

Next Steps in the Needle Trades

The four-weeks' strike of the New York dressmakers (February 18—March 18) afford us a lesson from which every Left wing worker should draw the necessary conclusions. As has already been reported, the results of the strike were miserable. The N. T. W. I. U. lost a great deal of prestige among the workers, thereby weakening the whole Left wing. Numerically, the Industrial Union did not lose anything. The number of shops under its control remain about the same, with a slight increase in membership. But the morale of the workers was lowered to a great extent, and spread still further the spirit of pessimism and apathy in the ranks of the membership. Due to the strike, the Left wing was undoubtedly weakened. But it has not yet been crushed.

The objective conditions under which the strike was called must be taken into consideration. We cannot lose sight of the fact that the deep-going crisis, which affected every industry, the needle trades included, the prolonged and extensive periods of slack time, paralyzed the fighting capacity of the workers to a considerable degree. The workers' conditions in the organized shops, under the control of either the Right or the Left wings, declined about thirty-five to fifty percent. To settle down in the shops and make ends meet—this has been the prevailing sentiment among the workers. In such situation it becomes a duty of the leadership to much seriously, deliberately and consciously prepare to strengthen the morale, and the unity of the workers as a prerequisite for the strike.

The conditions won by the dress makers through many bloody fights against the bosses, such as a minimum wage, a nominally established piece rate, shorter hours, have been continually taken away and abolished. The Industrial Union failed to carry on an intensive drive in the shops to resist the lowering or breaking down of the hard-won condition, and to extend the struggle into the unorganized shops and into the shops where the Right wing, with the help of the bosses and the police, gained control, and where the process of elimination of working conditions has been going on with the same rapidity and determination.

The workers felt that during these hard times the Industrial Union allows the same state of affairs to exist in the shops under its control as do in those under Right wing domination. The average worker looked upon both unions in the same way. The endeavor of the present leadership to make up for these shortcomings with an ill-prepared strike, put the Industrial Union into further isolation.

Further, the Union leadership created, at the very outset, a widespread confusion by its vacillation and uncertainty on the question of strike demands. A leadership, to be successful, must have at least a measure of definiteness, so that the workers feel confident in entrusting this leadership with the conduct of its struggles. The Union first proposed the conclusion of economic demands, entirely essential under the circumstances. Then, under the pressure from the Right, the party decided upon giving up the demands for week-work and the shorter working day. Our comrades of the Opposition, fighting in the General Strike Committee, and in the Delegates Council, felt that the very foundation and the backbone of the strike had been removed. To strike for recognition of the union without conditions meant the virtual disregard of the unorganized workers and also of those organized in the Right wing union.

The demand for shorter hours and week work would at least have proved to the workers that the N. T. W. I. U. is championing better conditions and is ready to lead the workers in struggle. The strike would then have become a fight of the workers for better conditions, and the forerunner of the coming struggles under the leadership of the Left wing. Once these demands were abandoned, the central point of the strike removed, there was no valid reason for a general strike. The leadership could not and did not expect a response. They gambled with the life of the N. T. W. I. U. That is why our comrades proposed that if the party heads insisted upon eliminating the economic demands, it would be better to convert the movement into an intensive organization campaign in preparation for a really broad strike.

While the forces of the Union in the shops were declining, no new adherents were gained from the workers in the Right wing union. Instead of building a Left wing in the I. L. G. W. U., the leadership sang in chorus: It's a company union; don't bother with it; keep away from it. For more than a year, the Left Opposition hammered away at the Left wing generally, and specifically at the Communist party members in the needle trades, on the necessity to lead

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the struggle of the workers who had been corralled again by the Right wing unions and not to leave them a prey to the bosses' agents, the Schlesingers, the Kaufmans, the Hillmans and others.

Subsequent events have borne out this policy to T. An organized and developed opposition in the Right wing union, would afford moral and organizational help for every struggle of the N. T. W. I. U. Through such an opposition we would have been able to carry on a united front policy with the workers in the old union. Not a fake "rank and file united front committee" to snatch a few workers away from the great majority, but a genuine united front to carry on a fight against the bosses on the basis of specific demands, for instance: a shorter working day, the abolition of piece work, improved conditions, etc.

The Industrial Union, which is a minority section, must follow the path of united front action. The hesitation and delay of the leadership (party and T. U. U. L.) to adopt this course, contributed largely to the present weakened condition of the N. T. W. I. U. The fundamentally erroneous policy of: Hands off the "company unions", a medicine given to the workers in big doses at very short intervals, is coming back to the same leadership at present. The workers are confused. Only yesterday, the workers were told to keep away from the "social fascist company union"; without any explanation, they are told today by the zig-zagging leaders, that the policy must be to work within these organizations. Naturally, there is skepticism and further confusion. The proper way to make the workers understand the significance of the new policy is to admit to them that the "company union" theory was wrong from the beginning, and to inaugurate a thorough-going discussion on how to carry on the building of an opposition in the unions controlled by the reactionaries.

