

The Coming Dress Strike

A Talk with the Left-wing Needle Trades Union Members

The New York joint board of the Needle Trade Workers Industrial Union Left wing) has finally adopted an official position on the dressmakers' strike now being planned by the leaders of the Right wing union, the I. L. G. W. U. The essence of this decision has been known for some time among the Left wing workers, but it has aroused no enthusiasm among them. And the passive and even antagonistic reaction of the workers is a healthy sign for the Left wing, because the decision that has been made by the officials of the Left wing union, directed by the Party specialists, is certain to deal the N.T.W.I.U. one of the heaviest blows it has yet suffered!

At the membership meeting of the dressmakers in the Left wing union, held in Webster Hall on October 17, 1929, the recommendations of the joint board were adopted, including the following, which forms the essential kernel of the whole question: "2) Should the Schlesinger coterie with the leaders of its dress bosses' association call the dressmakers to a stoppage, the said call should be entirely ignored." (*Morning Freiheit*, 10-18-1929.) Since this decision is qualified in absolutely no respect, it means in plain English: When the Right wing union calls its strike of the dressmakers in New York, the workers in the Left wing union are instructed to remain at work in the shops while the rest of the dressmakers are striking and picketing. Or in still plainer English, the Left wing is instructed by Zimmerman-Wortis-Gold-Foster-and-Weinstone to scab!

Can the decision adopted have any other significance or result? Absolutely none. The whole needle trades market knows to a man that the Right wing bureaucrats are unmistakably moving forward in their dressmakers' organization drive (and this too because of the grievous past blunders of the Left wing). It is known that when Schlesinger, Dubinsky and Co. get ready to call their stoppage or strike, their appeal will be followed, for one reason and another, by the bulk of the dressmakers, as was the case in the recent cloakmakers' strike. If the senseless policy of the Left wing is carried through in practice, it will mean that while the majority of the shops are being struck, the Left wing workers will be compelled to work on scab garments. The Left wing's "peculiar" tactic will not only be misunderstood by the needle trades workers in general, but it will certainly discredit and set back the Left wing movement for a long time.

Why did the Stalinist adventurers force this insane decision upon the Left wing union? Is this really a "radical" policy or is it opportunism gone mad? If it is the former, how does it happen that such congenial opportunists in the Left wing as Zimmerman, Rose Wortis, Gold and Boruchovitch are its staunchest protagonists? Will its application advance the interests of the Left wing and the workers in general, or will it be a crushing blow to them?

This is the fourth change of policy by the Stalinists in less than a year, and each has led the Left wing to a worse position. The first was in the dressmakers' strike of about a year ago led by the same Zimmerman and Wortis. It was so scandalously conducted, and the settlement so indistinguishably similar to any ever made by Sigman or Schlesinger, that both the leadership and the settlement had to be semi-officially condemned in the organ of the T.U.E.L., *Labor Unity*, by Philip Aronberg. The second was the policy in the recent cloakmakers' strike called by the Right wing. After weeks of vacillation, the Party and the Left wing union hit upon the unique idea of calling the workers to join the "fake stoppage" by quitting work and coming to the Left wing halls. Naturally, no one came to the Left wing halls, but at least the stigma of working during a strike was avoided by the N.T.W.I.U. The third attempt to retrieve the ground the Left wing was steadily losing in the needle trades, was the poorly organized, ill-prepared, badly-conducted adventure—it can hardly be called a strike—in the fur industry, which was lost before it began and was officially called off a few weeks later with an acknowledgment by Gold of total failure.

All of this irresolution, this squirming effort to avoid adopting the proposals made in the *Militant*, has not left the Left wing unscarred. On the contrary, for the first time in years, the Right wing union, the leaders and policies of which were the most discredited in the American labor movement, is virtual master of the New York field and the Left wing is being reduced ever more to an undecided factor in the industry. Now, the latest decision with regard to the coming dressmakers' strike presents us with an act of mad desperation to recoup losses by paying for the openly opportunist sins of the past with counterfeit "radicalism." That such an overnight reversal of position is not infrequent, and particularly in the needle trades Left wing dominated by Zimmerman, Wortis and their kin, is attested by no less an authority (nowadays, alas!) than Earl Browder: "When a reaction against the disastrous results of opportunism sets in, it gives rise to wild adventures, 'leftist' policies, splitting tendencies, etc. The opportunist who has 'reformed' (but who has failed to grasp the essentials of Leninism) is almost sure to become the 'putschist', the ultra-left advocate. Finding that 'being practical' was a failure, he decides to 'be revolutionary' without being practical. The result is sectarianism." (Earl Browder, *The Workers Monthly*, August 1925, page 469.) It is no accident that Browder spoke in that article of precisely the present leaders of the needle trades Left wing, Zimmerman, Gold, et al. But Browder could never have conceived at that time (1925) that Zimmerman, Wortis and Co., would go so far in their opportunist sectarianism as to adopt their present decision, or that he, Browder, as one of the leaders of the Party, would endorse that decision!

