

Racketeering and Sell-Out Agreements

Hillmanism in Amalgamated

by Ben Gitlow

The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of New York, the union organization of the men's clothing industry of the city, is today receiving plenty of publicity in the press. Sidney Hillman, the president of the Amalgamated, is now endeavoring to establish a reputation as the courageous fighter against the racketeers in the industry. The president of the Amalgamated is the double-faced man of the labor movement. To the outside public at large, he appears as the progressive, honest, force in the labor movement. To the workers the rank and file he is a crafty, unscrupulous, scheming boss of the organization, whose policies and bureaucratic machine are responsible for converting the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America into a servile, passive instrument of the bosses, reeking with gangsterism, racketeering and corruption.

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THE CONDITIONS IN THE INDUSTRY

Today the conditions for the workers in the industry, especially in New York, are such that they could not be worse. Workers receive starvation wages. The speed-up is terrific. Unemployment is very acute. There are no standards, no prices, no conditions for the workers. The union is dominated by a most vicious ring of corrupt officials in league with the underworld. The labor bureaus are crowded with men destitute, penniless and starving. The unemployment insurance fund is used for grafting purposes. Shops are reorganized. Workers are thrown out at will. The army of the unemployed is steadily being increased. Wages are continually being reduced. The union, thru a staff of efficiency engineers helps the bosses to reorganize their plants, reduce overhead and increase profits—all at the expense of the workers. In the union organization gangsterism and terrorism

reign supreme. Workers who criticize the administration are intimidated, expelled, discriminated against and deprived of their jobs. The situation can be best understood by the glaring fact that since 1917 the union has not called out one general strike in the New York market. Fourteen years of inaction, of allowing the very foundation of the organization to be undermined, typifies the policies of the Hillman administration. The latest developments in the Amalgamated prove conclusively that the conditions prevailing in the Amalgamated are due to the policies of the Hillman administration.

THE FORTY-FOUR HOUR WEEK ISSUE

The facts:

Three conventions of the Amalgamated have gone on record for the 40-hour week. The rank and file workers thru

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out the organization have demanded it. Nothing was done to establish the 40-hour week. The will of the workers was ignored. The issue could no longer be kept merely in archives of convention decisions. Agreements were expiring in Rochester, Cincinnati, Chicago, New York and elsewhere. The 40-hour issue had to be met. How was it met by the Hillman administration?

The Rochester agreement was renewed in March of this year. It established the precedent for all the other markets. It continued the existing agreement for another three years. This Rochester agreement is the most flagrant betrayal of the workers and a wonderful instrument of the bosses. It is a Hillman, "golden-rule" stroke of strategy that wins the applause of the bosses and begets the groans of the workers.

On the 40-hour week this agreement does away with the proposition in this dainty manner. I quote from the agreement:

"It is agreed that the demand for the 40-hour week, which the manufacturers find themselves unable to accept at the present time, be referred to the representatives of the parties to this agreement with instructions to consider the feasibility of introducing the 40-hour week in the industry."

That ended the 40-hour week. It is very clear from the organ of the manufacturers, the *Daily News Record*, that there was considerable sentiment among manufacturers to grant the 40-hour week and that, had the Hillman administration been interested in the welfare of the workers, the demand would have been won not only for Rochester but for every other market as well.

No wonder George J. Hexter writing for the bosses in the *Daily News Record* of March 9, 1931 states:

"It is quite certain that the Chicago employers would not grant, nor Mr. Hillman demand, the change for the one market after having waived it in the other (Rochester). In fact the 40-hour week is unlikely ever to become effective until the entire organized industry can be swung into it, not until perhaps industry generally is more nearly ripe for it."

The starving, unemployed Amalgamated workers must wait until "industry generally" through the country is ripe for the 40-hour week" before Hillman will demand that the clothing bosses grant the demand. Hillman can wait; his fat salary goes on. He has nothing to fear. His family won't starve.

This same writer of the *Daily News Record* praises Hillman for his 40-hour stands as follows:

"However, as he matures, Mr. Hillman becomes less and less doctrinaire and more and more pragmatic."

He means: As Mr. Hillman continues to give more and more service to the bosses he becomes more and more practical in this respect and less and less representative of the interests of the workers.

AND MORE!

But this is not all there is to the Rochester agreement. Not one single demand for some improvements of conditions was presented by Hillman to the manufacturers! The negotiations were started, the parties met and in less than twenty-four hours the new agreement was signed. Mr. Hillman is typical of the modern age, a true apostle of speed and efficiency in negotiating and signing agreements.

