

The Unemployed Cutters Rebel

By ALBERT ORLAND

Over 300 unemployed clothing cutters, members of the most powerful local union of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, Local 4 of New York, have come together and decided to launch a struggle against their miserable conditions. For a long time, these oppressed, starving workers have been suffering patiently and hoping for a change in their conditions. Day in and day out, they have been waiting for their officials to do something for the redress of their miserable situation. Some of them have been unemployed for years and their families have been starving. At the same time they have been witnessing acts of the rankest corruption and have suffered abuse and discrimination at the hands of their officials. Their patience has finally broken down and they came out in an open revolt against the rotten methods of their officials who are responsible for their misery and destitution.

Condition of Unemployed

These unemployed today find themselves in utter despair, hence their defiance and challenge to those who only yesterday held them in their grip of terror and domination. Deprived of employment because of the corrupt practices of the officials in handling the distribution of jobs, done out of the relief due to them from the fund collected from those employed supposedly for their benefit, betrayed by the general officials who have continually violated the decisions of the last three conventions for a 40-hour week and deceived with a fraudulent unemployment insurance scheme, these unemployed are now determined to demand an account from their officialdom and redress of their grievances.

For 18 weeks, their local union officials have been collecting ten percent of the wages of the employed members of the local which has brought enormous sums into the fund for relief. But the unemployed cutters received only a miserable portion of that money. The committee elected by the local to administer the fund has been shoved aside and no account has been given to the membership. At the local meetings their protests have been ignored and their demands derided by the officials. The unemployed now protest against the continuation of the assessment which does not go for their benefit and is only a source of corruption for their officials. They demand real relief, the shorter week and division of work.

The Unemployment Insurance Fund established by Hillman is exposed by the unemployed as a complete failure. This fund only serves to insure the dues and the salaries of the officials and is of no benefit to the unemployed. The members contribute to this fund directly or indirectly through constant reductions in the wages, and the fund is used by their officials to maintain themselves in office. The Unemployment Insurance Fund is an adroit scheme to solve the financial problem of collecting dues from the unemployed workers and is also used as a mask for Hillman in his personal publicity campaigns. Hillman and Co. need it. They invented it for their benefit. It is also a boon to the clothing manufacturers. It relieves them of all responsibility to the workers. It also strengthens their bonds with the union officialdom who, jointly with them, exploit the clothing workers.

The unemployed protest against the fraudulent Unemployment Insurance scheme. They demand real unemployment relief. This is the list of their demands as published in the press, after having been adopted at a mass meeting at Manhattan Lyceum on April 23:

The Workers' Demands

- (a) The immediate establishment of the 40-hour week with 44-hour pay.
- (b) After the 40-hour week has been established, the cutters should work 36 hours so as to create work for the unemployed by distributing the four hours among them.
- (c) The immediate abolition of temporary cards.
- (d) The equal division of work.
- (e) Taking away manufacturers from the tables to be replaced by cutters, thus making work for the unemployed.
- (f) The abolition of the ten percent assessment since it does not go to the benefit of the unemployed cutters at all.
- (g) The establishment of a system of strict rotation of jobs to be honestly distributed under the supervision of a rank and file committee.

How have the officials responded to the action of the unemployed?

At the very first news of the unemployed gathering to discuss their conditions, warnings were sent out to the hall-

keepers in the district to bar the unemployed from the meeting halls. The officials foolishly thought that the unemployed would be scared and discouraged by this trick. The unemployed proceeded with their plans and secured Manhattan Lyceum. The owners of that hall refused to be intimidated and rented a room to the unemployed, where several meetings were held. A committee from the unemployed came to the local executive board to present their claims but the executive refused to deal with them.

At the local meetings, the officials have resorted to the ignoble methods of attacking the unemployed for their actions in meeting "outside of the pale of the organization" and accused them of forming a "rival union". They also did not neglect to raise the hue and cry of Communism, and have threatened with expulsions and starvation. No consideration of the just claims of the unemployed, however, has been given by them and no attempts have been made to change conditions.

The unemployed, however, have not failed to secure the support of the membership at the local meetings, and they will undoubtedly have this support throughout their struggle. At the local meetings, the membership voted for their demands. But the decisions of the local meetings are trampled under foot by the officials. The struggle of the unemployed will have to be carried further to insure victory for their demands.

The Accomplishments So Far

The officials are in a state of consternation. They fear the development of a rank and file movement. But they are at a loss to the methods for its suppression. The publicity this movement has secured in the press, including the **Forward**, and the sympathy of the employed cutters have shocked the officials and they are terror-stricken. They are, however, determined to crush it before it has had a chance to develop. They see in this revolt of the rank and file a serious challenge to their rule which has been maintained by terror and deceit.

