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## FASCIST SYNDICALISM AND THE I. L. O.

FRANCIS G. WILSON  
*University of Washington*<sup>1</sup>

THE United States is entering a period of close cooperation with the International Labor Organization. Observers were sent to the Labor Conferences of 1933 and 1934, and a Congressional Resolution passed in June, 1934, gives the President authority to accept membership in the Organization for the government of the United States. A resolution passed by the Labor Conference in response welcomes the American resolution and provides that the final arrangements for American membership may be made by the Governing Body of the Organization. Some definite action will be taken, doubt, by the national administration within the next few months.

The interest of the organized workers of the United States in this new policy will be varied, since among other things the American Federation of Labor, as the most representative organization of workers, will be called upon each year to suggest a delegate to the Labor Conference, and its delegate will likewise sit on the Governing Body. But one of the primary interests of the American workers will be in supporting the international struggle for the maintenance of free trade union bodies. Article 427 of the Peace Treaty of 1919 provides for this liberty, and the workers in the Labor Organization have been able to use the Confer-

ence as a forum in which to protest against the gradually increasing post-war encroachments on this fundamental liberty of liberal political society. Trade union freedom is clearly an international as well as a national problem, and at least one line of defense must be through those international organizations which recognize this right. One may say without exaggeration that the information presented to the Labor Conference each year is an effective barometer indicating the state of the struggle to maintain freedom of association.

The activity of the Labor Organization in the field of trade union liberty has been discussed in previous issues of this publication (July, 1932, and October, 1933). But in the Conference which met in June, 1934, some interesting developments took place. Certain governments of fascist tendencies have apparently decided that instead of sending hand-picked workers' delegates to the Conference, where they will be subject to the frank criticism of the representatives of free trade union bodies, they will not send any workers' representatives at all. Such a policy not only weakens the balance of the Conference between the governments, the employers and the workers, but it shows also that these governments are not anxious to recognize any form of labor association, perhaps even that controlled by the governments and made a department in political administration. Naturally, the workers of Germany were unrepresented,

since the German government announced in 1933 its withdrawal from the Organization. It is a striking fact, however, that the hitherto solid opposition of the workers' group to the acceptance of the credentials of the Italian workers' delegate was not expressed in the vote on this question in the Conference. It was significant, on the other hand, that this delegate spoke with more freedom than in previous Conferences as to the need for trade unions.

The workers' criticism of the situation centered on the fact that there were nineteen incomplete delegations in the Conference, which meant that over one-third of the states represented had sent no workers' delegate. Of the forty-eight states sending delegates to the Conference, nineteen sent only government representatives. These states were Albania, Austria, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Persia, Siam, Turkey, Uruguay, and Venezuela. When the report of the Credentials Committee noting this fact was presented to the Conference, Mr. Hayday, the British workers' delegate, called attention to the fact that the balance in the Conference depends on the presence of three groups, and that the number of states sending incomplete delegations had increased from twelve in 1933 to nineteen in 1934. The Credentials Committee undertook to investigate the situation, and it requested each government to give an explanation of the failure to appoint non-government delegates.

The Austrian government explained that "a corporative order of

a specifically Austrian nature" was being established and that the old organizations of the workers had lost all meaning. Under the circumstances it was felt inadvisable to appoint non-government delegates. The workers' representative on the committee challenged this statement, and he declared that Austria had in fact suppressed freedom of association, making it impossible to appoint either workers' or employers' representatives under Article 389 of the Treaty of Peace. The Chilean government explained that it cost too much to send a complete delegation to the Labor Conference. It might be noted in this connection that there is a strong movement in the Organization to bring about an equalization of the cost of sending delegations to the meetings in Geneva. The workers' representative on the Credentials Committee criticized the plea of the Lithuanian government that its failure to send a workers' delegate arose from the fact that the organization of agricultural workers (the most numerous group of workers in the country) was only partially completed. Before this the Lithuanian workers have been represented through the railroad workers.

