

Teachers Unite Against Reaction

MALCOLM WINTER

TO THE teachers of America, the American Federation of Teachers has sent forth one appeal from its Twentieth Annual Convention—a stirring appeal for unity against political and economic reaction. The unity sought is no sectarian unity. The Convention acted to cement the ranks of teachers. It set machinery in motion to prevent the threatened split in the A. F. of L. It took steps to promote that broader unity against war and fascism which is the unity of the People's Front of France and Spain.

To keep the A. F. of L. united was the Convention's gravest concern. The progressive caucus meetings discussed the problem. An evening session was devoted to it. The resolution that passed without a dissenting voice condemned the suspension threat and called upon the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. to rescind it. It urged that the delegates of the C. I. O. unions be seated at the Tampa Convention and that the charges against these unions be aired there. More important yet, the resolution called upon teachers and workers to fight the split by spurring their Central Labor Unions and State Federations to protest the Council's suspension threat.

One sector of the progressives believed that the resolution did not go far enough. Followers of Tucker P. Smith of Katonah and of Ben Davidson of New York argued that a split was inevitable and that nothing could prevent the expulsion of the C. I. O. unions. While supporting the resolution, they felt that the A. F. of T.'s Council should be empowered to act immediately after the Tampa convention—presumably to draw the A. F. of T. out of the A. F. of L. This view found few adherents. The teachers did not want to cede to their Council the final power to decide the A. F. of T.'s course after the Tampa Convention. Furthermore, it was generally felt that the inevitability of the split depended in large measure on what was done up to the Tampa Convention.

TOWARD developing a broad front against war and fascism, the Convention made a number of unprecedented moves. After long and heated debate, it voted cooperation with the American League Against War and Fascism. This move was opposed, on the one hand, by Miss Selma Borchardt of Washington who sought unsuccessfully to substitute opposition to "all wars" for opposition to "imperialistic wars." On the other hand, Dr. Maynard Krueger of Chicago fought cooperation, arguing that the trade-union base of the League was too small. The convention frankly acknowledged the fact that the League, as constituted, offered organized labor the opportunity for unity

with sections of the middle class that had been duped in European countries into supporting Fascism.

The convention took two other steps to combat war and fascism. It reaffirmed its support of a farmer-labor party, and significantly enough, urged Federation locals to cooperate with *all* local movements advancing the formation of an independent farmer-labor party. In the second place, it passed a vigorous resolution boycotting all communication agencies owned by William Randolph Hearst. To make the boycott effective it voted to set up a central anti-Hearst committee, and recommended to each local the establishment of anti-Hearst committees for the purpose of cooperating with the Newspaper Guild and all anti-Hearst organizations and of building up sentiment "to repudiate all candidates whose principles and program are those of Hearst."

SEeking to unify the teaching profession, the convention made short work of the A. F. of L. Council's recommendation that the charter of the Teachers Union of New York (Local Five) be revoked. On recommendation of its own Council, the convention voted 266 to 107 to reject William Green's proposition. This vote does not accurately reflect the tremendous sentiment for unity among the delegates. The minority that voted against the resolution and introduced its own, differed with the majority not on the idea of rejecting Green's proposal, but on how the rejection should be couched. Thus William Green's attack on the largest

and most progressive local in the A. F. of T. was effectively squashed—and with it, his obvious attempt to stem the progressive tide within the A. F. of T.

A more basic step toward unification was taken with the adoption of new organizational plans. Two paid organizers were replaced by twelve regional vice-presidents charged with the task of spurring organization of the unorganized in their areas. Two additional vice-presidents were established to give representation to the many W.P.A. and college teachers that have come into the organization within the last year. A fifteenth vice-presidency went for the first time in the history of the A. F. of T. to a Negro teacher. All these actions indicate that the Federation is seriously setting out to become the major *industrial* organization of the teaching profession in America.

ACADEMIC freedom was a major concern of the Convention. It went on record condemning the McNaboe investigation. It voted support of the American Student Union's campaign to reinstate Robert Burke, a student suspended from Columbia for demonstrating against Columbia participation in the Heidelberg celebration. It called upon the Board of Higher Education to remove Dr. Frederick B. Robinson from the presidency of City College. It manifested unyielding opposition to "loyalty" oaths for teachers. The more detailed problems of organizing and defending teachers, of improving educational methods, and of raising educational standards, some delegates felt, could have received more attention. To many delegates, conservative as well as progressive, this was the necessary result of the great crisis facing the labor movement and the American people.

Against the 1935 convention, this year's convention makes a sharp contrast, not only in the drive for unity which has come out of it, but in the spirit of unity which marked the proceedings. There was a small conservative bloc, a very large progressive bloc, and divisions within each of these. The conservatives revealed tendencies toward craft unionism—they were somewhat dissatisfied with the presence of W.P.A. teachers. Some of them, led by Selma Borchardt of Washington, D. C., made a last-minute attempt to isolate the A. F. of T.—they introduced a motion, which was quickly tabled, forbidding the A. F. of T.'s Council to cooperate with other organizations. But progressives and conservatives alike were staunchly united on one thing: steadfast opposition to what Hearst, the Liberty League, and Landon represented. It was a conservative who called upon the convention to raise \$5,000 for the heroic Spanish workers fighting fascism.



"What about this 'Little Red Riding Hood'?"

The Equilibrists and Mr. Keynes

EDWARD MOUNT

THAT bourgeois economics is breaking its back on the problem of the crisis and unemployment is clear to all except the practitioners themselves. The economists' babel in New Deal Washington, rightly a public scandal, is enough to convince most people. The confusing variety of opinions held in the name of science is nicely expressed in a remark attributed to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin: that when he asked five economists for advice on a problem, he always got six different answers, "two from Mr. Keynes."