There was an occasion in the Party when one of its leaders was only partly guilty of the monstrous blunder for which the entire Party leadership is now responsible. That was during the 1925 strike of 150,000 anthracite miners, when Ben Gitlow developed his "famous" thesis that: "The anthracite coal strike is a conspiracy between the officials and the coal operators. It will benefit only the coal interests. The strike will not benefit the miners out on strike. It will cause untold hardships to the workers in the eastern states that depend upon anthracite coal. . . . The miners will remain out on strike for many months. They will probably go back to work without any material advantages gained. The check-off will be won by Lewis. The strike is a John L. Lewis strike, a strike led by the policy of class collaboration. It is cooperation between the officials of the union and the owners of the mines for mutual self-interest. It does not in the least help the workers or attempt to solve their intolerable conditions." (Ben Gitlow, *The Workers Monthly*, Nov. 1925, page 17.)

At that time, such a hue and cry was raised against this reactionary sectarianism by Party leaders like Cannon, Foster, Dunne and others, that not even Gitlow's faction, which was then leading the Party, could defend his position and it was finally repudiated and condemned. Substitute Schlesinger for Lewis, dressmakers for miners, dress bosses for coal operators, and you have exactly the same arguments made by Messrs. Foster-Zimmerman-Gold today as were made in 1925 by Gitlow. But not even Gitlow ventured to go so far as to call upon the Left wing miners to stay at work; he advocated the intervention of the then Progressive Miners Committee "in an effort to make the anthracite strike a real struggle in the interests of the workers." Gitlow developed logically to his present position as one of the leaders of the Right wing inside and outside the Party. Again, it is no accident that the present policy—like so many others—of the Party and the Left wing, so "revolutionary" at first sight, should prove in actuality to be only a further application of Gitlow's Right wing thesis of 1925. The difference is that today, unlike 1925, there is no responsible Party leader to raise his voice in condemnation of the policy just adopted for the dressmakers.

We speak primarily to the Left wing workers: Do not be swayed by demagogic appeals to sentiment. Schlesinger is no better and no worse than John L. Lewis, and the Party's condemnation of Gitlow's policy in 1925 must be repeated by the Left wing workers in a rejection of the Gitlowist policy that has been adopted now for the dressmakers, which will bring discredit and defeat to our movement. The new path to which the irresponsible Stalinists have just jumped will not lead to the eradication of Right wing influence in the industry, but to its consolidation. That is the path of the Schlesingers, the one they trod during the last dressmakers' strike. It cannot be ours. Ours must be the one that leads to the struggle side by side with even the most conservative worker, even though for the moment he is deceived by Schlesinger and follows his leadership. In the struggle, the Right wing workers can be won away from the misleaders of the Right wing, but not if you stay in the shops while they are striking.

The severe defeats of the Left wing in the cloakmakers' and furriers' strikes should be signposts of warning. The Left wing can make headway, and regain the strength and influence it enjoyed in 1926 and 1927, if it knows how to approach the Right wing worker, how to work for a united front against the bosses. The Left wing must take the initiative in the united front. It must challenge Schlesinger and Co. openly to unite the divided ranks of the workers. It must work for joint action, joint committees in the shops. The Schlesingers and Dubinskys will expose themselves sufficiently in their actions during the struggle, but only if the Left wing shows its readiness to work side by side with the Right wing worker. The present attitude of the N.T.W.I.U. gives the Right wing hypocrites every opportunity to strengthen their grip upon the workers. The cheap "Leftism" of the Lovestoneite, Zimmerman, and the Stalinite, Foster, must be rejected by the Left wing workers before too much damage has been done.

The severe defeats of the Left wing in the cloakmakers' and furriers' strikes should be signposts of warning. The Left wing can make headway, and regain the strength and influence it enjoyed in 1926 and 1927, if it knows how to approach the Right wing worker, how to work for a united front against the bosses. The Left wing must take the initiative in the united front. It must challenge Schlesinger and Co. openly to unite the divided ranks of the workers. It must work for joint action, joint committees in the shops. The Schlesingers and Dubinskys will expose themselves sufficiently in their actions during the struggle, but only if the Left wing shows its readiness to work side by side with the Right wing worker. The present attitude of the N.T.W.I.U. gives the Right wing hypocrites every opportunity to strengthen their grip upon the workers. The cheap "Leftism" of the Lovestoneite, Zimmerman, and the Stalinite, Foster, must be rejected by the Left wing workers before too much damage has been done.

