

Why Lewis Resigned

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THE resignation of John L. Lewis from the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor in order to dramatize the industrial unionism issue and the organization of the Committee for Promoting Industrial Organization, shows the speed with which struggle between forces of reaction and progress within the A.F. of L. is proceeding. It is only six weeks since the Atlantic City convention adjourned.

The battle line between craft unionism and industrial unionism within the American Federation of Labor is now clearly defined by decisive developments which have crowded upon each other since the Atlantic City convention where the opposing alignments were indicated in the resolutions and debates, following the San Francisco convention, where issues and forces appeared in outlines only.

The organized workers in the basic industries are now, through their union machinery, taking determined steps to reconstruct the A.F. of L. on an industrial basis.

As *THE NEW MASSES* stated in estimating the results of the Atlantic City convention, the central question was the organization of the unorganized in the basic industries as the most necessary step for effective resistance to the open-shop drive, company unionism, wage cuts, speedup, fascist reaction and war.

The Committee for Industrial Organization recently established by eight unions, headed by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, with headquarters in Washington, D. C., is not only the organizational expression of the determination to organize the unorganized on an industrial basis but is an open challenge to the throttling authority of the tory wing of the A.F. of L. executive council. In actuality it is another labor-union center to which the organized workers in basic industries already have given their allegiance.

But the question raised by President Green and others of the likelihood of a split in the A.F. of L. as a result of the activities of the Committee for Industrial Organization and its adherents serves only to befog the real issue. The craft-union wing of the Executive Council—now the majority of that body—bases its opposition to industrial unionism and its support of the right of craft unions to “raid” the industrial unions, on purely formal constitutional provisions and precedents that have no real connection with the present needs of workers confronted by the gigantic power of monopoly capital—increasingly concentrated during six years of crisis.

Permanent mass unemployment with a rising index of industrial production, the continued existence of an army of ten to twelve million unemployed while production figures are within ten points of 1929, the continued lowering of the total income of the working class and its living and social standards,

have brought millions of workers to the realization that their right to work and live depends upon the building of a powerful industrial-union movement in the United States—that all barriers to this in the form of persons and policies, union officials and outworn programs, must be swept aside.

In only one decisive basic industry has wide mass organization been secured during the crisis and the period of N.R.A.—in coal mining. (In the clothing industry there has been sweeping organization but it cannot be compared to coal mining in importance for the labor movement as a whole.) The great majority of workers in steel, metal mining and smelting, oil wells and refineries, heavy machinery and electrical apparatus manufacturing, auto, rubber, textile, chemical manufacture, light and power production, telephone and telegraph, are still unorganized. Marine transport is well organized but the unions of seamen and longshoremen are dominated by thoroughly reactionary officials who, however, face a powerful rank-and-file movement for industrial organization.

The picture of the forces of the American Federation of Labor compared to those of the organized employers is not a pleasing sight to anyone conscious of the fact that labor throughout the capitalist world today has to fight for such elementary things as the right to organize and to strike—the mere right to a minimum level of human decency.

At the Atlantic City convention Secretary Morrison was able to show by per capita tax figures a gain of only some 450,000 members over 1934. The figures show a gain of some 900,000 over 1933, but if we deduct 100,000 newly-organized coal miners and some 100,000 clothing and textile workers from this estimate, we see that the gains in other industries by the A.F. of L., under the leadership of the Green-Woll tory wing, amount actually to very little in spite of all their orotund pronouncements about the benefits handed to labor by the New Deal. The membership figures are 3,050,000 for 1935 and 2,600,000 for 1934.

The Committee for Industrial Organization has a perfect case. The shameless neglect and sabotage of the organization of the unorganized by the executive council during the whole crisis, its paralyzing policy of sifting out the mechanics from industrial unions, distributing them as gifts to the moribund craft unions, thereby splitting the unions and discouraging the struggles of workers facing the might of the most powerful corporations and their agencies, cannot be explained away. But the tory wing of the council has no intention of stopping these treacherous practices, no intention of relinquishing the right of the craft unions to raid not only the new but the older unions with industrial charters.

The forces for industrial unionism have now taken the offensive by the organization of a center, by launching a propagandist campaign for industrial unionism, by practical aid to the independent union of shipyard workers in Camden, by appeals to central labor bodies and state federations—by the resignation of Lewis and an open challenge to the authority of the executive council on the central question of organization in basic industry.

