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SIGMAN'S CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE IN ACTION

Late Developments in the Needle Trades

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THE two needle trades conventions held in the month of May demonstrated clearly to the workers in the industry the treachery of the leadership of those unions and the semi-company union form and Fascist characteristics the unions assume under their present domination.

The Sigman convention in Boston, May 7, was eighteen months after his open betrayal at the time of the cloakmakers' strike when he signed agreements with the manufacturers over the heads of the regularly constituted organization, giving up all of the demands of the cloakmakers, suspending the Joint Board and local unions that were leading the strike, and attempting with the assistance of the manufacturers to force the workers to register in a union of his domination.

This betrayal by Sigman which resulted in an eighteen months' struggle, with the main base of his support resting on the manufacturers, who turned over the half million dollars of the workers' unemployment fund, and gained additional financial support from the "Forward" and Socialist Party, did not result in the establishment of his leadership or dominance over the workers in the industry or the union nationally.

During the entire struggle to maintain a semblance of union conditions in the shops for which the workers had struck for five months, the suspended joint board and local unions had the ideological leadership and confidence of the masses although many were compelled through hunger, which Sigman was able to wield as a weapon, as

a result of his collaboration with the manufacturers, to register with his union.

These workers compelled to register with the Sigman union by the manufacturers, never submitted to his regime, and as soon as the registered locals met, they organized what is now known as the "Tolerance Group" and began, at first weakly, and later as they grew, a stronger agitation for the unity of all elements in the union demanding of Sigman that he bring it about.

With the aid of the manufacturers Sigman also succeeded in suspending and reorganizing the Chicago Joint Board and compelling many workers to register with his union.

Local 41, one of the independent organizations, not affiliated with the New York Joint Board, was another of the intended victims of the Sigman gang. While negotiating with the manufacturers, for the renewal of their agreement, Sigman attempted to intervene and reorganize and sign over the heads of the left wing officials, but these workers had the experience of the other interventions of Sigman and had no illusions as to its meaning. The resulting strike against the manufacturers and Sigman left them in control of most of their shops.

Demand For Unity

In many locals nationally Sigman succeeded in establishing his agents in control through hundreds of expulsions, strong-arm methods, and support of the manufacturers. But the workers generally found means of expressing their demand for the establishment of a union that should function in their interest and it generally took the form of a demand on Sigman to readmit all elements in the organization and to reestablish the New York and Chicago Joint Boards and other suspended locals.

These demands on Sigman took many forms: in one form they were voiced by the Sigman Local 8, demanding of their joint board through a resolution to fight at the convention for the readmission of all elements, even the Communists; another was from the registered workers under the leadership of the "Tolerance Group" who sent a delegation to the convention with the same demand. The shop chairman and shop representatives of the New York shops met at the call of the committee of fifty under the leadership of Shelley, and elected a delegation to the convention to demand unity. The workers who were sentenced to prison for strike activity sent a delegation with the same demand. Candidates removed from the ballot by Sigman because of their struggle for unity of their organization, ap-

pealed to the convention. Of course, the suspended Chicago and New York Joint Board, and the other suspended locals asked to be seated at the convention. The overwhelming majority of the membership appealed to Sigman to readmit them to the union.

Call In Police

The delegation of the New York and Chicago Joint Boards who came to the convention, found the Payne Memorial Hall barricaded and surrounded by a cordon of police and their credentials which were submitted in advance, were consigned officially to the waste-paper basket. Later the same fate was meted out to all other delegations who came to plead for the unity of the organization.

After the rejection of their credentials, the New York and Chicago joint boards met and decided to address a communication to the convention pointing out the effect of the activity of Sigman on the conditions of the workers in the shops and the necessity of reestablishing the organization, and calling on all elements who really desire unity, to meet in conference immediately in Boston.

The response to this call resulted in a conference that was truly representative of the mass of workers in the industry. The struggle in the Sigman convention for a division of the spoils between Sigman and Schlessinger and the speeches delivered, especially by the editor of the "Forward", Cahan, who boasted how he dictated to his stenographer the expulsion order, clarified the situation for those who had any illusions about the possibilities of reestablishing the union under the leadership of Sigman or Schlessinger.

