

How Do the Cutters Stand?

By ALBERT ORLAND

In the Militant, Number 29, in his article on the last convention of the A.C.W. in Toronto, comrade Schneider wrote about the fight between the Beckerman and the Hillman cliques and the compromise reached by them at that convention to divide the spoils in the New York organization and continue to keep the members in submission. To have a better understanding of the situation in the New York organization and the importance of the Toronto convention it is necessary to have some knowledge of the character and functions of the Cutters Union, Local "Big Four", A.C.W.A. For in the fights between the cliques in the New York Amalgamated organization in the last few years this local has played an important part and on the developments in the Cutters' Local depends much of the future of the Amalgamated in New York.

Local 4 has always been considered the strongest post of the A.C.W. in New York. Due to the specific conditions under which the cutters work, they have been a sort of aristocratic caste in the ranks of the clothing workers, particularly in New York, unlike the clothing workers here.

Working directly for the manufacturers in separate cutting rooms, isolated from the tailors who make up the garments in the shops of the contractors the cutters have occupied a position more advantageous than that of the rest of the workers in the industry. The cutters have consequently been easily influenced by the craft ideology of the leadership of the old United Garment Workers as well as of the present A.C.W. leadership. The cutters union has maintained its local autonomy under the A.C.W. Its affiliation with the New York Joint Board has been almost on the lines of a fraternal organization and its co-operation of a voluntary character.

The peculiar position of the Cutters Local has been responsible to a large degree for the demoralization and the sufferings of the thousands of clothing workers in New York. Holding the key position to the New York organization, Local 4 has been the decisive factor in the struggles between the union and the bosses and also a strategic post for all political machinations of the cliques and factions in the union. In the years when the A.C.W. was a militant union, the cutters local was the vanguard of the clothing workers and contributed the greater share to the improvement of their conditions in the shops and the building of the union.

Today the Cutters Union, while it has maintained many of the gains of the previous period so far as conditions go, is looked upon as the bulwark of reaction in the A.C.W. This reputation of Local 4 is due to the role it has played in recent years in Hillman's campaign of "efficiency-unionizing" the New York Clothing market.

Local 4 has been the chief instrument in Hillman's hands for breaking the resistance of the tailors against standards of production, the introduction of piecework and finally the crushing of the Left wing.

Each victory over the tailors in New York was achieved by the help of the Cutters' corrupt officials who in addition to the strategic position they have occupied in the organization have also, through their connections with the strong arm guard, been best qualified for that job.

Who does not remember the infamous Beckerman campaign of forcing piece-work on the tailors and his blackjacking of the Left wing? And Beckerman as the evil link between the cutters union and the New York organization has contributed most to wrecking the morale and the solidarity and making the job of betrayal of the tailors so much easier for themselves. In the above mentioned campaign of Hillman and Beckerman against the tailors, the cutters stood aloof, thereby sanctioning all the disgraceful acts of their officials.

But in all the bargains between Hillman and his agents, the Cutters union officials, the membership of the local has been the loser. The privileges of the cutters have been gradually lost, their conditions worsened, and due to the general disruption of the A.C.W. organization in New York, they are today as helpless as the rest of the workers in the industry. The speed-up in the shops, the temporary job system which serves as a means of supplying cheap and efficient labor to the bosses and keeping the workers divided, have demoralized the membership and thrown hundreds of them into the streets.

The intolerable regime in the local, the

irresponsibility of the officials, the tramping upon the elementary rights of the membership, the espionage system and the economic terror have destroyed the activity and broken the resistance of the rank and file of the membership. These are the results of the machinations of the A.C.W. officialdom in the strongest local in New York.

The Cutters local has faithfully performed its service as an instrument in Hillman's hands to force "efficiency-unionism" on the tailors. It now comes next in order to be whipped into line with the rest of the clothing workers. The cutters will not escape the fate prescribed for them by Hillman and the clothing bosses.

What did the Toronto convention accomplish for Hillman and what will be its results for the cutters? This convention completed a chapter in the history of Hillman's "efficiency-unionizing" of the New York market. In this chapter, the cutters local had written not a few important pages and its future can already be forecast.

