

ILGWU NEWS-HISTORY

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION ISSUE

CHAPTER 8

From Darkness to Dawn

1928 - 1933

25,000 in Dress Walkout; Factors Called to Albany

NEW YORK, Feb. 5, 1930—Approximately 25,000 men and women employed in the dressmaking industry here went on strike at 10 A.M. yesterday to reorganize and stabilize the industry, to eliminate sweatshops and to regularize employment.

At the end of a day which led the union leaders to predict an early and constructive peace, it was reported from Albany that Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt had written a letter inviting all the factors to confer with him at the Executive Mansion on Friday in an effort to arrive at an early peace. The "inside manufacturers" and the contractors who learned of the Governor's action said they would be glad to go to Albany on Friday. The union deferred its response

until today, but the reply will be favorable. The jobbers could not be reached last night.

"A most gratifying success," said Benjamin Schlesinger, president of the ILGWU, at its building, 3 West 16th St., after receiving reports last night from his lieutenants. "The workers responded so as to paralyze the trade, and in a few days the tie-up will be complete, involving 35,000 workers."

—NEW YORK TIMES

Cleveland Mfrs. Okay Contractors' Limitation

CLEVELAND, Jan. 17, 1930—After a strike which lasted only three days (Jan. 7-10), an overwhelming victory was won by 2,500 Cleveland cloak and dressmakers employed by the Garment Manufacturers' Assn. and independent manufacturers of this city.

After the strike had been in progress three days, the more discerning among the manufacturers figured they had had enough and capitulated by signing an agreement with the union.

The terms of the agreement, affecting at least 11 of Cleveland's largest manufacturers, include:

1. The immediate establishment of the five-day, 42-hour, instead of the 44-hour week, as at present.

2. Inside manufacturers agree to confine their outside production exclusively to union contracting shops, thus aiding the fight against the sweatshops.

The agreement was made public at a mass meeting of 2,000 garment strikers at Public Hall on Jan. 10. The strikers greeted the agreement with tremendous cheers and almost unanimously ratified it. The only dissenters were six Communist malcontents. It was also unanimously voted to tax all returning workers 5 per cent of their weekly wages as long as the strike is conducted against the open shop manufacturers, grouped in the American Plan.

JUSTICE

Cloak Joint Bd. Strikes At Modern Sweatshop

UNION IN BALTIMORE URGES STRONG ASSN. TO AID BARGAINING

BALTIMORE, Apr. 11, 1930—One of the first steps to be taken in the campaign to organize Baltimore garment workers will be an attempt to organize the bosses, according to an official of the union.

If this sounds anomalous, nevertheless it has worked in other cities. Small employers, unorganized, striving every man for himself, are extremely difficult to deal with satisfactorily. It is much easier for the union to get along with an association of employers, for an organization can discipline, as well as protect, its members.

So, it is not illogical for the union to do all it can to perfect the organization of the bosses preliminary to effecting organization of the workers. It makes collective bargaining really collective. Bargaining where the collective power is all on one side is unjust in the nature of things and cannot be otherwise; and unjust bargaining is the fruitful mother of all sorts of industrial troubles.

—BALTIMORE EVENING SUN

NEW YORK, July 3, 1929—Once more, after the breakdown of negotiations between the "inside" manufacturers and the ILGWU, more than 25,000 cloakmakers have been called out on strike. The issues ostensibly include wage demands, limitation of the right to discharge and an unemployment fund.

But fundamentally the strike springs from the disorganization and debility of the industry, and its main object is to reorganize and rehabilitate the whole trade. The work of Gov. Smith's commission three years ago was swallowed up in the disastrous left-wing strike of 1926. Conditions have gone from bad to worse, and the present troubles are the result.

As always, it is the submerged section of the cloakmaking industry—the sweatshop section—which is primarily responsible. The "inside" manufacturers, who employ perhaps one-fourth the workers, pay tolerable wages under fairly good conditions; the submanufacturers offer employment on less favorable, but not bad, terms. But the sweatshops, which have sprung up since the 1926 strike and which hire from one-third to two-fifths of all the cloakmakers, exploit their hands.

The existence of this debased, ill-paid, overworked part of the industry tends to lower standards everywhere, to drive the best manufacturers to the wall and to make proper long-term agreements impossible. To eliminate the sweat-

shops is the important goal, and the union leaders realize it. One of the demands they have pressed most vigorously is for the establishment of a Joint Board of Standards, with an inspection system to cut off contracts from these establishments.

A short slack-season strike is not a great disaster, but its long continuance might prove one. The situation calls for a conference of all the elements in the industry—the union, the "inside" manufacturers, the jobbers' association, the submanufacturers' association. Some means should be found by which they could combine their energies to attack and restrict within narrow limits the perennial sweatshop evil.

