

Western Clarion

A Journal of History, Economics, Philosophy,
and Current Events.

Published twice a month by the Socialist Party of
Canada, P. O. Box 710, Vancouver, B. C.
Entered at G. P. O. as a newspaper.

Editor.....Ewen MacLeod

SUBSCRIPTION:

Canada, 20 issues \$1.00
Foreign, 16 issues \$1.00

900 If this number is on your address label your
subscription expires with next issue. Renew
promptly.

VANCOUVER, B. C., SEPTEMBER 17, 1923.

A DULL CONGRESS.

THE casual visitor to the gallery of the thirtieth annual Trades Congress of Canada looks down upon a meeting seemingly but little different from any other gathering of tired business men. The majority of the delegates—with good reason enough—have the appearance of being bored stiff. Occasionally a little spirited argument occurs over a minor point; the president's gavel pounds the table:—"All in favor say Aye, contrary No: The Ayes have it." Just like that, no matter where the noise comes from.

The convention appears to run quite smoothly, despite the grave fears expressed last month by the "Alberta Labor News" and reproduced by the "Canadian Congress Journal" that the terrible Reds might get control and so upset the easy-going-eyes-right-line-up in trade union ranks. But no. By the time a dozen or two of the resolutions prepared by branch local unions, including recommendations for the adoption of measures reaching towards national autonomy, the universal union card system (and such like) have been through the digester of the resolutions committee, they have disappeared off the table entirely. Thereupon the collective resolutions, supposed to summarise the sense of the former, are disposed of as easily as they are drawn and the former are disposed of by not being dealt with at all. No deviation from the agenda is tolerated. Which reminds us of the question asked by old man Bart Kennedy, hobo and man of parts, at a convention in his day: "What are agendas? Agendas are things to be done. We have been agendas ourselves in our time."

It is almost pathetic to hear one delegate after another talking and talking about the best method to be employed to place union made cigars and union made hats on the market as a wonderful way to prosperity. The user, the purchaser of anything, one man says, has "the buying power" and so can demand the union label on whatever he buys. Yet he is himself at the moment talking in a building built on open shop lines, the job being worked, if we remember aright, throughout the building trades strike in Vancouver in 1912. The details and business of hiring a convention hall, to be sure, comprise a somewhat different arrangement from the simple purchase of "three for a quarter." All a matter of convenience and familiarity in the use of purchasing power. That is to say, the head under that union made hat would come to no harm with a little attention between conventions. All a matter of education.

Extraordinary statements are made in this Congress which betoken the isolation of union made ideas. For instance, Mr. Trotter, vice-president of the International Typographical Union calmly states that the strike in the printing trades, commenced in

1921, and just recently ended, has marked not only a signal victory for labor, but has demonstrated the international craft form to be the most satisfactory form of trade union organization. Nobody laughs at this, because laughing is not on the agenda. The printers' strike was part fact and the other part fiction, one part of the union being on strike and the other part at work all in the same towns, the work meanwhile being done on schedule time. Mr. Trotter reads his "Congress Journal" in the most responsible way. Discipline must be maintained.

The "Congress Journal" appears to be in a bad way financially. By all accounts its "Here and Now" pulse beats perpetually low. The delegates discuss ways and means of keeping it going—not keeping it alive—and it seems to be the sense of the gathering that reading is a bothersome business anyway and "dependable advertizing" is scarce. There's the Home Bank advt. for instance, that the "Journal" has carried for some time; let's hope Mr. Draper has collected on that.

The big gun of the Congress this year, among the fraternal delegates, has been figured as Frank Hodges, of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, delegate from the British Trades Congress. Last year the visiting notable was Neil McLean, ex-S. L. P. ite, and now "the opportunist member for Govan." Last year McLean propounded the class struggle and Oriental exclusion. This year Frank Hodges propounds brotherly love and the British Imperial settlement of Canadian lands. Knowing nothing of Canada, he cannot be expected to know that these are contradictory hopes. We are frankly disappointed in Hodges. He looks and talks and thinks like the traditional English gentleman who in his own head monopolizes for the English in his stupid way the virtues of the whole human family. So far as we can see the Congress might just as well have had Lord Curzon as a fraternal delegate from England. One imperialist is as good as another.

