

IN THE AMALGAMATED

Hillman and the Left Wing

This is the second of a series of articles on the situation in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the record of the Hillman Right wing administration, a criticism of the policies of the Left wing and the present tasks of the latter. The first of this series appeared in the last issue of the Militant, and the next one appearing next week will deal with the present regime in the union to which intellectuals of every stripe have sung such passionate songs of limitless praise. The series is of vital importance to all militants in every industry, and particularly to workers in the needle trades. By a regrettable error, the pen name of the author of this series, "A. Schneider" was omitted from last week's article.

After the 1921 lock-out Hillman left for Russia for his vacation. During his absence from New York a serious situation developed in the New York organization.

"Harry Cohen, once manager of the Children's Clothing Joint Board, left the organization in 1920 and engaged in selling sewing material to the clothing employers. The union which was unattractive when private profits seemed in sight became attractive when the profits failed to materialize.

Capitalist Corruption in the Union

"In September 1921, H. Cohen announced his candidacy for office of manager of the Children's Clothing Department of the New York Joint Board. H. Cohen was promptly informed by the General Office that his name would not be placed before the members to be voted on unless he cleared himself on certain charges. These charges involved checks which H. Cohen had received from employers of our members. But H. Cohen failed to appear before an investigation committee and opened fire upon the organization.

.... "At the same time H. Cohen withdrew certain locals from the Joint Board and proclaimed himself boss of a separate union. After a few months fight H. Cohen was forced to appear before an investigation committee and explain his acts. The committee's unanimous verdict was, the act of any union official in borrowing money from manufacturers with whom the union has relations is, in the opinion of the committee, unethical and to be condemned. A man whose act of accepting financial favors at the hands of the employers of our members is unanimously condemned by an investigation committee, cannot hold any office in the A. C. W. A. The General Office took the position that in the labor movement purity must be even above unity. A labor organization that is unable to keep its hands clean does not deserve to live." (See the Advance editorial of Feb. 3, 1922, and the report of the investigation committee in the same issue pages 4-9 signed Morris Rothenberg, B.C. Vladeck, Charles W. Ervin. For other references see editorials, Advance of Dec. 19, 1921 and Jan. 13, 1922.)

During this fight the Forward and all those discredited leaders who were forced out of the union supported H. Cohen in his fight against the Amalgamated. They knew that if H. Cohen won they would be able to come back to the organization. But the investigation committee decided against H. Cohen and he withdrew temporarily.

The investigation committee also recommended to the Chicago convention a change in constitution in 1922 which states specifically in Article 13, Section 7 that people who have had dealings with employers are not eligible for office before the lapse of five years after their return to the trade. Did Hillman or Schlossberg live up to this clause in the constitution? No! Hillman, just as most chiefs, violated the constitution and still holds office, and H. Cohen, right after the Chicago convention was taken back into the union.

An interesting occurrence at the Chicago convention was Hillman's report of the Russian-American Industrial Corporation to help build clothing factories in Russia. The delegates unanimously approved his report with the exception of A. Beckerman who spoke against it. The "Left wing" so rejoiced over the approval of his report that they forgot to fight against standards of production and other "reforms". Hillman's going to Russia and the Russian-American Industrial Corporation

was a maneuver to bind the Lefts in order to introduce standards of production and reductions of wages. Hillman succeeded in fooling the Left wing.

Hillman Fools the Left

At the same time an unemployment situation developed in New York during 1921-22. Some of the old leaders who had left the union during 1919 and 1920—some of whom were forced out by the rank and file—utilized this situation for their own purposes while the Lefts were busy caucusing in the General Office with Rapchik, the lickspittle, and Salutsky-Hardman. Of course they organized with the aid of the Forward, and they threatened to split the New York organization and go back to the U. G. W. Hillman was faced with two possibilities: either to accept the challenge and make a fight against the clique with the aid of the progressives (or the Lefts) or to make peace with the Forward and take back the corrupt gang. Hillman chose to make peace with the Forward and its clique. He took back, in a quiet way, D. Wolff, Alex Cohen and Harry Cohen.

