

Philadelphia Labor Movement Up In Arms Against Disruption Policy of Yellow I. L. G. W. U. Heads

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PHILADELPHIA, Pa.—The conference of various Trade Union and Fraternal Organizations of Philadelphia called for the purpose of protesting against the wholesale expulsions of active and well-known members from the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was a success, notwithstanding the fact that the conference was called on short notice, 28 organizations were represented. The Jewish Workmen's Circle was well represented despite the fact that the officials of that organization announced reprisals against all members who dared to participate in the conference.

Brother B. Neinstein, chairman of the Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union, presided. Esther Weissman and Max Levine, former chairman of the Joint Board of the Cloak Makers' Union, made a very interesting report on the controversy which aroused the indignation of all present against the reactionary machine of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

Expulsions Disrupt the Organization

With facts in their hands the two expelled veterans of the labor movement brought to light several illuminating facts exposing the tactics of the officialdom and the motives behind the expulsions. It was no concern of the officials that the expulsions, which were made contrary to the constitution of the union, led to a complete breakdown of the organization. The total membership of the union was reduced from 1800 to but 900, even according to the official reports. Since the expulsions took place the union completely lost its control over the shops which took the radical elements years of hard struggle to establish.

Against Dual Unions.

The expelled members were strong enough and had a sufficient following to organize a union of their own. The masses are with them. In fact, the officials were making every effort possible to provoke them to start a new union. But the expelled members are against dual unionism. Their determination is to fight their way back into the existing union which they themselves organized and built thru years of efforts and sacrifices.

League Not The Issue.

Membership in the Trade Union Educational League was the official reason for the wholesale expulsions. This was only a blind to cover up the real issues involved. The expelled members offered to withdraw from the League for the sake of preserving unity in the organization. But the officials even refused to listen to this proposal and put up new conditions to make it impossible for the expelled members to return. Reinstated members are subject to monetary fines, in many cases sufficiently high to make payment impossible. No office can be held by the reinstated for a period of one or two years. They must not read or support radical newspapers. They must not attend meetings addressed by radical speakers. They must not attend affairs arranged by radical organizations. One dress maker, who was not a member of the League and was in no way connected with it, was fined ten dollars for attending a Freiheit ball. She refused to pay as a matter of principle and was expelled from the Union. She is compelled to work in an Open Shop.

The Real Issue.

The expelled members were constantly fighting for constructive measures dealing with union affairs, with conditions in the shops. It was because of this that they gained the support of the rank and file of the union. This the officials feared. The radicals, for instance, were carrying on a bitter fight against the so-called "fish" elements in the union. There

is a number of petty business men who join the union during the busy season by paying the required twenty-five dollars initiation fee. After the busy season is over these elements quit the union, "fish" themselves out of the union. (Hence the name "fish".) The bona fide garment workers who stick to the trade all year round, including the slack periods, were naturally supporting the radicals in their fight against the "fish" who as a rule are staunch supporters of the officialdom.

Expulsions Affect Other Trades.

Speaker after speaker, representatives of other trades, pointed out that the breakdown of the Ladies' Garment Workers Union is playing into the hands of the bosses and has already seriously affected many other trades in the city. The situation is especially critical in view of the urgent need at the present moment to solidify the ranks of labor in order to be able to withstand the onslaughts of the employers. The conference therefore determined to take a hand in the controversy and adopted the following resolution calling upon the leaders of the trade union movement of the city to bring pressure to bear on the officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union to have the expelled members reinstated.

Resolution Adopted.

Considering that the critical situation of the expelled members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union has affected the general labor movement of Philadelphia and has created a serious crisis which may lead to far reaching results, and

Whereas, the attacks of the employers against organized labor demands unity of the various tendencies within the labor movement, and

Whereas, only thru united efforts will it be possible to fortify the positions of the unions, be it therefore

Resolved, that we, the Conference of labor organizations of Philadelphia call upon the President and Secretary of the Central Labor Union of Philadelphia—Brothers Hershberg and Birsch—who stand at the head of the labor movement of Philadelphia, and upon Brother Golden, State Organizer of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, our most powerful sister organization to the International, to act as a committee of three:

Be it further resolved, that this committee be urged upon consultation with the expelled members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union to get in touch with the officers of the Cloak and Dressmakers Union in order to bring about the reinstatement of the expelled members with full membership rights and without conditions.

We are firmly convinced that this will serve the best interests of the labor movement in general and of the needle trades in particular by uniting all the forces for practical organization work in the unions.

Permanent Committee Elected.

A permanent committee of nine was elected to continue the work of the conference—to canvass all labor organizations of Philadelphia and urge them to raise their voice of protest against the disruption of the labor movement by the officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, to collect funds for support of the families of the expelled who are deprived by the union officials of the opportunity to work and to call another conference to consider further steps to be taken to compel the reinstatement of the expelled members.

Whether the officials of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union will dare fight the entire labor movement of Philadelphia remains to be seen.