

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE ELECTIONS

By Rose Wortis

WHAT is the role of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union in the present political struggles? We select these two unions because they have a large membership of Jews; because this membership has traditions of socialism; because they are hotbeds of social democracy; because their leaders are outstanding figures in the social democratic movement in our country. By history and militant traditions, these unions properly belong in the Progressive Party. An analysis of the activities of these unions and leaders will explain in general the activities of similar unions and leaders, like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Painters Union, and of some individual leaders like Walter Reuther of the Auto Workers and Emil Rieve of the Textile Workers. Such an analysis will reveal the ideology, the objectives and the activities of social democracy in general. By every law of logic, these unions, some with a socialist background, others with militant traditions and led by social democrats, should be in the front ranks of

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this great people's movement at this turning point in American history. If they are not, it is because of the type of leadership that dominates these unions. Leaders like David Dubinsky of the ILGWU, and Max Zaritsky of the Millinery Workers, are betraying the best interests of the workers, defaming the good name and record of these unions by their alliance with the enemies of the Progressive Party.

In 1936, these unions were in the thick of the fight for the organization of the CIO, enthusiastically supported by the membership. The workers had high hopes that the association of these unions with this great movement for industrial unionism would make a basic change in the policies of the unions. These hopes were shattered when Dubinsky and Zaritsky, without consulting the membership, deserted the CIO and returned to the AFL, completely identifying themselves with the latter's reactionary policies. Today, the social democrats are the main obstacles in building the united front of labor to halt the drive toward war and fascism.

Just imagine what a force these unions with their hundreds of thousands of militant class-conscious workers and

huge treasuries could be in the Progressive Party movement! What enthusiasm and unity this would generate among their members! Instead, social democratic leaders of the needle trades unions have become the bulwark of the reactionary attack on everything progressive in our nation.

While progressive unions, especially those under left wing leadership, are winning wage increases, fighting against the Taft-Hartley act and the Mundt bill, the leadership of these unions speak of strikes as "old fashioned" and boast that they can accomplish everything by "cooperating" with management. They subordinate the economic interests of the workers to Wall Street's Marshall Plan and world objectives.

While Dubinsky enjoys love feasts with employers in Unity House (summer camp for social democratic workers), the conditions of the workers are being seriously undermined due to the high cost of living and through indirect wage cuts resulting from poor settlements in prices and declining employment, particularly among piece workers.

In the hat, cap and millinery industry, the workers received no increases within the past three years. The report of Julius Hochman, of the ILGWU, on conditions in the dress industry shows that the earnings of the 75,000 dressmakers have fallen by 9.9 per cent during 1947. This, plus the 27 per cent increase in the cost of living in the same period, has cut purchasing power of the dressmakers by 34 per cent since 1946. The yearly average earnings of the dressmakers are \$2240.15. For the thousands of lower paid workers, this means actual starvation wages.

After weeks of dilly-dallying, the agreement in the cloak industry was renewed for three years, leaving unsolved the many aggravated problems of the workers, such as regrading, tightening control of jobbers, differentials between New York and out of town shops, section work shops, etc. The leaders of the cloak unions, staunch "champions of democracy" in Czechoslovakia, did not even find it necessary to go through the formalities of reporting the results of the negotiations to the membership. The workers learned of the abandonment of their demands through the press. In the meantime, the employers are exploiting to the full the many weaknesses and loopholes in the agreement.

The leadership of the ILGWU can also claim the dubious credit of originating the famous "escalator" clause, tying wages to bookkeeping profits and losses thereby providing for wage cuts, which were included in the agreement in the midwest and in the raincoat workers agreement.

The Taft-Hartley Act, which the general executive board of the ILGWU widely proclaimed was to be exploited for the benefit of the union, is used as an excuse for their "do nothing" policy which allows the reintroduction of the open shop with cut-throat competition, disorganization and chaos in the industry.

To the workers, they talk about fighting the Taft-Hartley Act. They will come soon to collect taxes from the workers for the Liberal Party of New York, a social democratic creature, under the pretext of fighting this slave act. But in the intimate atmosphere of their hand-picked convention, they don't think the Taft-Hartley Act with its strike break-

ing injunctions is so bad after all. Here is a quotation from the general executive board report to the recent convention of the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers. "Industrial strife during this period has not increased; workers have not been enslaved; unions' treasuries have not been depleted by court suits."

Partnership With Imperialists

Side by side with the economic struggles, there is the need to organize and lead the workers in the fight against the war-mongering policies of the social democratic leaders of the unions and rally the workers for the Progressive Party.

The sharpening international crisis and growing reaction at home have intensified the cleavage between the social democratic leadership of these unions and large numbers of the union membership. Completely identified with Wall Street world objectives, these leaders demagogically present to the workers the aggressive policies of the bipartisan administration as "American world leadership."

Under the generalship of Dubinsky the needle trade unions are being used to help build up a world labor center of reaction. By intrigue and war mongering they also work to disrupt the progressive American labor movement. Like their counterparts in pre-Hitler Germany, they are tools of the most reactionary, chauvinistic section of American big business, using their social democratic demagogy to sell the workers the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, atom bomb diplomacy and militarization of our country for the "holy anti-Soviet war." They applaud intervention in Greece, China and Italy, using workers' money to bribe sections of the world labor movement in order to remove the main obstacle against Wall Street's drive to subjugate the world.