What must the unemployed do to insure victory? The cutters must expand their activities to involve into the struggle, the employed cutters. The interests of the cutters, employed and unemployed, are inseparably bound together. The existence of an unemployed army is a menacing danger to the conditions of those employed. The bosses do not hesitate to use the unemployed to break down the standards of the workers in the shops. The employed should therefore come to the assistance of the unemployed in their struggle to secure the 40-hour week and the abolition of the temporary jobs. They should join hands with the unemployed in their fight for the abolition of the corrupt practices of the officialdom who have turned the union into a racket and deprived hundreds of its best members of the means of existence, members who have sacrificed many of their best years to build up the organization. They must jointly wrest control of the union from the hands of the corrupt clique and maintain it for their own benefit. The demand for an honest election of officials will have to be raised by the entire membership even before the present term of the officials expires. There are sufficient grounds for their recall and impeachment, and they can be made to resign.

The cutters must unite with the workers in the other branches of the clothing industry in a general struggle for the improvement of their conditions and a change in the policies of the organization. The A. C. W. A. must abandon their policy of cooperation with the bosses and adopt a fighting policy. Only a united and militant organization can effectively carry out the demands of the membership. The officialdom has always striven to keep the membership divided so that they can maintain their rule unchallenged. It is vitally necessary for the workers to bring about unity in their ranks. The opportunity presented by the present movement of the cutters can be utilized to bring the cutters and tailors together in a common struggle for the shortening of hours and improvement of conditions.

Immediate Relief Needed

The conditions of the unemployed, which have become unbearable, must be relieved immediately. Provisions should be made in the shops for them to divide work with those employed.

Instead of payments to the union treasury where money is squandered by the officials, the employed cutters will render real relief to their unemployed bro-

thers by sharing their work with them. The demand of the unemployed for a 36-hour week with 40-hours pay is a reasonable one and can be carried out by the union with the assistance of the cutters in the shops.

All the above-mentioned conditions are absolutely necessary for the success of the struggle of the unemployed cutters. What the struggle has accomplished so far is

Weisbord: Cult of Confusionism

The American movement has been presented with a new group, the "Communist League of Struggle" and the first issue of its paper, the **Class Struggle**, behind which are massed a baker's dozen of supporters of the high priest of confusionism, Weisbord. On the masthead of his group Weisbord has hoisted the banner "Adhering to the International Left Opposition" in the hope of thereby accrediting himself with the name of the Marxist wing of the movement today, and in actuality only to soil and discredit this banner. That he has neither the political right nor the authority to utilize this banner does not concern Weisbord any more than he is concerned with an honest treatment of facts in disputing with his political opponents, primarily with the Left Opposition in the United States.

As to the axis around which Weisbord's whole, creaking theoretical and practical machinery revolves, we find nothing that is new in Weisbord's paper. His "original" contribution to the policy of the Left Opposition (in reality, it is a vulgarized plagiarism from Urbahn, Paz and similars) is the proposal that in order to separate the Communist movement from Menshevism and to "re-establish mass work", the Left Opposition should make a bloc with . . . the Lovestone Right wing. Hopeless "Right wingers" that we are, according to Weisbord, we have nevertheless rejected this ingenious idea in the past, and still do. We are fortunate enough not to be entirely alone in our "sectarianism", especially when comrade Trotsky has expressed himself in our sense on this same proposal of Weisbord. Only four months ago he wrote:

"The leading comrades in the United States inform us that in the American League, certain comrades—to be sure, only individual ones [these individual ones amounted to exactly two comrades: Pollack and Ahrens,—Ed.] speak for a bloc with the Lovestoneites in the name of . . . 'mass work'. It is hard to imagine a more ridiculous, a more inept, a more sterile project than this. Do these people know at least a little of the history of the Bolshevik party? Have they read the works of Lenin? Do they know the correspondence of Marx and Engels? Or has all the history of the revolutionary movement passed them by without leaving a trace? Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of the American League has nothing in common with such ideas."

A group with so hopelessly confused a platform as Weisbord's is not one to cause anybody great concern. Confusionism is not a political tendency. It can cause political damage, but Weisbord's capacity for either good or bad is fortunately very strictly limited.

