



The A. F. of L. Officialdom Sanctions Government By Injunction

By ROSE WORTIS

JUDGE ERLANGER has issued in New York a decision fining the leaders of the Joint Board Cloak & Dressmakers' Union the sum of seventeen thousand dollars or imprisonment for contempt of the injunction order, taken out by the Dress Contractors' Association at the instigation of the right wing officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The injunction included sworn affidavits against the officials of the Joint Board in which the bureaucrats of the International expose themselves in the role of the lowest type of stool-pigeons and government agents. The metropolitan press admits that it is the first time that such a decision has been rendered in a labor dispute. This also is the opinion of the manager of the Dress Contractors' Association, who stated that this decision will set a precedent that will in the future compel the enforcement of all injunctions against picketing. Evidently there was strong pressure brought to bear on Judge Erlanger to induce him to render this decision, which is even being criticised by the Law Journal of New York.

As for the cloak and dressmakers, this decision will have little bearing on their struggle as the policy of the present Joint Board, ever since the first day it came into power, has been to fight by all possible methods any attempt to curtail the workers' right to strike by injunctions.

This policy was put into effect during the strike in the cloak industry in 1926 when the employers' association was granted a sweeping injunction against the Union. Under the leadership of the left wing the cloakmakers defied the injunction by mass picketing, and instead of breaking the back-bone of the strike, as the

employers had hoped, the injunction only served to stimulate the ardor of the strikers. Thousands of them came on the picket line daily in defiance of police orders. Hundreds were arrested every day, sent to jail and replaced by others. In spite of the combined forces of the employers, the police and the courts, in spite of the support given by Governor Smith to the manufacturers, the cloakmakers succeeded in breaking the injunction and forcing the employers to conclude a settlement which secured for the workers many important gains (Unfortunately, these gains were later nullified as a result of the internal war forced on the Cloak and Dressmakers' Union by Mr. Sigman and his General Executive Board).

Bosses Back Sigman

Similar was the policy toward the injunction after Mr. Sigman had begun his campaign of compulsion and persecution. The leaders of the Joint Board had no illusions as to the forces that were backing the corrupt Sigman machine. They knew that the Sigman pogrom would have the support of the bosses, the police and the courts and that to take up the challenge of these powers of darkness would mean persecutions and imprisonment. They knew to what extent the bureaucracy would go in order to once more force their domination on the workers who had struggled for many years to overthrow the corrupt clique firmly entrenched in power. Judge Erlanger's decision did not come as a surprise to the leaders of the Joint Board and will not in any way retard the struggle. Should the decision be upheld by the higher courts, they will be ready to go to jail if necessary so as to champion the rights of the workers to organize and strike for the im-

provement of their conditions, and to bring to the forefront the struggle against injunctions.

A specific instance of the militant policy of the left wing in the fight against the injunction as compared to the wishy-washy tactics of the A. F. of L., is the stand taken by E. Taft, Manager of Local 41, at the hearing on the contempt of court proceedings brought against him by the employers' association in conjunction with the Sigman machine. Taft in a frank and fearless statement made clear his position toward injunctions, challenging the right of the courts to prevent workers from striking and organizing themselves. He openly stated that regardless of the consequences he would continue to defy this or any other injunction issued by the courts under one pretext or another. This courageous stand taken by Taft in open defiance of the injunction was a typical example of how injunctions can be fought most effectively. The judge, who had been accustomed to the cowardly tactics of the officialdom of the A. F. of L., was taken aback by the attitude of Taft and, fearing the publicity this case would receive in the event that Taft were sentenced to jail and the effect it would have in stimulating an open fight on the part of the workers against injunctions, absolved Taft from offense under some technical subterfuge, after the latter had stated his intention of pursuing the policy of defying injunctions in the future.

The Officialdom Of The A. F. of L.

Officially, at its conventions the Officialdom of the A. F. of L. has always expressed condemnation of the injunction. However, this defiance has in almost all instances been expressed in words and not in deeds.

The decision of the A. F. of L. convention for a special miners' conference in answer to a sweeping injunction in the central competitive coal fields aroused hope in many labor circles that finally the executive council had recognized the gravity of the situation and was seeking methods to fight the employers.

The result of the Pittsburgh conference was a blow to the rank and file of the workers and demonstrated the complete bankruptcy of the officialdom of the A. F. of L. and its unwillingness to fight in the interest of the workers. In dealing with the injunction menace this august assembly of International chiefs dared not reiterate in print its traditional phraseology of fighting injunctions, but in an evasive and abstract manner it adopted a resolution "to keep

within the bounds of the law as guaranteed by the constitution."

This was the answer of the A. F. of L. chiefs to the hungry, struggling mine workers. This was the solution given to the I. R. T. workers, who are striving to free themselves from the clutches of Hedley & Co. This conference of union heads, which could have been the turning point of the great struggle of the mine workers, was reduced to a philanthropic assembly and ended with an appeal to the mercy of President Coolidge, the representative of Wall Street.

This cowardly, evasive and treacherous method of dealing with the injunction is in full harmony with the general policies of the bureaucracy of the A. F. of L. Its policy of surrender to the employers, its class collaboration policies, its new wage strategy, the fostering of the speed-up system, have given rise to widespread discontent among the workers.

The hitherto professed A. F. of L. opposition to injunctions has been completely abandoned. The failure of the A. F. of L. to take any concrete measure at the Pittsburgh conference against the injunction, its support of the Sigman administration which has now resulted in the conviction of the Joint Board leaders, in their attempt to secure an injunction against the grocery clerks, etc., has definitely placed the A. F. of L. on record as having sanctioned government-by-injunction, and marks the complete surrender of the A. F. of L. officialdom to the offensive of the open-shoppers of this country.

The workers of this country, the organized as well as the unorganized, are gradually beginning to realize that they must look for leadership and guidance in the direction of the progressive wing of the American labor movement. The workers are to-day faced with the alternative of accepting the leadership of the reactionaries whose policy is surrender to the bosses, or the leadership of the progressives who offer a policy of militant struggle to combat the attacks of the employers. The workers of this country are beginning to understand this difference in policy and whither it will lead the labor movement. By degrees the ranks of the progressives are becoming strengthened. Every new betrayal of the bureaucracy only adds new recruits to the militants, who to-day constitute the only constructive forces able to save the American labor movement from utter ruin.