They are apologists for the British government's war against the new state of Israel. By their silence they are partners to the British Arab war to crush Israel. But their partnership goes even deeper than that. For Dubinsky is the political and ideological blood-brother of Bevin and Attlee. And while Jewish blood flowed in Israel as a result of the policies, machinations and intrigues of the social democratic Labor Party government, in cahoots with American imperialism, David Dubinsky received, accepted and retained a medal from Bevin and Attlee for services rendered to Britain. And to show his impartiality and "liberalism" he also was an honored guest at a banquet for Winston Churchill in New York.

But Dubinsky's betrayal of the Jewish people is no simple and obvious action. It is loaded with double dealing. When there is danger that the masses of Jews will recognize that the social democratic policies of Dubinsky lead to war against Israel, he tries to wash away his sins by a loan of one million dollars to the State of Israel. When he sees that the resentment of the workers is reaching a boiling point because policies such as his go along with the imperialist drive of Britain and the United States in the Middle East, Dubinsky quickly concedes to the demand of the workers for a protest stoppage. But such fake maneuvers

will not stop the war in Palestine, nor will they bring back to life the victims who fell under the ruthless violence of the Anglo-American imperialist partnership in the Middle East, because the social democratic policies of Dubinsky encourage the war and help feed the violence of imperialism.

The social democratic leaders of the needle trades unions are the most bitter enemies of Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party. In this fight, they conveniently forget their former campaign for a third party and their eulogies for Wallace. Let me quote from a speech of David Dubinsky at the 1946 convention of the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union (Convention Report, pages 227-228):

"I hear one labor leader making a threat he is going to defeat Truman, another one threatening to defeat congressmen; a third one threatening to defeat senators. How? I would like to know how they propose to do it. . . ."

"I happen to be for a Third Party and that is the reason I come to you, the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Convention (applause). I know you believe in independent political action. We all believed in independent political action. We all believed in political action 20 or 30 years ago, and not only as of today. (Applause) . . ."

Then referring to the ILGWU and the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union, he continued, "They cannot satisfy themselves with a Party that includes the Southern reactionaries or the industrialists in the Republican Party. They may call themselves by different names but you cannot rely on them on questions or principles. Only an independent labor party is the solution."

If this were true in 1946, it is doubly true now. Here is another quotation from a resolution adopted by the same union in convention about the man whom they now call a Moscow quisling:

"Henry A. Wallace . . . is an outstanding protagonist of the New Deal, brave and forthright in his exposition and defense of the progressive aims and desires of the New Deal. He has espoused the cause of the common man and has worked for it and promoted it without reckoning political advantage. He has remained steadfast in his purpose under the insidious attacks of the reactionary forces."

Today, when Truman and the Democratic Party have shamefully betrayed Roosevelt's progressive policies and have completely been taken over by big business, Dubinsky, Alex Rose of the Millinery workers, and their colleagues are fighting tooth and nail to keep the workers chained to the two party system. In their desperation to find a candidate, they have seized upon Truman's formal recognition of the Jewish state to set him up again as a champion of "liberalism." They cherished the hope that Eisenhower, the life-long soldier and advocate of jimcrow might make himself available. They have taken up the war cry of Wall Street that Wallace is a "Moscow quisling" and that "Wallace must be stopped to 'contain communism.'"¹

¹ Since this article was written, Dubinsky's ILGWU executive board has endorsed Truman and issued a call to the union to raise a \$100,000 campaign fund. The CIO national executive board and the Liberal Party of New York have also endorsed Truman.—Eds.

Forgetting the lessons of their German colleagues, these social democrats are first among the red-baiters, they support the witch-hunts, Truman's Loyalty Order and the infamous Un-American Committee. At the Millinery Convention, the social democratically controlled Liberal Party chairman, A. A. Berle, and the social democratic lawyer, Louis Waldman, openly boasted authorship of the infamous Mundt bill and called for its support amidst applause from the hand-picked delegates. The convention later expressed approval of the intent of this bill but voted opposition because of disagreement with some of its formulations. Together with the pro-fascist Un-American Committee, they denounced the protest of liberty-loving Americans against this police state bill as a conspiracy of the communists.

The treachery of the social democratic leaders of these unions points up the rapid development of American imperialist policy with which these misleaders have now completely identified themselves as the struggle of the democratic camp versus the imperialist camp is joined in battle on a world scale. Imperialism must always have agents within the labor movement to demoralize, disorganize and divert the working class in order to guarantee the temporary achievement of imperialist aims.

Social democracy, true to its historic role as the betrayer of the working class, classically carried out by German social democracy in the years between 1918 and 1933, has placed itself again at the service of the tottering world imperialism. This was the main content of the recent conference in Vienna, called to reconstitute the Socialist International. The so-called exponents of democracy barred the true socialists from the Eastern European countries who would not sacrifice the independence of their countries to Wall Street and its Marshall Plan.

In our country, the social democrats functioned during the period of relatively peaceful development prior to the Second World War, as a small group mainly in the needle trade unions. In the present situation of sharpened capitalist contradictions, the social democrats have been elevated by big business to a position of great importance.

Contrary are the trends and development among the workers. The lessons of the Second World War and the struggle against fascism, and the slaughter of six million Jews have stirred a deep yearning for peace among the needle trades workers. The Negro and Spanish workers are rallying *en masse* to the Wallace movement. To a lesser extent perhaps this is also true of the Italian workers. Jewish workers in particular feel profound gratitude to the Soviet Union for its contributions to the defeat of fascism, for its consistent support to the Jewish state and its fight for peace. They feel sympathetic toward the new democracies who have outlawed anti-Semitism and are generously supporting the reconstruction of Jewish communities with government aid.

The emergence of the Progressive Party with its program of peace and progress has created the most favorable conditions for a realignment of forces among the needle trade workers.