The main tasks confronting this conference were the re-establishment of the union, which has been destroyed by the treachery of Sigman; the organization of the mass of unorganized workers, and the restatement of the economic program of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union which has been discarded by Sigman.

While the conference was dealing with these tasks they received additions from the Sigman convention of more locals' delegations that were not seated and delegations which refused to go along further with the Sigman policies.

The conference decided to immediately proceed with the organization of the scattered forces of the union, launch a campaign for the organization of the mass of unorganized workers, and elected a "National Organization Committee" for the reestablishment of the I. L. G. W. U.,

representative of all centers in the industry.

This action opens a new page in the history of the struggles of the needle workers and is a good augury for the future.

"Our Amalgamated"

With an average wage much lower than the rest of the needle workers, with terrorisation of the workers comparable only to the Fascist union in Italy, with hundreds of militant workers expelled from the union and deprived of a livelihood, with speed-up shortening the lives of the workers, with reorganizations to "maintain" the manufacturers in business" throwing thousands out of employment, with the union disrupted in New York, Rochester, Montreal, Toronto, etc., Hillman, surrounded on the platform by his ideologists and sycophants, opened the convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in Cincinnati May 14, to boast of his accomplishments for the industry.

The hand-picked delegation surrounded by "guests" who were their business agents and managers at home, did not at first respond enthusiastically to Hillman's exhortations about their "responsibility to the industry". It was necessary Tuesday morning, the second day of the convention, to give a breakfast-banquet to the Chicago delegation and "guests" and there inform them of their duties, and furnish them with gavels, hammers, whistles, and automobile horns with which to supply the proper enthusiasm. Under the cloak of the resulting din, which the Cincinnati local papers described as "bedlam broke loose" the major decisions affecting the lives of the clothing workers were smuggled through without discussion, and the outstanding characteristic of the convention was the artificial enthusiasm created by the rattles and other instruments furnished.

The report of G. E. B. to the convention can compare very favorably with the propaganda of the Allies or the Entente during the World War in forgetting the facts

The speeches of Leiserson, Squires, and the rest of the impartial chairmen who really guide the policies of the organization called for the organization of the unorganized markets, as that would enable them to peacefully adjust all of the differences between the manufacturers and the Union. Naive, if nothing else!

This competitive industry is divided into: on the one hand, large production which has its principal centers in Chicago and Rochester; and on the other, small manufacturing plants, spread

all over the country and 100% organization of the workers will not bridge the difference in the cost of production between them and help to peacefully adjust the difference. There is no peaceful adjustment possible and Hillman's attempts were based on war against the workers—first, to maintain the small manufacturers in business by reduction in wages, speed-up, and reorganization; and second, to lower the conditions of the workers in the large plants to those of the workers in the small plants. A very efficient agent for all the manufacturers! For the workers, Hillman's peace means degradation, and the problem for the clothing workers is therefore how to rid themselves of the agents of the bosses and establish a union that will defend their interests. As far as the bosses are concerned, let dog eat dog!

The convention was also blessed with a galaxy of talent from the Socialist party: Pankin who pointed out some problems confronting labor without offering any solution for them; Vladek, \$15,000 manager of the "Forward", who in a poetic speech lauded Hillman's accomplishments and policies by saying "the establishment of one labor bank is worth more than all the volumes of Marx and Lenin".

Reason For The Noise

Under the noise of these demonstrations resolutions for the abolition of piece work, against speed-up, and appeals against expulsions were rejected. The demand for the establishment of the 40-hour week was referred to the G. E. B.

A demonstration against Fascism in Italy and its influence on the labor movement in the United States led by the Italian delegation, was the only sincere note in the convention; since this does not disturb Hillman's power to sell the workers, it is utilized by him to cover the Fascist character of his own acts.

The convention ended with the distribution of honors in the form of demonstration—some noisier than others—to all the sycophants and time-servers of Hillman. But what of the workers? They are now confronted with the same terror of Hillman as before the convention, which can only be broken down through efforts for solidarity among the workers in the industry.

What of the disrupted union in New York and the other centers? What of the unorganized workers? Shall they again come under Hillman's heel? The workers in the clothing industry are confronted with a situation which united and heroic action, compatible with the traditions of the workers in this industry, can easily overcome.