What is the situation now? The present situation is by no means hopeless, even though the wrong policies have driven the Union into isolation and made the struggle more involved. The existing unions, on a craft basis, have not solved the problems of the workers. The problem of building an Industrial Union embracing all needle trades workers is still on the order of the day. Whether the present unions will constitute the foundation for one industrial union or whether it will be built through the vast majority of the unorganized through united front struggles cannot be decided in advance. But our course must be to build one industrial union, the tactics to be determined by prevailing conditions. To achieve this aim, we must not relax for one moment, nor must we capitulate before the hardships. The tendency of the Right wing has always been to capitulate before the fakers, expressed today by the Lovestone group proposal to liquidate the Industrial Union. This proposal aims at the liquidation of the organized Left wing, and involves a submission to the Right wing bureaucrats or their "Left" assistants. Such a way out of the situation must be repudiated.

The Left wing and Communist workers should exert all pressure to eliminate such a capitulationist ideology. Our Union has suffered enough from such defeatism in the past.

The possibilities for building the new union are at hand. There are thousands upon thousands—the majority in the industry—who are unorganized. The knit goods trade, for example, is an outstanding instance. There we can begin our organizational work with the help of those cloak-makers who went through a training in the struggle and are even now, after all the defeats, still sympathetic to the cause of the Left wing. They did not exchange the banner of the Left wing for that of reformism. This industry now comprises from 30,000 to 35,000 unorganized workers. The same is true of other branches even though there has been some organization. The dress, the fur, the raincoat, the millinery, the white goods, etc., etc., are not even half controlled by the Right wing. Here is our field for work, of course, if we actually do the work and do not wait for miracles.

The organization work will have to be carried on in a planful and constructive way. The tactics used up to now must be discarded, and instead a broad policy of establishing contacts with the shops, of preparatory work, of single strikes, should be adopted. The conditions of the workers have almost reached rock bottom. The same standards prevail in both union and open shops. This creates a condition where the future struggle of the workers, in both the Left and Right unions and in the open

shops, will be for the same improvements. To be more specific, all the enumerated groups will have to make the same demands in order to regain the lost standards and further to improve conditions.

We know now, without a shadow of a doubt, that the reactionary officials will not promote such struggles. On the contrary, they will do all in their power to divert the militancy of the workers. Therefore, it remains for the Left wing to help the workers in the old unions to organize and fight side by side with the other militants for their own interests. From this struggle, new oppositions will emerge, with whom the N. T. W. I. U. will have to carry on fights for improvement on the basis of united fronts. Not such united fronts as

The Daily Worker Explains Some Differences

"A worker in South Bend, Washington," the *Daily Worker* (3-17-1931) informs its readers, "writes: What is the difference between a Lovestoneite and a Musteite? I have been reading the *Daily Worker* for a year now, but I have never seen this question answered."

The perplexity of the South Bend worker is easily to be understood and sympathized with. After reading the *Daily Worker* for a year, he has not been able to find an explanation of the difference between the Right wing of the Communist movement and the Left wing of reformism. That the oracle who replies to him in the "Questions and Answers" column tacitly accepts the implication of the worker's question is already an illuminating revelation of the confusion and ignorance that Stalinism sows in every important political question? How could it be otherwise? To expect clarity on such problems from these professional incompetents is to look for milk from a bull. Is it not the beginning and end of all their wisdom that there is no difference between anybody and everybody who opposes the "line" that prevails for the moment, regardless of the nature of the opposition? Does not "every worker know" that Hoover, Fish, Borah, Green, Thomas, Hillquit, Muste, Lovestone and Trotsky are one and the same person, masquerading as many only with the mischievous purpose of confounding philosophers of the "third period"? It would appear that questions settled so long ago by the *Daily Worker* no longer required the elaborate reply which it devotes to the South Bend worker, especially when the reply consists principally of the usual superficial journalistic denunciation of Lovestone and Co., which are repeated all the more violently the more the author seeks to make his readers forget that only yesterday the Stalinists were so amorously celebrating with Lovestone the their joint pogroms against the expelled Left Opposition. And these "settled questions" would really require no reply but for two reasons: the fact that they are not yet "settled", and secondly, the need felt by Stalinism, in order to hold its own head above water, to promote the campaign of slander and falsehood against the Left Opposition. That is why, in the midst of his reply, the anonymous writer in the *Daily Worker* presents his readers with the following information:

"Lovestone stopped all his 'criticism' of the Musteites and the so-called 'Lefts' in the socialist party long ago. Nor was Lovestone alone in this. The Trotskyites who considered themselves the 'Communist leaven' (in) the new progressive movement' made overtures to the Lovestoneites on the basis of work within the Muste movement and against the Communist party.

