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TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR, PITTSBURG

OLD CITY HALL, Pittsburgh, Pa., November 13, 1905.

Pursuant to the regular meeting of the twenty-fifth annual convention of the American Federation of Labor, President Gompers called the convention to order at 10 o'clock a.m., in the Old City Hall, Pittsburgh, Pa.

A band composed of members of Local Union No. 60 of the American Federation of Musicians played "Post and Peasant" overture and "My Maryland," and were heartily applauded by the delegates and visitors.

President Gompers introduced Mr. J. A. Robinson, of the Hotel and Restaurant Employers' International Association.

Mr. Robinson said: I should like to have Mr. Joseph Weber, of the American Federation of Musicians, come forward. Mr. President and Mr. Weber, I have been selected to perform a duty this morning which gives me infinite pleasure. As the representative in part of the local business agents and organizers and the members of Local No. 60 of the American Federation of Musicians, I have been selected to perform this pleasant duty. We all recognize the fact that on coming into the world the song of the baby strikes a chord in the hearts of the parents that nothing else can do, and that even in our moments of intense anger we can be soothed by the melodious strains of music. There is, therefore, nothing so appropriate to aid in bringing into life this twenty-fifth annual convention of the American Federation of Labor as a welcome by musicians who are members of the American Federation of Musicians.

I have been requested to present to Mr. Joseph Weber, of the American Federation of Musicians, this floral emblem. I hope, Mr. Weber, you will receive it in the way it has been tendered, as a gift from the trade unionists of Pittsburgh.

Mr. Weber: In a convention of my own organization I am never at a loss for something to say; but now I am so taken by surprise that I can think of nothing to say except to thank you and ask to be allowed to present this token of your kindness to the American Federation of Labor Convention.

It is not many years since musicians were not looked upon generally as wage earners; now they are, if last not least, in the movement, and whenever the musician is called upon to come to the aid of his fellow workers, you will find him in the front ranks every time.

President Gompers: Mr. C. C. Douglas, president of the Iron City Trades Council, the central labor organization body of Pittsburgh, will address you.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. President, delegates and visitors: In behalf of the organized workers of the Allegheny County and Pittsburgh, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this, the twenty-fifth annual convention of the American Federation of Labor, and to welcome you to our State, our city and our homes. Our city is not one beautiful with roses or famous for historical points, but it is known throughout the world to be the workshop of the Keystone State. This is a city of which it can be said that the hammer mark of its mechanics is given preference in every city in the world. Our chief industry in Pittsburgh and the places surrounding it is the manufacture of iron and steel. We must not be unmindful of the fact, however, that we possess in this city mechanics as well as millionaires; but if rich or poor, if wage earner or manufacturer, you will find in this city as loyal and as hospitable citizens as you have found in any city you have ever convened in. For twenty-five years this organization has traveled from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, and has now come back to the Mother City, a full grown man, fully developed in power, intelligence and honor. That is acknowledged throughout the world by all thinking people. Notwithstanding the fact that, with the exception of the building trades, which are second to none in the City of Pittsburgh, you may find other cities better organized than we are, we intend to go on with the work until it is thoroughly organized. You must remember that in this city we have received many knocks and bruises, which have, however, only stimulated us to renewed efforts to advance the labor movement and make Pittsburgh the banner organized city of the world.

We hope your stay in this city will be of great benefit to those you represent, and that it will also be of benefit to the City of Pittsburgh and to the great labor movement of the world. We hope when you leave the city you will carry to your homes and to your native lands fond recollections of your stay in Pittsburgh, and that you will carry home

a good impression of the Smoky City we so dearly love.

I again bid you welcome to our city. Stay as long as you can, and may the All-Seeing One who has a watchful eye over us every day, be with you in your deliberations in this convention in behalf of the great labor movement of the world.

At the close of Mr. Douglas' address the band played "America" and "Everybody Works But Father," and was heartily applauded by the convention.

President Gompers: I now have the honor of presenting to you the Hon. James B. Drew, who will address you as the representative of Mayor Hays, who is unable to be with us this morning.

Mr. Drew: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen of the convention: His Honor the Mayor, who could not be present this morning, has authorized me to extend to you a hearty welcome and to give you the freedom of the City of Pittsburgh. You have come here from every part of this great republic, and from many foreign shores; you are here from the north and the south, from the east and the west, to deliberate and to enact laws for the government of almost three millions of working men. I take it that never before on this continent was there assembled a labor convention in which so many hundreds of thousands of workmen were represented. I believe the delegates here represent more men than there were people in the thirteen colonies of the United States at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. I know there never was marshalled on any field of battle in this world an army which in number contained anything but a small percentage of the membership of the great organization you represent. Alexander, and Hannibal, and Caesar, and Napoleon all conquered their worlds, and they did it without having at their back either the might or the right of the American Federation of Labor. (Applause.)

