

The I. L. G. W. U.: Its Strength And Some of Its Weaknesses

By Rose Wortis

Last week the General Executive Board of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union met in its quarterly session at Atlantic City. The meeting registered consolidation and continued growth of the union. President Dubinsky reported organization of the industry had reached a new high of 96 per cent. The union, during the past year, broke through many of the open-shop fortresses and brought these workers into its fold.

The financial condition of the union is sound, with an accumulated reserve fund of close to \$9,000,000.

The greatest asset of the union, however, is its membership. Representative of all groups and nationalities, it is a membership which combines within itself the best fighting traditions of America as well as of the old countries with the vigor and enthusiasm of the American working class.

With such a membership, with such a background and tradition, it was to be expected that this union would come to the forefront in the present national and world crisis, use its great strength, prestige and influence to help forge the strongest bonds of unity among its own members and take a leading part in uniting the entire labor movement, for the common struggle against fascist barbarism.

Unfortunately the results of the deliberations of the board fell far short of such expectations. They show that this Board meeting, unlike the recent meeting of the National Board of the CIO and the New York State CIO convention, failed in its major responsibilities.

As far as the problems of the industry are concerned, the Board, though somewhat belatedly, adopted a comprehensive and, what appears to be, a practical program.

7 POINTS OF PROGRAM

The main points of the program are:

1. To convince the WFB of the advantages to the nation of allocating a larger percentage of war orders for the Army and Navy to New York, where industrial resources and manpower are available, instead of building new plants with much-needed material to produce government orders in other cities (since the meeting an announcement has been made that 20 per cent of the war orders will go to New York).

2. Pooling of equipment and facilities of smaller plants in order to make easier the necessary readjustment and obtaining of war contracts.

3. The establishment of a government clinic to assist employees in problems of war production and

procedure for obtaining war contracts.

4. The establishment of a system of rationing available fabrics to assure equitable production and control the entrance of new firms in the face of a declining fabric supply.

5. Recommendation to the government for a system of blending wool with used and reworked wool, rayon and cotton, after needs of armed forces are supplied.

6. Retraining garment workers for war industries, who, despite these measures of relief to the industry, cannot find permanent employment.

7. The Board also decided to institute a conference of the union employers to work out practical ways of applying these proposals.

SOME SHORTCOMINGS

Had the leadership of the union been a little more far-sighted in planning for the anticipated mass unemployment with the reduction of consumer goods, had they mobilized the membership to exert its pressure to find a solution for the many aggravated problems, much of the present disorganization and hardship might have been avoided. However, the program offers a serious approach to the solution of the unemployment situation and a more effective utilization of the resources and manpower available in the industry. It embodies many of the points evolved during the discussion in the recent local elections.

On the major issues of the war, international labor unity and other major political issues relating to basic domestic policies it showed a reticence which gives cause for serious concern.

The Board met four days after the historic Roosevelt - Molotov agreement, and the Anglo-Soviet pact for the opening of a second front in 1942 and collaboration after the war between the three powerful democratic nations. This agreement was hailed throughout the world. It brought new hope and inspiration to all oppressed under Hitler's iron heel. It gives an impetus to the possibility of achieving victory in 1942 and establishing a basis for a people's peace.

This agreement should have received the unanimous and enthusiastic endorsement of the Board and become the starting point for a mass campaign in support of President Roosevelt's position for the immediate opening of a second front.

INTERNATIONAL UNITY

The agreement found no echo at the Board meeting of the ILGWU. Throughout the entire week of its deliberations, the Board did not even take note of this great event

that will decisively influence the course of history.

Another problem of world-wide importance under discussion in the labor movement—international labor unity—found no place on the agenda at the Board meeting.

Sir Walter Citrine, representing the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee, had come to the United States with a mission to secure the affiliation of the American trade union movement to the British-Soviet Trade Union Committee. International labor unity is of the greatest importance, if the labor movement is to exert its influence in the councils of the United Nations in the war effort as well as the peace. Such unity will surely strengthen the alliance of the governments of the three nations.

The National Board of the CIO, which met early this month, voted enthusiastically for cooperation with the English-Soviet Trade Union Committee. Hundreds of local unions, AFL and CIO, a number of international unions, which met in the recent period, such as the Building Service Union, Jewelry Workers, both AFL, the American Communications Association, as well as some city and state organizations—Pennsylvania State Convention, CIO and AFL, the Minnesota, New Jersey State CIO conventions and others, voted unanimously for affiliation with the Committee.

The question of international labor unity was placed before the Executive Council of the AFL. Despite the favorable attitude of President Green and other pro-war forces, the defeatist Hutchison with the support of Matthew Weil succeeded in temporarily blocking affiliation. However, the matter is still under discussion.

Surely a union like the ILGWU, which for many years fought for the affiliation of the AFL to the Amsterdam International and itself has international affiliations, should have left nothing undone to exert its influence for the achievement of international labor unity. But the Board met and adjourned without even inviting Citrine to address its meeting. Had the Board taken a positive position on international unity, such action might have had a determining influence in the final decision of the Executive Council of the AFL.

Thus the leadership of the ILGWU failed in its international working class obligations to the Soviet people, to the British people, who are shedding their blood for our common cause, to the interests of our country.

(Continued Tomorrow)