

# L.A. Garment Workers Give Dubinsky Frosty Welcome

By Rose Wortis

**FOR A NUMBER** of weeks the leadership imposed on the Los Angeles garment workers carried through a terrific campaign in preparation for the impending visit of their chief, David Dubinsky. The capitalist press cooperated in building up this visit.

Arrangements were made for the honored guest to be feasted with the manufacturers at special luncheons. He was to dedicate the new health center in the presence of the city fathers, who hailed him in a special resolution as "one of the most enlightened labor leaders in the country."

Arrangements were made with the employers to stop all shops at four o'clock in the afternoon. The Olympic Auditorium, with a seating capacity of over 12,000, was engaged.

The banquet with the manufacturers, the ceremonies with the city fathers, were a huge success. The mass meeting, however, where Dubinsky was to congratulate the workers on the wonderful job they had done in driving out the "Communists," fell far short of expectations. Thousands of workers who stopped at four went home. The thousands of empty seats at the Olympic Auditorium were eloquent testimony of the attitude to Dubinsky's action in robbing them of the right to elect officers of their own choice.

The March issue of *Justice* devoted seven news items and a special editorial, entitled "The New Deal in Los Angeles," to Dubinsky's visit. The editorial unwittingly admits that all the maneuvering and scheming carried on by the top leadership for years to undermine the progressive administration in the Los Angeles organization had failed until the hated Taft-Hartley Act and the general anti-Red hysteria was used.

**THE EDITORIAL** states that the turning point came in December, 1948, when the G.E.B. decided to act on charges brought against the local officers for failure to sign the T-H anti-Communist affidavit. At the 1950 convention "the slow-moving wheels of union justice (the purge) began to roll to their logical and unavoidable conclusion" (a Hitler-Ja election, under the supervision of a committee of vice-presidents headed by Charles Zimmerman).

What prompted such drastic action against the Los Angeles workers? Was it because the progressive leaders failed in

their responsibilities to the membership? The contrary is the case. Conditions in the Los Angeles market are the best in the country.

When the leftwing was elected to leadership in 1940, a large section of the industry, especially the contracting shops, were unorganized. The wage standards were 50 percent lower than in New York. The progressive leadership immediately mobilized the workers for an organizing drive which brought about 100 percent organization of the cloak industry. All workers, irrespective of political opinion on other issues, were united, and it paid off. By 1948 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that conditions of the garment workers in Los Angeles were the highest in the country, including New York. Statistics of January, 1950, disclosed that Los Angeles machine sewers had the highest earnings among 12 leading garment centers, with an average of \$3.29 per hour on the single-hand system, and \$2.29 on the section system. In New York the earnings in these occupations averaged \$2.68 and \$2.09, respectively.

Even Zimmerman, in his recent report to the G.E.B. meeting, indirectly admitted these high standards when he stated that "during the period of the war the working standards of the cloakmakers in Los Angeles rose very high . . . this made readjustment during the recession more difficult. Manufacturers began to seek ways of reducing prices and wages."

These efforts were staunchly resisted by the progressive leadership, with the support of the whole membership.

Can it be that the whole question of purging the Los Angeles union of its left leadership was motivated by the desire to help the bosses out of their difficulties?

That this is no idle speculation the workers have learned from experience with Dubinsky-appointed supervisors, who on assuming office began to grant concessions to the employers. With their consent, Vice-President Levy signed agreements with run away employers,

through the Knit Goods Department under his supervision, for lower standards.

**IS IT TO BE WONDERED** that when the newly-appointed director of the West Coast Division came to Los Angeles he was (according to *Women's Wear*, Nov. 1) feted at a testimonial in Ambassador Hall, attended by 200 employers and the hand-picked union officials.

The drastic action taken against the Los Angeles local had nothing to do with safeguarding union democracy. The small clique of Dubinsky followers, despite all the support they received from the national office, were discredited and repeatedly defeated in union elections.

The Los Angeles workers were punished because they dared exercise a certain degree of independence. They worked with progressive unions of the CIO and AFL against the Taft-Hartley Act, even after the union leadership capitulated. They joined with other progressive AFL unions in opposing the endorsement of a Gerald K. Smith candidate for public office who was endorsed by the reactionary leadership of the Central Trades Labor Council. They were punished because they opposed redbaiting, Soviet-hating, cold and hot war. Dubinsky could not tolerate such independence.

At the end of 1948, the General Executive Board decided to send a committee to establish a receivership in the union; but the solid support of the members for the progressive leadership proved quite embarrassing to this committee. After prolonged hearings, they removed a number of executive board members and officers who refused to sign the T-H affidavit, and appointed supervisors for the Cloak and Dress Joint Board. These actions were carried through against the overwhelming protest of the membership.

The disregard of the appointed supervisors toward enforcement of the union agreement; their attempt to bring the Los Angeles local in line with  
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the dictatorial policies prevailing in other sections of the union, led to a rapid deterioration of conditions in the shops:

The workers hoped to correct this situation in the 1950 elections. To prevent this, the GEB issued a diktat calling off the elections for executive board and officers until after the union convention.

**A NEW COMMITTEE,** headed by Zimmerman, was given the go-ahead signal. In his September report to the GEB, printed in *Justice*, Zimmerman announced the job was done. Within 10 days, from July 19 to 29, 1950, they had carried through a so-called election of the five locals of the Cloak and Dressmakers under the supervision of the GEB committee, after removing from the ballot not only Communists and progressives, but anyone who was not known as a staunch Dubinsky supporter. In one instance, where they could find no objection to raise against a

Mexican dressmaker running for the executive board, she was asked whether, if elected, she would turn informer against any Communist in the leadership of the union.

"It was a free, unhampered balloting," reported Zimmerman to the GEB. "Every qualified member of the ILCWU except avowed Communists and known fellow-travelers were permitted to run for office." (The definition of Communist can well compare with that of the McCarran Bill.)

The fact is that there was only one slate of candidates and a Hitler-Ja election.

"We believe that the operation in Los Angeles had been successful beyond expectations," continued Zimmerman.

Zimmerman and Dubinsky may deceive themselves into

believing that the "operation was successful," but the militant cloak and dressmakers of Los Angeles will not allow the patient to die or go into a coma because of the Dubinsky-Zimmerman type of democracy.

Evidently things are not working out quite as smoothly as Zimmerman would wish. Los Angeles was again on the order of business at the last GEB meeting. The removal of Benjamin Levy as West Coast director and the appointment of Langer; the recall of Bagner and the appointment of the Lovestoneite Isidor Stanzer, the cold reception and silent protest during Dubinsky's visit, show that the workers are not taking things lying down; that they will carry on the good fight for union standards and conditions, and for union democracy.

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