Workers' Education—Or Mis-Education?

By Bertrand ""Scotty"" Russell

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union has been the private property of the Sigman-Cahan "socialist" reactionaries. It is an absolute monarchy, a perfect picture of despotism. In many particulars it duplicates the "socialist" dictatorship of Germany under Ebert and Von Seeckt and parallels the unprincipled, union-wrecking leadership of the German trusts.

It will be noted that the German unions under similar leadership have been nearly ruined and are being deserted by their betrayed membership. But just as conditions force the German workers to organized resistance, and the Communists to continue and redouble their efforts to win the rank and file of the unions to left wing leadership, so the vital needs of the workers in the ladies' garment industry are compelling resistance by the union in spite of all the obstacles to effective action placed in the way of the membership by the Sigman monarchy. And just as in Germany, so do the Sigman pastorals run directly counter to the habits of the membership by the Sigman-Cahan "socialist" reactionaries. It is an absolute monarchy, a perfect picture of despoticism.

The rank and file have no reason to trust the officials; they have every reason to be closely vigilant over their conduct in this strike. The provocative expulion policy, clearly intended, totally weakened by provocation and disrupt the fighting ranks as they approach battle with the bosses, could benefit nobody but these bosses. Moreover, a revolt against the outrageous expulsions at the time the union faced a strike, could be used as an excuse by the officials for playing off the workers and redouble their efforts to win the rank and file. Few unions in the world are dominated by such black reaction as the I. L. G. W. This is illustrated by the disgraceful Boston convention. The high point of which was a demonstration against Soviet Russia. In the hands of such officials have been and are the negotiations with the New York manufacturers for demands long ago formulated by the left wing. It must be reiterated that the left wing has long agitated for these demands being made a part of the union program. A forty-hour week, unemployment insurance, guaranteed employment for a minimum number of weeks, increase of the minimum wage scale, limitation of the number of contract workers, etc., have been and remain trade demands of the left wing. It shall continue to fight for these and other demands not yet adopted by the union, and only by the energy of the membership inspired by left wing leadership can they be won. Any victory will be won only by the rank and file smashing all the obstacles laid down by Sigman, and by vigilant punishment of all treachery and compromise.

FACING THE NEW YORK STRIKE

From the beginning of the expulsion policy it was recognized that the motive of the officials was the desire to conceal their own programmable bankruptcy in face of the crisis in the industry. Behind the turmoil and disruption which they created by the expulsion attack on the left wing, they hoped to restore their lost hold on the membership. To maintain a semblance of struggle for union conditions, they could not expel the left wing and ignore the trade demands at the same time. So ten demands, originally made by the left wing, were taken up by the officials and a pretended fight made to put them into effect.

The result of the disruptive expulsion policy is seen now that the New York cloakmakers, driven by the most crying needs to face the crisis of a great strike, are dependent for official direction upon these black reactionaries, upon Sigman and his gang who are doing all in their power to obstruct, compromise and defeat the efforts of the membership.

The employers are only part of a prene-
Yet no adequate preparatory measures were to be made in New York. Weeks passed after both the bosses and the treachery of Sigman. It has been known that a fight would have taken at any time, and even the make-shift, as was done, has no rebuke for the bosses that declared the demands "undeterrent." Besides, the officials propagate defeatism by cautional talk of the "grave event" and the "honorable means" and "peaceful methods" it uses to dodge a strike against greedy exploiters whom it servilely calls the "vile and living factors" in the woolen industry.

The militants will not allow Sigman's desisted disruption to succeed. Neither will they allow him to avoid complete responsibility for the strike situation. They will continue, as in the Boston and Chicago strikes, to fight for the union and union demands. With the membership they will fight for the New York demands against both the bosses and the treachery of Sigman. They will not allow themselves to be separated from the masses even for a single day.