A Cowardly Paper

We will yet have occasion to return to the first, and other, numbers of the *Revolutionary Age*, the official organ of the Right wing (Lovestone group). Here only a word:

What strikes the reader is the political cowardice of the paper and its editors. We said some time ago that Lovestone is organizing his faction first on the basis of petty matters, and only after it has been mobilized, will he unfurl his banner, will he develop in full his platform. The first issue of the paper bears this out entirely. Lovestone and his faction are an integral part of the International Right wing. It is no secret that he supports the Bucharin faction in Russia as

well as he does its Brandlerite brother in Germany. But not a word of that in the R. A. The first page contains a "statement" which says nothing at all about its position on the burning issues of the Russian revolution's greatest crisis, about the struggle between three tendencies in the Comintern. Lovestone's article on Russia is a cowardly mass of meaningless platitudes, in which he dares not come out boldly for the Russian Right wing, except through the furtive expedient of calling the Five Year Plan "Rykov's" plan. He does not "endorse" the Right wing groups in the International; he only gives highly-colored favorable news about the Brandler, Jilek-Hais, Huber, Flyg and Roy factions. That is how Lovestone is "preparing the followers" for deeper swamps. The *Revolutionary Age*, to borrow a term from Browder, is an organ of cowardly opportunists.

Wicks at Large Again

An unsigned editorial by H. M. Wicks in the *Daily Worker* (10-26-1929) strains itself to the utmost to explain away the recent defections of George Bessadovsky and Paul Marion in France. In the course of the short editorial, we find a minimum of two wopping lies, not to mention seventeen smaller ones, including one slander of the *Militant*.

1. Wicks speaks of "one George Bessadovsky, who was dismissed from a subordinate post at the French embassy" (of the Soviet Union), and who gets together with counter-revolutionary thieves and blackguards "with the kind permission of Monsieur Briand." This "one, George Bessadovsky" was not dismissed, and did not hold a subordinate post in the Russian embassy. He ran off of his own accord, and his post was that of Acting Ambassador of the Workers' Republic in the absence of Valerian Dovgalevsky. As for his friendship with Briand, there is an interesting story to tell. After Comrade Trotsky was deported to Turkey, he applied to various European countries for asylum. One of the secretaries of the French Communist Party, Bouthonnier, ran to the Soviet embassy and pleaded frantically with Dovgalevsky and Bessadovsky to see Briand and influence him to prevent Trotsky from coming to France. A couple of days later, the Soviet representatives were visited for the same purpose by Marcel Cachin, who trembled and groaned that if Trotsky were to enter France "he would ruin the Communist Party." As is known, Comrade Briand accommodated Comrades Bessadovsky and Cachin and the French Communist Party was saved. But while he is at it, will Wicks explain to us how it can happen that an out-and-out counter revolutionist could have remained in such a high Soviet post for so long a time, while the Bolshevik fighter, Rakovsky, who was his superior at one time, is today in exile at Barnaul?

2. "Recently, in the world capitalist press, another pimple burst in the form of flamboyant 'exposures' by a hitherto unknown soldier of counter-revolution, Paul Marion, a petty-bourgeois intellectual, who sought a career in Communism. Being an intellectual he was taught to need an education, and at what better place to learn than in Moscow, where, however, after working in a minor position a while, he was sent back to France with the testimonial to the French C. P. that he was a cheap careerist and an enemy of the working class." Lots of lies here! Marion was not unknown; he was indeed no less a celebrity than the head of the agit-prop department of the French Communist Party. He was not sent to Moscow for an education, but as one of Stalin's educators of the Communists of the world. He was not sent back to France with that testimonial, for if he had been, how could an enemy of the working class remain in the ranks of the C. P. for 30 minutes? Marion left the C. P. of his own accord to join the social democrats, where so many of the pillars of Stalinism have recently landed. What Wicks "forgets" to tell us is that Marion, as head of the department of agitation and propaganda, was the author of most of the manifestoes, theses, platforms, proclamations, directives, road-maps and phillipics in the campaign against "Trotskyism". He was the lad who taught the French Party membership how "counter-revolutionary" Trotsky and the Opposition were, and how *Bolshevized* he, Marion, was (just as Bro. Wicks does today). For it was the Wickses, Marions, Bessadovskys, Lovestone's and Peppers of the world who expelled and slandered the Opposition.

That's why Wicks should be a bit more reserved in condemning Marion and Bessadovsky. After all, Wicks, who knows what the Third Period can do? A few years ago, you thought it necessary to line up the Gary Chamber of Commerce and American Legion against the Communists. And does not the good priest teach us that God alone knows what the morrow may bring? So why make it harder for yourself to climb over the garden wall, like Bessadovsky, into the comforting arms of the bourgeoisie and its Law?

"LET NOT THY FIRST PAGE KNOW WHAT THE SECOND PAGE SAYETH"

"The capitalist Scripps-Howard newspaper syndicate openly rebukes the A. F. of L. for not doing more to head-off and suppress the workers' strike movements, because it has not succeeded in stopping the 'industrial warfare in the South'—that is, stopping the workers' fight for better conditions." (*Daily Worker*, October 25, 1929, PAGE ONE).

"The (Scripps-Howard press) criticism was that the A. F. of L. was too cautious, reactionary and cowardly to do anything for the workers, that it was an organization of labor aristocracy, and all aristocracy is rotten." (*Daily Worker*, October 25, 1929, PAGE TWO).

Well, which is it? Is it too reactionary or not reactionary enough? The first two pages of the *Daily Worker* ought to get together and straighten out the line.