

## Johnstone's 'Self-Criticism'

## Crisis in the Needle Trades

The essence of Stalinist "self-criticism" can be summed up in one sentence: The central leadership is infallible and must not be criticized under any circumstances but as blame must be fixed for the constant blunders and debacles, let it be loaded upon the shoulders of the rank and file or the second, third or fourth layers of functionaries who only carried out the ruinous policies imposed upon them. The bureaucratic idea dominates every line of the sensational article (Daily Worker, 5-7-1930) by Jack Johnstone (endorsed by the Political Committee of the Party) which has caused a furore in the ranks of the Left wing needle trades workers. By what could only be ironical humor, the article is titled "Building the Needle Workers Union!"

The article is sensational, and was obviously intended to create a sensation. After many long months of unstinted praise for the Left wing Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, of bluff about the progress and the strength it was enjoying, and of the revolutionary class leadership it was giving to the needle workers, Johnstone establishes the following astounding facts:

## A Scandalous Record

The whole past period in the union has been one of defeats. Virtually the whole union has become corrupted and has betrayed the workers. The leadership is permeated with class collaboration ideas indistinguishable from Sigman's. It has worked hand in hand with the bosses and has even organized one group of them into an association in order to arrange contractual relations with it. It has used Tammany Hall police during strikes, bought immunity from the bourgeois state by employing Tammany Hall lawyers and refraining from criticizing the city administration, and has deliberately covered up the treachery of Ryan Tammany Hall president of the local A.F. of L. council, in order to gain his support. It was being hooked up with Mr. Broderick, head of the infamous Industrial Police Squad, the professional skull-crackers of the workers. It sold out to Sidney Hillman by pledging its tacit support to him in exchange for support against Sigman and Co. It even made deals behind the scenes with the blackest I. L. G. W. bureaucrats (Ninfo, etc.) and helped Schlesinger to oust Sigman. It accepted the worst kind of "impartial chairmen" settlements in strikes it led. Collaboration with the police flourished among the leadership of the Left wing and of the new union and "produced such jewels as Shapiro whose itching hand and stool-pigeon (!) proclivities were allowed to flourish... The real inner union politics consisted of a maze of 'clever' intrigues, maneuvers with so-called progressives, Shelly Sorkin, sections of the bureaucracy, the police, the bosses and the underworld, but never laying a base among the workers."

The whole hair-raising paragraph written above is taken practically word for word, from Johnstone's article. He is not referring here to any "counter-revolutionary Trotskyists", who are "agents of the bourgeoisie and its police" but to the leaders of the only Left wing union that has had any semblance of mass influence. Worst of all, every important charge that Johnstone makes is true. There remains, however, the job of looking into the reasons for Johnstone's article at this time and the ADDITIONAL facts and charges which he and the Political Bureau of the Party which endorsed his article omitted to mention.

The Left wing union in the needle trades is in a severely critical state. From ideological and organizational control of the decisive sections of the workers in the industry it has steadily sunk in the last two-three years to a position of impotence and passivity. The Right wing, effectively crushed at one time, has succeeded in reestablishing its stifling control of the organized workers. The Left wing has neither a perspective of its future, nor an effective program of action to extricate itself out of its present stagnation and decline.

## Lovestoneites Mainly Responsible

It is quite beyond doubt that the main burden of responsibility for this state of affairs rests upon the shoulders of the Love-

stone faction whose representatives and policy have dominated the course of the union in the past period. The rankest opportunism and all the elements of degenerating corruption were consciously nurtured by this group, from Lovestone, Gitlow and Wolfe, down to Zimmerman Wortis and Gold.

But with the removal from control of the Lovestone group and the imposition of the "new leadership" the situation has not improved, but if anything, been made worse. There is no reason to doubt that Johnstone's article was dictated by essentially factional motives—to discredit the easily discreditable Lovestone leadership, to lay it on thickly in order to cover up Johnstone's own share (and that of his fellow "leaders") of the criminal responsibility. For example:

Johnstone constantly fentions Gitlow, Zimmerman and Gross as the culprits. Why does he fail to write that Gold, Potash and Burochovich are at least equally guilty? Purely and simply because the latter trio have "accepted the new line" and thereby automatically guaranteed themselves from criticism for their past misdeeds. Were they any less involved in the dealings with Tammany Hall, with Broderick with the police, with the I. L. G. W. fakers with the shrewd Hillman machine than Zimmerman and Co? Not a whit less!

