The Needle Trades Convention

By J. W. Johnstone

In the month of May, conventions of three principal unions in the clothing industry will take place. On May 5th, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union opens its biennial convention in Boston; on the 8th, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers meet in Philadelphia; while on the same date the Furriers' Union are called to meet in Chicago. In these three unions, in one of the most advanced sections of the labor movement, will be fought out three phases of the battle for progress in the trade unions.

Fur Workers Ruled by Gunmen

It is the Furriers' Union that presents the most extreme form of reaction in the needle trades. Although the rank and file of the union, in large majority, are progressive and revolutionary, yet the administration of Kaufman, supported by the machine of the Jewish Daily Forward, still keeps the union committed to right-wing policies and ruled by right-wing elements. The methods by which this has been accomplished are well-known. Things and men have been called in to break up local union meetings to prevent action against Kaufman and his cohorts. In the elections, all the lift-wing candidates have been cleared off the ballot. No member could vote unless he voted for a right-wing candidate. Also, the Convention is taken as a rule even while they are officially "outside" the shop delegate system; the left for collaboration; the right for continuance of the present cumbersome local forms; the left for militant struggle against all reductions in wages, the right for compromise and collaboration.

When, a year ago, the left wing was sweeping into power in the principal local unions throughout the country, the reactionary general administration launched a war upon the left, in a desperate effort to stem the tide of progress. Expulsions, disfranchisements, and discriminations, were the principal weapons relied upon, although even in the I. L. G. W. U. strong-arm men were occasionally brought in and at the famous Chicago protest meeting, shots were fired at Wm. Z. Foster. The I. L. G. W. U. officials became the principal exponents of the tactics of the Amsterdam International and set out to destroy the left wing; and the Boston Convention on May 5th, will have this expulsion issue as the main question before it.

"Repudiate the Expulsions!"

"Repudiate the expulsion policy" has been the slogan of the elections to this convention. The membership has rallied to this issue very decidedly. In spite of the fact that all members of the Trade Union Educational League have been removed from the ballots, and the most arbitrary obstacles set up against any effective protests being made, still the reports from all the large centers of the trade show that a majority of delegates elected are pledged to repudiate the expulsion policy, and to restore the right of free propaganda for amalgamation, the Labor Party, the shop delegate system, etc. Although opposition to the expulsion policy does not mean support of all left-wing issues, yet every one recognizes that it is really all the progressive measures that are at stake, and not an abstract question of "right." The absurd charge of "dual unionism" against the T. U. E. L. and the adherents of the R. I. L. U. has been completely exploded. The question of amalgamation has been raised in many of the conventions. Although the chief obstacles set up are by the right-wing administration, all the expelled members re-instated, and all the expelled Chicago members have been placed in responsible posts in the strike now going on, and again proved that they are among the best and most active and energetic in the labor movement. The left wing has been fighting for amalgamation of all needle trades union, the right wing for craft separateness; the left for an all-inclusive Labor Party, the right for an exclusive S. P. P.; the left for a general collaboration; the right for the shop delegate system of union organization, the right for continuance of the present cumbersome local forms; the left for militant struggle against all reductions in wages, the right for compromise and collaboration.

In Chicago the strike now going on shows again the necessity of amalgamation. The dressmakers are battling bravely alone, with the other branches of the needle industry expressing their sympathy. All recognize that a defeat for this dressmakers is a defeat for the entire industry. But loose alliances do not give the necessary strength to do battle with the well-organized employers. The votes from the best connections now existing is irregular and unsystematic financial assistance. Amalgamation is the only real solution to the question of solidarity.

Another fact that forces consideration of the proposal to amalgamate the needle trades unions, and forces to I. L. G. W. U. to take a leading part in this amalgamation, is the growing centralization taking place in the industry. The factories hitherto confined to making men's clothing are beginning to take over production of women's clothing. The section system is being applied to cloak making. What may be expected soon is indicated by the fact that Hart, Schaffner & Marx, large producers of men's clothes, are now turning out large quantities of women's cloaks. If there is to be any effective control of this change that is going on in the industry, to protect the interests of the workers involved, it can only be done by uniting the two unions with jurisdiction over the two fields that are thus being united in the industry itself.

There is but one alternative to amalgamation to solve this question—that is to engage in a struggle for amalgamation, which will be destructive of all unionism in the needle trades. It is a method that cannot be defended even by the blackest reactionaries. There is not one argument against amalgamation left. The I. L. G. W. U. at its Boston convention will be called upon to enter into a movement for unity in the needle trades.

In the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, in common with all unions in America, the issues between right and left wings have become more acute. The line-up on policies, for class collaboration by the right wing and for class struggle by the left, is becoming clearer all the time. But this ideological struggle has not taken on the same attitude as that of the Chicago convention against the left wing and its rights in the A. C. W., such as occurs in the other unions. The attitude of the administration has, on the whole, assisted in preserving the A. C. W. from wholesale right-wing disruption.

Issues in the A. C. W. of A.

But distinct danger-signals have appeared also in the A. C. W. The administration group has been catering to the reactionary elements in New York City—a most dangerous course, for it directly invites them to begin emulation of the Sigman tactics of warfare, tactics that would be fatal to the A. C. W. as a militant union.