The Latvian government representative stated that financial and political difficulties had prevented the appointment of non-government delegates. The workers' representative declared that what had happened was that the Latvian workers' organizations had been suspended and many of their leaders were in concentration camps. No workers' delegate was present, he said, because the Latvian government had destroyed freedom of association. The Mexican gov-

<sup>1</sup> The author was enabled to study the International Labor Organization in Geneva during 1931-32 as the holder of a fellowship of the Social Science Research Council.

ernment explained that the division within the ranks of organized labor made it impossible for the government to determine which was the most representative organization. The workers' delegate on the committee observed that the Regional Confederation of Mexican workers had not been consulted by the government, and that it was difficult to see why no complete delegation was sent in 1934 when there was such a delegation in 1933. Portugal explained that a corporative organization of occupational interests was in process of formation, and that until these organizations were created no complete delegations could be sent to the Conference. The workers' representative on the committee replied that the Treaty did not require the workers' organizations to accept any governmentally determined social philosophy, and the policy of this country was contrary to the Treaty. Uruguay sent an incomplete delegation solely because of "exchange difficulties" and because of the "practical impossibility for the Government to bear the cost at the present time of sending its Delegates to Geneva." A number of governments offered no explanations at all.

The Credentials Committee asked, in its report, that the Director of the International Labor Office call the particular attention of the governments to the duty under the Treaty of sending complete delegations, but it also saw that there was a real need of assisting those states far away from Geneva in financing their collaboration with the Organization. It suggested that the study of the equitable distribution of the cost of travel be continued. Under the circumstances

the Conference took no action on the fact that there was such a large number of incomplete delegations; in fact, there is in reality nothing the Organization can do except to urge that the governments live up to their obligations under the Treaty. In the discussion of the report of the committee in the Conference, the workers' spokesman asserted that governments have no legal option in the matter of sending complete delegations, and he further asserted that the Conference has the right to ask for any explanations it sees fit in discussing incomplete delegations. He denied that any government has the right, on a matter of freedom of association, to refuse to have its decisions considered and criticized in the Conference.

The activity of the Italian workers' delegate in the Conference seems on the surface to indicate some change in Italian policy, as well as a change on the part of the workers. There were only fourteen workers' votes against the acceptance of the Italian workers' delegate's credentials, which is a considerably lower figure than is ordinarily the case. Perhaps it is the over-shadowing importance of other issues in trade union liberty which has lessened the tension on the Italian question. Not only in Germany have the trade unions been crushed, but in other countries as well, as the above discussion shows, are there marked tendencies toward fascist syndicalism, that is, the suppression of trade union liberty in the accepted sense of the word. In addition to this, the fascist workers' delegate stood with the other workers at one point during the

Conference in opposition to a contemplated provision in a recommendation on unemployment insurance which would have encouraged the formation of company unions. The workers' organizations, he said, must be on a footing of equality with those of the employers.

While the developments of the last session of the Labor Conference are primarily symptomatic of what is taking place, the interest of the American unionist in these tendencies is great. This is true, not only because of the fight to maintain the organiza-

tions of workers in this country, but also because of the role which the representative of the workers is going to play during the next few years in the Labor Organization as a result of the present desire of the administration to accept membership. The late Samuel Gompers, as President of the Peace Conference Committee which drafted the constitution of the Labor Organization, would approve, no doubt, of any steps which American labor might take, in cooperation with European workers, for the maintenance of trade union liberty.

#### NEW NEIGHBORS DOWN ON LEM'S PLACE

They never fill the lamps until it's dark,  
Nor split the wood until the fire's dying;  
They breathe upon the last exhausted spark  
To hold it bright until the boy comes crying,  
"Open the door!" . . . and staggers through with grins  
His arms around a heavy load of birch;  
He lets it tumble down among the tins  
Of milk for cats, then gives a backward lurch,  
Being relieved of cargo, towards the wall,  
Bumping his elbow smartly.

"Lucky thing,"  
They tell him, "that you didn't really fall  
And hurt yourself!"

And then they kind of sing,  
Laying the sticks along the cooling ash,  
Hunting for coals with cheerful, little pokes;  
Some people like to call them shiftless trash,  
They're pleasant neighbors, though, . . . untidy folks!

—MARTHA BANNING THOMAS,  
*Commonweal.*