

Expulsions Please Clothing Bosses

By I. L. Davidson

EMPLOYERS in the clothing industry have been highly gratified by the attempted expulsion of the left-wing militants from the I. L. G. W. U. by Sigman, Perlstein, and their assistants. They see the terribly weakening effect that it has on the organization, and they are making ready to reduce wages and cancel other gains made in the past. Already they have registered this situation in Cleveland, where Perlstein signed an agreement in which the Union surrendered many things gained but a short time ago. The clothing workers are beginning to pay the price for the insane policies of the officials.

The "open shop" forces have long battled to destroy the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. But in spite of all their efforts and all the money spent upon their project, they could not stop the steady progress of the Union. Many times our organization went into battle with them and, despite leadership that was often stupid and reactionary and despite the resulting battle within the Union between "lefts" and "rights," the Union emerged from them stronger than ever. So long as the essential unity of all workers in the industry, without regard to political beliefs, was maintained as the basis of the Union, just so long the Union held its own or made progress against the bosses.

But the stupidly destructive tactics of Sigman & Co., in attempting to cut off bodily a large section of the Union, to disfranchise it, to take away its rights of free speech, press, and assemblage, these have done what the bosses could not do with all their money. Never in the past has the Union suffered in struggles with the bosses, as it is now suffering from the policies of its officials. The employers, if they spent twice as much money, could not have done us so much harm as have Sigman and his assistants in the past few months.

No, it is not the boss's money that is hurting us now. We are being forced to pay for our own injury. The official policy is being carried through by spending the \$4. assesment ordered by the last Convention for the purpose of raising a fund of \$400,000 to pay off the Union debts and start an organization campaign. A great demand was being raised from the rank and file for the organization of the unorganized, and the assesment was voted gladly, because everyone thought it meant organization work and payment of debts. But what a disillusionment have we been given! The assesment is collected, the

money is spent, the debts are unpaid, and the industry is less organized than ever. In fact, the industry is slipping out of the control of the Union, and is being taken over by the "co-operative" (or "social") shops.

Only a bluff at organization work has been made. Right after the Convention the Eastern campaign started with much publicity, and reports were made in *Justice* until recently that results were good. The conditions were ripe for organization work. That did not fit into the plans of those who were controlling our Union, however, and all the forces of the organization had been turned some months ago to expelling and disfranchising members instead of bringing in new ones. In the official organ today we read, instead of hundreds of new members and new locals organized, the story of disorganization, how they will break up Local 22 if other members are not expelled, how they will re-organize Local 9 if it does not pass the motions they dictate. All the while the money is being spent like water.

Philadelphia is another city that has called for organization work. The convention congratulated Local 15, in that city, for the wonderful fight they gave the dress manufacturers there. They have yet a Local which is ready at any time to renew the fight. Conditions were unbearable and finally the word was given for an organization campaign. The militants went to work full force. No longer than two months elapsed, however, when the whole campaign was destroyed by the expulsion orders.

The dress and cloak makers in Philadelphia, in spite of their bitter war with the manufacturers, had maintained an organization of considerable strength. The dress makers Local, although it lost some members in the struggle, still retained about 500 members. But Sigman & Co. insisted upon expulsions, and when the Local refused to throw out its most active members, they "reorganized" the Local with 50 members. Local 2 was reorganized in the same manner, with but a handful of members. Philadelphia is being shattered by the destructionists.

Cleveland is a city that has been controlled by large manufacturers. The Union spent great sums to establish an organization there. Due to the system installed there by Mr. Perlstein, the standard of production with efficiency experts, half of whose expense is paid by the Union, the treasury was kept empty, so they had to call upon the International to assist in the organization

drive. Sigman and the International officers came to Cleveland, and the members prepared to tell them how hundreds of workers are walking the streets while their work is being done in non-union shops, how others are getting only 18 weeks work although the agreement guarantees 41 weeks, and other problems of the trade.

