

# Labor in Convention

TWO visitors went to Buffalo and told the American Federation of Labor that it was not making the most of its opportunities, nationally and internationally. Mr. John Hill went representing the British Trades Union Congress. He told the convention of a conference held by representatives of Allied labor meeting in London. "We found," he said, "the national differences among us so great that to have gone to any International, particularly to have met those who were fighting against us, would have been against all our interests at that time. . . . We decided that we must first obtain something like general consent, general unanimity of aim amongst ourselves, and the Congress instructed the Parliamentary Committee to take these steps. Having done that, we entered a strong protest against the government's action in refusing passports to our delegates."

Mr. Hill is not over here to disintegrate public opinion. He officially represents the British labor recognized by his government. He asserts that "general unanimity of aim" among the Allies is essential to the winning of a peace that labor wants. What essentials did American labor formulate in its Buffalo convention?

It started with certain proposals which Mr. Gompers and the Executive Council had drawn up. They were liberal proposals. They went so far as to suggest the establishment of an international eight-hour day, an international child labor law, and the direct representation of working people in diplomatic affairs. The fundamental considerations were declared to be an international covenant for peace, governments to derive their power from consent of the governed, rights of small nations, no selfish political or economic restrictions, no indemnities or reprisals based on vindictive purposes, and no territorial changes "except in furtherance of the welfare of the peoples affected and in furtherance of world peace."

Essentially this is the program of the President, the early Russian revolutionary party, and the French Socialists. It is a program upon which a liberal government, at this stage of the war, may proudly stand. But for a liberal group which hopes to see its principles carried into the negotiations a liberal program is not enough. Mr. Hill, from the fund of his experience abroad, could have suggested that labor's program might have had the endorsement of Mr. Lenine and Lord Curzon, Mr. Trotzky and Mr. Roosevelt. Two men may agree that territorial changes should be made only "in fur-

therance of the world's peace," and still hold contradictory ideas of whether or not the world's peace would be furthered by the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France. Two groups may affirm the principle of "no indemnities based on vindictive purposes"—and yet fight on for a year because they could not concur in one another's definition of the word "vindictive."

Could American labor have attempted to deal specifically with Alsace-Lorraine and Bagdad and trade restrictions in South Africa and the hundred other considerations that will be factors in the settlement? No. But American labor expects to, at the future date when the peace congress is called. "It is of paramount importance," states the Executive Council of the Federation, "that labor shall be free and unembarrassed in helping to shape the principles and policies for the future." Free labor may be; but if it has not informed itself as to what "principles and agencies" are essential, it will certainly find itself embarrassed, when the time comes for a settlement, by an ignorance which will keep its sympathies from being effective. Organized labor might indeed win its demand for direct representation in the peace congress—and succeed in sending delegates who could somehow manage to grasp the intricacies of European economics between the day they sailed from New York and the day they sat down at the conference table. But, as the report of labor's Executive Council pointed out, a peace that will promise to have the best chance of success, because it has democratic understanding and endorsement, can be secured only "by diplomatic representatives responsible to the people." Delegates to a peace congress, whether or not they bear the credentials of organized labor, cannot be responsible to a constituency which is familiar only with the general terms that both sides must accept before the congress can even be summoned. Coal in Alsace-Lorraine, a road to Bagdad, autonomy for the Jugoslavs—these are not affairs which labor is accustomed to make plans for. But they are now being fought for. And they will monopolize the peace congress. What responsibility can the delegates to that congress owe unless their constituents have been given the means to react to various proposals of settlement?

The fine opportunity of the Buffalo convention was to begin supplying these means. It could vigorously have affirmed the need of democratizing discussion of war objectives, furnished the machinery for keeping such discussion among labor groups informed, begun an effort for what the British Trades

Union delegates termed "a general unanimity of aim." Such a program, made the cause of organized American labor, would have added to the chances of achieving, and then holding, that sort of liberal peace which the Buffalo convention affirmed.

