

The Guild Goes to Town

S. W. GERSON

HISTORIANS of the future, seeking to learn the dynamics of our day, can say with assurance that Richard Harding Davis was a serious factor in the newspaper industry up to May 30, 1936. On that day the venerable ghost was finally laid.

The ceremony was as brief as it was simple. It consisted of a majority and two minority reports to the third annual convention of the American Newspaper Guild at the Hotel Astor. The majority report, calling for Guild affiliation with the American Federation of Labor, was carried, 84 to 5, and the Davis wraith forthwith beat a hasty retreat to the dim recesses where publishers keep the romantic shades of the business.

American publishers have only themselves to blame if the Davis tradition has finally been banished from the city room and reporters and rewrite men voted to align themselves with bricklayers and glassblowers. Romance and bylines never did pay for pork chops and the situation wasn't helped by the stubborn publishers' refusal to treat with the Guild in the days when it was still a cross between a drinking club and a welfare society. Whacks on the head from the Milwaukee police and injunctions from Jersey justice probably assisted considerably. People who simply lifted a supercilious eyebrow at trade unionism in 1933 were in 1935 convinced that the Guild, *volens-nolens*, was a trade union *de facto*.

Surprisingly little opposition to affiliation manifested itself at the convention. Most of the delegates came instructed to vote to join the A.F. of L. Such dissent as there was arose not from objections to becoming identified with the trade-union movement, but from a criticism of the present craft set-up of the Federation. Recent events have recorded themselves sharply on the minds of newspapermen. The opening sentence of the majority report, which may well become historic, indicates this clearly.

The best and lasting interests—it reads—of the members of the American Newspaper Guild, composed of newspaper men who work for a living, is bound up with the general welfare of all workers in the nation.

We are perhaps too close to the convention to see it in perspective. Certainly, for the industrial workers of the country who have long felt themselves somewhat isolated from the white-collar groups, it is a distinct victory. Apart from that, Guild affiliation with the A.F. of L. will have repercussions in circles wider than the organized labor movement. It will help break down the Chinese wall that has hitherto existed between the man in overalls and the man at the desk. It will help the middle classes orientate themselves in the direction of an

alliance with labor against reaction. The Guild decision may very well be one of the important factors in creating the necessary unity between the Man at the Lathe, the Man with the Hoe and the Man at the Typewriter. In the deepest sense of the word, therefore, the Guild decision should be hailed not only as pro-labor but also as anti-fascist.

All major decisions of the convention were settled in the same progressive spirit. Resolutions in favor of Farmer-Labor action, curbing of the power of the Supreme Court and for advanced labor legislation were adopted with little or no opposition. Election of Heywood Broun as president and Jonathan Eddy as executive secretary clearly sprang from the determination of the delegates to maintain progressive officers in the administration to carry out progressive policies.

Decisions affecting internal organization followed the same lines. A constitution, representing the distilled but doubtful virtues of nearly 100 craft unions and submitted by Robert M. Buck of Washington, never

reached the floor of the convention. Expansion along democratic lines was the motif of all discussions on organization.

Formal admission into the A.F. of L. is a matter of weeks. That the Guild will have delegates at the Tampa convention of the Federation is virtually agreed upon. What forces it will support there are already foreshadowed by repeated Guild resolutions in favor of industrial unionism. Already there are indications that the big-wigs of the A.F. of L. are well aware of the peculiarly strategic character of its newest affiliate.

Of the overwhelmingly progressive character of the third annual convention of the Guild there can be no doubt.

They're getting the point. One story, which went the rounds of the convention corridors and which we hereby hand on to the readers of *THE NEW MASSES*, seems to confirm the idea.

It seems that Bill Davey, a Guild organizer, and J. Nash McCrea, a Republican in politics and at present chairman of The Wisconsin News strike committee, were having beer and skittles one night at a Milwaukee tavern after a long, hard day. Both were tired and dusty. "Look at me, Bill," said old McCrea. "Look at me. I look like a lumpen-proletarian, don't I? Ah, but you're all wrong, my boy," and he wagged an admonishing finger. "I'm not a lumpen-proletarian. I'm just an old lumpen-Republican."

Jottings on a Salesbook

ALBERT MORTON

Earning bread in the unbiblical sweat of other people's feet
Sing me the unheroic saga of the shoe salesman;
Phrases between customers to make in many weeks a poem,
Poems to make delight or poems to make a union;
The salesman poet lines the right size images the right color
Soundly constructed for mass picketing with rhymes that—
(Good afternoon, Madam. Yes of course, Madam.
Cheaper? Surely.—The leather may be stiff, but
See the fit, the snug grip at the arch, Madam)
Saying the same words in the same way in the same store
To different ladies, it's carfare to the park
Some green air for the kids
And rent not more than one week late—
(Yes, Mr. Hanson, 12 tonight, yes, Mr. Hanson)
Gather up phrases now, the harvest interlude,
Phrases to sow in tired minds to make in many weeks a union,
Stand with a statue smile and gather phrases—
(Yes, Mr. Hanson, 9 tomorrow, sure, Mr. Hanson)
Sure, tilt a last year's shoe to this year's angles
Smiling an all year smile, go home and sell your son
On overcoatless winters, soles with holes;
Sure, go home and smile my wife
Into the thin coat with the frayed collar—
You in the next section, comrade,
How long before we quit
This amiable drawing back of lips?

Social Work Comes of Age

SIMON DONIGER

IT IS probably unfair to look for realistic awareness, clarity of analysis or a sense of direction on major social issues at a National Conference of Social Work. For in addition to the usual liberal confusions, social work suffers from a series of contradictions peculiarly its own: its origin, function and its misapplied and over-generalized techniques.