Before they could state their problems, President Sigman declared that they could take up nothing of the sort. His purpose in coming to Cleveland was to see that his orders for the expulsion of certain members should be carried out. The local agents of the G. E. B. then proceeded with the disruption, with the result that in Cleveland the Union has no time for organization work. It is too busy carrying out the expulsions ordered by Sigman and Perlstein. Black and Co., Prince & Bidderman, and the other manufacturers, with all their money could not have purchased so good a job of union-wrecking.

The membership everywhere has been overwhelmingly opposed to the expulsions. Further evidence of this was seen in the Philadelphia meetings where, with Sigman and his assistants present, Local 2 voted 500 to 10 to reject the expulsion order. Local 15 followed with a similar action. The same results have occurred everywhere when the membership had a chance to vote.

Some time ago Perlstein, in an effort to bolster up the expulsion policy, interviewed the old veteran of the labor movement, Eugene V. Debs, and asked him for a statement on the proposition. Debs was just starting on a trip west, and gave a statement in which he said that he was not acquainted with the merits of the controversy but that he stood for solidarity. This was sent out by Perlstein all over the country with the statement that Debs had approved the expulsion campaign. Foster wrote to Debs, asking him if this was true. Debs repudiated the story and suggested that a conference should be arranged, in which he should be glad to take part, which could stop the disruptive expulsions. Foster immediately approved of the proposal and suggested that Debs should arrange such a meeting. Debs replied that he was in ill health and on the road, and suggested that Foster write direct to Sigman. This Foster did. His letter has been published in the weekly papers.

Debs was good enough for Perlstein to drag into the expulsion campaign, when the reactionaries thought they could use him for their own ends. But when Debs tries to stop the disruption, then they turn upon him. In *Justice*, November 9th, the officials of the I. L. G. W. U. say: "Both Debs and Foster are in error," "we would not deal in union matters with any self-styled outside impostors," Foster "tried to in-

volve our old Comrade Debs into this affair," and so on. Of a sudden Debs has become an "outsider" to them and, by proposing a conference on a subject into which they themselves dragged him, he has violated their "ethics." The whole Debs incident shows up Sigman & Co. in all their stupid arrogance.

The attempts to terrorize the membership into permitting the reactionary dictatorship to go on, by throwing those who protest out of the shops, instances of which were reported in THE LABOR HERALD last month, have continued. The latest case is that of Mrs. Cohen, who works for the New Style Dress Co., a shop which she herself organized. Because she refused to call a shop meeting in the morning while the girls were not all present and when a meeting was already scheduled for the same evening, she was assaulted and struck by one of Perlstein's business agents, Harry Roofer. When she complained to Perlstein, the latter advised her to go before the Joint Board, but when she did so that body refused to hear her. The next day Harry Roofer came to the shop and, in the name of the Union, ordered her removed from the shop. The members, reluctant to disobey even such an outrageous order as this, allowed her to leave the shop only because they all went with her to demonstrate their solidarity. As this is written the shop has been idle three days because of this shameful proceeding.

It is clear that the officials are trying to expel and disfranchise everyone who is opposed to them and their reactionary policies, before the coming Convention of the Union, in order that they may continue to control the organization. They seem to have not the slightest care as to whether the Union shall grow and become stronger, or whether it shall continue its present downward course. They seem to be determined to rule or ruin, and in the latter there is grave danger that they may be successful. It is up to the membership of the I. L. G. W. U. who can, if they will bestir themselves, put a stop to the present shameful course of events.

RUSSIA NEEDS SKILLED WORKERS FOR KUSBAS

The Chicago Group Kusbas, which is organizing workers to fill this need, meets the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month, 3 P. M., at Labor Lyceum, 2733 Hirsch Blvd., Chicago.

All workers interested in this project are welcome. For information write **Kusbas, Room 307, 166 W. Washington Street, Chicago.**