These are historic acts. They are of revolutionary significance when seen in connection with the background and development of the American labor movement. Writing in *The Daily Worker* for Nov. 28, William Z. Foster, chairman of the Communist Party and a trade-union organizer whose remarkable ability even his enemies acknowledge, said:

The millions of unorganized workers are now looking with hope towards the A.F. of L., feeling that at long last a real organization campaign will be carried on. . . . The Committee on Industrial Organization, headed by Lewis, composed of eight presidents of industrial unions, has declared that its purpose is to unify and strengthen the A.F. of L., to organize the workers in the basic industries into the A.F. of L. . . . The Communists have always fought for such an organizing campaign. . . . The Communists support the struggle. Of course Communists have many important differences with many of the major principles of John L. Lewis. Lewis is now opposed to the Farmer-Labor Party which would further unite the workers. . . . Lewis still supports President Roosevelt whose party has launched a murderous strikebreaking campaign. . . . Lewis speaks of fascism and Communism in the same breath. He lumps together fascism and Communism, which means democracy for all who toil. . . . But the Communist Party supports the struggle of Lewis and all others in their fight to achieve unity . . . through the elimination of craft barriers. The Communists will, as they always have, support with all their energies the movement for organizing the unorganized workers in A.F. of L. industrial unions.

The industrial unions grouped around the Committee for Promotion of Industrial Organization are the backbone of the A.F. of L. There is no doubt that in the near future the committee will include representatives of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (whose members are in favor of the industrial union program) and of the new unions in rubber and auto.

The powerful movement for industrial unionism cannot and will not remain purely an economic one. It must and will and rapidly take on a definite working-class political character. Something of this is to be sensed in Lewis' statement quoted in *The Herald Tribune*, Nov. 29, in an interview giving the reasons for an industrial union center:

There are forces at work which would wipe out, if they could, the labor movement of America just as the labor movements of Germany and Italy were wiped out.

The progressive forces of American labor are now preparing for decisive struggles and spurred on by the most pressing necessity a new labor movement is being built. In the course of this struggle the “non-partisan political policy” will have to make way for an independent Labor Party based on unions.

The Klan Turns to Murder

BRUCE MINTON

LAKELAND, FLA.

WHEN several men stepped on the porch of their house and knocked at the door, Frank and Ethel Norman were mildly surprised. But now that the citrus union was functioning, it wasn't unusual to have visitors even so late as nine o'clock in the evening. Workers often came to Frank Norman for advice; in the dark, they could visit without being spotted by the deputies.

It was mild outdoors, a typical Florida spring night, the kind that makes Lakeland a splendid resort, and more important, the center of the citrus industry. The Normans had almost finished their letter writing. In the front room, Mr. and Mrs. Surrency, boarders and friends, had already turned out the light. Four-year-old Frankie was long ago in bed.

Frank Norman rose and went to the door. Mrs. Norman could hear the low voices of men intent on what they were saying. She looked at the paper in front of her, not writing, not listening to the murmuring drone from the porch, thinking of how much it meant to have Frank back after three months at the training school for workers. He had returned with such energy, talking with a new fluency about things he had always felt. Life wasn't any bed of roses in Lakeland despite the circulars put out by the Chamber of Commerce. Work remained difficult to find; Mrs. Norman sighed—at least, she had her cannery job. Frank couldn't land anything that would allow him to practice his trade as electrician. Formerly, he had belonged to the Citrus Workers' Union, the same as she, and for a short time had held the position to which she had also been elected, secretary and treasurer of the Lakeland local. Now, Frank must accept work relief—at six dollars a week. The owners refused to hire him—called him an "agitator," a "Red." He talked about organizing the grove workers and packing-plant men; he favored treating Negroes like human beings. Imagine, the moneyed men were saying, treating a "nigger" like you would anyone else, when everyone knows a "nigger" has no soul! Frank Norman, "furrener" from the North (eight years in Florida and married to a Georgia girl made no difference), Frank Norman refused to accept such distinctions between white and black. He continued to talk about Negro rights, even met with Negroes just as if they were equals—and that sort of action, said the big growers and business men, was calculated to stir up the Negroes and put ideas into their heads.

