
Foster Would Meet Gompers in Debate:

Accepts Challenge When Chicago Amalgamation Resolution is Denounced by AF of L Chief

[event of April 19, 1922]

by Carl Haessler

Published in *The Federated Press Bulletin* [Chicago], v. 3, no. 3 (April 22, 1922), pg. 3.

CHICAGO.— Acceptance by William Z. Foster, Secretary, Trade Union Educational League, of an implied offer by Samuel Gompers, President, AF of L, to debate the question of amalgamating the various craft unions into single organizations, each of which shall cover an industry, marked the climax of a high tension conference of Chicago trade union officials at the Hotel Morrison Wednesday [April 19, 1922].

Gompers called the meeting and acted as chairman. All international officials in Chicago and all central body and local officers of the AF of L organizations were invited.

Emmet Flood, international organizer, made the purpose of the conference apparent by launching a violent attack on the amalgamation resolution which had twice passed the Chicago Federation of Labor by overwhelming majorities. He also denounced the Farmer-Labor Party activities of the Chicago body and charged that radicals and “piecard artists” had packed the organization and made functioning of regular trade unionists impossible.

Flood was seconded by Oscar Nelson, Vice President, Chicago Federation, who said he opposed the one big union and IWW-ism and believed in the autonomy of each craft.

After John H. Walker, President, Illinois Federation of Labor, had defended the political activities of labor in the Farmer-Labor Party, Foster rose to speak for the amalgamation resolution and the league.

Offers Audit of Books.

Foster challenged Flood to debate amalgamation versus craft unionism from any platform and asked Gompers to appoint an auditing committee with Flood on it to go over the books of the Trade Union Educational League.

The league was engaging in the same activities, said Foster, as similar organizations within the oldest and most conservative union, such as the printers. It was backing certain slates and urging certain programs, as had been done for many years.

Amalgamation, Foster explained, is not one big unionism, because it means a number of large unions, one in each industry. In Europe the one big union is a live issue now and amalgamation widely accepted, Foster showed, and the Chicago F of L had simply moved with the times and not in advance by adopting the amalgamation resolution. He asked Gompers to show in what way anything in the resolution was contrary to the AF of L constitution.

John Fitzpatrick, President, Chicago Federation of Labor, deplored the attacks made upon the policy of the body by trade unionists, saying they were supplying the *Chicago Tribune* and the enemies of labor with ammunition. The resolution, he said, merely asked for a conference of international unions.

Calls Foster Autocrat.

Gompers closed with an acrimonious personal attack on Foster. He excused his selection of Foster to manage the great steel strike of 1919 by saying he had not approved the calling of the strike. Foster's former membership in the IWW, his recent visit to Russia and conference there with Lenin and Trotsky were recited by Gompers, who declared: "Never in history have I

known such a self-appointed autocrat as this Foster, who discarded the IWW doctrine to return to the red mantle of sovietism.”

He asked why Foster had challenged Flood to debate amalgamation and not Gompers himself and suggested a committee of three trade unionists before whom Foster should lay his proposals.

Amid a storm of cheers and angry shouts to sit down, Foster accepted the challenge.

Gompers dismissed the conference with an admonition to everyone to preserve unity and stay inside the ranks of organized labor.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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