

TWO CONVENTIONS

By TOM JOHNSON.

THE Alabama State Federation of Labor opened its 28th annual convention at Tuscaloosa, Ala. on May 12. The Trade Union Unity League will call to order its first southern conference in Chattanooga, Tenn. on June 8. It will be interesting to compare the convention of the State Federation, its compositions and results with the conference of the Trade Union Unity League.

The Birmingham "Labor Advocate," fascist labor sheet supreme, characterizes the convention as the "stormiest session ever held by the State Federation since its organization." The convention lasted from May 12 until 2 a. m. the morning of May 15. Even according to the "Labor Advocate" nothing was accomplished. Almost the entire time of the convention was spent in squabbles over the removal of President Hurst and Secretary Griffen on the charge of "borrowing \$1,000 from one of the largest printing concerns in the state, without the knowledge of the other Federation officials. This pair of worthy thieves were finally kicked out by the convention.

Their "Good Friend."

The convention was opened by the president of the Tuscaloosa Central Body, who promptly turned the chair over to a "good friend" of labor in the person of Mr. Norfleet Harris, the president of the Tuscaloosa City Commission! The next speaker was another "good friend of labor," ex-Governor William W. Brandon. The present Governor of Alabama, Col. Bibb Graves, was invited but failed to put in an appearance until the second day of the convention, when he, too, spoke. This is the same Graves who in 1920 commanded the State Militia which succeeded after a bitter struggle and after the murder of several miners, in smashing the 1920 coal miners strike in Alabama.

The credentials committee reported the second day of the convention and the fight started. In the first place some of the more naive delegates were opposed to the seating of the delegation of the Mobile Street Carriers Union on the ground that this organization had last year built a new hall and headquarters with non-union labor. This matter was finally referred to the national headquarters of the A. F. of L. at Washington. Bill Green promptly wired the convention that such a little thing as one A. F. of L. union scabbing on another should under no circumstances cause the unseating of delegates, and the Mobile delegates resumed their places in the convention.

The second fight centered around the person of one J. L. Clemo, former Secretary of District 20 (Alabama) of the United Mine Workers of America. Mr. Clemo, with the able assistance of Van Bitner, of West Virginia fame, sold out the 1920 strike of the miners. This no one disputes. Since this time it has been common knowledge that Clemo is on the pay roll of the Alabama coal operators, ready to smash any new efforts of the miners to organize. Clemo showed up at the convention representing himself as a "delegate" from District 20 of the U.M.W.A. In the credentials com-

mittee several facts were revealed. First that Clemo was expelled from the U.M.W.A. following the 1920 sell out. Second that there is not a single local of the U.M.W.A. in Alabama today, and no district organization to send Clemo as a delegate. Third that it is common knowledge that Clemo is a labor spy. After these facts had been aired the convention voted to seat Clemo!

Jim Crow.

The convention was made up of some 275 delegates. Of these 20 were Negroes from the Longshoremens Union and a couple from locals of the Plasterers Union. Some 10 women were present. The Negro delegates were of course segregated from the others in true Jim Crow fashion. The delegates present were almost exclusively from the highly skilled trades. The textile workers had a negligible delegation. There was not one delegate to represent the 20 odd thousand steel workers in the state. Not one to represent the thousands of coal and metal miners. In other word it was a typical A. F. of L. convention.

The convention had not one word to say about the recent wave of lynchings that has swept the South. Not one word to say about the terrible social and political oppression of the Negro workers. From start to finish it was a Jim Crow convention.

As to the organization of the unorganized workers, the keynote of the convention was sounded by Paul Smith, one of the worst scoundrels in the entire labor movement and at present chairman of the Southern organization campaign of the A. F. of L. in his speech on the results of the campaign. Smith said: "We have come here on the invitation of the Southern workers (read bosses—T.J.) to help them. We realize that we must help the employers of labor if the workers are to be benefitted and we are anxious to be of assistance. . . . We have made considerable headway in our organization campaign, but the employers, some of them at least, are unfavorable to us, though why I don't know." Such was the convention of the Alabama State Federation of Labor.

Quite Another Matter.

The coming Southern Conference of the Trade Union Unity League will be quite another matter. There will be no ex-Governors or present governors with the blood of working class victims still on their hands, to welcome this conference. This will be a conference of workers, direct from the bench and the face in the mines. The largest delegation will be from textile, next will come metal, and after metal, mining. The overwhelming majority of the delegates will be Negroes.

Far from being welcomed by the bosses and high officials of the state, the T.U.U.L. Conference will meet in an atmosphere of raging white terror. It may be broken up by the police. It may have to meet underground. But it will meet and lay the basis for the building up the revolutionary unions into the mass organizations of the Negro and white workers of the South.