The cutters local is already being placed under Hillman's control. The local officials are gradually submitting to his

Wipe Hooliganism Out of the Movement!

Those who imagine that the Stalinists have given up their tactics of violent physical attacks upon ideological opponents within the working class, like the disruption of public meetings, are laboring under a misapprehension. The only change in the tactics has been that the *Daily Worker* is more careful than it was about boasting of the bureaucratic gangsterism. In reality, however, it continues in just as dastardly a manner as when it was first begun by the Lovestone faction against the meetings of the Left Opposition. The most recent case in point is the disruption of the New York I.W.W. street meeting at University Place and 14th Street, a couple of Wednesdays ago.

The I.W.W. has been holding its meeting on that corner for sometime, every Wednesday night. Recently, some Party members have been instructed to cultivate the habit of attending these meetings not for the purpose of discussing respective points of view, but of deliberately provoking battles. Two weeks ago, this contemptible procedure reached its peak. Surrounding the meeting at which a handful of I.W.W. was present, some 150 to 200 Party members worked up to a pitch of incitement that ended with a physical assault upon the I.W.W. members who were greatly outnumbered. As usual, the Stalinists were equipped with blackjacks and similar persuasive instruments. In spite of the odds, the I.W.W. courageously and successfully routed the hoodlums even before the police came on the scene. Needless to say that the meeting was then dispersed.

Some time later, at 10th Street and 2nd Avenue, where a Party meeting was in process, Herbert Mahler, a local I.W.W. member, started to ask Engdahl, the Party speaker who had just mentioned the Party fight for free speech, why the Party sought to prevent the Wobblies from speaking freely. A gang of Party members immediately set upon Mahler and his companions. Bulls and cops came on the scene in a moment, and one of the former was kicked, while beating a prostrate I.W.W. with his fist. Mahler, Kolescar and a few other I.W.W. were then arrested! In the patrol wagon, Mahler was unmercifully slugged by the dicks so that he bled profusely. Kolescar, a slight worker, had two of his teeth knocked out. Both he and Mahler are being held for trial now on charges of "felonious assault".

So much for the upshot of this sample of Stalinist gangsterism!

Significantly enough, the Stalinists who organized and led the rioting were almost exclusively young comrades in the movement, with perhaps a year or six months of membership. They have apparently been taught by the Party leadership that Bolshevism is synonymous with . . . vio-

lence. While the Beckerman forces have been split, the administration of local 4 is forced to divide power with the Hillman forces in the local. These combined forces have already shown their strength in the local by a recent victory over the membership in doubling the amount of membership dues in the local. In what grip the membership will soon find itself is not difficult to imagine.

These are the net results of the Toronto Convention for the Hillman leadership. The New York market is nearing the final stage of being completely "efficiency-unionized" for the benefit of Hillman's "higher union strategy". As to the clothing workers—their history is still to be written.

Where is the Left Wing in the Local?

To fix the blame for not having a strong Left wing group in the cutters union entirely on the politicians of the "third period", as comrade Schneider does in the case of the other locals would not be entirely correct, neither would it be just. In the specific conditions of the cutters union the absence of an outspoken Left wing group in the present period of general reaction is hardly surprising. Unlike the other branches of the A.C.W., the cutters local still enjoys some union conditions, like the week-work system and the

ence. They do not seem to know that during the history of the struggle between Bolsheviks, S.R.s and Narodniki in czarist Russia, a struggle that reached the bitterest points at times, there was never a single, solitary instance of one of the groups in the revolutionary movement organizing a gang for the deliberate purpose of disrupting the meeting of another group. Heckling, questioning and similar means of discussion were frequent occurrences, but never the fanatical hoodlumery that is the crowning contribution of Stalinism to the revolutionary movement.

