

# Elections in the Amalgamated: What For?

By ALBERT ORLAND

The approaching annual elections in Cutters Local 4 of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America have caused not a little trouble to the local administration and also at the same time led to an outbreak of indignation and protest by the cutters against their chief official, manager Philip Orlofsky.

Elections have long been a serious problem to the Tammany labor official. Knowing well that his rule is hated by the membership, the local king, since his ascension to power several years ago, has never taken a chance in an election without first "making it safe" for himself, to use the Wilsonian expression. Various methods have been used for that purpose, from manipulating votes to the more effective means of entirely removing oppositions from the ballot. In this manner the present manager of the cutters' local has succeeded in re-electing himself to office year after year together with his administration of dummies whom he carefully picks from among the most unscrupulous and basest elements in the local.

## Abolishing Elections

At this time, however, of unprecedented unemployment and great discontent among the membership, the safest thing for Orlofsky and his lieutenants is not to have any election at all and assure themselves the offices for another year, and things would fare fairly well with them. The former "opposition" has, with the help of Hillman, been liquidated by a rapprochement with its office-seeking leaders who were placed in soft jobs a long time prior to the elections. The administration will even be able to pretend that it is very much concerned about economy, and would rather divert the money which an election entails into the relief fund for the unemployed.

But—and here is where the trouble comes in—there is a mischievous child in the house, and a member of the family at that. The present chairman of the local, a staunch supporter and trusted accomplice of Ph. Orlofsky in all his machinations, is determined at this time to advance himself to a paid office in the organization.

And lo and behold! This mischievous boy has proved to be a real "rebel". He refuses to budge for any consideration. A way must be found to remove him from the ballot. He must, in addition to that, receive his due punishment for defying his chieftain. The integrity and wisdom of the administration on the other hand, must be demonstrated before the membership.

A membership meeting of the local was called to consider a recommendation by the Executive Board to disqualify the candidacy of the present Local chairman for Business Agent at the coming elections on the ground that he has been engaged in selling insurance policies. Simultaneously, a recommendation has also been brought to bar all those engaged in sidelines while belonging to the union from seeking office for a period of two years.

The membership that crowded the large meeting room watched the performance of the verbal encounter between the corrupt officials on the platform like a crowd watches a sporting game without being concerned about the outcome, as though they were not directly involved. They have become so accustomed to such performances that these hardly produce any moral effect on them. They have long convinced themselves of the corruptness and treachery of their officials and therefore show indifference on such occasions.

However, as the fight between their manager and chairman progressed, the mutual attacks and accusations, as well as cynical utterances, revealed facts of corruption and treachery that caused a spontaneous outbreak of uncontrollable protest from the ranks that almost turned into a riot. With great difficulty order was established after general commotion. But the meeting ended in a "victory" for Orlofsky.

## Rank Corruption

What were the facts brought out at the meeting? The following:

The manager accused the chairman of striving to advance his insurance business through the medium of a union office (there are strong rumors prevalent that the manager himself is engaged in a big business!), namely; in the manufacture of canvas for the clothing trade.

The chairman stated that in 1929, in the year previous to his election to the office of chairman, he sold insurance to the value of \$385,000 and that in the year 1930, while chairman of the union, he sacrificed his business and is ready to give it up entirely and devote his entire energy to the union. (He did not, however, say to whom he sold his insurance). The manager proudly declares that he fears no opposition since he knows how to deal with oppositions.

The chairman accuses him of stealing

elections, eliminating oppositions by means of intimidation and electing his executive board and staff in advance of the elections (which is a farce). The manager answers that the chairman has been an accomplice in all of his acts in the union and therefore cannot shake off his guilt for them.

The chairman makes a demagogic appeal to the members for support. He swears loyalty and devotion to the best traditions of the A. C. W. which are being trampled upon by Hillman and his hosts of conspirators. He claims to champion the membership's elementary rights to elect their own officials against the manager's autocratic rule.

The manager threatens to "chain and muzzle" him until he submits to his will.

Such are the facts laid bare before the members of the cutters' local at the meeting called by their officials on the eve of

the coming elections in the Local. These facts have not been unknown to the members before, but the cynical and frank manner in which they were brought out by their officials were too insulting and irritating not to provoke an outburst of indignation on their part. Their patience has already been overtaxed and they are showing signs of awakening and a readiness for struggle. The struggle will be a hard one. But a beginning will have to be made. The cutters have for a long time kept aloof from the struggles of the A. C. W. members against their corrupt officials and their treacherous policies. Now they are facing the effects of the worsened conditions in the clothing industry and must join the tailors in their fight to defend their common interests. The cutters are beginning to realize this. The cutters' officials at the last meeting received a warning of the approaching storm in the organization. They will attempt to stave it off or stem it. But they cannot succeed. The misery and sufferings of the masses of

the clothing workers has reached the climax. Too many grievances have accumulated. A revolt in the A. C. W. is unavoidable. In this revolt, the cutters will play their part. They may be destined to strike the first blow.

