

What About the Needle Trades?

by Ben Gitlow

(continued from last issue)

NO wonder the manufacturers were jubilant as reported in the *Women's Wear* on Feb. 5, 1930:

- *"The Association of Dress Manufacturers had an enthusiastic meeting at the Hotel New Yorker last night. Some 700 contractors attended. They were given strict orders to keep their shops closed until such time as the conference committee gives word to return to work."*

Mr. Schwartz, president of the Affiliated Dress Manufacturers, Inc., let the cat out of the bag that the dress strike was called for the bosses' interests when he issued this statement in *Women's Wear* of Feb. 7th:

"Our organization was formed scarcely two months ago (that is for the dress strike—B.G.) for the purpose of fostering stabilization in our chaotic industry."

A complete agreement between Schlessinger, president of the union and Schwartz, president of the manufacturers, to call the dress strike for the purpose of stabilizing and ending the chaos in the industry.

The recent so-called dress strike was not a strike at all. It was called by the right wing bureaucrats in agreement with the certain sections of the bosses, not to improve the economic conditions of the workers but primarily to rationalize the industry further and thus increase the exploitation of the workers.

This is proven by the statement issued by the union itself after it held two conferences, one with the Affiliated Dress Mfg. Ass'n, Inc. and one with the Wholesale Dress Manufacturers Association, composed of the jobbers. The statement is from the Nov. 22 issue of *Justice*, official organ of the right wing. It is as follows:

"The result of both of these conferences was an agreement by the employers to follow the example of the inside manufacturers and participate in the appointment of a joint sub-committee of representatives of the employers and the union to work out basic agreements which would serve as a foundation for the reorganization of the industry when the General Strike of Dressmakers is called next January."

More than two months before the strike was called the capitalist bosses and the union officials agreed on plans to reorganize the industry and to call the strike. This strike it is clear from *Justice* itself was a colossal fraud and conspiracy on the part of the bosses and the right wing officials. It was actually called by the bosses. The right wing as a result of the pressure used by the bosses upon the workers in the factories succeeded in enrolling a considerable number of dressmakers in the union organization.

Justice of Feb. 14 writes about the conference at which the strike was settled as follows:

"In the course of his remarks on that historic occasion Lieut. Governor Lehman declared: 'I want to compliment the union particularly for its attitude and highly conciliatory spirit'."

This from Mr. Lehman who was supposed to have settled this so-called strike. He compliments the union officials' highly conciliatory spirit. It is the spirit that surrenders the bosses. Who is this Lehman? He is of Lehman Bros., bankers for the garment industry, member of the family who direct and control The National Cloak and Suit Co., Oppenheimer and Co., Stern Bros., which corporations are among the biggest factors in the garment industry.

The same banker-Lieut. Governor Lehman, capitalist financier

for the needle industry, is supplying capital to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers for financing cooperative houses. Hillman, Schlessinger and other right wingers' attachment to and admiration for the banker capitalist of the clothing industry is brought out by their relations with banker Lehman.

The agreement concluded in the dress industry gives the workers absolutely nothing. The right wing agreed to extend the piece work system by making a provision that piece workers shall not receive extra time pay for overtime. They virtually agreed to abolish the 40-hour 5-day week. Saturday work is permitted. No increase in wages took place. A 10% reorganization was agreed to. The unemployment fund was postponed till the future. Jobbers are not restricted from giving work to non-union contractors. The provision requiring jobbers to pledge to use union contractors in New York City for a three months trial has already been broken. The jobber, the most important factors in the industry refuses to live up to the fake provision. The agreement is to run for two years.

The workers in the right wing fold will not get improved conditions. Their conditions will become worse and worse. The *Times* editorial puts in very correctly when it states:

"In sharp contrast with the International has been the experience of the other great organization in the needle trades, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, comprising the operatives on men's clothes. The recent annals of the Amalgamated have been happy in being comparatively blank. When the name has come before the public it has not been in connection with conflict, but with constructive experiment and progress. The Amalgamated is mentioned in the development of the new labor-union philosophy of guaranteed output in return for fair wages and good working conditions, or in connection with labor banking, or with cooperative home ownership as exemplified in the model apartment house development in the Van Cortland Park section."