As comrade Trotsky has so poignantly expressed it, the Stalinists try to make up for their impotence in the face of the bourgeois state by physical domineering over and attacks upon non-Stalinist groups in the movement; they substitute for an appeal to the workers' brains, a club on the workers' heads. These methods disgrace the movement as a whole. We branded them vitriolically when Lewis Sigman, Hillman and Co. introduced them in the trade unions. We have no less condemnation for them when they are introduced in the name of a Stalinist neo-Communism.

The workers everywhere will be aiding the cause if labor by shouting their hostility to these reactionary methods against adversaries in the movement. The worker in the official Party, in whom the revolutionary spirit has not been extinguished by the senseless marionettes who occupy the high posts, will do an incalculable service to the Communist movement too by standing up and raising his voice in protest against these degrading tactics. He will find a ready echo from the hearts, if not the lips, of hundreds of others.

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minimum wage, and their disposition is in general less revolutionary than that of the tailors. But their discontent has been continually growing under the intolerable regime of the local, and with a correct policy the Left wing could establish a good base there.

But the zig-zag tactics of the T.U.U.L. and previously the T.U.E.L. that have followed like a weathercock the official winds of the Communist International have had their disastrous results here as everywhere else. The swift alterations between the united fronts at all costs and the holier-than-thou attitudes of the "third period" apostles have so confused the rank and file that no organized Left wing movement is to be found in the A.C.W.A. The existence of a Left wing there is not at all desired by the official Communist Party, and any attempt to organize a Left wing in the A.C.W.A. is met with fierce opposition by the Stalinists.

According to the "third period" policy activation of the membership of the old unions is branded as reformism. Participation in these is considered a sort of "necessary evil" and permitted only with the object of exposing the reactionary officialdom and recruiting members for the revolutionary union under the leadership of the T.U.U.L. This policy is of course based on the theory that the workers in the reactionary unions have already been radicalized and are ready on short notice of the T.U.U.L. agents to leave the old unions and join the revolutionary ones. All that is necessary is just to stage a few exposures of social-fascists there at their meetings. No pressure, however, should be used on the officials to show in concrete cases of struggle just where they stand on questions affecting the interests of the workers for fear that this may create illusions among the workers that the old unions can be reformed. Here is how this policy is expressed in the *Daily Worker*, August 19th editorial:

"It is not our duty to desert the A.F. of L. and leave the members of these union under the leadership of the bosses' agents to be utilized against the interests of the workers. On the contrary revolutionary workers must carry on their activities within the A.F. of L., not with the Lovestonian conception of forcing the leaders to fight, but with the revolutionary conception of winning the leadership of these workers for the building of revolutionary trade unions which alone can successfully fight for the economic demands of the workers."

This policy is a complete refutation of the Leninist conception of working within the old unions. To believe that the workers will get radicalized under the influence of a few speeches exposing the reactionary leadership and not by organized pressure on this leadership to show their color in action condemns the work in the unions to futility. The result of such a policy can only be the isolation of the revolutionary element from the bulk of the membership still under the influence of the reactionary leadership and the strengthening of the later's position in the unions. The reactionary officials, relieved of the pressure of an organized opposition, have a free hand to carry on their work of betrayal and can only be thankful for such a policy.

In reciprocation for this policy, which is a real service rendered them by the Left wing, they are obligingly taking careful pains to relieve the "third period" Left wingers of the effects of the "necessary evil"—of the participation at union meetings entirely, by either expelling them or gradually doing away with union meetings, thereby also saving the reactionary unions and themselves from exposure. That this always means strengthening the revolutionary unions is hard to say but it should mean that to "right-thinking" Communists anyway. However, the immediate effect of the new policy is this amazing reciprocity between the reactionaries and the "third period" revolutionists which, though not pre-arranged or even intended, is nevertheless logical and unavoidable under the application of the new policy.

It remains entirely for the Left Communist Opposition to undertake the rebuilding of the Left wing movement in the A.C.W.A. as well as in the other unions where the Left wing has been wrecked. The rank and file of the membership will respond to a call to action by a responsible and constructive Left wing organization.

(Coming articles by comrade Orland will deal with the concrete conditions of the cutters at present, and with other sections of the men's garment industry, and the problems of the Left wing.—Ed.)