
Cheer Plea to Impeach Wilson:

President Scored by Congressman at Freedom Meeting: Convention Elects Immediate Action Committee to Organize Machinery for Carrying Propaganda for Amnesty and Restoration of Civil Rights to All Parts of Nation: Statement of Principles is Adopted.

by H. Austin Simons

Published in the *Milwaukee Leader*, v. 8, no. 250 (Sept. 29, 1919), pp. 1, 2.

CHICAGO. — Three thousand persons rose to their feet and cheered for 3 minutes Sunday night [Sept. 28, 1919] when Congressman William E. Mason, Illinois, speaking before the American Freedom Convention, said:

“We are sending our boys to Silesia and to the Rhine to act as policemen. Our boys are in Silesia as guards for railways in which Rockefeller owns \$400 million of stock. Those boys have to come out. There are only two ways in which Congress can get them out. One is by refusing to vote appropriations for their supplies, but if that were done the boys would suffer. The only other resource Congress has is to impeach the President. I would 10,000 rather do this myself than vote against appropriations. In my opinion Wilson stands impeached because he has changed the form of our government from a republic to a monarchy.”

“If present conditions are allowed to go on, if compulsory service becomes a law,” he continued, “Wilson will have an army of 1 million boys to send wherever he wants.”

The League of Nations was assailed by Mason as a league to promote war, not to prevent it.

“That is why Congress will vote for it,” he continued. “Congress voted for the last war; it will

vote for the next, whether it is in Mexico, Japan, or elsewhere.”

Speaks for India.

Robert Morse Lovett, Chicago, spoke in behalf of India, saying that it is only against India that we violate our tradition that America is an asylum for the oppressed.

Lovett...scored the government for violating the American tradition of offering asylum for the political refugees of other lands. He assailed the deportation of Hindu revolutionists at the behest of the British government.

Pick Organization Body.

The convention voted to establish the American Freedom League to carry on propaganda for amnesty and the restoration of civil rights. The league will have a national committee composed of a representative of every state in the union. William E. Quick, Milwaukee, was chosen to represent Wisconsin. The work of choosing the National Committee and completing organization work is in the hands of the Immediate Action Committee, composed of the following: James

Mahlon Barnes, Robert M. Buck, H. Austin Simons, Mary O'Reilly, Mrs. Lenetta M. Cooper, G.T. Fraenckel, and T.J. Neary, all of Chicago. Headquarters of the league will be here.

Resolutions Adopted.

The convention adopted resolutions against the League of Nations, for the freedom of Ireland, for the restoration of 2nd class mail rights to papers deprived of them during the war, against the deportation of Hindu revolutionists, against the efforts of the State Department to foment war with Mexico, against pogroms, for the withdrawal of troops from Siberia, and for immediate resumption of trade and diplomatic relations with Russia.

The following statement of principles was adopted by the convention:

Democracy Wiped Out.

Democracy no longer exists in the United States. One by one, the rights of a free people have been stripped from us until our government is a republic in name only.

Under the alleged necessities of war:

(1) A conscription system has been fastened upon this country and it is the intention of the junkers of the War Department, the incompetents in Congress, and our real rulers in Wall Street that this conscription system shall be a permanent institution and a vital part of the new and strange "Americanism" that is now agitated by the labor-fighting employers and the prostitute press they control.

(2) The right of free speech, and the expression of a free minority have been abrogated. A reign of terror has been established; under the joint auspices of an Attorney General whose pride is in the ruthlessness of his application of the iron heel to opponents of the private owners of industry, and a Postmaster General whose conceptions of human liberty are those of a chattel slave owner.

(3) The right of a free press was swept away, and second class mailing privileges were used by the Post Office department as weapons to suppress in newspapers and other publications, criticism of the President of the United States and his administration. Other means were devised of loading hardship after hardship on newspapers that dared express disapproval of the course of the government and big

business. These included such methods as interference with their incoming and outgoing mail, dragging their editors and business managers before inquisitors who pried into their subscription lists and other business affairs, and (in the case of foreign language newspapers) causing them to undertake the expense of filing translations of their issues with the government. It is now even proposed to order certain of these foreign language newspapers to publish in English exclusively or not at all. This means their suppression.

(4) The right of freedom of conscience or religious belief — that formed the mainspring of the movement of early settlers in the colonies which preceded this government — was thrown into the scrap heap by the sword-rattling gentlemen who directed the preparations for and conduct of our participation in the war.

(5) Under the terms of the new alliances made by our government with imperialist foreign states, the right of asylum for the oppressed of other lands (one of the most sacred of American doctrines) has been uprooted from American soil. At the behest of Great Britain, political refugees from India, after being imprisoned in our penitentiaries, are now under order to be deported to India, where British officers will execute them upon their arrival. Large numbers of foreign-born persons who have come to this country from many lands are being deported because of their activity in organizing workers into labor unions, participating in strikes, or for political activity against the continued domination of our government by the private owners of industry.

Furthermore, during the war it was brought forcibly to our attention that there exists in our army a court-martial system that is a relic of past centuries — more Prussian than that of Prussia.

These abuses did not die when the war ended. The vicious and un-American Espionage Act, upon the constitutionality of which the Supreme Court has not yet had the courage to pass, is still in force on the technical ground that the war is not yet ended. A new and more vicious peacetime Espionage Act is contemplated and drafts of such an act are now pending before Congress.

The various states, not to be outdone in the orgy of repression that began during the war, have passed sundry measures, ranging from so-called criminal syndicalist laws to search and seizure and state constabulary acts. All these are designed to suppress the activity of groups or individuals who oppose exploitation by the private owners of industry, whether they function through labor unions, political organizations, newspapers, or from the pulpit or platform.

