
THE I.L.G.W.U. AT THE CROSSROADS

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THE events of Moscow, Cairo and Teheran have had profound repercussions in the trade unions and have posed before the workers new problems as to how best to cement labor's forces for the widest unity for the realization of the Teheran decisions. These problems present themselves in their most complicated form in unions under Social-Democratic leadership, of which the International Ladies Garment Workers Union is the outstanding example.

The I. L. G. W. U. is one of the largest unions in the A. F. of L., occupying a position of great importance and influence in the labor movement. It remains the broadest mass base for the Social-Democrats, with a following of thousands. This union has for years been the battleground for progressive policies. Because of the advanced character and the Socialist traditions of a large section of the membership, the sharpest struggle in the union in the past decade centered around basic political issues, such as the attitude toward the Russian Revolution, international labor unity, and collaboration between Socialists and Communists.

World events, in the past period, have resolved these differences of

principle which divided the membership into Left and Right. There is unanimity among the overwhelming majority of the workers on the issues of the day. This was demonstrated during the recent visit of the Soviet Jewish delegation in our country. In the recent New York Councilmanic elections, thousands of I. L. G. W. U. members voted for the victorious Communist and progressive candidates, while their own Vice-President Ninfo went down to defeat as a result of his anti-unity position.

This unanimity among the workers has been further advanced since Teheran. However, workers who have been under the influence of Social-Democrats for twenty-five years do not break with all their prejudices overnight. The union leadership plays on these anti-Communist prejudices. Its main agitation today is that the Communists want to exploit the victories of the Red Army to "capture" the union.

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During the period of friction and disagreement between our Government and the Soviet Union on the conduct of the war, because of the delay of the Second Front and the anti-Soviet intrigues on the part of

certain elements in the State Department, the leadership of the I. L. G. W. U. still made their calculations on a possible break with the Soviet Union, despite their lip service to the Red Army. Their position was that wartime alliance with the Soviet Union was a "necessary evil," but that long-term collaboration with the Soviet Union was alien to American policy and American interests.

The Moscow and Teheran Conferences put an end to these false hopes and pernicious theories. It brought the union leadership face to face with the problem of its future course. This problem cannot be met with maneuvers. The policy of the union cannot be half for and half against Teheran. It cannot be for support of President Roosevelt and for maneuvers with Lewis and Dewey. It cannot be for international unity and for conspiring with Matthew Woll and William Hutcheson against such unity. It cannot be for unity and for continuing divisive tactics in the labor movement and within the union itself.

In approaching the union elections, the progressive forces in the union set themselves the objective, not merely to elect a more progressive, more representative leadership, but to change the course of the union on the basic issues. These are:

1. Support for the policies of Teheran, which in the labor movement means support for international labor unity and participation in the World Labor Conference to be held in London in June.

2. Support for President Roosevelt, which means labor's own unity

and labor's broad collaboration with other pro-Roosevelt forces for the re-election of our President for a fourth term.

3. Determined struggle against John L. Lewis and the defeatists inside and outside the labor movement.

Agreement on these fundamental issues can lay the basis for constructive solution of the many economic problems of the union, which, though less acute today because of the "war prosperity," are basic to the future life of the union. It will also lay the basis for the solution of the problem of democracy in the union and autonomy for the hundreds of locals throughout the country, which today are dominated by appointees, very much on the style of Lewis' practice in the United Mine Workers.

The best guarantee of the effective execution of such policy is to wipe out the now artificial Left and Right divisions of the former period and establish the broadest friendly cooperation and unity in the ranks of the union.

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In developing this policy, the progressives have encountered difficult problems due to inability to cope with the demagogy of the Dubinsky forces who, while formally approving the Teheran Agreement, continue the old Red-baiting and splitting line. Evidences are not wanting.

The General Executive Board at its November meeting greeted the Moscow Conference. *Justice*, the official organ of the union, greeted

the Teheran decision editorially in glowing terms:

"We cannot escape the fact that peace after this most terrible of all wars would be impossible without full cooperation with the Soviet Union. . . . Teheran dramatizes the world's hunger for understanding among leaders which is the requisite for understanding among people. . . . The Teheran conference did more than sharpen the sword of war—it built the first scaffold for a world at peace."