Not only did the Lefts not resist this treachery of Hillman, but local 5 under their leadership supported D. Wolff as manager of the N. Y. Joint Board! Hillman promised the Lefts that D. Wolff would carry through the Left policies in the union, and the Lefts took it for granted. Furthermore, the Lefts in local 5 called a meeting in Cooper Union and D. Wolff outlined the Left policies he would carry through in the union! It did not take long for the Left wing to find out that Wolff and Hillman had put them in a trap and double-crossed them. This shows how the Lefts allowed themselves to be used as a tool by Hillman and his gang. The Lefts made a grave mistake by giving Hillman time to make peace with the fakers and the Forward clique whom the Left knew would do everything in their power to oust it from the organization. Will this be a lesson for the Left wing in the Amalgamated?

At the same time conditions in the industry became deplorable along with Hillman's policy of more production (which he called "efficiency" and reductions in wages (which he called "adjustments") to say nothing of reduction in working forces where workers were thrown out of the factories with the aid of the union.

Something had to be done to put a stop to this unbearable situation. So the local unions under the control of the progressives and the Lefts demanded certain reforms in the N. Y. organization: 1. A minimum wage scale. 2. An aggressive and constructive policy against "standards of production", reduction in wages, and reduction in working forces each season. 3. Economy for the Joint Board, which meant reducing the staff. 4. Amalgamation of the two Joint Boards (Children's and Men's clothing) and local unions. These demands were never carried into effect until the Amalgamated officials were kicked into action by the fight the Left wing made.

Hillman's War on the Left

When Hillman saw the Lefts were determined to put up a fight for the reforms (or demands) and were gaining strength, he convinced himself at the Philadelphia convention in 1924 that the Right and Left wings were equal in numbers. Hillman and his General Executive Board made a gesture of "peace". Hillman declared that he belonged to neither group and what he wanted was "unity", which, in reality, meant the beginning of a bitter fight between

the two factions. Hillman who didn't like to have a "Right or a Left" machine but always a Hillman machine, had to eliminate one of the groups in order to intrench himself. So after the Philadelphia "peace" convention Hillman with his Right wing Forward clique declared war against the progressives (or Lefts).

Furthermore, Hillman took in A. Beckerman, a person whom he always disliked, and made him manager of the New York Joint Board without an election. Hillman appointed Beckerman as manager because he knew Beckerman would do the "dirty work" against the Lefts. Who does not remember Beckerman with his gang which broke up meetings, black-jacked members, deprived workers of their jobs, or threw them out of their shops? Beckerman succeeded in crushing the Left wing and kept in submission the discontented workers. Not only were individual members expelled and ruthlessly blacklisted, but local unions, such as Local 5 of N. Y. and the Pressers local of Rochester, under trusted organizers like Harry Cohen and with the help of the underworld, were suspended and reorganized. Hillman, a shrewd politician, killed individual activity in order that his group should be kept in power.

Why were the Lefts defeated in the Amalgamated in a time when they controlled the largest local unions in N. Y. and half of the membership supported them throughout the country? This power was evident at the Philadelphia convention when the Right and Left wings had equal strength. As I pointed out: 1. The Left gave Hillman time to make peace with the H. Cohen and the Forward clique. 2. When the fight began they had the machinery in their own hands and it was easy for them to oust and expel the Left wing. 3. The Left did not develop leadership able to cope with the situation. 4. There was no unity among the Lefts; they fought among themselves instead of fighting the Hillman and Beckerman machine. 5. They devoted much time to eliminating each other as leaders. In other words there wasn't one who could dominate or hold the group together. On the other hand the Hillman clique had the whole machinery in their control. They had the bosses, the police, the gangsters, the cash, and above all they were united to crush the progressives, or the Lefts. They have succeeded temporarily.

The question is: Have the Lefts learned the lesson from their past mistakes? This can not be answered off hand. For one thing the isolation policy the Communist Party officials have lately adopted will not bring any results.

