
Resolution of Micrometer Lodge 460, IAM, to Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson and His Reply [February 18, 1919]

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A letter written by Secretary of Labor Wilson, which was made public yesterday [Feb. 18, 1919], reveals the fact that Micrometer Lodge 460, International Association of Machinists, with headquarters at 5 Court Square, Brooklyn, recently adopted a resolution protesting against the deportation of the 54 aliens gathered in the West and now held at Ellis Island.† The resolution was sent to Secretary Wilson and brought forth his reply in which he declares that any foreigner who advocates the overthrow of our country is an invading enemy and is treated with leniency when he is deported.

The resolution, which drew the sharp reply from Secretary Wilson, is as follows:

We, the members of the Micrometer Lodge 460, International Association of Machinists, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, in meeting assembled, Feb. 14, 1919, at 5 Court Square, Brooklyn, NY, do most emphatically raise our voices against the intention of the authorities to deport the 54 alien radicals without due process of law.

Such a shameful act strikes right at the root of American institutions, namely, the right of a minority to express an opinion. We hold that to exercise this right is no crime, and if these people have committed a crime they are entitled to a just trial.

The capitalist class interprets every move of labor to obtain its just share as a crime. Remember the time

when you were a miner! You surely cannot approve of this shameful act. You cannot act as a tool of the enemies of labor. Organized labor will not tolerate this act.

Secretary Wilson, in his letter, said:

It is my intention as Secretary of Labor, now that the unusual danger of sea travel is over, to carry out the clear provisions of the law; first, because it is my sworn duty to do so, and second, because any foreigner who comes to this country and advocates the overthrow of our form of government by force is an invading enemy, who is treated with great leniency when he is simply deported to the land from which he came.

When our own citizens desire to change the form of government they can do so peaceably in the manner provided by the Constitution. If we cannot make progress by the peaceable process by discussing and voting, we are not liable to make any progress by the riotous process of “cussing and shouting.” The man who cannot be depended upon to vote right cannot be depended upon to shoot right.

Those you refer to as radicals are being sent out of this country because they have been found advocating the overthrow of our Government by force. They have had every possible opportunity, both at the places they were originally arrested some time ago and at the department [of Labor] in Washington to defend themselves against the charges made under the immigration law.

All were freely granted the privilege of counsel. Some accepted it; others declined; but all, irrespective of whether or not they employed counsel, were treated fairly, as the department never acts or allows any of its officials to act

†— Reference is to a group of IWW members previously warehoused in jail in the Western states along with other radicals gathered up in the aftermath of the failed Seattle General Strike of February 1919 and publicly transported under armed guard across the country by train for deportation. There were actually a total of 58 prisoners held together for deportation, but a list of 54 of these appeared in the *New York Times* issue of Feb. 12, 1919, pg. 9. The published list of formal reasons for deportation of the so-called “Alien Agitators” and “Defiant Reds” included such utilitarian catchalls as “morally unfit” and “person likely to become a public charge at his time of entry.” The anti-Russian aspect of this operation seems to have been greatly exaggerated by the contemporary press, as very few of the published surnames indicate Russian ethnicity, with Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon names predominating. The chief “crimes” of the majority seems to have been membership in the Industrial Workers of the World or arrest by the authorities during the Seattle General Strike.

as prosecutors, but simply as an agency to ascertain the truth. The right to resort to the courts was not denied to any of the aliens. Some of them availed themselves of the opportunity. Most of them preferred to abide by the department's decision.

A. Zahn, Secretary of Micrometer Lodge, said yesterday that his organization meant to fight to the last the deportations. When told that there had been considerable difficulty in locating the address of his organization through the American Federation of Labor, with which the lodge in its resolution had represented itself as affiliated, Mr. Zahn said that the American Federation of Labor did not recognize the lodge.

“While we are affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, it is only through our international organization,” said Mr. Zahn. “We have nothing in common with it. We do not approve of Mr. Gompers, and we are not recognized by the American Federation of Labor. But we shall continue to fight such injustice as Secretary Wilson practices. We believe the men now at Ellis Island are there solely because they belong to the IWW, and we also have evidence that very few of them are Russians. They are for the most part British and Canadian subjects.”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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