"In the summer of 1930 conversations were held between Cannon, leader of the Trotskyites, and Lovestone. The purpose of these parleys was to work out a common base of struggle against the Communist party and the Communist International. While they had to keep this alliance more or less secret from their followers, the spirit of 'cooperation' on the basis of the Muste program became so prevalent in the Trotskyite group that Cannon, on pressure from Shachtman, et al, was forced to castigate his followers who, like Bart Miller of the Lovestone group, took the cue of their leader without its diplomatic trimmings and went too openly into the Muste camp. The flesh and blood alliance of the Trotskyites with the Muste group did not mature. They could not travel quite so fast as the Lovestone group had done, but their hearts were set on the distant green fields of the Musteite 'mass movement'. They had an international anchor."

Were it not for certain unintended avowals contained in these sentences, it would hardly be worth refuting the fantastic fabrications out of which they are composed. But the Communist movement is living through a period where lying is in-

Potash is now proposing with the discredited labor skate Sorkin (of the Furriers). It seems that the Potashes have learned nothing from the past betrayals. Again we hear the voice of the Lovestone ideology in the party: United fronts with "progressive" cliques. Lovestone unites with Levy and Potash proposes that the N. T. W. I. U. unite with Sorkin. A schooling in Lovestoneism seems to be hard to live down. We want united front with the rebellious workers in the ranks of the Right wing unions. The Left Opposition will fight with the help of the Left wing workers against such "united fronts" as are proposed by the Lovestone Right wing or the Stalinist Potashes.

Steering clear of corrupting influences in our own ranks, the Left wing can win its struggle to build one powerful industrial union of the needle trades workers if it is able to adopt a course that will lead it with sureness in the right direction.

vested with the cloak of official authority and backed by an unprecedented apparatus for "distribution".

Falsehood No. 1 is a distorted quotation from an old Militant in which we said that "the Communists must establish contact with the workers in the ranks and combine with them for a common struggle. Without the Communist leaven the new progressive movement will have no backbone. . . . Without asking anybody's permission the Communists must become a part of it, influence it from within, push it to the Left and help to shape it into an effective fighting force. Ruthless criticism of the Muste leadership is an indispensable part of this work for the future of the movement" (9-15-1929). We have not changed our opinion on this point. The party leaders, who change their opinions every week, will yet be compelled to accept our point of view—without understanding it, it is true, and without being able to execute the policy as Bolsheviks.

Falsehood No. 3 is the alleged "summer of 1930 conversations" between Cannon and Lovestone to negotiate "a common base of struggle" against the Comintern. Why in 1930? Did not the *Daily Worker* inform us for a year prior to that date that "the Trotskyites and Lovestoneites have concluded a united front of renegacy against the party"? If it was "concluded" early in 1929, why the 1930 conversations? Are we to draw the daring conclusion that the *Worker* was lying about the "united front" at least between the summer of 1929 and the summer of 1930? Rash as such a deduction may appear, we can come to no other! And while conversations are being discussed, will the *Daily Worker* be kind enough to inquire of comrade Bittelmann about some "conversations" that a certain representative of the Comintern had—not in 1930, but in the late winter of 1931—with the "Right wing in Canada about a common base of struggle"? Such a report would make more interesting, more valuable and more truthful reading. . . .

Assorted falsehoods: Just where did the "spirit of cooperation on the basis of the Muste program" become prevalent in our group, and require "Cannon, on pressure of Shachtman, et al [who is this 'et al']? to castigate his followers"? Which of the Oppositionists "went too openly into the Muste camp", or into that camp at all? Hasn't the *Worker* writer confused us here with his yesterday's comrade-in-arms in the struggle against Trotskyism, Bert Miller, who is now fighting "Trotskyism" on the other side of the barricades, as many of his similars will do tomorrow? . . .

In an unguarded moment, the *Worker* makes a damaging confession: We did not go over to Muste, that is, to the Left wing of social democracy, because we "had an international anchor". If this has any sense at all, it means that our association with the Russian and International Left Opposition "is keeping us" in Communist waters. But, dear Messrs. Browder and Co., it is precisely because we proclaimed our solidarity with the Russian Opposition, because we "tied ourselves to the international anchor", that you expelled us on charge of being "counter-revolutionists"!

Well, there's nothing that can be done about it. A feeling of hopelessness overcomes one when confronted with these gentlemen of the Stalinist school. It is politically impossible to have them stop lying—they would first have to stop living politically. It is even impossible to have them tell one lie and stick to it. But then, that is the curse of the liar's life: he can never remember accurately the lie he told yesterday, and what is even more distressing, he is in the Stalinist concentration camps with the competition of his fellow-tellers who are constantly trying to "catch up with and outstrip" him in their products. Against such convict labor we raise our voice in protest. In vain. The Browners really enjoy their abominable labors. -8.