Tendencies to the right also were shown in the appointment of A. J. Wolf, a reactionary, as manager of the N. Y. Joint Board. The election in Local 2, June 17, will be a real battle for this result. Upon the question of uniting all needle trades unions into one industrial organization through amalgamation will be a most vital issue at the Convention. Even though theavored amalgamationists have been deposed of their right to the election to the administration, the right still keeps the union committed to right-wing policies and rules by right-wing elements. The methods by which this has been accomplished are well-known. Things and men have been called in to break up local union meetings to prevent action against Kaufman and his cohorts. In the elections, all the lift-wing candidates have been cleared off the ballot. No member could vote unless he voted for a right-wing candidate. Also, the Convention is taken as a rule even while they are officially "outside" the shop delegate system; the left for collaboration; the right for continuance of the present cumbersome local forms; the left for militant struggle against all reductions in wages, the right for compromise and collaboration.

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tary-treasurer, shows the same line-up between progress and reaction witnessed throughout the needle trades. There are numerous candidates, but the real struggle is between Max J. Sillinsky, backed by the left wing, and T. J. Sweeney, present incumbent, backed by the reactionaries. The issues are exceptionally clear.

Sillinsky has been endorsed by 35 local unions; in his letter of acceptance he states the program upon which he solicits the vote of the membership; this contains, in addition to the purely trade issues, amalgamation, the Labor Party, protection of the foreign-born; recognition of Soviet Russia, organization of the unorganized, and other planks.

Sweeney, on the other hand, is a follower of Commers. He voted against amalgamation in the A. F. of L. Convention at Portland, although his own union is in favor of amalgamation. He voted to unseat Bill Dunne, an act that aroused the left wing in a number of conventions. These two gatherings were made a consistent record of voting and fighting against amalgamation. The official journal, to which he is a regular contributor, has made a personal organ out of the official journal, to slander his opponents. He has also been the support of practically every reactionary element.

The writer has never met Sillinsky, but has watched his record in a number of conventions and in the movement generally. Sillinsky has made a consistent record of voting and fighting for progressive measures, even when they were decidedly unpopular. He was one of the few that voted for all the progressive measures in the Portland A. F. of L. Convention, and against the expulsion of Dunne. He has no affiliation with any organization but the Tailors, in which he represents the general advance of the labor movement of the left wing forces. Repudiation of the expulsion policy in the I. L. G. W. U., participation in the June 17th Convention by all the unions, particularly the A. C. W., endorsement of amalgamation by the I. L. G. W. U., adoption of the shop-delegate principle of organization, election of Sillinsky in the Tailor's Union—all or any one of these will mark a great advance in the labor movement. In all unions the left wing will be fighting militantly for these principles of the A. F. L., and for many other measures, particularly for measures against unemployment. Victory on all of them is quite impossible if the whole left wing strength is thrown into a real fight for them, because the management of the Canadian National Railways is determined to block the worse progressives not voting. The writer has never met Sillinsky, but has watched his record in a number of conventions and in the movement generally. Sillinsky has made a consistent record of voting and fighting for progressive measures, even when they were decidedly unpopular. He was one of the few that voted for all the progressive measures in the Portland A. F. of L. Convention, and against the expulsion of Dunne. He has no affiliation with any organization but the Tailors, in which he represents the general advance of the labor movement of the left wing forces. Repudiation of the expulsion policy in the I. L. G. W. U., participation in the June 17th Convention by all the unions, particularly the A. C. W., endorsement of amalgamation by the I. L. G. W. U., adoption of the shop-delegate principle of organization, election of Sillinsky in the Tailor's Union—all or any one of these will mark a great advance in the labor movement. In all unions the left wing will be fighting militantly for these principles of the A. F. L., and for many other measures, particularly for measures against unemployment. Victory on all of them is quite impossible if the whole left wing strength is thrown into a real fight for them, because the management of the Canadian National Railways is determined to block the worse progressives not voting.

The next few weeks will be a period of intense interest in the needle trades. Prospects are good for a decided left-wing advance in the needle trades, in spite of the general advance throughout the labor movement of the left-wing forces. Repudiation of the expulsion policy in the I. L. G. W. U., participation in the June 17th Convention by all the unions, particularly the A. C. W., endorsement of amalgamation by the I. L. G. W. U., adoption of the shop-delegate principle of organization, election of Sillinsky in the Tailor’s Union—all or any one of these will mark a great advance in the labor movement. In all unions the left wing will be fighting militantly for these principles of the A. F. L., and for many other measures, particularly for measures against unemployment. Victory on all of them is quite impossible if the whole left wing strength is thrown into a real fight for them, because the management of the Canadian National Railways is determined to block the worse progressives not voting. The writer has never met Sillinsky, but has watched his record in a number of conventions and in the movement generally. Sillinsky has made a consistent record of voting and fighting for progressive measures, even when they were decidedly unpopular. He was one of the few that voted for all the progressive measures in the Portland A. F. of L. Convention, and against the expulsion of Dunne. He has no affiliation with any organization but the Tailors, in which he represents the general advance of the labor movement of the left wing forces. Repudiation of the expulsion policy in the I. L. G. W. U., participation in the June 17th Convention by all the unions, particularly the A. C. W., endorsement of amalgamation by the I. L. G. W. U., adoption of the shop-delegate principle of organization, election of Sillinsky in the Tailor’s Union—all or any one of these will mark a great advance in the labor movement. In all unions the left wing will be fighting militantly for these principles of the A. F. L., and for many other measures, particularly for measures against unemployment. Victory on all of them is quite impossible if the whole left wing strength is thrown into a real fight for them, because the management of the Canadian National Railways is determined to block the worse progressives not voting.