

Woll's Anti-Soviet Line Shames AFL

By Rose Wortis

The closing day of the 63rd Convention of the AFL will be remembered with shame by its membership. On that day the Committee on International Relations, headed by Matthew Woll, brought in a report which registers a setback for our nation, for labor, for national and international labor unity. It is a reactionary, red-baiting, Soviet-baiting document, in conflict with some of the major pro-war policies adopted by the Convention. It is of one piece with the decision of the Convention to give the Executive Council power to readmit the defeatist Lewis to the AFL. It is cause for alarm, and will require the most energetic efforts of the AFL membership to nullify its evil effects.

This report, submitted by Matthew Woll, was an attack not only on the Soviet Union and the CIO; it was a dastardly attack on the tens of thousands of honest, hard-working members of the AFL in the State Federations, City Central Bodies, Internationals, and hundreds of Local Unions that have gone on record for international labor unity. Those loyal, devoted members and leaders of the AFL were denounced by Matthew Woll as "subversive elements," "foreign agents," in the familiar Hearst, Pegler and McCormick defeatist style. This hysterical denunciation was an indirect admission of the tremendous sentiment among the AFL membership for international labor unity, for affiliation to the Anglo-Soviet Committee. It was an admission of the pressure brought to bear on the Executive Council by affiliates of the AFL to reverse its stand on this important issue of great concern to labor and the nation.

"Minority groupings within the AFL," says Mr. Woll, "hostile to the democratic ideals, philosophy and practices of the Federation, have conducted a deliberately malicious campaign of misinformation on this question in order to confuse and bewilder the American people."

Further, "No aspect of the Federation's international relations have been more wilfully misinterpreted."

Poor, misunderstood Mr. Woll!

HUNDREDS OF WIRES

Reports current at the Convention indicated that hundreds of telegrams came from all over the country to the Convention, urging that body to reconsider its previous stand and join with the rest of labor in uniting the labor movements of the United Nations. In private discussions, numerous delegates—some from very important unions—indicated disagreement with Matthew Woll's report. Unfortunately, the pressure was not yet strong enough to overcome the sabotage of Matthew Woll, William Hutcheson and David Dubinsky. Those who favored international labor unity were still terrorized by the ruling clique, too much influenced by narrow considerations and remained silent.

The pleas for international labor unity from the masses were ignored. The only answer that the reactionary clique has to demands for a more progressive policy is the old cry of "professional agitators." On the Negro question, it is not the wholesale discrimination in the AFL but the "professional Negroes" who create trouble. On international labor unity, it is the "professional Communists" who disturb the peace of Matthew Woll. And it was quite evident that Mr. Woll was disturbed, not only by the tremendous sentiment for international labor unity, but by the general progressive trends in the AFL.

For he states further:

"The abnormal pressure brought to bear on the affiliates of the AFL to join the Anglo-Soviet

Committee was specifically designed to submerge the interests of the free democratic American labor movement to the foreign policies of Soviet Russia, which in the past through its controlled agencies has sought to promote disruption and disunity in the ranks of the AFL."

Thus no appeals for the AFL to join forces with 28,000,000 organized workers in the Soviet Union becomes a conspiracy against the AFL.

WHO ARE "SUBVERSIVES?"

Let us stop for a moment to consider who are these subversive elements. Are they the numerous State Federations of Labor, such as those of Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, New Hampshire?

Are they international unions such as the Jewelry Workers International Union, the International Culinary Alliance, the Building Service International Union, who have gone on record on international labor unity? Are they numerous city central bodies throughout the entire country—the hundreds of local unions from practically every industry throughout the country who have gone on record for international unity?

Are these the "Soviet-controlled agencies designed to submerge the interests of the free democratic American labor movement to the foreign policies of Russia?"

Of course, according to the thinking of Mr. Woll and his colleague Hutcheson, the advocacy of unity with the rest of the labor movement of the world is "subversive." According to their thinking, the advocacy of industrial unionism and the organization of millions of unorganized workers in the war industries into the CIO who are making such tremendous contributions to war production, are some of the subversive acts for which the "Soviet-controlled" agencies in this country are responsible. In a similar category can be placed the struggle for unemployment insurance, which the leadership of the AFL fought for many years, the struggle for Negro rights, for trade union democracy and many other gains that are being won by the workers in our country over the most determined opposition of Woll and company with the help of these so-called conspirators.

THE CONTRAST

The report goes on to say:

"The difference between the AFL and government-controlled Russian unions are so glaring that no liaison between the two is now remotely possible."

Evidently the British unions, which are recognized by the AFL and are no less devoted to freedom than is the AFL, see no obstacles to working with the Soviet unions. On the contrary, the unions of both these countries are working in close collaboration for the past two years without any apparent difficulties and without any fear of "contamination." In fact, the British Trades Union Congress is advocating a similar relationship of the AFL with the Soviet trade union movement.

On one point we do agree with Mr. Woll. The differences between the Russian unions and some of the AFL unions are glaring indeed. It would be almost inconceivable in the Russian unions for any leader or group of leaders to run so roughshod over the will of the membership as is often the practice of the AFL. It is difficult to imagine the Russian unions resorting to such undemocratic practices as: election to office for life, no conventions for years, no accounting to the membership for funds, and toleration of such disreputable elements as only until a couple of years ago served in leading capacities in AFL unions and on the Executive Council itself—as Willie Bioff, George Brown, George Scalise and others who have brought so much discredit upon the AFL.

Despite all this, and despite the disagreement of the Soviet unions with policies of that type, they are leaving these matters to be solved by the American workers and are interested in but one thing, to unite labor so as to hasten victory and bring the unconditional defeat of fascism.

Now, as to the other arguments to justify the position of the AFL in refusing to deal with the Soviet Union. The report states that the trade unions in the Soviet Union:

"... are not free and voluntary associations of the workers. They constitute a department of the Soviet State and enjoy no more autonomy than the various agencies of any TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENT"—emphasis mine.

In this statement, Woll reveals his true colors—he characterizes our most powerful ally, which has made the greatest contribution to the struggle for the freedom of the entire civilized world, as a "totalitarian" government. Surely this does not represent the attitude of the membership of the AFL, who have come to regard the Soviet Union as the greatest bulwark against fascism.

(Continued tomorrow.)

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