At meetings of the most important locals, the leadership introduced resolutions along similar lines. The program published by the administration groups of cloakmakers and dressmakers eulogizes the Red Army and repeats almost verbatim the economic program proposed by the progressive group.

Following the publication of the election program of the progressive group in Local 9, Manager Louis Hyman declared himself ready to accept the program of the progressives in toto and asked their support for his candidacy in the coming elections. But at that very meeting which adopted the pro-Teheran resolution, the chairman, a Dubinsky supporter, made a Red-baiting attack. The progressives saw the contradiction in such a policy—a policy of supporting unity in words and fighting it in deed—but did not know how to react. The same contradiction characterizes the general policy of the I. L. G. W. U. today.

At the General Executive Board meeting that endorsed the Moscow Conference decisions, Dubinsky

fought against unity in the American Labor Party. He insisted that under no circumstances would he permit unity of various elements in any of the local unions. In his union he would give no quarter to the Communists, he is reported to have said. The struggle, he declared, was on with greater force than ever before: he personally would intervene in any local which defied his edict. This was no empty threat.

Since that Board meeting, Dubinsky has worked hard to whip his supporters into line. When his own efforts failed, he was given a helping hand by the notorious Social-Democrat N. Chanin, of "Shoot-the-Stalin-regime" fame. This splitting policy has already been put into effect in Dubinsky's own Local 10. Leading progressive workers such as Arnold Ames, Leo Unker, and others, have been framed up and eliminated as candidates for office. Through threats and promises of jobs Dubinsky has disrupted the movement for unity in the Italian Cloakmakers Union, throwing his support as President of the International to the most corrupt and discredited elements in the local. Officers who for years have loyally served the members are confronted with the alternative of either issuing a statement repudiating their views on basic policies of the union and their association with Communists or being eliminated from the leadership. The manner in which the leadership treats anyone who question its highhandedness is to be seen in the Italian Dressmakers Local 89, headed by the splitter of Italian unity, Vice President An-

tonini. At the recent nomination meeting the leader of an opponent group, a man known as a fascist sympathizer, who for years actively assisted Antonini in his anti-Communist crusade, was assaulted at a membership meeting by Antonini's present supporters and sent to the hospital.

The most shameful campaign of terror, unprincipled maneuvers, cajoling, and job bribing is going on (in this union hailed in certain liberal quarters as an example of democracy), all with but one objective—to continue division in the ranks of the workers and to prevent any Communist or progressive workers from breaking through Dubinsky's stranglehold in any of the local unions.

The same *Justice* that greets the Moscow Conference, in another issue attacks the Conference and carries pages of Red-baiting attacks by Antonini, against the Five-Party Coalition in Italy and the Free Italy Committee in our country. On many other issues of the day, the paper continues to print anti-Communist, Red-baiting articles and editorials. The same leadership which greets Teheran opposes international labor unity, in company with Woll and Hutcheson. In reply to the recent article in the Soviet magazine *War and the Working Class* attacking Dubinsky, the latter left the door somewhat open for reconsideration of his position. But it is a well known fact that Dubinsky's anti-unity position is not merely a matter of carrying out decisions of the A. F. of L. He, more than any other leader of the A. F. of L., is responsi-

ble for the failure of the A. F. of L. to join the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee and the ineffectuality of Citrine's visit to the United States in 1942. The same leadership which states that it supports President Roosevelt still continues its scheming to bring Lewis back into the A. F. of L. and blocks unity in the American Labor Party, which may endanger the re-election of the President.

Some rank-and-file workers, not equipped to meet this double-dealing policy of Dubinsky, draw the conclusion that the general policy of the progressives, to conduct the election on the basis of a principled fight for policy and unity free from factional considerations, is incorrect, that this means abandoning the fight against Dubinsky's anti-unity, anti-United Nations policies. They see only one answer—to fight Dubinsky with his own factional weapons—an all-out fight along the old factional lines. This would be fatal. It would hinder the growing unity among the workers and play into the hands of those who are interested in continuing the present course in the union.