The origins of social work stem from the church and parish. While the average social worker has a tendency to overlook this fact, the boardwalk and convention halls at Atlantic City last week bore witness to this relationship—they were full of church uniforms, priests of all denominations, nuns, members of the Salvation Army.

Social work has been used as a cushion between the devastating effects of a ruthless economic order and its victims. Social workers refer to this function sentimentally, as the "alleviation of human suffering." In economic terms, it is the function which places at industry's disposal a surplus population ready to step in whenever needed and easily disposed of when it is no longer useful—without the worry that the cast-off surplus will "actually" starve. Finally, there remains the dangerous tendency to attribute the major tragedies suffered by one-fifth of our population to individual inadequacy—a tendency which, though it is receding, nevertheless still muddies a clear view of the problems faced by social workers.

These considerations and confusions explain much of the opening address of the President of the 63rd Annual Conference of Social Work at Atlantic City (May 24-30), the Very Reverend Monsignor Robert Fr. Keegan, Executive Director of the Catholic Charities of New York City. In one breath, Monsignor Keegan spoke on the need for security and in the next on the spiritual elements in life which were more important than material security.

There are those who cry: "Back to Rugged Individualism." It would be an unprofitable adventure. Some favor a Communistic experiment. We have too much faith in spiritual values and human rights to go the Russian way.

And in the same vein, Monsignor Keegan expounded on the use that the exploiting classes have made of the state as an instrument of power while he expressed faith in the Supreme Court as an instrument to curb the state from assuming too much power. Thus:

It is not easy for democratic government to rise beyond the control of powerful groups. There is real danger that in so doing it may move definitely in the direction of dictatorship in one form or another. Fortunately, in the case of our American government, the point of departure from democracy would be clearly and boldly indicated by transgressions against the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

This in the same week that the Supreme Court declared the New York state minimum wage law unconstitutional!

Monsignor Keegan did not stop there. His solution of the problem of the middle classes was to advocate a return to small ownership, the decentralization of industry:

The only safeguard for private property ownership as a social institution is a phalanx of middle-class and small property owners. . . . Widespread ownership means a fair chance for wage earning people; an opportunity for the industrious and thrifty man to rise and an opening for youth to reach an independent status. . . . Man does not live by bread alone; neither does a nation. Let us come back to recognize the importance of spiritual values! They are more real and lasting than any profits or wage-rates can be.

Small wonder that The New York Herald Tribune captioned its report of Monsignor Keegan's speech, "Security Plan Perils Cited to Social Workers."

Mayor LaGuardia, too, appeared before the convention, the "liberal" mayor whose police had clubbed pickets on the New York waterfront and who now urged protective labor legislation, a constitutional amendment to curb the Supreme Court, the regulation of commerce and industry. "We are going to a new order. . . . We shall come there through legislation on old-age pensions, through child labor amendments, through national unemployment insurance."

There were other speakers. Edith Abbott, president-elect of the Conference for 1937, director of the Graduate School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago, decried partisan politics and pleaded for civil-service status for public-welfare employees. She demanded that both major political parties include a civil-service plank in their platforms—though both parties have included such planks in their platforms for the past twenty years and have done nothing about them. Or Professor Parker T. Moon of Columbia University who discussed war and omitted the fact that war itself is a result and not a cause. "Capitalism will crumble and Communism will come and that would be an unspeakable tragedy," the professor observed. His solution—a League of Nations and the satisfying of the "unsatisfied nations," specifying as such the three fascist countries, Germany, Italy, Japan.

Fortunately, the story of social work does not end here. The depression catapulted into social work a new force: workers from fields unrelated to social work, students, professionals unhampered by its traditions, able to approach and face and attack the realities of our social order. Aided by this new group, there has grown up an organized rank-and-file movement which sees clearly and logically the problems of social welfare, of the social

worker and of the professional generally and the alternatives that the social worker faces in his attempt to carry through his program.

THE National Coordinating Committee of Social Service Employee Groups is barely two and a half years old. Already its role is an important one; it promises to overshadow the more conservative groups. Allied with it are a few—very few, indeed—in social work who have succeeded in transcending both the handicaps of tradition and the handicaps of their positions. We can count them on the fingers of one hand—Mary Van Kleeck, Director of Industrial Studies of the Russell Sage Foundation, Bertha Reynolds, Associate Director of the Smith College School of Social Work, Dr. Frankwood Williams, until recently medical director of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Dr. Harry Lurie, Director of the National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, New York City. It is to this section of the Conference that one must look for future direction of social work. It is here that one finds the ideological and tactical contradictions resolved and a clear statement of method and purpose outlined, formulated, carried through.

Under the auspices of the National Coordinating Committee of rank-and-file employees one of the most important meetings was held, on "Social Work and Fascism." The meeting was prefaced by a statement of purpose of a committee of rank-and-file workers, outlining in clear and uncompromising terms the present situation in this country—the plight of youth, the regression in child welfare, the attack on the unemployed, the C.C.C.—its militarism and war tendency—the attacks upon the liberties of the people and workers as disclosed by the Black and LaFollette committees, the Tampa flogging, the attacks on social service by the American Manufacturers Association, Boards of Trade, Liberty League. The report concludes that unquestionably "the symptoms of fascism are here but the ideals of social work cannot exist with fascism." To discuss techniques of social work in a time like this is futile. The answer to the problem of social work for the present, at least, is organization along with the labor groups. The interests of social workers and the labor movement are identical, hence the program of social workers must include full utilization of the productive forces of America; the Youth Act and child-labor amendments; adequate unemployment insurance as embodied in the Frazier-Lundeen Bill; adequate relief standards as expressed in the Marcantonio Relief Bill; the right to organize, etc.

This report was followed by a masterly and profoundly moving analysis of fascism