

Labor Herald Library  
No. 9

**Wm. F. Dunne's Speech**  
**At the A. F. of L. Convention**  
**Portland, 1923**

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Price 5 Cents

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1923

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Published by  
**The Trade Union Educational League**  
106 No. La Salle Street Chicago, Ill.

1921  
University of Texas  
Austin, Texas

University of Texas  
Austin, Texas

FOREWORD

**W**ILLIAM F. DUNNE, a regularly elected delegate of the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council, Butte, Montana, a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for almost 14 years, editor of the Butte Bulletin, a militant Labor Paper, official organ of the Butte Trades Council and Montana State Federation of Labor, was unseated at the 43rd annual convention of the American Federation of Labor held in Portland, Oregon.

No charges were preferred against him except that he was a member of the Workers (Communist) Party of America and that he had criticised officers and policies of the A. F. of L. As a matter of fact, the motion for his unseating made by Vice-President Phillip Murray of the United Mine Workers of America gives no reasons whatever for the action.

This arbitrary unseating of a regularly elected delegate from an affiliated body by the officialdom of the A. F. of L. was in violation of every principle of free speech and expression of opinion to which the A. F. of L. professed allegiance. It was carried out amid the applause of the employers' press and is shown to be a cowardly as well as a tyrannical act by reason of the long record of unswerving allegiance to the labor movement and uncompromising hostility to the oppression practiced by the great employers of labor and their government possessed by William F. Dunne. His speech in reply to his prosecutors at the A. F. of L. convention is given herewith.

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## Wm. F. Dunne's Speech at the 43rd Annual Convention of A. F. of L. Portland, Oregon, 1923

*Mr. Chairman:* This is not the first time I have faced a white-collared mob aroused to frenzy by the press of its masters and bent upon my destruction. It is not the first time that my head has been asked as the price of peace and harmony, but in the capitalist courts I am not called an enemy of the trade union movement; rather do they say that I call upon the workers to resist the attack of the employers.

I am glad that Delegate Green for the prosecution has succeeded in finding a Biblical precedent for the action you are about to take,—in the expulsion of Lucifer from Heaven. It not only aids what is a weak case, but it gives the proper religious atmosphere to a proceeding that is entirely consistent with the heresy-hunting proclivities of the officialdom of the American Federation of Labor. The accusations themselves cite only criticisms of officials of the United Mine Workers and the American Federation of Labor. The prosecution has had to stoop to interpretation, insinuation and misconstruction just as do the district attorneys of the employers; and with all this labored effort the charge simmers down to the accusation that I do not worship at the shrine of John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, William Green and the rest of the hierarchy.

This I do not deny, nor do I intend to defend myself. Before a capitalist court I would offer a defense and take advantage of every loophole, but before the lackeys of the employers, NO! Any statements I may make will be merely for the purpose of making my position clear.

The officials of the United Mine Workers are very jealous of their unspotted reputations but they do not hesitate to tell

the truth about one another during election time—even at the risk of disrupting the organization. They are very much incensed at me because I have quoted some of the accusations hurled at each other during quarrels over the good jobs—family quarrels in which much truth is told as the thieves fall out. I have not gone as deep into these matters as I might. Accustomed as I am to the smell of corruption emanating from the headquarters of international unions the stink of some of this is too much even for my strong stomach. I could have, for instance, quoted from a spicy leaflet issued by one who has undergone recently a change of heart, John H. Walker, President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. The leaflet, unfortunately for John, is like the other stuff labelled “Johnny Walker”—it cannot be put back in the bottle after it has been poured out. It is still a matter of record and as I recall it was entitled “John L. Lewis, Liar, Coward and Thief.” John began there and went up—so you can imagine about what the pamphlet was like. He has, however, been made to see these little matters in their proper perspective and doubtless now believes that these are just the kind of qualifications and characteristics that the president of the United Mine Workers of America should possess. If he has arrived at this conclusion by what is known as the rule of the preponderance of evidence he is probably quite correct.

I did not come into the trade union movement by the back door, as Mr. Frank Hodges inferred some of the reds do when he made his inspired speech. Neither did I come into the trade union movement by the back door as did Mr. Ellis Searles, editor of the United Mine Workers' Journal, the individual who is chiefly responsible for the attacks upon the radicals and who asks the cooperation of the employers in the witch-burning campaign.