And how fitting and proper it is for the greatest body of organized labor in the world to bring its annual convention to the greatest industrial city on earth! It matters not what can be said in praise of other cities, it cannot be truthfully said that there is a city anywhere which is the equal of the City of Pittsburgh as an industrial center. We have here more than five thousand shops, mills and factories, which give employment to more than five hundred thousand men. The great coal fields, of which Pittsburgh is the center, give up more than thirty-five million tons of coal a year, and it is estimated that they will continue to do so for more than seven hundred years. The tonnage of Pittsburgh is more than the combined tonnage of Chicago and New York. There is nowhere a city which as an industrial center, compares with the city you have honored by bringing your convention to it.

Gentlemen, we are proud to have the convention of the American Federation of Labor with us, and we offer you the freedom of the city, and hope while you are with us you will have a good time.

We will do everything in our power to contribute to that time. You represent many thousand of organizations, and, as I am a very ardent advocate of the labor union, I am glad to be able to welcome its representatives here to-day. It was the labor union that has struck from the limbs of the workers the shackles of ignorance and misery; it was the labor union that took the young children from the wretched conditions under which they worked in factories and mills and workshops and gave them to the public schools and to God's out-of-doors; it was the labor union that demanded and secured the installation on railroads and in workshops of safety appliances, and it is the labor union that is now doing away with the slums of our cities and the awful disease-breeding sweat shops. The labor union is doing much for the men; it is raising the standard of womanhood and it is giving the children a better chance for an education. The labor union stands for order, for intelligence, for prosperity and for Christian brotherhood. The labor union has lifted the workman up to a plane which he never occupied before.

You men in your organizations need no apologists, your enemies are the common enemies of us all and they are the enemies of our government. Every advantage you have gained in the way of reduced hours of labor, better wages and better living conditions, every opportunity you have obtained for culture and refinement, all are directly traceable to the labor union, and to no other source. And it might be said that to the labor unions is due the liberty which the American people have to-day. For it is because of the constant agitation, because of the militancy of trade unions in these days of cut-throat competition that the conditions we now enjoy are preserved to us.

Gentlemen, in my humble judgment, the labor union is the greatest moral force of this age. There has been nothing done on this continent which has done more for a greater mass of people than has the labor union, since Washington and our forefathers founded this imperishable republic. (Applause.)

We are very proud to have you with

us. You men, we believe, are the heroes of organized labor. With your union cards and union labels, with your annual conventions year after year, you go forward from victory to victory for the good of us all and for the upbuilding of the race.

Mr. President, you are very welcome to the City of Pittsburgh, and I present to you the key of our great gate. (Applause.)

Mr. Drew presented to President Gompers a large key decorated with the Pittsburgh colors.

President Gompers: Mr. Drew, permit me to express the keenest appreciation of your kind words of welcome, and more than all, of your splendid tribute to the efforts of organized labor. We are accustomed to have cordial and hearty greetings and welcomes extended to us, but I think I am safe within the limits of truth when I say that at no time in a speech of welcome to a convention of the American Federation of Labor, or to any other organized body of workmen, has there been such an epitome of truth and philosophy and sound economy combined in so short a speech. In brief, it summed up the activities and the achievements of the labor movement to which, to the fullest limit of our humble abilities, we contribute our efforts. In the old past, in the days when men of labor bore their burdens and their yokes, it was an awful time, and from then to now is a wonderful stride in human progress. I can do no better to illustrate my conception of the old time than to relate the story of two boys, one of whom had an apple, and it was suggested that he divide it with his playmate. After a while he reported to his father, who asked him if he had divided the apple. He said he had, and his father asked him how he had divided it. He said: "I gave him the best part of the apple." "Well, what did you give him?" asked his father. "I gave him the seeds." And that, in the past, was typical of what the men of labor received from the industrial apple—the seeds. After all, however, by proper nurture the seeds have proven the best part of the apple; they have taken root in the hearts and minds of the workers who are growing thousands of industrial apples and are now securing a larger share, not of the best part of the apple—the seeds—but something more substantial from the apple itself.

And so the seeds of industry are spreading, so the seeds of intelligence, so the seeds of discontent with wrong conditions are spreading among the people of our country, and the organized workers give it expression. Surely we have a labor problem, surely we have labor troubles. I might quote here with a great deal of propriety the President of the United States, who a few weeks ago said: "Of course we must expect labor troubles; of course there is a labor problem; there will be, and must necessarily be, where there is labor to do. There is no labor trouble or labor problem where there is no labor to do."

We cannot expect to emerge from the dim, dark past into an enlightened present or into a still more enlightened future without paying in travail and work and application. It is the organized labor movement that is the conservator of the peace of the country, notwithstanding our great industrial development. (Applause.) We aim to do our level best in the interests of our fellow men, and although we are primarily interested with those who associate themselves with us in our movement, yet there is not one act that we can perform, there is not one expression we can make, not one movement we can inaugurate for the improvement of our members, but must have an uplifting effect upon every workman, regardless of whether he is a member or a non-member of our unions. And we shall aim to do our best to the fullest limit of whatever ability we possess.