The Rochester agreement is one of the blackest sell-outs of the workers interests. I quote from the agreement (Point IV):

"The power to hire shall remain with the employers but in time of unemployment it is understood that consideration shall first be given to persons who have been employed in local shops doing work for members of the clothing exchange."

The bosses have the right to hire, given full power of discrimination in hiring. Now let us proceed to Point V:

"The full power to discharge and discipline lies with the employer. It is agreed that this power shall be exercised with justice and with regard to the reasonable rights of the employee. The power of discharge shall be exercised only thru the duly authorized and responsible representative of the management."

The bosses are given full power to fire. How easily Hillman disposes of the right of hire and fire! But that is not all. Let us take Point VI:

"The right of the employer to make changes in shop management and methods of manufacturing is recognized; such changes to be made without loss to the employees directly affected."

The bosses are further granted the right to reorganize, speed-up and throw workers out by the hundreds. But Hillman doesn't stop there in protecting the bosses. Point VII provides:

"This agreement provides for an orderly adjustment of differences and there is no provision for direct action. If, however, a stoppage shall occur, the union shall immediately order the people to return to work and in the event of their failure to do so, any or all of the participants in or instigators shall be liable to discipline."

This is a vicious guarantee not to strike and to punish militant workers who resort to direct action to settle grievances. The bosses can hire, fire, reorganize at will. The workers, according to the slave pact signed by Hillman, must submit or suffer the consequences. But this is not all there is to this remarkable Hillman document. Point XI provides:

"Piece rates, standards of production, wages of week workers in effect May 1, 1922 cannot be reduced or raised during the term of this agreement unless, by mutual consent of the parties to this agreement."

No changes in wages from those established in 1922 when the Rochester market was first organized! No wonder as Hillman matures, he becomes mellow and soft, pragmatic, practical, constructive and an upright leading figure whose

leadership, the *Daily News* says, the manufacturers should welcome and follow. But how about the workers? They after all are only the under dogs. Why worry about them!

RACKETEERING IN THE A. C. W.

The racketeer business in the Amalgamated is not new. It is strange that Hillman now claims to fight the racketeers in New York, but is mum about his own pet racketeers in Chicago. Mr. Hillman's skirts are not so clean as he would have us imagine. He is surrounded by a gang of racketeers as corrupt as vicious as those surrounding Abe Beckerman and Philip Orlowsky. It was Hillman himself who foisted Beckerman and his gang upon the organization in order to destroy and smash the growing militant and progressive rank and file movement in the Amalgamated. The situation in the cutters local is not new. Hillman has known it for years. Nevertheless he had no qualms of conscience in using the cutters officials and gangsters against the workers, the rank and file.

When Orlowsky stole elections, when the corruption of his administration was called to Hillman's attention, when he knew workers were being intimidated, thrown out of employment and their lives threatened, Hillman, the president of the organization, kept quiet and did not raise a finger or wink an eye.

THE "ANTI-RACKETEERING DRIVE"

Now there is being prepared a war against racketeers and Hillman leads the union and the manufacturers. The district attorney, the chief of police and Mayor Walker are enlisted in the fight. For what purposes:

1. To eliminate Beckerman by sending some of his boys and aids to prison.
2. To distract the attention of the workers from the new agreement which is to be fastened around the necks of the workers.

The elimination of Beckerman will maintain as corrupt, as vicious, a gang of racketeers in the Amalgamated—with this exception that they will at least for the present be satisfied with supporting

the Hillman administration and its policies.

THE NEW YORK MARKET

As far as the New York market is concerned, that matter Hillman thinks he has settled. He has definitely come to an agreement with the manufacturers. They work together today on all points.

Hasn't Mr. Jaffee, president of the New York Clothing Manufacturers Exchange, gone hand in glove with Mr. Hillman in a common cause before Mayor Walker?

And when Mayor Walker, turning to Hillman declared: "Promise me that there won't be a strike". Mr. Hillman replied: "If there is, the racketeers will call it."

What will the new agreement provide? Nothing for the workers except one new point the check-off, so that Hillman can get the bosses to collect the dues from the workers.

THE TASKS OF THE WORKERS

What must the rank and file do?

Organize a genuine opposition movement of all honest, progressive, militant, left wing forces, on the following program:

1. For the 40-hour week and no reduction in pay.
2. For week work.
3. For an adequate unemployment relief.
4. For a rank and file union controlled by the rank and file with full democracy in the organization.
5. For a minimum scale of wages that shall be a living scale of wages.
6. Against all gangsters, racketeers, corruptionists, whether they are Hillmanites or Beckermanites. To drive them out of the union.