When the United Citrus Workers' Union

came to Lakeland from Haines City, forty miles down the road, Frank Norman took the lead in organizing the local. The workers trusted him. They began to grasp what he was driving at when he advocated Negroes joining too, white and black sticking together, each refusing to scab on the other. Things aren't done that way in the South. It's all very well, the white officials agreed, to have a Negro local—under the strict jurisdiction of the nearby white local. The Negroes would be told what to do, when to strike, what to ask for, how to cooperate with their white superiors. They would get their orders. Frank Norman objected to that arrangement. Well, it was generally conceded in high circles that Frank Norman was a bad influence.

Rumors circulated, rumors that worried Mrs. Norman. She wouldn't interfere with Frank: he knew best and when he explained to her, she saw his idea as clear as day. But the bankers and growers objected to Frank's organization, the International Labor Defense. At the meetings, whites and blacks gathered together, and the blacks didn't stand while the whites sat down, but all sat down together. The owners told each other that the International what-do-you-call-it was "Comoonistic" and wished nothing more than to destroy society by demanding high wages, by having Negroes rape white women and by putting Negroes at the head of the state. As bad, worse, than the Catholics, for the Catholics had a Pope that was white and now the Comoonists came along and no one knew where they'd stop.

Lakeland's "better class" drew a sigh of relief when Frank Norman went away to school. Then, just as things were looking up, the citrus workers struck in the packing plants and forced concessions. In the wake of this victory, Frank Norman returned. He talked just as much about militant organization and Negro rights as he did before he went away.

Mrs. Norman knew the Southern owners. They prided themselves on patriotism, thought of themselves as happy, carefree altruists who only wanted to make a living. It wasn't their concern that the search for profit meant starvation for workers. The owners didn't make the depression, not a bit of it. All they desired was their profit—"building the South" is the way they put it—and to live decently. If workers can't live decently too—well, suh, no one gave the bosses nothin', they jest got it by sweatin' work and now they sho' had a right to what brains done bring 'em. The niggers—Frank Norman had no business fixin' to stir 'em up. They'd gotten 'long up to now and no

damned Comoonistic furrener's goin' to up and tell a self-respectin' suthe'n gen'leman how to care fo' his niggers.

The door slammed. Frank came toward her, thin and tall, his deep-set eyes worried, biting his lip, running his fingers through the mass of brown hair. He stood over her. "Sheriff Chase 'n two deputies are outside," he said in a low voice. "They want me t'go down the road toward Haines City to 'dentify a Negro who's been lynched." He stopped, clearing his throat. "I'll bet it's one of my I.L.D. members."

Mrs. Norman stood up. "Well, then, I'm a-goin' with you."

"D'you really want t'go?"

"Yes."

She followed him out on the porch, feeling sick, seeing the brown body swaying slowly back and forth at the end of a rope. They'd do anything, the Klan, anything. She glanced at the strangers, one leaning against a post a little way down the porch, the second playing with Frankie's puppy and the third, evidently the one who called himself Sheriff Chase, smiling, conciliatory, huge in the dim moonlight. Well over six feet and a two hundred pounder.

"Mrs. Norman here's goin' with us."

The big man smiled and bowed. "That's sho' all right if you want t'go, Mrs. No'man, but it's no place fo' any lady."

Frank shrugged. "Why, she's seen one Negro lynched an' I guess she can see another one."

"Well, come on then."

Mrs. Norman told Frank to let the Surrencys know where they were going. Perhaps they would look after Frankie. She went into the house. When she returned, Ben Surrency was out but hurriedly dressing, eager to accompany Frank. She decided to stay behind with Mrs. Surrency. "But you can take our car," she said.

"There's no need fo' that," said the big sheriff, kindly, immense against the dark sky. "It won't take more'n a couple minutes to go down there and have a look at that body. We done found Mr. No'man's name and address on a slip o' paper in the nigger's pocket. Why take yo' car when we've got a nice car just down here?"

They left the porch. Mrs. Norman looked after them, the huge sheriff lumbering before, followed by the two smaller deputies and then Frank and Mr. Surrency. They stepped into the car—Frank and Ben Surrency in the back seat with the immense man called Sheriff Chase. The car drove off, down the dirt road, round the bend across the railroad track.

He was never to come back, Frank Nor-