It is characteristic how the *Advance* of March 6 reports this meeting. In its customary lying manner the bureaucrats' mouthpiece tries to convey the impression to its readers that the entire membership present at the meeting participated in the voting and that the rank and file expressed their views in the discussion. At the same time the real question involved in the whole affair, the question of the elections and the maneuvers of the officials, is carefully covered up. No mention, of course, is made of the protests of the membership and the disturbance. The voice of the membership is not very pleasant to the bureaucrats' ears. It does not harmonize so well with the much vaunted "Amalgamated spirit" of which they prate in the columns of *Advance*.

Well, *Advance* is published not for the A. C. W. membership but for the outside world to broadcast the glory of the Amalgamated leadership and to win medals for Hillman. So why bother about it?

# The Stalinists in the Hungarian Bureau Run Amuck

It took somewhat more than three years for Pepper, Lovestone, Gitlow and Weinstein to turn the Hungarian Bureau of the party into a good Stalinist bureaucratic machine. It was not an easy job. Comrades of long standing in the movement had to be removed and expelled, to be replaced one by one with servile petty bourgeois elements of the declassed type, ready to serve any master. Yes, it was a hard job but it was done and for a number of years this petty bourgeois apparatus has been sitting in the saddle firmly and serenely, not only in the Hungarian Bureau but in the auxiliary organizations as well. They are rather running amuck in consequence of some events which came like a bolt from the blue sky, or, to put it in a more prosaic way, from the Hungarian Sick Benefit and Educational Federation, the only Hungarian mass organization under party control.

## Charges of Corruption

This organization is the mainstay of the *Uj Elore*, the party's Hungarian daily. With its nearly five thousand members it is a recruiting ground for the party. It gives valuable support to the various party campaigns. It is a considerable financial source for the party. Looking over its financial report for the year of 1930, we find the following items in the expenditures: For the official organ (*Uj Elore*) \$9,626.78 for educational and organizational purposes \$4,643.88; for defense \$509.72. The sum first mentioned went directly to *Uj Elore*, the second amount was spent by organizers appointed by the Hungarian Bureau, the third went to the I. L. D. In various ways more than ten per cent of the total income was placed at the disposal of the party. Out of almost five thousand members not more than half a dozen used to protest once in a while against this support given to the party,—some non-working class, reactionary members, insignificant in numbers and devoid of any influence. The organization was called a milch cow for the party by all the reactionary newspapers as well as by the I. W. W. and the S. L. P. In the face of attacks and reproaches from these sides, the organization took the correct and proud position of support to the leading, revolutionary party of the working class as the elementary duty of a labor organization worthy of the name.

On the other hand it must be admitted that such a correct position should not be taken by the party leaders as a license for mismanagement of the organization, for misuse of its fund for corruption in general. And this is what the party leadership stands accused of even by such members of the organization who for many years have been staunch supporters of the party.

Here are the facts:

Some time ago a hint was given to members of the Astoria branch by Friedenfeld, a party member, president of National Executive Committee, to the effect that "something is rotten in Denmark", an "investigation of the books of the organization would be in order," and so on. The branch took the hint and appointed an investigation committee, to go over the books of the national organization, such procedure being the constitutional right of any branch. Independently of the Astoria branch, a similar committee was elected by the New York (Yorkville) branch. Both committees found and reported the following cases of mismanagement and misuse of funds:

1. The Active Press, a party institution, got a loan of six thousand dollars from the Sick Benefit and Educational Federation. This loan was given for three years in 1927. In three years \$1,100 was paid, at present the notes for the balance are in the safe of the organization, but in

the meanwhile the Active Press was liquidated by the party and there is no one to pay the balance. Furthermore the Active Press owes to the organization \$2,300 for rent and moving expenses. Since the Active Press was liquidated by the party this amount also must be regarded as bad debt.

2. The *Daily Worker* just now is making a strong and justified attack upon the *Russky Golos* for publishing an ad of some swindling real estate venture. The *Uj Elore* did something just as bad or worse. It ran the ads of a swindling stock scheme of Partos, the head of the Cornell Drug Stores. Although some of the bourgeois papers exposed the swindling operations of Partos and warned the Hungarian workers to beware of this faker, thousands of workers bought the worthless stocks because of the ads they read in the *Uj Elore*. This fellow paid for the ads with notes and after pocketing hundreds of thousands of dollars, ran his corporation into bankruptcy. The notes which the *Uj Elore* held for the amount of \$1,800 became worthless. But this matter did not cause headaches for the Hungarian Bureau. It turned over these worthless notes to the Sick Benefit and Educational Federation for cash.