Only thru such a broad genuine rank and file movement, not based upon trickery, maneuvers, and hidden intentions can a mighty rank and file opposition be developed that will sweep out the dirty mess and make the Amalgamated again a militant fighting organization of the workers.

The Carpenters Election in Los Angeles

TWO POLICIES IN TRADE UNION WORK

by A. Schaap

That the policy of the C.P.-Majority Group of the Communist Party of America for unity and independent activity is correct is borne out by recent events in Los Angeles, particularly in relation to trade union work.

The Old T. U. E. L.

For some time the T. U. E. L. functioning under that name and guided by the policies laid down during the years that the Ruthenberg-Lovestone group led the Party, had a dominant influence in the Carpenters Union Local 1967 in Los Angeles.

This is as it should have been for in Los Angeles there was and still is a most vicious struggle carried on by the open shoppers to crush the trade union movement. That the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce prides itself for keeping this city as the "white spot" of America is well-known to the many workers who have felt the iron heel of the bosses in their desire to smash every vestige of the trade union movement.

In this situation the workers in many unions looked to the T.U.E.L. for leadership in the struggle for better conditions. And at that time, with the exception of some mistaken policies now and then, the T. U. E. L. carried on the struggle in an effective manner.

Its influence was felt and registered in the Central Labor Union and at one time carried a very substantial following.

In the carpenters union the left wing had a dominant influence and it was the union that was the spearhead in the struggle against the bosses and the trade union bureaucracy, in the building trades, in the Central Labor body and in the trade union movement as a whole.

In every section in the carpenters union the workers registered their unflinching confidence in the left wing and generally always elected a full left wing slate.

The Change of Line Comes

But with the change of line of the Party policies, the left wing movement in Los Angeles collapsed.

Its substantial following in the Central Labor Union has been reduced to zero. In fact to show the Party's present attitude in relation to this body, we need only refer to the "discussion" in the Party in Los Angeles, where the "burning" question is whether it is correct or not correct to send a letter to the Central Labor body to invite it to a united front conference on free speech! The "great" discussion revolves around the question as to whether this would constitute a united front "from below" or "from above."

The influence the left wing previously held in the Central Labor body has been further drained by the withdrawal of left wingers into the new unions which today in Los Angeles (as everywhere else—Editor) merely appears on paper.

In the carpenters union we find that the T. U. E. L. is isolated, having lost its dominance due to its sectarian policy, to its looking at all workers thru the spectacles of "social fascism," and to its rejection of a united front with the progressives.

Our Course

Faced with this situation in a union once known for its militancy, some of the workers felt a need for a revival of the left wing in this union, considering at the same time the possibility of putting the T.U.U.L. here on a real functioning basis, with a corrected outlook on the situation.

Elections for officials of the union were approaching. What should the policy of the left wing be?

Comrade Cox, a left wing carpenter, refused admission into the T. U. U. L. because he wouldn't approve its narrow and sectarian line, grouped around him many members of this union in an effort to bring to the fore correct policies to meet the present situation.

The developments took on such a turn, because of the pressure of the workers, that it was rumored by the T. U. U. L. that Cox would be nominated and endorsed by the T. U. U. L. as candidate for chairmanship of the local. Comrade Cox immediately got in contact with the T. U. U. L. and told them clearly that he would run on their slate only upon a platform consistent with the needs of the workers.

Here the T. U. U. L. sensed that to do so would bring a reprimand from the Fosters and Stachels, for who ever heard of the T. U. U. L. running a "Lovestonite" on its ticket? So the T. U. U. L. backed down.

Again, Cox, in an effort to present a united front of all progressive forces in the carpenters union, told the leaders of the T. U. U. L. that it would be in the interest of the trade union movement and the left wing, to put up a united minimum program which would rally together all forces to the militant section of the union. Again, the T. U. U. L. backed down. Consequently the T. U. U. L. decided to run its own candidates.

At the union meeting, when nominations for chairman were called for, a candidate was nominated by the T. U. U. L. for the office of chairman. Coincident with the throwing open of nominations for this office, there arose a spontaneous demand for Cox to run.

Comrade Cox felt that for this office he would not challenge the T. U. U. L., however giving constructive criticism of

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DESPITE some improvement in sentiment, especially in the speculative market, due to the Hoover debt delay, there is no visible sign of any improvement. The price decline has stopped in the last week but there is no definite upturn in the trend evident. In the more authoritative finan-