Is Johnstone animated by the interests of the Left wing and working class, or merely by the desire to take a factional

crack at Lovestone when he conveniently forgets that Gold proclaimed Shapiro's "innocence" only up to a couple of months ago? or that it is precisely the now white washed Gold who had the financial dealings with Hillman by which the Left wing's "neutrality" in the A. C. W. fight was purchased? or that Gold and Burochovitch are far from being strangers to the police? or that Wortis has always been the "ideological" inspirer of opportunism in the needle trades?

Or perhaps Johnstone will tell us why he "forgot" in his cataloging of opportunist crimes, to mention that both he and Browder advocated a policy for the I. L. G. W. Philadelphia convention which would have allied the Left wing with a temporarily disgruntled gang of the bureaucracy in order to "divide the power" in the union? The record of this shameful proposal and our fight against it is in the minutes of the Political Committee for that period. As on a previous occasion, we again demand: Publish that record! Where was this vulgarly opportunist policy, which we fought so sharply in the Party, any better than the maneuvers of Gitlow-Zimmerman with Sigman and Ninfo? Or perhaps Johnstone will find for us a record of his protests in the past against the corruption rampant in the Left wing?

## Johnstone Then and Now

Johnstone speaks indignantly about the "Zimmerman-Lovestone" policy of the Left wing during the cloak and dress makers strikes of the Right wing last year. Has Johnstone so quickly forgotten that the policy was HIS and Foster's and that of the rest of the "new leadership"? When he

## Prelude to a President's Swan-Song

The United States has recently produced two distinct types of presidents: Coolidge, a mediocre politician, an upright marionette who screens his masters' corruption, one who knows little and does less—in other words a mere figurehead. During a period of "plenty and prosperity" such men even become little heroes. Simpletons ascribe the good times to their expert leadership. The other is the Hoover type, the engineer of high finance, one who can take leadership in capitalist aggression. During hard times, it is this type that capitalism needs.

Louis Hyman, president of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, is rather the Coolidge than the Hoover type of president. While he rode the prosperity wave of Left wing influence among the needle trades workers, he even became a little hero. Some simple-minded people thought he had something to do with the wave. But when matters took on a different shape, when an aggressive policy, hard fighting and clarity of purpose were required, president Hyman became impotent, useless, and in some respects even an obstacle. Whole weeks passed with the president's chair vacant. It is during this period that he was given a trip to Moscow. There he spent several worth while months—worth while insofar as the president's absence from activities and the office could at least be easily explained.

But there is one thing that must be mentioned to Coolidge's credit: because he has nothing to say he is silent. President Hyman, however, frequently speaks out of turn. One of these occasions was at the Left wing needle trades mass meeting at Cooper Union on May 9th, where a campaign "for 6,000 new members" was supposed to be started. I suppose the Militant will deal with other interesting aspects of this meeting; I have in mind the unsigned article of "self"-criticism by Johnstone.

In his speech, Hyman said, among other things: "When Trotsky was asked why it was that he lost the power, it did not take him long to think up an answer. 'When the revolution was at high tide it needed great leaders, but when it was at ebb such nobodies as Stalin got into power.' As a matter of fact, if Trotsky's policies had been carried out Russia would be ruined today."

President Hyman who, because of his own faultless policies, wields such enormous power over the mass, revolutionary

industrial union of Left wing needle trades workers, cannot see why anyone should "lose the power" except as a result of bad policies... But that is something else again. Suffice it to ask: Does Hyman know what the Opposition demanded and still demands? Did he read it from their documents or out of the fabricated handbooks containing ideas maliciously ascribed to the Opposition by Stalin, handbooks given gratis to all official visitors to the Soviet Union? These questions are not difficult to answer.

## Where Hyman Has Fallen Down

There is, however, another side to the matter, and that is the tactlessness with which Hyman spoke about "losing" power. We needle trades workers have known for a long time the unfortunate role to which Hyman's lack of genuine independence has condemned him. Hyman is essentially a screen—an honest, an unwilling screen but nevertheless a screen. He has used his prestige as a militant, his standing as a "non-partisan" to cover up the chicanery, first of Zimmerman, Gross, Gold, Wortis and Co. when they were in power, and now of Gold, Potash and Co. alone. He has not had very much heart for this sort of job—that is true. He has frequently excused it to himself and his closest friends by pleading: "What else can you do? It's in the interests of the union." He has not even done this work very actively or energetically—and that accounts for his long passivity in union affairs. Nevertheless, the accomplishment, however feeble, of this task has enabled him to retain his formal "power" in the union, at least until now.