A man of a little bigger outlook on working class matters appears to be Mr. Brown of the Int. Fed. of T. U. (Amsterdam). Certainly he appears to know something more of trade union history and to have appreciated its educational worth in addressing the Congress than either Hodges or the fraternal delegate from Washington, D.C., the latter representing the A. F. of L. Brown takes occasion to remind the Congress that a hundred years ago legal combination of workers was denied to them.

Mr. Woodsworth, M.P. for Centre Winnipeg, and now a visitor to the Congress, in a short address gives Hodges to understand that British rights and justice, apparently so dear to him, are just so much tripe at times here in Canada. Mr. Hodges might, if he said anything here that could be construed as seditious, be taken and thrown out of the country, all without trial by jury and all quite in accordance with our well built legal code. All well and good, but Mr. Woodsworth himself, apparently quite innocently, proceeds to call for help in restituting "our ancient British rights." We are by this time completely fed up on our ancient British rights and are moving to leave. It seems the British have an uncanny faculty for pre-empting, patenting, hallmarking, laying claim to (and avoiding the enjoyment of) all human rights, political and social and generally legendary, and that the claim stretches far back into time. In spite of this Hodges tells us there are about two million half starved people in England just now, a little problem that will be solved in the British way.

It is to be supposed that the Congress has a function to fulfil in the nature and structure of the general organization and practice of trade unionism. Without the purpose of registering a carping criticism and from the viewpoint of the visitor it would appear that the business of the Congress could be done as well and a more uniform expression of opin-

ion obtained, especially on resolutions and such like matters, by the exchange of some written matter. Be that as it may, the institution exists and we leave it about where it proceeds to elect its officials, an event which is heralded as the real business of the Congress.

Trade union activity and organization primarily concerns itself with matters affecting wages and working conditions in modern industry. Having fought and won the right to combine in trade organizations—in a general way—a hundred years or so ago, the trade unionists have reached the stage where their membership is affected by market conditions encountered by the employers in selling the goods produced; bad trade, a small membership,—good trade a greater membership. And that seems to be about all the hidebound trade unionist at this congress worries about. But while the system of wage labor lasts the advantage is with the masters at every turn, and the general tendency for the mass is to reach at intervals more and more frequent the low level of wage standards. The trade unionists' efforts are mainly efforts as sellers of the commodity labor power. Their status as wage workers determines the nature of the bargaining over price in the sale of that commodity. For the rest, we can do no better here than to quote Marx in "Value, Price and Profit":—

These few hints will suffice to show that the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favor of capitalist against the working man and that consequently the general tendency of capitalistic production is not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the value of labor more or less to its minimum limit. Such being the tendency of things in this system, is this saying that the working class ought to renounce their resistance against the encroachments of capital, and abandon their attempts at making the best of the occasional chances for their temporary improvement? If they did they would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation. I think I have shown that their struggles for the standard of wages are incidents inseparable from the whole wages system, that in 99 cases out of 100 their efforts at raising wages are only efforts at maintaining the given value of labor, and that the necessity of debating their price with the capitalist is inherent to their condition of having to sell themselves as commodities. By cowardly giving way in their every-day conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any large movement.

At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wages for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: "The abolition of the wages system."

HERE AND NOW

Here and Now, by Clarion tradition, denotes subs. It has come to the point nowadays that it denotes lack of subs.

The Canadian farmers have been accused of possessing enormous crops and as a consequence it has been suggested from the prairie country that many of them are likely to secrete a dollar or two for Clarion purposes before the bankers and brokers come to collect for the debt of other days. We await the result of the process of bringing in the sheaves.

Following \$1 each: J. Crossley (per W.A.P.), O. Motter, C. Lestor, Wm. Power, E. F. Rawlings, R. C. McKay, A. Tree, G. Elliott, E. Johnson, H. Burman.

Following \$2 each: Roy Addy, H. W. McKnight, J. Graham, A. E. Hollingshead, H. P. Graham.

San Francisco Labor College (per J.K.) \$9.60; H. Lerner \$1.50.

Above, Clarion subs. received from 29th Aug. to 14th September, inclusive, total \$31.10.