**Officials Renounce Class Struggle**

However, stupid and ruthless though the Sigman-Cahan machine was at the Boston convention, it cannot be defeated itself by such means as were used to wipe out the last vestige of workers' democracy in the union. These "socialists" went over to capitalism and are striking out the whole I. L. G. W. preamble, which contained a recognition of the class struggle and an endorsement of a "system of society wherein the workers shall receive the full value of their product." This renunciation of struggle against capitalism was fittingly accompanied by a typical Fascist-reactionary assault on the left wing.

Those who struggle against capitalism and try to realize the society the preamble describes, were expelled, and membership in the Trade Union Educational League declared illegal. Moreover, the constitution for failure to lead the struggle, and will fight for the demands of the workers in the isa. This was done, and since then the official labor party, unconditional recognition of Soviet Russia, and for a Communist society.

**The Lesson of History**

But history has proven the failure of such tactics. The Communists in the German unions have shown how to combat capitalism and its agents in offices of the union. Sigman cannot abolish the class struggle by abolishing mention of it in the preamble. He can avoid expression of that struggle by the formation of a left wing. A few militants have been expelled, but two will appear where one appeared before. The left wing is the modern Hydra!...

The left wing has been through the battle and reaction is still in the saddle. But one battle is not the whole war—and the war is not over. The left wing is not dismayed by difficulty. History, running swiftly, is on its side. Sigman's tactics of attempting to provoke ill-judged actions will not succeed, neither will the left wing submit to force. For the left wing is not an artificial, arbitrary creation, but the crystallized needs of the industrial workers. When, as is sure to happen, the socialist monarchy succeeds in defeating every effort of the workers against the bosses, the disillusioned membership, however bound under the constitution, will find a way to choose new and left wing leaders to direct their struggle.

**Lewis the Real Strikebreaker**

During this strike the Lewis administration acted as a strike breaking agency. At the request of the corporation Lewis deposited the district charter and appointed a "provisional government" of men who had been rejected in the previous district election, such as Dalrymple and Houston. The miners were ordered back to work under threat of expulsion from the union.

Knowing the history of Kansas district and District 18, the miners decided that such a "reorganization" of locals under Lewis' dictators, the best thing to do was to return to work. As soon as Lewis was deposed, and since then, the rank and file militants have been in the front of the campaign to prevent a split. All attempts at building dual unions have come to naught owing to the leadership of the rank and file militants having benefitted by the experiences of the miners of District 18, who attempted to organize in 1919.

The provisional appointees of Lewis confidently predicted that when the contract expired under which the miners then were operating, the corporation would raise wages to the 1921 standard, because those who would negotiate with the corporation were recognized as "fair and reasonable" men—not "reds" and advocates of the Red International of Labor Unions, as some of the deposed officers had been.

On January 15, last, the contract expired and the corporation posted notice of a 20 per cent cut in wages. This took place after the Lewis appointees had negotiated for nearly two months, and so flabbergasted the appointees that they were at loss what action to take. However, the miners settled the matter by quitting the job. Later on, the "provisional government," afraid to declare a strike outright, and afraid to reveal their cowardice and their fear of the miners by declaring a "suspension of work." This was in reality, a strike, but they were fearful of that term lest they lose their reputations as solid conservatives.

**Lewis Breaks His Promise**

The miners were informed that the policy of Lewis—"no reduction under the 1921 rates"—would be applied to the district, and to carry it out the International would support the district to the limit. But in February, a contract was signed which, while giving the dotal laborers an increase of ten cents a day, and the contract miners an increase of about seven per cent, had an elaborate set of rules and regulations which bound the miners to the corporation like so many chattle slaves.

Prohibition of quitting work in order to force the management to adjust a grievance, forcing the pit committees to supply miners to take the places of those who quit because of grievances, forcing the "enforcers of "work force" at the complete disposal of the management, and setting up arbitration machinery with "impartial chairmen"—these were typical officials. The Lewis administration placed on the miners in the interests of the corporation.