Alas, his recent needless assault upon Trotsky, even though it earned him the praise of Gold and the other Potashes, is only the operative prelude to his own swan song. It is an open secret in the needle trades market that Hyman is among those slated to go. Coolidge was at least followed by Hoover, but Hyman cannot even have that poor consolation. He is to be replaced (isn't the decision already made at 125th Street?) by that giant intellect and darling of the needle trades masses, H. Sazer. In cold truth, Sazer is already loitering around the corridors and offices of the union, an ominous shadow to Hyman, preparing for his historic task of leadership by an apprenticeship of licking postage stamps and folding envelopes.

So we see that comrade President Hyman is precisely the man to talk about "lost power". He ought to know. —B. T.

now criticizes the "negative" slogan of "Don't Join the Fake Strike!" why does he not add that this was the official Party policy for criticism of which the Militant was denounced as counter-revolutionary, just as was done when we demanded the application of the united front tactic? Why was it counter-revolutionary to criticize Johnstone and Foster IN TIME for the same stupidities which Johnstone A YEAR LATER accuses the scapegoats of having committed?

The answer is not hard to find: "Self-criticism" under Johnstone and Co. is the mean and cowardly device by which scapegoats and whipping boys are made to take the blame for disastrous results of policies that the Johnstones themselves impose. Stalinist "self-criticism" means the gag for the workers and the shield for the bureaucrats. In this case, it happens that Johnstone is really able to make out an excellent case against the Lovestoneites, but he will not be able to conceal the principal culprits: the new Party leadership. No, not even though tomorrow, when things continue to grow worse, Johnstone tries to pick new scapegoats out of the ranks of the still anointed leaders. Let Burochovich and Wortis look to their posts! Uneasy rests the head that wears a crown—even the paper crown of a Stalinist functionary. Is it not already known that Browder, Johnstone, and Co. are feverishly organizing a new, faction struggle to "clean out the old Lovestoneites"? The demand that Wortis, Gold, etc. "acknowledge their errors while associated with Gitlow, Zimmerman and Co." is advance thunder of this struggle.

The reader will ask: What does Johnstone propose now? The cold truth is that he proposes nothing because he has nothing to say. His principal aim is achieved when he succeeds in crushing his Party faction opponent. He writes a few vague, non-committal words about "the closest application of the R. I. L. U. class struggle policy laid down by the 4th World Congress and the 6th Plenum of the R. I. L. U. for this period of imperialist wars, mass class struggles and proletarian revolution."

That costs nothing and means nothing, because Stalinist resolutions are raw cloth out of which any policy you want (except the correct one) can be manufactured at a moment's notice. But there is a significant silence about the immediate perspectives of the Left wing union, about the program of action it should pursue, about the attitude it must have towards the masses of workers now dragooned into the I. L. G. W. U., and about the dozen other concrete decisive problems in which the Stalinists have so thoroughly demonstrated their bankruptcy and blunderings. What Johnstone fails to say, what he fails to propose as a means of issuing forth from the crisis that is wrecking the Left wing in the needle trades, will therefore have to be said by others. Space requirements compel us to postpone that for the next occasion.

The Militant invites Left wing needle trades workers to write for its columns on the situation in the union and to give their views on the problems of their movement. Articles written in any language will be translated into English and printed. The Daily Worker is the closed organ of the cynical bureaucrats—the Militant aims to become the voice of the militant rank and file.

## FROM BAD TO WORSE

The C. E. C. of the Party has replaced Roy Stephens as district organizer in Boston with Nat Kaplan. Stephens, after having ruined the Kansas City district, was promoted—not for ability but for fidelity—to Boston. The results are too well known. Kaplan, after having done his level best to ruin the New Jersey sub-district last year, is now also promoted to Boston, again, not for ability but for servility. We know that it would require a plenum of the Party C. E. C., with an open letter from the Comintern, to decide officially which of the two organizers is worse. But the Party members in Boston cannot be permitted to suffer so long without aid. Until the plenum is held, we are willing to open a fund drive for the Persecuted and Intensely Suffering Party members in Boston.