3. The investigation committees found in the safe of the organization bad checks to the amount of \$2,333, issued by the Active Press and the *Uj Elore*.

4. They found in the safe a note signed by Louis Kovess, a party leader, indorsed by Gustave Mayer, another party leader, for the amount of one hundred dollars. The note was payable in the month of March, last year. They found a bad check cashed for Hugo Gellert in the month of April, last year. They found other notes for various sums given to party members.

5. For several years there was a growing demand for the replacement of the assessment system with the more sound rate system. This proposition was rejected by the Hungarian Bureau as "anti-proletarian". The proposition is now given up by the Bureau, but the party leaders made an agreement with a Philadelphia lawyer who for the consideration of three thousand dollars undertook to secure permission from the Insurance Department of the State of Pennsylvania to let the Pennsylvania branches retain the unsound assessment system till 1932.

There were other instances of misuse of funds and mismanagement found by the investigation committees of the two branches. The Astoria committee submitted its report to the National Executive Committee of the organization. The party leaders denied the charges at the meeting, but something unexpected happened. The two national auditors took the floor and made a statement to the effect that every charge was true, they know of these cases of mismanagement and corruption, they kept silent about them under the pressure of the party leaders, but they refuse to shoulder the responsibility for such mismanagement. As a protest against it they tendered their resignation. One of these auditors, Piskothy, was a party member for a long time, left the party just recently, but remained a supporter of the Bureau up to the time of these exposures.

## Supporters Turned into "Fascists" Overnight

The party leaders took action at once. Day after day articles were published in *Uj Elore* about a great fascist conspiracy against the organization. Party members and ardent supporters of the party for many years, who dared to raise their voices against the corrupt acts of the party leaders were branded as fascists and the allies of fascists. They were turned into fascists

by the party leaders overnight. In order to reinforce this campaign carried on in the party organ, four organizers were sent on the road to visit the branches throughout the country to expose the great "fascist conspiracy". Pressure was brought upon party members in various cities to send in correspondence expressing the unlimited confidence of the workers in the party leaders. The number of party members not being very impressive, letters were published in *Uj Elore* allegedly written by members and workers with signatures of "a member" and "a worker"

In some cases the attacks made on some members of the investigation committees have some justification. Two or three members of these committees had for years a very strong anti-Communist attitude, not so much on a theoretical basis but rather because of dissatisfaction with the way the affairs of the organizations were handled by the party. But the overwhelming majority of the opposition has always been composed of sincere and loyal supporters of the party. They are known as such by the masses of the workers. By branding them as fascists the party leaders hope to turn them against the party, to make them anti-Communists and then to have their charges dismissed on the ground that these charges, coming from a counter-revolutionary camp, are not worthy of consideration.

So far they have failed. The action taken by the committees is anything but anti-Communist. They made their report and recommendations to the branches. They demand the removal of the guilty party leaders. They reject any tendency to withdraw support from the party or to overthrow the party control. They insist that rank and file party members should be elected to the National Executive Committee and that party control should be ideological rather than mechanical. They demand workers' democracy in the organization. In the face of all the provocation they declare that they are going to carry on the struggle within the bounds of the organization not for the dissolution of the relation between the organization and the party but for the elimination of corruption.

If the opposition sticks to this line, it will deserve support.

## Beware of Dangers!

The appearance of any opposition within the movement is taken by all anti-Communist elements as a signal for a concerted attack upon the party, upon Communism. These elements will try to attach themselves to oppositions in the Communist movement. An opposition, no matter how justified, will degenerate if it does not reject such approaches in a clear-cut, decisive manner. The opposition in the Hungarian Sick Benefit and Educational Federation has failed to do this. This is a dangerous failure and if not corrected at once, will lead to its degeneration. Anti-Communist elements will offer help. It must be repudiated. The I. W. W. has taken up this fight and offers a remedy: to fight against corrupt leadership—replace the Marxian-Leninist theory with syndicalist notions. The opposition must disassociate itself from such elements in an unmistakable manner. Failure to do this means disaster for it and the strengthening of the very bureaucracy against whose corruption it began the fight.

There is another shortcoming of this opposition. It is its failure to understand the basic reasons for the situation. We shall take up this question in our next article. —Y. S.