The right wing in the ladies' garment industry is now applying the trade union policies of the Amalgamated. As the *Times* states: "The recent annals of the Amalgamated have been happy in being comparatively blank." Right! Blank for the workers! Prosperity for the bosses, and the worst kind of corruption and betrayals of workers on the part of the officialdom.

The lot of the workers is bound to become worse and worse. The right wing bosses' agents cannot, will not and dare not do anything in the interests of the workers. Nevertheless, we must record the fact that today even in the ladies garment industry the right wing has a much larger base than the N.T.W.I.U. We must face this fact boldly and courageously like Communists.

These workers in the right wing organizations must be won by us. They must be won for the N.T.W.I.U.—Under no circumstances must we give up these workers to the right wing. We must fight to win them for a genuine union, for the N.T.W.I.U.

We must fight with them against the intolerable conditions that prevail in the industry. In the Amalgamated and Hat, Cap & Millinery we must do everything in our power on the basis of the economic issues to develop a broad left wing to fight for the overthrow of the Hillman machine and the Zaritsky machine. The left wings in these two organization must work and fight together with the N.T.W.I.U. for one industrial union in the industry:

Among the workers in the I.L.G.W.U. we must organize

a left wing to fight the betrayals of the right wing bosses' agents and for a militant program.

We must utilize the discontent among the workers to develop a left wing in the local unions. The left wing groups in the shops and in the local unions must be linked up with the N.T.W.I.U. and must carry on their activities under the direction of the N.T.W.I.U.

We must strive on the basis of an economic program for the industry to unite all the workers in the needle trades.

The advantages the right wing gained in the dress situation are due to the fact that the new union did not sufficiently develop its organization campaign. The present Party leadership bears the responsibility for this because on the one hand, it did not understand the industry and on the other hand it turned the union into a Party fraction in which the issues in the Party must be thrashed out. Instead of organizing shops the campaign was to slander, to discredit, and to prepare the union for the driving out of Zimmerman, Gross and the best militant workers from the union.

W. Z. Foster conceived the idea that the ladies garment industry in New York was being concentrated because he saw an aeroplane picture of the garment center. So he was busy with his new discovery rather than with meeting the problem confronting the N.T.W.I.U.

As far as the concentration of the industry is concerned the following authoritative source proves the direct opposite tho there are certain developments in the industry that are leading towards some concentration:

*"The author finds while New York shops are smaller in average number of wage earners, more irregular in employment and more often disturbed by labor upheavals; the labor cost, per dollar of output is lower there than in any other city and the output per plant exceeds that everywhere else in the country except in Cleveland the town of large cloth-in factories."*¹

In the dress industry no policy was presented to the workers

1 Review in *Womans Wear on—Trends In Location of The Womens Clothing Industry*, by Mabel A. Magee.

until the last moment tho our comrades, Zimmerman and Gross, did present a correct policy which was eventually adopted but not carried out as it should have been.

One day there was one policy to call out a general strike—the next day another policy and the third day still another policy. The Party leadership was confused and unable to come to a definite conclusion on policy much to the detriment of the N.T.W.I.U.

What are the tasks for the left wing?

The organization of the unorganized still remains the central campaign for the building up of the N.T.W.I.U. This has been neglected. Instead of organizing, instead of preparing to fight the right wing offensive in the dress industry, a campaign of slander against the best comrades was instituted. Nominations and elections were ordered during a time when every force should have been mobilized for organization work and for a determined fight to defeat the right wing and the bosses.

In the fur industry no work was done. The bosses brought back Kaufman. We took no steps to fight his reentry into the industry.

This wrecking policy, this sectarian policy of the present Party leadership must be stopped if the N.T.W.I.U. is to be built up.

It is up to the workers to end this policy, to save the N.T.W. I.U. and to make it the dominant trade union in the industry.

There is only one way in which to do this:

Establish proletarian unity in the union! No elimination of good left wing workers from the activities and leadership of the union must be permitted!

Organize the unorganized!

Fight to win all the workers and smash the right wing!

Build broad left wings in the shops and in the local unions on a program based upon the economic needs of the workers.

Unite the left wing struggle in all the organizations A.C. W.A., Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers, Journeymen Tailors, I.L.G.W.U. with the N.T.W.I.U. to the end of making the N.T. W. I. U. the industrial union of the entire needle industry!

Unity and not disruption is the solution for the workers in the needle industry and for the Communists also!