I have been a trade unionist for more than 14 years and for almost that length of time an active member of the Electrical Workers' Union. My record in the labor movement has no flaws in it; my efforts have been devoted to building a

better and a stronger movement and in no single place where I have been has the trade union movement not profited by my activities. I have in my pocket now a letter from one of the international officers of the Electrical Workers thanking me for my assistance at a critical time.

The patched up story of my activities in the Pennsylvania coal fields during the 1922 strike of the miners is interesting, but incomplete. I made two speeches to miners in that district after the strike started and in both instances they came out on strike and stayed out. So far as I know there was not an organizer of the United Mine Workers then within 15 miles.

In Fayette county, Pa., where it is said, by the prosecution, communists were active, it is a matter of record that the strike there was continued weeks after an agreement, which left them to the mercy of the coal operators, had been signed and they were left flat without relief by the organization whose strike they won.

*I make a distinction, however, between you, international officers, and the membership. When I said in a speech the other night that this was not a workingclass gathering, I meant what I said. I told the truth, you know I told the truth and none of you dare deny it. Workers! Drawing the same salaries as the employers, living in the same hotels, eating the same food, belonging to the same fraternal orders, hobnobbing with them in their clubs! What do you know or care about the eternal struggle of the wage-earners except that it forces you to apologize to the bosses from time to time and disavow any radical tendencies!*

You say that I have contempt for you and you are right. I have. I know you all and I know your silly pretensions to leadership. So do the employers, and they laugh at you while using you. Even the men in the press box, upon whom you fawn, despise you while they cater to your petty vanities.

The numerical inferiority and theoretical weakness of the American labor movement constitutes a threat to the American workingclass but is nothing compared with the servility and corruption of the officialdom of most national and international unions. This condition has become so outrageous that it stinks to high heaven and makes the trade union movement at once the shame of the American workers and an object of contemptuous sneers on the part of the employers and their agents in government positions.

In Butte, we have had our share of trouble with boss-fearing and boss-loving international officers. We witnessed, during the great strike of 1917, involving more than 12,000 workers and tying up the biggest copper mining camp in the world, the spectacle of international presidents, vice-presidents and organizers, coming into a district where the wage-earners were engaged in a life and death struggle with the copper trust and going to the Sixth Floor of the Hennessy Building, the head offices of the Anaconda Mining Company, for consultation with the corporation heads before they even reported to the strike committees of their unions. We know in Butte that in this strike during which Frank Little was murdered by thugs of the copper trust and every active unionist carried his life in his hands, when an army of company gunmen co-operating with the militia patrolled the streets and manhandled men, women and children, that with one single exception, Taylor of the Machinists' Union, every international officer (and there were a dozen in Butte at the time), got his orders from the offices of the copper trust and became part of the machinery for breaking the strike.

The president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Frank J. McNulty, after trying with the aid of a conciliator from the Labor Department to break the strike of the electricians, after seeing them win all of their demands in spite of his sabotage, left Butte ostensibly to return to Springfield but was seen three weeks later at the Milwaukee depot returning from a hunting trip with Frank Kerr, Vice-

President of the Montana Power Company, a subsidiary of the A. C. M., and Frank Connelly, warden of the state penitentiary—gunman and political fixer for the copper trust.

It is in this way that you officials build up your reputations for militancy and integrity that you accuse the Communists of destroying.

Another incident from life that illustrates the devotion with which you prosecute the struggles of the wage-earners who pay your bills.

The strike of the miners was being conducted in 1917 by an independent organization that had sprung into being thru sheer necessity—the Metal Mine Workers' Union. International officials of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' Union were on the ground. The committee of the Metal Mine Workers' Union with representatives of the A. F. of L. unions held numerous conferences with Davidson, International Board Member of the Moyer organization, with the hope of effecting a permanent organization of the miners. I was present at these conferences and never have I seen officials less interested in the prospect of securing 10,000 new members without effort on their part. An agreement was finally reached to the effect that the striking miners would take a referendum on the question of joining the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers; if the vote was favorable they were to be admitted to membership.

Due to the events of 1914 the feeling against the officials of the Smelter Workers was very bitter but I need not go into that here. I knew the extent of this feeling and the justification for it—nevertheless I appeared before a special meeting of the miners and advocated their joining the Moyer organization. The day before the vote was to be taken sentiment was overwhelmingly for joining and the majority for it would have been four or five to one. That evening Davidson issued a special manifesto stating that if the miners voted to join the Smelter Workers, they must join as individuals

and not as a body; that they must go back to work and allow thirty days to elapse while the executive board considered their grievances.