What Must Be Done

In order to change the present intolerable conditions of the Amalgamated members something must be done. Conferences should be held in every clothing center. The Left wing should unite with progressive workers, and put responsible leadership in every city to carry through the work. An educational campaign should be waged throughout the country to bring before every local union in the U.S. and Canada the following demands: 1. All expelled members to be taken back to the organization with full membership rights. 2. No discriminations against political affiliations. 3. Elections should be held in every city and the members should decide who should represent them. 4. A 40-hour week should be established all over the country with week work. 5. To do away with piece work and "standards of production". 6. A minimum wage scale for all operations. 7. Unemployment insurance to be paid by the bosses and controlled by the workers. New York must take the lead in this fight because the loss of New York was decisive in the defeat of the Lefts throughout the country.

I know the Amalgamated bureaucrats will not accept these demands. What is important, however, is that with the help of the progressive workers, and with a constant agitation, the masses will rally behind the Left wing. When the next battle between the Left wing and the Hillman machine occurs, the Lefts and the progressives, united and not isolated, will come out victorious.

Stalinist Splitting

Bordiga Expelled

Il Lavoratore, organ of the Italian fraction of the Party, has just announced the decision of the Italian Communist Party Executive to expel comrade Amadeo Bordiga, on the charges of leading the Left Opposition and supporting "Trotskyism". The expulsion of the most capable leader of Communism in Italy is one of the most irresponsible and severe blows yet struck at the Party by its own leadership.

Comrade Bordiga is the founder of the Italian Communist movement. When about nine-tenths of the present leadership of the Italian Party were still either in the camp of the social democracy or hesitating about the formation of a Communist Party and a break with the yellow leaders of the Socialist party and the Federation of Labor, Bordiga was leading the struggle to found the Party from which he has now been expelled. He was the principle spokesman of the Left wing at the famous Livorno Congress of the Socialist Party in 1921, and was the acknowledged leader of the Communist Party after the Congress split.

In 1923, Zinoviev manipulated the executive of the Italian Party in order to remove the Bordiga group from leadership, even though a subsequent vote showed ninety percent of the Party to support the Left, and practically the entire Youth Federation. The coup d'Etat of the Centrists and Right wingers in the Party was finally achieved at the Lyons Congress in 1926, where the most outrageous gerrymandering and mis-counting of votes enabled them to cinch their control. Not only was the vote of Bordiga's own local Party group officially recorded against him at the Congress, but even the vote of Bordiga himself!

In November of the same year, comrade Bordiga was imprisoned by the fascist regime for being a Communist and exiled to the island of Ustica, between Sicily and Naples in the Mediterranean Sea. Only on the occasion of the recent "amnesty" were he and a number of other comrades released—only to be kept under the most rigid surveillance by the fascist police.

Not daring to expel Bordiga as a "counter-revolutionary" while he was in fascist exile, the opportunist leaders of the Party, fearful of the great influence comrade Bordiga would exert in the ranks of the Party took the desperate measure of expulsion. It is unnecessary to add that this will do anything but prevent the progress of the Left Opposition in the Italian Party.

That the expulsion will not pass by without serious repercussions in the ranks of the Italian Communists in all parts of the world, goes without saying. The first reports we have already received in New York indicate a strong resentment in the ranks of the Italian Party members against the expulsion. We are confident that many of these comrades, as well as revolutionary workers outside of the Party, will make their voices heard in protest against this criminal act of the Italian Stalinists.

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"MY LIFE"

All readers of the Militant, and their friends, who desire to get their copy of of Leon Trotsky, "My Life", should make it a point to order the book directly through the Militant. Shipment will be made the day the order is received, and the cost of the book, five dollars, (\$5.00), covers the postage charge. Send your order, together with money order or cash to

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SAN FRANCISCO—Oscar Liigeholm, 75, ran out of money and was too old to get a job. He dug himself a rough cave in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, and had lived there for two weeks before starvation drove him out. Two boys found him half unconscious and begging for water.