

Treachery in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union

By ROSE WORTIS.

The 7th of May is the date set for the opening of the convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Now, on the eve of the convention, is the proper time to take account of the accomplishments, gains and losses of the organization.

The last convention, held in Philadelphia immediately after the successful struggle of the Joint Action Committee in 1925, laid down principles and a line of activity to be pursued by the International for the coming two years. The convention acted on the question of expulsions and discriminations and decided that tolerance of political views and opinions must be a recognized principle in the union.

The convention also acted on the cloak situation in New York, giving the New York Joint Board the power to call a strike in the event the demands of the cloakmakers were rejected by the governor's commission. The convention decided upon an intensive campaign to organize the thousands of unorganized workers throughout the country. It went on record in favor of the establishment of a 40-hour week. It decided to carry thru a referendum on the question of proportional representation and unite all elements for the purpose of building and strengthening the organization.

Betrays by I. L. G. W. Misleaders.

The brave strike of the cloakmakers, who fought twenty-two weeks against the joint forces of the bosses and the state with its various commissions and injunctions, was betrayed by the International clique and their gains sold out to the bosses. In the midst of the strike, the Joint Board was expelled and the International clique launched its attack on the New York cloak and dressmakers. It is 16 months since this destructive war is on.

As a result of this pogrom, the union is demoralized and practically destroyed. The workers have lost not

only the gains achieved during the last strike but every vestige of union conditions. The working week is unlimited. Piece work, under the lowest prices, has come into existence and the sweat-shop system is entrenching itself more strongly from day to day.

The employers are the sole dictators. They decide the working hours. They decide the wages. They are the organizers; the dues collectors. The worst elements, who had been eliminated at the Philadelphia convention, are once more at the head of the organization.

Militants Fight Treachery.

The best and most class-conscious workers are engaged in a determined struggle against the shameful treacheries of the International clique.

Armed with the faith and consciousness that the fighting spirit of the cloak and dressmakers is alive and will sooner or later succeed in driving out the disrupters from the union.

The workers throughout the country have fared no better. In Chicago the clique has carried thru a similar program. The Chicago Joint Board, which in the course of the left wing administration gained important improvements in the working conditions and brought new life and spirit into the organization, was viciously attacked and broken. The union is now in practically the same condition as the New York organization.

Misleaders Rule in Boston.

The chaos and demoralization in New York and Chicago had its disastrous effects on the Boston market, where widespread unemployment exists at the present time. The best and most active members of the Boston union have been taken off the ballot during the recent elections and the organization has been transferred into the hands of the most discredited elements, under the leadership of the outlived Polakoff, who had been driven out from the Dressmakers' Union of New York many years ago. This dotard, who had even tried his luck as a cotton salesman only to

find union business more profitable, is now the leader of the Boston union.

In Philadelphia the clique has demonstrated with what sincerity it stands for the slogan "No Party Control in the Union." There, the former manager of the "Forward," Pollin, who has as much knowledge of the dress industry as the man in the moon, has been imported to take charge of the Dressmakers' Union. His only qualification is the fact that he was manager of the "Forward" and is a loyal "Forward" man.

Regarding the policies of the Philadelphia union toward the employers, we will let Mr. Pollin speak for himself. In the "Justice" of March 2nd, he writes:

"There is in existence an agreement or a 'platonic understanding' between the Waist & Dressmakers' Union and the Manufacturers' Association."

It required the ingenuity of an ex-Forward manager to discover this new term, "platonic understanding," in the trade union phraseology. According to this "platonic understanding" the employers are not obligated to come in too close contact with the union. They are not obliged to recognize the business agent or chairman of the shop. The blessings of this "platonic" agreement for the workers

are described by Mr. Pollin himself in this manner:

"The first point (the 44-hour week) is observed by the employers only during the dull period."

"The same is the case on the question of price settlements and the other points of the agreements."

Now a few words about the Cloakmakers' Union. The prosperity which existed in Philadelphia during the cloakmakers' strike of 1926 has long passed. The bosses have introduced the speed-up system and are laying the basis for the introduction of piece work.

Misleaders Out of Town.

This situation has its effect on the Cleveland market also and before long it will be felt there severely. In Baltimore, Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and other smaller centers the union has been completely wiped out. No doubt the clique will even find it difficult to bring the usual out of town delegates to the convention. During the two years since the Philadelphia convention, not a single organization campaign, not even a fake campaign, has been carried on in the out of town centers.

The union has suffered tremendous losses in its membership. (It is curious to know what sort of report the secretary will submit at the coming convention on the question of union membership). Financially, the International is bankrupt. The bank has been sold to private individuals. The various union buildings have been either sold or highly mortgaged. The out of town locals, which have been bled of their funds to finance the pogrom in New York and Chicago find themselves in similar financial difficulties. The union is broken and demoralized. In place of a spirit of "tolerance" it is ruled by a fascist dictatorship. In place of unity the organization is divided into two hostile camps and the clique is itself divided into various groups and groupings.

This is how the general executive board has carried out the mandate of

the Philadelphia convention. This is the record of accomplishments for the past two years with which the International clique is coming to the Boston convention.

Progressives Will Not Submit.

What then remains for the workers to do? Shall they bow their heads in submission to the agents of the bosses? Shall they submit to the yoke of slavery forced upon them by the united front of all the reactionary forces? NO! The cloak and dressmakers will never make such a choice! On all occasions when the cloak and dressmakers were face to face with the alternative of either a struggle or submission to slavery they are always chosen to fight. The workers are too class-conscious; they have suffered and sacrificed too much in the struggle to build a union to serve as a weapon for the improvement of their living conditions to make peace with a "company union."

It is many years since the internal struggle has been on. Not at all times was it carried on in the same form and with the same tempo. One thing is clear, however, that even the clique has abandoned the hope of ever dominating the cloak and dressmakers, and knowing this, it is ready to destroy the union.

The expelled Joint Boards and locals are coming to the convention as duly elected representatives of the great mass of the workers in the industry to demand their rightful seats. They are coming to demand the repudiation of the policy of discrimination, expulsion and persecution, which has proven so disastrous to the workers. They are coming to demand an end to the struggle. They are coming to demand unity in the organization for the purpose of rebuilding the union and restoring union conditions to the workers.

The coming convention of the International will either bring about an end to the internal war, or it will be the rallying point for a renewed struggle against clique domination of the union.



ROSE WORTIS.