The effect of this was to disgust the strikers and convince them of the treachery of the officials of the union they proposed to join. The matter of affiliation was voted down and from that time on the strike was lost altho it continued to be bitterly fought.

Here is more unanswerable proof of the disruptive and subversive character of the activities of union officials whom you accuse me of defaming. I have a ready tongue but no words come to my mind that could constitute defamation of men who in such a brazen manner serve the corporations that oppress their memberships.

I could spend the rest of the morning reciting similar incidents but to what purpose? You know your guilt better than I do and you know what I say is true. I submit that if the trade union movement is not respected and feared by the employers of this country it is not because of the acts or utterances of myself or any other communist. It is held in contempt because these employers have learned by experience that you are not fighters but traders and trucklers; that you are bluffers and when the corporations or their government cracks the whip you do their bidding and do it cheaper than the rest of their hired men.

Why, during the war, the cheapest spies the imperialists had were the trade union officials who turned in their own members to the corporation-owned department of justice. Some of you are now ashamed of the role you played but the most of you are too ignorant or too callous to be ashamed.

No, I have not defamed your characters; I could not even tho I would.

Sam Gompers, head and shoulders above 90 per cent of you intellectually, also despises you, yet he is more to blame than any of you for the present pitiable situation in which American labor finds itself—forced to beg for favors and continually excusing itself for being here at all. Gompers understands you; he knows your prejudices and your ignorances, your preferences and your idiosyncracies, and he plays upon them as a violinist does upon his instrument. He wants no intelligent leadership and he sees that none develops.

*Ignorance, I said. What do you men who shape the policies of labor know of the great struggle of labor that made history? What do you know of the composition of the capitalist system and its contradictions? Men who would be leaders of the workers owe it as a duty to the workers to inform themselves, but this duty you have neglected until it would be difficult to find a gathering in any capitalist nation where the average of intelligence is so low.*

I have, since I have been in this convention, seen international officers take the platform and boast of the revocation of charters, but I have heard no boasting of new unions organized. Do you realize that only about one-seventh of the wage-earners of this great nation are members of organized labor and that the percentage of the organized to the total number of wage-earners is growing smaller all the time? Yet you call yourselves labor leaders and you strut and swank about the convention hall as though you had capitalism by the throat. The standard of living of the American workers is decreasing—as any economist worth his salt knows. It is decreasing despite the remarks of Mr. Hodges concerning the wonderful conditions enjoyed by the wage-earners and for which he gave you credit.

*I would like to inform Mr. Hodges that the standard of living of the American workers is not the standard of living at the Vancouver and Multnomah Hotels, where he has been stopping during the three weeks he has been on this continent.*

*That is the standard of living of the officialdom of the American labor movement, but it has no relation to the standard of the dues-paying membership any more than the luxuries of the employing class have.*

*Mr. Hodges was trained in the Marxian school and he should know that objective conditions have much more to do with determining living standards than have the efforts of any labor organization, even though it be one with understanding and militancy which is lacking here.*

Speaking as a Communist since the issue has been raised although I came here as a trade unionist and not as a Communist, I understand the real reasons for the effort you are now making. You want to prove to the employers that you are more conservative than they are, that you love the wage system even more ardently than they do. You have succeeded already in gaining a good deal of immunity for yourselves, but this immunity does not extend to the organizations you are supposed to represent. In that the employers and we Communists think alike. They, too, make a distinction between a high-salaried officialdom and the working class. In six months time these same papers that are now lauding you for your determined efforts to cast the Communist into the outer darkness will be denouncing your organization just as bitterly as you now denounce me. Seeking to placate the employers you have bored from within their organizations, but you have captured nothing but jewel-studded lodge charms. You may save yourselves but you cannot save the unions unless you change your policies.

*Your attitude is well illustrated by an incident that occurred yesterday, and is a tribute to the success of the most studied attempt I have ever seen at a labor convention to eliminate everything of a workingclass character. Two workingmen were watching Mr. Gompers climb into his limousine in front of the auditorium. The slave who drives the car held them up and searched them because they looked like working-*

*men, therefore were suspicious characters. They did not fit into the setting.*

There is another reason for your desire to unseat me. You want to intimidate the supporters of amalgamation and a labor party because these two proposals are a threat to your privileged positions. You hide your opposition to these measures behind your alleged devotion to evolutionary progress. What you mean by evolutionary progress is that you fight all progressive measures with all your might, but when they are accepted in spite of you, you claim credit for the improvement.