How, then, can this situation be met? How can the progressives advance their main objective of changing the course of the union? The answer to Hyman et al. must be: It is not enough for you gentlemen to write occasional editorials and give lip service to Teheran and unity. The test of the sincerity of your pronouncement is deeds.

The test of the sincerity of the acceptance of the Teheran decisions on the part of any labor union is its

position on international labor unity, national unity, the fourth term, the fight against readmission of Lewis into the A. F. of L., the unity of all anti-fascist elements within the union. On these concrete questions, which are the basis for bringing the Teheran decisions to life, the I. L. G. W. U. leadership has still taken no serious steps to modify its former anti-unity position. On the contrary, the trend seems to be in the opposite direction. Unless the fine words are supported by deeds, the workers will regard these declarations as misleading maneuvers by the present leadership to perpetuate itself in power and continue its disruptive work in the labor movement.

With this in mind, the progressive group addressed an open letter to the administration of Local 9. On the basis of the resolution adopted by the local and Hyman's unity speech, they asked that the local demand of President Dubinsky and the General Executive Board of the International that *Justice* refuse its pages to articles attacking the Moscow Conference; that it cease printing Red-baiting articles, which militate against the unity of the workers and the anti-fascist struggle; that the union break its alliance with John L. Lewis and fight against his readmission into the A. F. of L., that the International support the call of the British Trade Union Congress for the World Conference in London and bring its influence to bear for A. F. of L. participation; that the International mobilize the full membership for the President's stabilization pro-

gram, the soldiers' vote, elimination of the poll tax, etc; that the local go on record for unity in the ranks of the American Labor Party on the basis of the Hillman proposal; that the local do away with the shameful practices of favoritism and of discrimination against progressives; that it unite the entire membership for the effective execution of this program.

The letter concludes by stating that the proposals above are in full accord with the resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and the speech of the manager. On the basis of such program, the progressives declare their readiness to cooperate with the administration and all other elements in the union.

It is only through such an approach that the progressives will make it more difficult for the leadership to maneuver on basic issues. Thus the broad unity forces will convince every honest worker and leader that they are not interested in controlling or capturing the union but have as their sole interest to help make the union a more powerful instrument to advance unity and victory.

Some progressives have raised the question: What if the leadership of the union agrees in regard to the main issues of the war but still continues the policy of discrimination, persecution and exclusion of progressives and Communists from the life and leadership of the union, are we ready to submit? The answer to this question is to be found, not by isolating the question of the union leadership's attitude to Communists and progressives in

the union, but in seeing this issue in its interrelationship with the basic policies. We can invoke the recent experiences of our nation in evolving its foreign political policies and the experiences of the I. L. G. W. U. itself.

So long as our country and Britain hesitated in their policy of full collaboration with the Soviet Union, withheld agreement for military action in unison with the Soviet Union and permitted anti-Soviet trends in the government to mar our relations with our Soviet ally, the logic of their position led them to support the Darlans and Mikhailoviches. The clarification of our policies on the conduct of the war, and the long-term collaboration with the Soviet Union, simultaneously brought a change in our attitude to the democratic forces in other countries, as instanced by the recognition of Tito and the improvement of relations with de Gaulle. Support for Teheran is visibly leading the Administration to change its policy of appeasing reactionaries and to depend more on the democratic forces at home.

What is true of the developments of unity nationally and internationally applies with equal force to the labor movement and also to the I. L. G. W. U. This is proved by the very experience of this union itself in the past years. When, in 1935, the leadership of the I. L. G. W. U. supported the C. I. O. when it showed solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, when there was agreement on basic issues, this logically led to greater unity in the union itself. During that period the

bars against Communists were removed, united administrations of Socialists and Communists were elected in many of the most important locals of the union. Had this policy continued, the I. L. G. W. U. today would be among the most progressive unions in the country. The withdrawal of the union from the C. I. O. (opposed by the Communists within the union) arrested this development and turned the union from its proper course. It brought about a renewal of Red-baiting and division. The union leadership once more began to depend upon a more backward and careerist element and stifled rank-and-file expression.