In this City of Pittsburgh, where the American Federation of Labor was founded, there occurred a great, historic incident, of which I shall speak in my formal report. It is a great satisfaction and gratification to find this altered feeling towards us; this change from indifference to friendliness and fraternity. Pittsburgh, smoky! Yes, and so long as you are dependent upon coal for your fuel it will be smoky. Lord bless the smoke of Pittsburgh! Whilst in Porto Rico in the early part of the year I found almost continuous sunshine on the island, only darkened by the end of the day. I was speaking to our friend, Iglesias, when he showed me a specimen of coal that had been found there. Although I am not much of a judge of what constitutes coal, I could see there wasn't much hope for Porto Rico from that sort of stuff. I asked him how he would like to have the sun of Porto Rico obscured for a while by some of the smoke of Pittsburgh, and he felt so exultant as he thought that he almost prayed for it. Yes, this smoke of Pittsburgh, coming from the coal, whose flames light up the heavens, speaks of the great throbbing hearts of its men and women, and shows its splendid development. And the workmen of Pittsburgh—well, the workmen of Pittsburgh—the men who produce the wealth of the city, need not apologize for the smoke and soot. Hats off to the men who produce the wealth of the world!

I want to assure you, Mr. Drew, that you have not only presented us with the key to the city, but it is a key that has opened our hearts to you in the eloquent and manifestly sincere address of welcome you have extended to us. In behalf of this convention and the American Federation of Labor, I want to assure you that you have our gratitude, our appreciation and our well wishes.

THE POINT OF VIEW.

"Democracy," remarked Dr. Tracy, of Toronto University, "is a failure." I have heard other highly educated men utter almost the same words. But are they true? Is it true that democracy has proved a failure? The answer depends wholly on what we are to consider as failure. If by failure is meant the unrealization of the fond dreams cherished by early pioneers of popular liberty, the charge is true enough. It is clear to everyone that society has fallen short of the ideals depicted for it when into the hands of the people should be given power. The masses have their shortcomings as well as the classes, the Demos as well as the Gilded Kings. But this is a false standard wherewith to judge the success or failure of any system of government.

Maybe Dr. Tracy and thinkers like him are disgusted by the monstrous evils prevalent in the great democratic countries of the world. Maybe they forget to recall the evils prevalent under other forms of government. They are living in the very midst of these evils, and probably do not view things in the right perspective. Perhaps they hold the multitude in contempt anyway. Whatever the explanation of this charge laid at the door of democracy, the charge itself is indefensible. If democracy is a failure, what order of society has proved a success? What order of society ever recorded on the page of history has secured the greatest good for the greatest number? Have absolute monarchies, have oligarchies or the rule of the few, have aristocracies or the rule of the privileged, have timocracies or the rule of the propertyed, have democracies or the rule of the people? We assert that of all these orders of society, democracy has wrought the greatest for the greatest number. Taking the most advanced democracies of modern times as our criterion, when and where and under what other conditions, we ask, has justice been so truly administered, the material welfare of the people so good, morality so high, public order so guaranteed, progress so rapid, and the average intelligence of all classes so high? Absolute monarchies breed automatons, oligarchies breed worms, aristocracies breed serfs, timocracies breed lackeys, plutocracies breed toadies, all these breed servility and woe, but from the loins of democracy issue forth men, men with minds and souls of their own, men worthy of all that pertains to citizenship.

We do not deny that democracies have their weaknesses and unlovely aspects. We only say that democracy, as we know it, is the best commodity in the market. But democracy as we know it is not pure and unadulterated. We are democratic only in our political and social organization, and plutocratic in our industrial organization. And what does it avail us when our industrial organization is not democratic? The dominating interests are controlled by any one class, we have democracy only in name. Unless we have industrial democracy, that is, the control of all industries by the people, our boasted political liberty is an illusion. The class that controls the great money interests of a country controls its government. Is not this true in every country of the world to-day? What power have the people in the Parliament of Canada or the Congress of the United States? Do these bodies truly represent the people? No; they are the political machinery of plutocracy, and every session betrays the fact. The interests of the public are only looked after when capitalist interests are not jeopardized and political self-preservation demands it.

Society is not yet rid of humbug. The people are not yet freed from happy illusions. They still cling to shams, and think they have the real thing. Of these shams, popular government is perhaps the grossest and yet the most desirable. If there ever was a farce, representative government is one. It is played this way: Corporations or certain interested parties nominate for political office men of their own stamp, who will faithfully look after their particular interests, bring them before the public, and label them "the people's representatives," that is, the people's excellent souls they are, how they have always loved and befriended the masses in the past, and exhort them to stand by the men who have always stood by them. To make the game more lively, another set of men with another set of interests, nominate another lot of "people's representatives," present them to the public, entertain them with slinging mud at the "enemies of the people," and with many courteous words advise their hearers to stand by the men whom they can trust! The two parties dub themselves Liberal and Conservative, Republican and Democrat. Both parties are going to make