We Communists do not care much for academic principles. We realize that only through organization can be obtained those things that make for progress, and the A. F. of L. is a living—partially living at least—example of the truth of our beliefs. Could an academic desire for higher wages and shorter hours achieve results there would be no trade-union movement to day. So it is with amalgamation, for instance. Those who see the need for industrial unionism as an improved weapon for the wage-earners must organize and work to bring it into being. In this work they encounter the opposition of those who are ignorantly opposed and of those who have privileges to protect as you have. We expect this opposition and if for years I had been holding a job in the trade-union movement that paid me five to ten times what I could earn in any other occupation it is possible that I would also be opposed to amalgamation. It is here that we see clearly the diversity of interest between the membership and officialdom.

The same is true of the labor party idea. We have a centralized government and a working class that is more homogeneous than ever before. In spite of your sabotage, labor parties are springing up in the various states and the class issue on the parliamentary field is becoming clearer. But you lovers of evolutionary progress can not see the unique fact

that quite often evolution may take no account of your petty prejudices.

Evolution may not care at all that it deprives you of the pleasure and profit of peddling your influence for the benefit of one or the other of the parties of the employers.

*You seem to believe that capitalism is in its heyday; we do not; we say that this is the twilight of capitalism and unless the labor movement changes its politics and tactics it is going to be caught and dragged down in the general chaos that capitalism is bringing in the train of its collapse. We have enjoyed one short year of capitalist prosperity following a two-year period of terrible unemployment and suffering. We now are about to enter another period of depression whose duration no one dare predict. What of the labor movement? Has it recouped the losses sustained in 1920-21? You know it has not. It will face another open-shop drive with less confidence than ever before. What is your answer to this? A war upon the radicals in co-operation with the department of justice, an appeal for aid from the employers in this holy cause; but it will put no food in the mouths of the unemployed—although I am sure that the Michigan prosecutor will be pleased to hear you take the same attitude toward me that he does.*

All over the world it is now a race between the organization and growth of consciousness among the workers, and chaos. You accuse us of looking with disfavor upon constitutional action. We do not, but we realize its limitations. I ask you now: If after you have exhausted all constitutional possibilities and the workers still starve by the millions, what then?

In closing let me say that no matter what you do here, I shall continue in the path I have chosen and to fight for what I believe to be right. I have no fear of the outcome because I fight with a knowledge of the lessons of history and on the side of evolution. You fight ignorantly and against the evolutionary processes you pretend to adore.

#### ANSWERS QUESTIONS AFTER SPEECH

*Delegate Green:* I would like to ask the delegate if he believes that President Lewis delivered the miners to the employers as is charged in this article in the Butte Bulletin?

*Delegate Dunne:* Please find and read the statement you refer to.

*Delegate Green:* Does the delegate believe that statement?

*Delegate Dunne:* When you find that statement and read it to me I will answer (Green could not find the statement. It was not there.)

*Delegate Green:* Does the delegate believe that the officials of the United Mine Workers acted as hangmen and informers for the employers as he stated in his report of his speech last night?

*Delegate Dunne:* I am literate and I understand the English language. If the articles sponsored by John L. Lewis and published in the capitalist press in which he accuses 66 Lithuanian miners of the Herrin shooting, after an acquittal by a jury, are not an attempt to turn members of his organization over to the gallows, what are they?

*Delegate Green:* Do you believe those stories of bribes published in the Butte Bulletin.

*Delegate Dunne:* I call the attention of Delegate Green and the convention to the fact that these charges of bribery are not made by me but were made against one another by two responsible officials of the United Mine Workers. I am interested only in discovering how far these men will go to keep their jobs.

*Delegate Green:* Do you charge that the United Mine Workers officials asked aid of the employers?

*Delegate Dunne:* I do not have to make the charge. It is there under their signature in the last paragraph of the fifth article.



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*A Constructive, Militant  
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WM. Z. FOSTER, Editor

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Subscription \$1.50 per year

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**Trade Union Educational  
League**

106 N. La Salle St.

Chicago, Illinois