name of the national office of the International Labor Defense.

### Prisoners' Relief Discussed

A report on relief for political prisoners, was given by Gertrude Graham, of the Prisoners Relief Department of the New York District of the I.L.D., and supplemented by Rose Baron, of the Prisoners Relief Department of the national office of the I.L.D.

Other speakers included James Gelders of the National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, who appealed for contributions of books for political prisoners; Winifred Chappell of the Methodist Social Service; Sam Weinstein, representing Painters Local 844 of the A. F. of L.; George Frazier, of the Allied Metal Workers Union, 412, A. F. of L., who headed the Resolutions Committee; Mike Walsh and Frank Griffin of the New York I.L.D.. Carol King of the International Juridical Association presided.

A continuation committee of representatives from labor unions and other workers' organizations was elected to continue the work begun by the conference, and to prepare for a broader conference in the Spring of 1936.

Among the organizations represented in the conference were the Furriers Joint Council, A. F. of L.; Invincible Temple No. 77 of the Elks (I.B.P.O.E.W.); branches of the International Workers Order, the I.L.D., Unemployment Councils and the Communist Party.