The A. F. of L. Labor Mission

The utter incompetency and reactionary character of the A. F. of L. mission to Britain, France and Italy has left a bad taste in the mouth of Anglo-French-Italian labor, which, in spite of its conservative attitude, is immeasurably in advance of the petrified bureaucracy of American "Organized Labor."

In its issue of August 10, *Collier's* says editorially:

"A friend of ours, at Paris, saw a letter from a member of the French High Commission at Washington in regard to the American 'Labor Mission'; it said, in effect: 'Send them to the Folies Bergères and dine them at the Café des Ambassadeurs, and show them something of the front, and introduce them to a few hand-picked French labor men—BUT *don't let 'em meet the French Socialists!*' This might lead one to infer that the French Government doesn't want American labor to get in touch and sympathy with French labor, or it might mean that the French representatives at Washington suspected that the aforesaid 'Labor Mission' was better adapted to *hors d'oeuvres* and pony ballets and patriotic speeches on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville than to discussion of war-labor problems with the Frenchmen who specialize in such matters."

The A. F. of L. Mission might be disposed of with this blistering characterization, were it not for the purposes animating the Mission and those who invited the Mission to Europe.

The invitation was extended by the British Government, and the Mission in England was practically a personally-conducted government tour. The members saw what they were wanted to see. They adopted an attitude that was not only self-pillorying, but that outraged French and British labor, which has suffered so much and so intensely in the war. The fact is that the A. F. of Labor Mission was used by Premier Lloyd George and Premier Clemenceau as an instrument in the offensive against labor and the Socialists, who are surely, if slowly, awak-

ening to a more independent attitude on war and peace. The A. F. of L. delegates were not interested in the terms of peace, or in problems of reconstruction; they betrayed a pitiful lack of understanding of things in general and the war in particular; they seemed unaware of, or brutally ignored the terrible agony that has come to Europe in four years of unparalleled carnage; their whole contribution was of the fire-eating variety—carry on, war to the finish! Brutality and stupidity, crowned by an assumption of superiority and complacent impudence, characterized the A. F. of L. Mission.

French and British and Italian labor, even the "patriotic" elements thereof, is beginning to realize that the governments' policy of asking labor to carry on, while the governments determine when and how the war shall end, and upon what terms, is a reactionary procedure, calculated to promote the very interests that provoked the war. European labor, hesitatingly, gropingly, unintelligently, perhaps, but none the less actually, is making up its mind that it shall not simply be cannon-fodder, but an independent force in the making of peace. This is the spirit that Lloyd and Clemenceau are afraid of, not so much because of what it is now, but because of what it may become; and so Lloyd George sends a British "Labor Mission" to this country, consisting of the most reactionary elements of British unionism; and the A. F. of L., being recognized for the reactionary force it is, is asked to send a mission to France and England, to become an instrument against awakening labor and for reaction.

The A. F. of L., in its official expression at least, is to-day precisely where European labor was during the first year of the war—supine, carried away by the impetus of the war, dickering for small advantages to be secured out of Armageddon, and accepting a General Staff ideology. The eloquent arguments of war itself have convinced labor of the stupidity of this attitude; and labor in Europe is awakening, has awakened to the point where the governments must import American reactionary labor officials in the struggle against the developing consciousness of

class. The A. F. of L. may yet become convinced of the reactionary character of its attitude by the arguments of war itself.

A most interesting and characteristic feature of this world war is the conscious use governments must make of labor and "Socialism" in order to create the psychology of "carry on!" It is simultaneously a necessary and a dangerous procedure. Necessary, since war to-day affects the whole people, must mobilize all the social, industrial and psychological forces of a nation for the prosecution of the war; dangerous, since it subtly inculcates labor with the consciousness of its necessity and power. In spite of the reactionary A. F. of L. bureaucracy, and under the dynamic impulse of the war itself, European labor will appreciate its power more and more; it will march onward toward the ideology and action of revolutionary Socialism, not retreat to the reactionary positions of the A. F. of L. *F.*

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PROGRESS BACKWARD

Ten years ago socialist sentiment within the A. F. of L. promised to become an influential factor in the life of the organization. A number of great international unions were undeniably under socialist influence, unions whose membership was largely composed of the so-called American element were electing socialist national officials and socialist delegates to A. F. of L. conventions with increasing frequency. To be sure, the delegates who held definitely socialistic views were still in the minority, a minority that could not hope for years to become a majority.

The "United Mine Workers of America," numerically the strongest of the A. F. of L. Internationals was typical of the mental upheaval of that time. More than fifty per cent. of its membership showed marked socialistic tendencies. In 1908 its convention adopted a declaration of war against the "National Civic Federation," that was essentially an attack upon Samuel Gompers and John Mitchell, the erstwhile idol of the miners. The same convention emphasized its anti-militaristic sentiment by the passage of a constitutional amendment providing for the