The whole art of Weisbord's "thesis" lies in platonically embracing a few phrases from the Left Opposition; pinning them on to an "economic analysis" which analyzes nothing, indicates no trend and allows for every possible variation; justifying his bloc with Lovestone with the invention that there is no such thing as Centrism; merging the three groups in the Communist movement into one single "Right tendency", outside of which stands the genuine Leninist (i. e., Weisbord!); and demanding the outright capitulation "as individuals" of the expelled Oppositionists, of everybody, that is, except Weisbord who "can never abandon its grouping".

One could go on for pages with comment on the confusionism in Weisbord's platform, which is soaking wet with ignorance, an arrant insolence at times, and worse yet, with revolting falsehoods and slanders against us lifted off the dungheaps of Browder-Foster-Lovestone and Co. A few instances will have to suffice to give the measure of the man who seeks to teach us Bolshevism, the man whom "the history of the revolutionary movement passed by without leaving a trace".

Weisbord justifies his criminal action in joining with Foster—while himself a faction agent of Lovestone—to expel the Left Opposition from the party in 1928-1929: "46, The driving out of the Lovestone and Cannon misleaders from the C. P. U. S. A. did not change its essential character!"

that it has brought out into the open the condition of the unemployed and opened the sores of corruption in the cutters' union. To effect a real change and remedy the situation this movement must be pushed ahead, expanded in all directions, until it achieves results. It must follow a definite course and follow it to the end. Any recession of this course is dangerous. The enemy is on the watch. The least slip in the wrong direction may cause irreparable damage. Solid unity and conscious action will insure victory not only to the unemployed cutters but also to the general rank and file movement in the A. C. W. A.

Weisbord condemns us for having seen in the Smith vote of 1928 an indication of the radicalization trend in the working class (an honest evaluation of our position of that time would take into account that while we misused the term "radicalization", the whole context of our documents then indicated that we understood by it the discontent of the workers. However false our appreciation may or may not have been, Weisbord, in 1931, discovers a radicalization process in . . . the crime rate rise and bootleg drinking. "34. The life-breaking pressure on the masses is further shown by the tremendous growth of the crime rate. On the one hand this is an illustration of rebellion by the masses . . . Prohibition has helped to intensify the class struggle."

Weisbord (under our pressure) finally proposes the extension of credits to the Soviet Union, not in the proletarian revolutionary sense of linking this demand with the class movement of the unemployed in capitalist countries, but in the Stalinist sense of a pure and simple business proposition between the Soviet state and the foreign bourgeoisie.

Weisbord, who specializes in "self-criticizing" the other factions, has not a single word to say about his own vicious inner-party faction record as a henchman for the Lovestone Right wing since the day he left the Socialist party and joined the Communists in 1925.

Weisbord, his political line being an impossible mixture of loans made from the viewpoints of the three other groups, finds it impossible to assail the platform of the Left on the basis of principle, resorts to slander and lies, a method learned from Lovestone and Stalin, and in the process, can find nothing better to do than to repeat the **Daily Worker** and the **Revolutionary Age**. Our comrades are condemned not only for alleged positions today but for alleged positions (nine-tenths of them inventions, pure and simple) of years gone by: "(d) the theory that the farmers must lead the Labor party movement; (e) Cannon was the first to make an alliance [!] with Pepper—1923 . . . was violently opposed to the organization of the unorganized (Passaic strike 1926) . . . participated in actual betrayal [!] of the New Bedford strike . . . unprincipled united front with former Cannonites (Bill Dunne and Co.) still in the party*" and so on to the point of nausea.

The Opposition on an international scale has, in the past, had to contend with similar confusionist groups, which not only hampered its growth but even discredited it in the eyes of the Communist workers. None of these groups (like Urbahn, Paz, Pollak, etc.), however, ever gave so prominent a place in their movement to such pillars of Stalinism—slander and falsehood—as Weisbord does. The weaker one's position in principle the more such rotten "props" are required. But nothing substantial, nothing of consequence can ever be built upon them. —S.

* Unfortunately for Weisbord, who has been carrying this tale around as a back-door whisper for months, Dunne has just issued a violent statement denouncing Weisbord as well as the Left Opposition. Dunne's venomous and disgraceful vilification of the "Trotskyists" is on a par with the outpourings of those second and fourth rate Stalinist functionaries who have surrendered their revolutionary birthright for the opportunity to mount the ladder of the apparatus by trampling on the rungs of their own past, seeking to purchase consideration for themselves from the infallible center by routine denunciations of the proletarian revolutionists.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Again we are compelled to call attention to unavoidable omissions from this issue. The reply of the editorial board of the **Militant** to the objections raised by comrade Mihelic to our position on the 6-hour day slogan had to be held over to the next issue, when it will positively appear. Included in it will be a reply also to the official party position as expressed recently in an article by Earl Browder.