

New York's AFL In the War Front

By Rose Wortis

The 80th convention of the New York State Federation of Labor in Buffalo registered the determination of AFL labor in our state to make the maximum contribution to the nation in the present struggle. Despite many weaknesses, the convention showed the unanimity of labor in support of the war, and the President, and spoke up forcefully against the fifth column, defeatist, anti-labor, negotiated peace elements conspiring against the war effort.

The general attitude of the delegates on the basic issues confronting the American people was expressed in the opening speech and summary of President Thomas Murray, when he reiterated labor's pledge for:

"... complete support to President Roosevelt as our Commander-in-Chief and for vigorous opposition to the reactionary anti-labor lineup which is seeking to disrupt his war program for selfish political and economic reasons.

"Labor will make that support evident whenever and wherever our President needs it."

He called for production efforts to match "broad-scale and steadily expanding offensives of the United Nations," intensified political action against "that reactionary grouping in industry and in public life which is aiming to sabotage the workers' morale and the war effort itself by destroying the political, social and economic rights which serve to distinguish us from fascist countries."

The same determination for speedy victory was expressed in more than 300 resolutions introduced by the state trade council that met prior to the convention, by central bodies, local unions and delegates. A number of these resolutions called for an immediate second front to shorten the war.

21-POINT PROGRAM

The 21-point victory program adopted by the convention called for full support to the Commander-in-Chief and reaffirmation of the no-strike pledge, against the reactionaries who sabotage the war effort. It presented labor's program on taxes, wages, social security, post-war rehabilitation and labor representation in government. The report of the Resolutions Committee, adopted by the convention, reaffirmed the unanimity of the delegates on these issues.

The major weakness of the convention, meeting while the Quebec conference was in session, was its failure to call for an immediate offensive on Europe's western mainland, decisive to victory in this crucial period of the war. However, there was no question as to where the delegates stood. Last year, the main differences between the progressives and the more conservative forces was on whether labor should say anything about a second front. This year, the delegates recognized the decisive moment of the war, the need for a second front, but were still influenced by those who say it is a matter for the military authorities.

A discordant note was the speech of Governor Dewey and some of the Republican State Legislators. Aware of the presence of some of the reactionary disgruntled elements at the convention, who have not adjusted themselves to labor's role under war conditions, Governor Dewey, who had not a word to say in behalf of labor during the entire period of Congressional debate on the vicious anti-labor Smith-Connally bill which his colleagues in Congress supported, now posed as the champion of labor's rights. He shed crocodile tears about the restrictions imposed on labor by government, which he termed "totalitarian," repeating his past statement that under present conditions the trade unions have no basis for functioning and that labor must prepare to fight for the restoration of free unions after victory.

These erroneous statements, together with his attack on the national administration, left the mass of delegates cold.

A fitting answer to Dewey's attack on the Administration was the wholehearted support of the entire convention for the President, the reaffirmation of the no-strike pledge and the determination of the delegates to intensify their efforts in support of the war in all its phases. Had it not been for the maneuvers of some of the politicians on the Resolutions Committee to postpone action on the fourth term resolution to 1944, the convention would have given its most enthusiastic endorsement to a fourth term for President Roosevelt, as was done by some of the state conferences prior to the convention.

LEWIS ATTACKED

Negotiated peace elements and defeatists found little comfort in this convention, and did not even dare to raise their heads. This was evident particularly in the discussion on Lewis' readmission to the AFL. There were 35 resolutions on Lewis, 34 against and one for his readmission. Even delegates who spoke for Lewis' readmission made the sharpest attack on Lewis and his motive in seeking to come back to the AFL. The problem was referred to the AFL's national convention.

Even Mr. Tuvin, delegate from the ILGWU, whose president, Mr. David Dubinsky took pride for hav-

This is the first of two articles on the recently concluded 80th convention of the New York State Federation of Labor. The second article will appear tomorrow.

ing engineered Lewis' application for readmission, was compelled to wiggle out of glowing tribute he paid to Lewis at the Central Trades prior to the convention, where he proclaimed Lewis as one of the greatest labor leaders (second only, of course, to Dubinsky). Even Tuvin now deserted Lewis for the period of the debate and made a plea in behalf of the "poor miners" who have to carry on without the brotherly help of Mr. Dubinsky, arguing that the delegate to the National Convention vote with the majority. The gentlemen missed no opportunity for the usual red-baiting which has become one of the features at every AFL gathering attended by the ILGWU or other Social Democrats.

Fortunately, Mr. Tuvin and his cronies found no support for his red-baiting even from the most conservative elements, who have enough understanding to know that red-baiting is no longer a saleable article today.

Very convincing arguments against Lewis' readmission, on the ground that it would hurt the war, disrupt labor and national unity and help to perpetuate Lewis' bureaucratic rule in the Miners Union, were expressed by a wide range of delegates not only from progressive but the more conservative unions, such as Molders and Printing Pressmen, in addition to the Painters and Food Workers.

Another question which gave rise to heated debate was the resolution calling for endorsement of the defunct Antonini Italian Labor Council. The unfortunate part of this debate was that a majority of the delegates knew little about developments amongst the Italian-Americans. Those delegates familiar with the issues who had a chance to speak, mainly Italians coming from locals with an overwhelming Italian membership. With the exception of Antonini all opposed the resolution, written by Antonini, and spoke for unity of Italian-Americans. The motion to refer the matter back to the committee so that the AFL can exert its efforts to unify the Italian-Americans found much favor amongst the delegates and was side-tracked by the steam-roller of the chairman. In this confused situation, a large number of delegates abstained from voting.

HIT NEGRO DISCRIMINATION

An outstanding feature of the convention was the discussion on the Negro question from all its angles. Numerous resolutions against Negro discrimination in the unions, in industry, in the armed forces, and for promotion of Negro workers in the railroad industry, against race riots, etc., were introduced by delegates from all sections of the state. Discussion on these resolutions showed the growing spirit of unity between Negro and white, even in the more conservative labor circles. The Resolutions Committee, whose policy was to evade definite action on as many issues as possible, by referring them to some other body, was forced to reverse itself on every resolution dealing with the Negro question. Many delegates, Negro and white, participated in the discussion.

For the first time in the history of the AFL in New York, the question of Negro representation in the leadership came before the Convention. Resolutions introduced on this question caused real consternation in the top leadership. They finally went to the trouble of deleting from the Constitution a provision specifying that one woman be elected as an Executive Council member, to justify their refusal to accept an amendment for the inclusion of a Negro.

Joe Ryan, Chairman of the Constitution Committee, argued demagogically that it is an insult to the Negroes and women to make such constitutional specification, stating all delegates have the same rights to be elected to the highest offices, therefore why only one woman or one Negro? Why not ten? The positive attitude of the delegates on this issue was expressed in the discussion on the floor, the appearance of a delegation before the Constitution Committee, and by the new Executive Council, which had promised unofficially that it would give consideration to the election of a Negro member to the Legislative Committee. Had the progressive delegates better prepared the ground for such action prior to the Convention, the administration, which found itself in this uncomfortable position, might have been forced to concede this demand.

Of great importance also was the action of the Convention majority in reversing the recommendation of the Resolutions Committee, voting for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act over the opposition of the Resolutions Committee, and the action of the Executive Council.