A basic change in the course of the union now, which will bring it back to the progressive, win-the-war camp, will also lead to the abandonment of the policy of exclusiveness, and result in greater democracy in the life of the union.

Despite Dubinsky's struggle against unity, there is a growing unity movement in the ranks of the workers.

In the Cloakmakers Local 117—politically, for many years, the most important local of the union—where our late Comrade Joseph Boruchovitch was the outstanding leader, the Boruchovitch tradition continues. Despite the intervention of Dubinsky and of Chanin, of the *Jewish Daily Forward* anti-Soviet clique, to prevent unity, leading Social-Democratic workers have joined hands with Communists on a unity program. The same is true in Local 9 and a number of other important locals. To quote from an

open letter signed by twenty-five leading workers who describe themselves as Right-Wingers:

"We were never Left-Wingers and we are not Left-Wingers now. . . .

"We feel that the time has come to end the strife among the members of our union. We feel that the time has come to do away with the cursed splits of Right and Left. . . .

"We, the undersigned, would be overjoyed if the union established full unity because we are convinced such unity can be established, but our leaders don't want to see this. . . .

"As far as the 'Communist menace' is concerned, we believe that this is just a means of throwing sand in the eyes of cloakmakers to confuse and divide them. We believe that drawing in the red herring will not add to the life of our union. It is just a means of further dividing the workers. At this moment whoever tries to divide the workers acts as an enemy of the cloakmakers and not as their friend."

If the progressives could secure an honest election, a major demand of the workers, the unity forces in these locals have every chance of emerging victorious. The Dubinsky forces are hard at work to prevent the free expression of the membership in the elections.

This so-called democratic union has instituted a procedure for elections which violates the most elementary principles of trade union democracy. The progressive forces, with few exceptions, are given no representation on the committees which conduct the elections, so that the entire election machinery is

left in the hands of the administration. In addition, the administration has devised a new scheme to thwart the will of the membership and to divide them artificially into distinct groups through the institution of the block system of voting, through which workers vote for slates instead of choosing individual candidates from all slates, as was the procedure of the union throughout the years. This procedure of the past is the only real democratic form of elections in a trade union, where strict party divisions do not exist. This new procedure of block-voting is especially repugnant to the workers now, when old divisions between "Right" and "Left" no longer have any meaning, when all workers are agreed on the main issues of policy, and when the only question to be determined is which individual candidate will most effectively and most sincerely carry through these policies.

While the real obstacle to unity comes from the leadership of the I.L.G.W.U., the sharp internal struggle long fostered by the leadership has brought about a situation in which the progressives have not entirely freed themselves from their past attitude of viewing with a certain mental reservation workers known as "Right-Wingers" with whom they had political differences. These tendencies must be ruthlessly eliminated. The progressives have the responsibility of encouraging the most friendly relations among all workers of the union around common objectives.

This narrow approach to fellow-workers is not limited to the

I.L.G.W.U. Remnants of this still exist elsewhere, as was indicated in recent elections in other unions. This approach flows from failure to understand the full implications of Teheran with its perspectives of long-term collaboration with the more conservative forces of the win-the-war camp, who may still have ideological differences with the progressives, and some of whom may still be influenced by anti-Communist ideology.

It is only through a deeper understanding of world developments so brilliantly elaborated in the report of Earl Browder at the Plenum of the National Committee of our party that we can help the progressive forces to realize fully the broad perspective open for them to collaborate with other forces in the labor movement and win them to acceptance of all constructive elements, including the Communists.

The I.L.G.W.U. is an organization of over three hundred thousand. The Social-Democratic clique will leave no stone unturned to influence the policies of the union's convention, which is due to take place in June, on the eve of the Presidential nominating conventions. The progressives in the union face many difficult and complicated problems. It is only by placing the vital issues before the broadest section of the members, scrupulously avoiding all partisan considerations, that the progressives will not only achieve favorable results in the elections but force a change in the course of the union. The Communists in the I.L.G.W.U., in common with all other honest workers, have but one aim—to win the I.L.G.W.U. back to the path of progress and unity, to make it a force for victory and the realization of the Teheran objectives.