

Conference of Needle Trades Big Success

By BEN GITLOW

The First National Conference of the Needle Trades Section of the Trade Union Educational League was a big success. Seventy-five delegates were present representing every important needle trade center in the United States and Canada. Among the delegates were some who officially represented local unions.

The conference demonstrated that the League is a vital, living institution in the needle trades organizations. In the conference as delegates were leading officials of unions in various localities. Also many of the delegates present came from leagues whose membership had full control of their respective needle trade organizations.

There were present leaders tried in the struggles of the needle trade workers, many militants who had fought in some of the bitterest struggles and many who demonstrated by their comportment in the debates that they were made of the fighting stuff that is a prerequisite for militant leadership in the labor movement.

This First National Conference signified that amalgamation is the next step in the needle trades and that when it comes it will find at its head a revolutionary, experienced leadership fully aware of its tasks and capable of fulfilling them. The needle trades will be worth while watching more than ever.

One of the greatest difficulties in getting a national movement started among the workers in the needle trades was the lack on their part of a national outlook. Being engrossed in the activities of their various locals they lost sight of the national scope of the militant movement. The result was that among them, until very recently, a local psychology predominated.

The First National Conference succeeded in definitely obliterating this local psychology. At this conference a national viewpoint was built up in the minds of the militant workers. They began to view the situation not from New York, not from Chicago, not from Montreal, but from the viewpoint of the whole needle trades organizations of the United States and Canada.

The unimportant local difficulties that before loomed tremendously important in their minds faded into insignificance and the national problems that affect all the 500,000 organized needle trade workers assumed prime importance.

At the coming conventions of the International Ladies Garment Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, as a result of this national psychology established by the conference in the minds of the militants, the militant delegates will make a fight that will be startling in its effectiveness and that will, I am sure, baffle the reactionary officialdom.

The most important discussion at the conference took place over the consideration of the proposed plan for a federation of existing needle trade organizations proposed by the Cap Makers' Union. The issue was amalgamation vs. federation. The delegates, 100 per cent, favored amalgamation as the only solution for the present difficulties confronting the needle trade organizations, and the only effective means for building up a powerful fighting machine of all needle trade workers.

However, there were some, and their number was not large, who believed that in the evolution of the needle trades organization towards complete amalgamation a federation of the existing organizations will necessarily be the next step.

These, therefore, wanted the League to help in the formation of a "Federation" as a step in advance towards amalgamation.

The overwhelming majority of the conference would have nothing to do with such a middle compromising course. As amalgamationists they wanted insistently and uncompromisingly to fight for amalgamation. They wanted amalgamation brought about by the rank and file and not a federation imposed upon the rank and file by the existing reactionary officialdom.

They wanted a radical change in their organizations, not the continuance in a federation, of all the present evils. They know the weakness and shortcomings of federation and wanted the opportunity of exposing its fault to the vast membership. They were sure that in an issue of "Amalgamation vs. Federation" the rank and file of the needle trade organizations would almost solidly support amalgamation.

The conference dealt with a large number of organizational and principle matters. Resolutions on many important matters concerning the militant and revolutionary workers movement were adopted. The conference indorsed the principles of the Red Trade Union International and officially joined the International Propaganda Committee of Needle and Textile Workers.

With the election of a National Committee of 20 members, representing 13 needle trade centers, the conference ended, closing a most important event in Labor history.