It is not hard to understand why the opportunity was not grasped. Public opinion has never been reassuring to the trade union movement in this country. Organized labor has always had to fear and to fight for its very existence. And particularly has it had reason to fear that in a time of war its hard-won concessions might be retracted. Labor needs a strategic position. It is patriotic. Its leaders feel that its patriotism must risk no suspicion. And anything which suggests that Allied war aims need unification is likely to be regarded by too large a section of public opinion as evidence of half-heartedness about the war. American labor has no secure position in the authority of government, direct and implied.

And this was the text of the second visitor at the convention, whose counsel ran counter to the Federation's plotted course. Mr. A. C. Townley came as representative of the Farmer's Nonpartisan League. As Mr. Hill advised labor to participate in international politics, so Mr. Townley recommended that labor go into politics at home. He saw no reason why the authority of government could not shortly be brought into labor's hands, by means of a coalition with the organized farmers.

Labor's reluctance to participate unitedly in politics is traditional. Yet I think the first effect of the Buffalo convention was to give the impression of a different approach to the question of government. War demands had brought a sense of the individual's responsibility to the state. They had also brought a sense of the state's responsibility to the individual. "This terrific war," declared the Executive Council's report, "must wipe out all vestiges of the old concept that the nation belongs to the government." In its Buffalo convention the American Federation of Labor was, I think, closer than it had been before to the idea of government as an instrumentality.

Several factors in addition to the significance of the President's visit made some change in attitude natural. For one thing the governmental machinery has grown so mighty that not to participate in directing it is to stand in danger of being its victim. Participation is a means of self-defense. This governmental power, moreover, has been shown to be capable of limiting prices and curbing profits. It has encouraged many labor leaders to think kindly of governmental regulation, and perhaps even ownership. Then there existed, among the delegates at the convention, an exceedingly favorable impression of the work that is being done in

the West by the President's Commission to Investigate Labor Conditions. The Commission's activity in Arizona and on the coast has further destroyed any notion of identity between government and capital, and pointed to the advantages of a permanent investigating body. Finally, labor, individually, has already begun its participation in government. Hugh Frayne, Federation organizer, is sitting in the War Industries Board; James Duncan, of the Granite Cutters, has visited Russia as a diplomat; John White, of the Mine Workers, has a portfolio in the Fuel Administration; a dozen other officials of organized labor are, primarily for the reason that they represent organized labor, filling places of responsibility in government administrative boards.

Of course these considerations did not convert the Federation of Labor to a new position in politics as completely as Mr. Townley would have enjoyed seeing it converted. And evidence of a changed attitude was chiefly to be found informally, in conversations rather than in official procedure. Nevertheless even the most official procedure reflected a philosophy that was being made over. Neither in the convention nor outside of it was there emphasis on the once popular theory that in the conflict between capital and labor the government must necessarily remain neutral; on the contrary, such recent federal interference as that in the Arizona Copper strikes was thought to be friendly and valuable. In present problems, the shortage of labor, for instance, the government was welcomed into partnership with organized labor. "With the withdrawal of hundreds of thousands of men for military purposes there is necessity for readjustment in the industrial field. Effective employment agencies, under the control of the Department of Labor, cooperating with local agencies and associations, would be an invaluable adjunct to our war machinery." And when peace puts an end to the need of war machinery, labor and the government must together work out the problems of a new state. "When the war closes there will confront our government and our people problems the magnitude of which cannot as yet be even approximated, but they will be coextensive with the magnitude of preparation, prosecution, and maintenance of the country on a war footing. . . . Our organized labor movement . . . can make its influence the most potent factor in the coming reconstruction."

In England the organized labor movement is already moving for reconstruction. It has before it such reports as those of the Whitley Commission and of the Reconstruction Committee on Relations between Employers and Employed. Convinced that "industrial disfranchisement is as unjust as political disfranchisement," labor is preparing plans

for a future that will be unhampered by many of the institutions and codes existing before the war. American labor lacks experience and the leadership which British labor has; but in its Buffalo convention it indicated a willingness to be part of the same movement.

CHARLES MERZ.