It is doubtless true that this confusion of the economists is not important for particular events, since the direct effect of economists on the policies of capitalists and capitalist governments is negligible. The position of bourgeois economists as advisers to capitalists on concrete affairs is about the same as that of fortune tellers; and the successful economist, like the successful fortune teller, is he who says what his patron wants to hear.

But in their role of teachers and publicists the bourgeois economists are extremely important. For a century the young have been entrusted to them for education in political and economic theory. Directly and indirectly they influence and are responsible for a mass of writing in newspapers, journals, and books. They are, and have been, the ideological leaders in fighting communism.

In this last capacity, it is worth noting, there are certain national differences in method. Unlike the German theorists, the English and American bourgeois economists have paid little direct attention to the writings of Marx. Most of them have never read Marx, almost none of them has seriously studied him. For them Marx was "refuted" before they read him. In this atmosphere the student of economics has little incentive to go to Marx; his courses do not facilitate it, and what he learns is a third- or fourth-hand summary opinion in a textbook. Occasionally, as a conspicuous act of liberalism, the *Communist Manifesto* is included in a reading list. As a class, the English and American economists have acted monopolistically and excluded Marxism.

The modern theory of the bourgeois economists is equilibrium theory. It is true that this means for most of them little more than a bit of patter about supply and demand. It is true too that there have been periodic revolts against the sterility of "orthodox" economics, and that "historical," "institutional," and "statistical" schools have been formed, but these latter have formulated little which can be called "theory." The major problem of equilibrium economics is to explain market prices and quantities produced by showing that a large number of subjective

and objective factors tend to result in one set of prices and quantities. This is the "equilibrium." Because all factors cannot be included, the equilibrium which is determined theoretically is not to be supposed ever to exist in the real world. It is defined as a description of tendencies, of what would happen to prices and quantities if the factors did not change and if no factor were excluded.

Unfortunately this type of theory cannot deal with unemployment since one of its basic assumptions is that there is always full employment. It is taken for granted that any unemployed workers who want work can always get it by offering to work for slightly less than the going wage, and that in fact competition will always force the wage down until all who want work are working. Faced with the unemployment of the real world, the more reactionary economists blame the trade unions. Those acute enough to note that unemployment occurs where there are no unions have been forced to invent special theories, usually monetary ones, to account for unemployment. The result is that the mind of the ordinary bourgeois economist is divided into two rooms—one holds his equilibrium theory, the other a special cycle or monetary theory.

The inadequacy of traditional equilibrium theory has recently been pointed out by the English bourgeois economist, J. M. Keynes, in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.^{*} Keynes was the chief economic adviser to the British delegation at Versailles. He was one of the first economists to realize the fatuity of the reparations clauses of the treaty, and the publication of his *Economic Consequences of the Peace* won him an international reputation as the white hope of liberalism. In subsequent years his advocacy of a managed currency did much to make that doctrine respectable. Keynes sees himself in the role of Cassandra, warning an unheeding Europe against the burden of reparations, an unheeding Britain against the dangers of returning to the gold standard, and an only half-heeding United States of the need for a large-scale public-works program. But he prefers to overlook such lapses as his prediction in 1922 that the U.S.S.R. was on the verge of a catastrophic economic collapse, or his laudatory obituary notice of the Swedish capitalist Ivar Kreuger, who on Keynes's interpretation was a far-sighted benefactor of the human race forced into suicide by the folly of state economic policies, but who was later proved to be a common forger and swindler. It is no secret that Keynes is *persona grata* at the White House, and that he whole-heartedly approves of an

expansion of government investment both in this country and in the British Isles.

It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* has proved a best seller in Washington, where the pundits of the government are working overtime at mastering Keynes's proposals for making the capitalist system work. For Keynes believes that he has succeeded in finding the causes of unemployment and the reforms necessary to save capitalism. It is impossible to summarize adequately his long and difficult analysis, but it can perhaps be said that he finds the source of trouble in the desire of the rich to save large parts of their incomes, in the possibility of their holding their savings in liquid, money form (when the alternative is lending at a low rate of interest), and in the reluctance of corporations to push investment in concrete capital so far that the expected yield is less than the rate of interest. He concludes that something must be done to push down interest rates and maintain investment so that employment can be maintained.

This argument can scarcely be criticized except in detail which would be tedious here, but there are signs in Keynes's book of the growing demoralization of bourgeois economics which are worth general attention. The demoralization is evident despite the fact that Keynes assumes the air of a clear-sighted savior bringing the cure to a long-suffering and expectant world.

Wearing their blinkers, the bourgeois economists, along with the capitalist class, have gone through previous crises comparatively unshaken. That this crisis has shaken them the following quotations from the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* will indicate. We now have, for instance, one of the foremost pupils of Alfred Marshall, that pre-*laissez-faire* economist, characterizing his colleagues as "Candidates, who, having left this world for the cultivation of their own gardens, teach that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds provided we will let well enough alone [p. 33]." And, in contrast, there is this assertion about the present system: "It is certain that the world will not much longer tolerate the unemployment which, apart from brief intervals of excitement, is associated—and, in my opinion, inevitably associated—with present-day capitalistic individualism [p. 381]." Only yesterday this same man thought that a few relatively simple monetary measures were all that was needed to make the system workable. Today this faith is largely gone, and though we are given another cure, it is not a pill but a surgical operation. "In conditions of *laissez-faire* the avoidance of wide fluctuations in employment

^{*} The Macmillan Co., pp. 430 and xii.