In Pennsylvania, the state authorities invoked an

act passed in 1794 to forbid the organizers of the American Federation of Labor from holding meetings or making speeches to organize the workers in the steel industry. This circumstance, more than any other, proves conclusively that the present reign of terror in the United States is not directed at radicals or revolutionists, except as a first step. As soon as a background of public opinion is established, the government, doing the bidding of Wall Street, is ready to assist in the disruption of the labor movement and any other force that interposes itself between the private owners of industry and the swollen profits they are reaching out for.

As a result of these unconstitutional and un-American laws and practices, hundreds of citizens are in the federal and state prisons of the United States charged with offenses that our forefathers never dreamed would be considered offenses in this country. For these political, industrial, religious, and military "offenses" they have had inflicted upon them prison terms as long as 50 years. Not only is this true, but these prisoners have been so inhumanly treated while in our prisons that many have died and others have lost their reason. Not one of them is a person of great wealth or power. All are workers, or those who have cast their lot with the struggle of the workers.

If this situation is permitted to continue in the United States, no one will be safe except the exploiters of industry.

So long as Tom Mooney is in prison no labor union organizer will be secure in exercising the right peacefully to induce workers to join unions.

So long as Eugene V. Debs is in the penitentiary, no person will be safe to exercise the right of express disapproval of the actions of utterances of men in power in the government or in industry.

So long as Victor L. Berger is deprived of his seat in Congress and faces imprisonment, the people of the United States have no assurance that the men they will elect to legislative councils to undo the tyranny that has been imposed upon us will be permitted to take their seat.

So long as the conscientious objectors to conscripted military service are within the walls of confinement, no person can hold his conscientious scruples or his religious beliefs to be his private affair, not will he be sure in his ability to follow the dictates of his conscience.

So long as the vicious repressive laws denying free speech, free press, and free assemblage in the United States are on the books; so long as the steel trust barons are permitted to forbid steel workers peaceably to assemble for organization into unions; so long as there is danger of a settled policy of conscription for military service; so long as our Prussian court-martial system exists — so long will

democracy continue to be dead in the United States and our government will be a republic only in name.

Therefore, the American Freedom Convention (consisting of 250 delegates authorized and accredited to represent organizations comprising more than 1,500,000 in membership) assembled at Chicago for the purpose of devising ways and means for the reestablishment and maintenance of American political and civil rights — free speech, free press, and free assemblage — and for the immediate release of all persons prosecuted or in prison for political opinions, industrial activities, or religious beliefs, dedicates itself to conduct a vigorous propaganda to awaken the labor movement, those political parties not dominated by the private owners of industry, civic, and religious organizations interested in the preservation of human freedom and other groups and individuals, to the manner in which American freedom has been destroyed and the terrible significance of that fact for every liberty-loving person.

The American Freedom Convention further pledges itself to urge in this propaganda the utter futility of merely petitioning Congress or passing resolutions or begging those who should be servants of the people to be loyal to the people, when their bread and butter depends upon their betraying the people in favor of private owners of industry; and that, instead, all elements of the population that love freedom proceed with all possible speed to organize in such a way that, if the usurpers of tyrannical power do not heed the will of the people represented in this convention, effective means may be invoked to compel them to do so.

The American Freedom Convention further urges all constituent organizations to exert every possibility in financial, moral, and active support of this fight for liberty and help to interest other organizations to the end that the second American Freedom Convention, when held next year, may be of such magnitude as to be a warning to the tyrants in authority of its growing power, determination, and intolerance of delay.

Mrs. Berger Urges Action.

Proposals that mothers of conscientious objectors and other women interested in those convicted under the Espionage and Draft Acts go to Washington and stage a militant demonstration were made by Mrs. Meta L. Berger of Milwaukee Saturday night [Sept. 27, 1919] at a banquet of delegates to the American Freedom Convention.

"Prohibition was put on the map when Carrie Nation went out and smashed windows," she

said. "Suffrage was given to women when they went to Washington and caused a demonstration that demanded the attention of the daily press. Amnesty will not become a popular issue until the women of the country act. They must act in a way that will get national publicity and that will be extremely distasteful to the authorities at Washington."

The same suggestion was made by Mrs. Alice Dow Allinson, Chicago, mother of Brent Dow Allinson, conscientious objector now in Leavenworth.

Jail Makes Radicals.

Rena Mooney, wife of Thomas J. Mooney, declared that government operatives are still trying to bribe Weinberg and others involved in the Mooney case to get them to change their testimony so that it will operate against the men unjustly convicted.

"I never enjoy eating at a banquet because I know that Tom lives on beans," she remarked.

"It would be a good thing if a bunch of these people would be sent to jail," said Roger N. Baldwin, New York, recently released conscientious objector. "It would cure them of their liberalism

and make radicals of them. Our prisons today have become schools for revolution."

How this has become the fact was related by H. Austin Simons, Chicago, another conscientious objector who served 18 months at Leavenworth.

"We had a school for radicals in the disciplinary barracks," he said. "And out at Alcatraz military prison other objectors have charge of certain classes of the prison school in which they teach the economic interpretation of history and geography.

Urges Aid for Prisoners.

Winnie Branstetter, representing the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, asked the support of the convention for the Prison Comfort Club, a national organization of women of the Socialist Party and other organizations whose purpose is to supply necessities to the class-war prisoners and their families.

Two voices — those of the wife and child — represented Erling H. Lunde, conscientious objector imprisoned at Fort Douglas. While Mrs. Lunde addressed the delegates, Harold Lunde, born since his father went to prison, lay on a blanket on the floor and kicked his heels.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.