## Auguste Rodin

**T**AME enough it looks now, Rodin's bust of Madame V, done in the time of his early struggles, said to be very like, detested and refused by her family, bought later for the Luxembourg. Not without difficulty, in the light of his later work, can one go back and realize that then it was considered too brutal.

The history of this bust, rejected at first and afterward exalted, is Rodin's history. So far as sculpture would let him he put the spirit of his time into sculpture, and his time was slow to see, though it saw at last, in Rodin a true expression of its spirit. What concerned him most was a truly sculptural subject, most sculptural of all subjects, the human body. His mastery of the human body through the eye was so absolute that his work is best understood and best enjoyed by sculptors themselves. And at first he found almost all sculptors, as he still finds many of them, rebellious or silent. Even after he had become a master and a modern his modernity gave offence and his mastery was denied.

What the eye expects, and is disappointed by the absence of, are the things it has seen. Sculptors, hardly less than the public itself, are under the influence of sculptural tradition. Because Rodin's work was so little framed in any sculptural tradition, because he gave more than they looked for, because they looked for more than he gave—that is why he antagonized them. What has been must be. Drapery must be used as the Greeks used it, most notably in the Parthenon pediments, to enhance the beauty of the form underneath. Could anything break this law more flagrantly than the drapery in the Balzac, which serves only as a cloak to subordinate the flesh, and which through its movement and direction concentrates our attention on the head? And this Bourgeois de Calais, whose drapery is no pleasure, is hardly more than lines leading to the head and emphasizing the hands, is hardly more than a rag, an expression of poverty and humility. Silhouettes and outlines must remind one of the Greek, and there is nothing Greek about Rodin's. A nude must look like a body accustomed to being nude out of doors: Paolo and Francesca, the two nude figures in *Le Baiser*, are people of today who wear clothes, and whose feet

have long been broken to shoes. Monuments to great men must be noble: never look at that Balzac.

Rodin gave more than people looked for. He gave them, among other things, intentions which sculptors did not and do not care for, and which he has taught a recalcitrant public to admire with misunderstanding and extravagance. He has fed this misunderstanding by the names he has given his works—*L'Age d'Airain*, *Le Penseur*, *La Pensée*. Did Rodin think of calling *Le Penseur* by its name before he set to work on the statue? Even if he did not the figure undoubtedly came to mean for him, preoccupied in later life as his talk recorded by Paul Gsell shows him to have been with abstractions, just what it would have meant had he from the outset intended a figure that could exactly be called *Le Penseur*. Even if such was his earliest intention, the statue proves, to anybody who knows, really knows, how to look at it, that while at work his interest was altogether in doing those muscles so tense, although the figure is sitting, and not at all in the nature of that effort of concentration which held them tense, and which might but need not be Thought. The two nudes in *Le Baiser* are supposed to be Paolo and Francesca. The vice of such a naming is that it arouses expectations which are not fulfilled, that it distracts attention from what Rodin has actually done. Let your eye follow that shadow along the modelling revealed by the meeting of light and shade—no sculptor could look at the course of that shadow without joy. To render the meeting of flesh and flesh was one of the strongest of Rodin's later interests, and that no sculptor ever rendered it better the *Cupid and Psyché* in the Metropolitan is of itself enough to establish.

A paradox which is true of Rodin may easily be stated. Attracted by his titles and misled by them, his public has read into his figures all sorts of intentions and significances which may have been in his mind before he began work, or which may have been afterthoughts, but which were not in the work itself. Even sculptors, repelled and misled by his titles, have been slow to realize this. Whether his intentions were starting-points or afterthoughts is a question for biographers, still more for psychologists, and probably answerable by neither. Whatever his meanings were and wherever he got them, and no matter how great the importance that has been attached to them by eulogists, by detractors, by Rodin himself, the fact is that when once he was at work the same intention always governed him: to see what was before him and to model what he saw.

All Rodin's interests were subordinate to the interest of his eye. None of his intentions, whether of rebellion, of social pity, of revealing the present