—THE WORLD

1½-DAY STOPPAGE IN BOSTON INJECTS NEW PRESTIGE INTO UNION

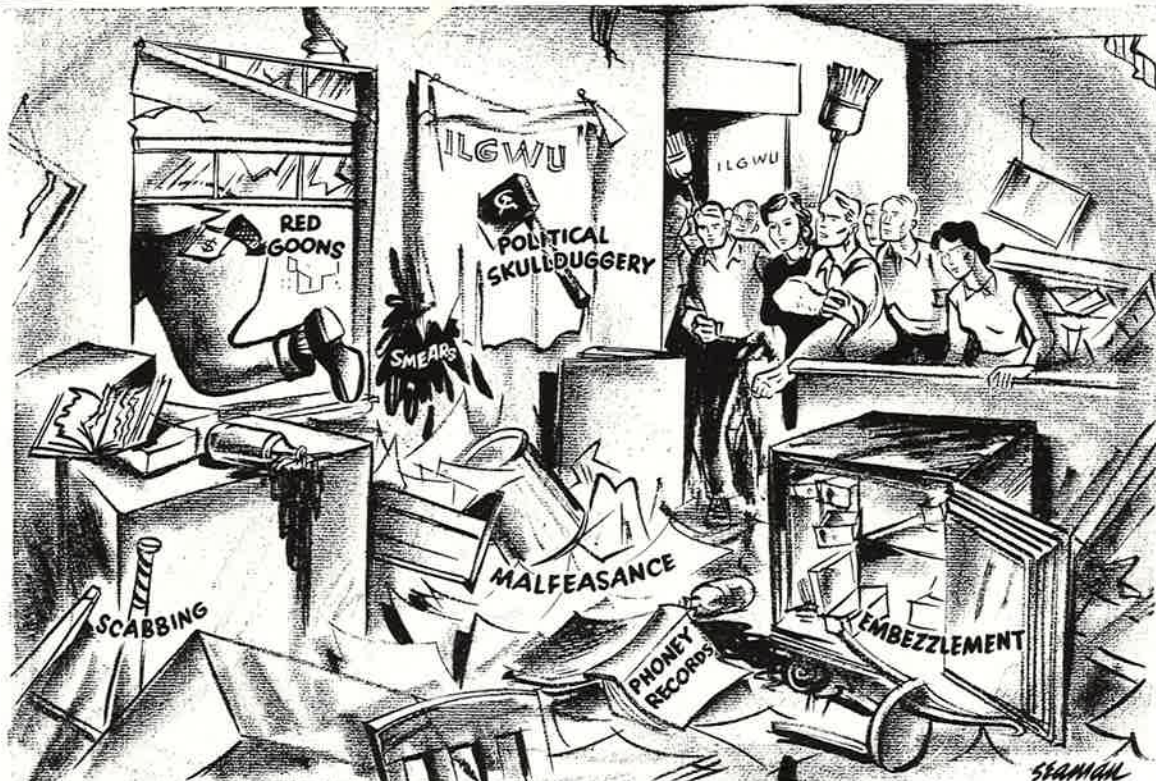
BOSTON, Mar. 28, 1930 — The shortest strike in the 30 years' history of the ILGWU was triumphantly concluded in Boston on Mar. 15, with the return of 4,000 dress and cloakmakers to a position of prestige and power they had lost since the Communist adventure shattered the Boston local unions five years ago.

The strike, lasting exactly a day and a half, is a record even in the face of the notable victories achieved by the International within the last year in New York, Cleveland, Toronto and Montreal. Its achievements have even greater significance because not only were the locals and the joint board of Boston completely rehabilitated, over 500 new members enrolled, collective agreements with every employers' group signed, the 40-hour week established, the sweatshop evil abolished at one sweep, impartial machinery created for the settlement of disputes, but also the last vestige of the Communist disease surgically eradicated.

When it is considered that, prior to the strike, the Boston cloak and dressmakers had only painfully re-established the nucleus of an organization, the overwhelming victory scored in a day and a half will mark one of the brightest pages in the history of the International Union.

—JUSTICE

"Let's Clean Up the Mess!"



The Drive to Rebuild the ILGWU

Stabilization of Garment Industry Seen as Key to Building a Strong Union

By BENJAMIN SCHLESINGER

When last year I again assumed the office of general president after an absence of five years, I found the following situation: the agreements which the International had with the employers were no better than scraps of paper.

There was a large membership on our books but comparatively few members paid their dues or took an interest in the work of the organization. The pernicious propaganda of the Communists and the loss of the 26-week strike, which was conducted by them, had destroyed the spirit of our members. Among the leaders themselves, I found apathy and even a great deal of pessimism.

'Rich' International Broke

My task, as I saw it, was simple, very simple. The leadership had to be solidified, enthusiasm aroused in the active members and an appeal made to the workers to get back their union. But when I wrote my first appeal to be distributed I found that the treasury of the "rich International" did not have the wherewithal to pay for the printing. I also learned that the office employees of the International did not always receive their salaries and that the union officers had not been paid for some time. Then, bills were coming in, notes were due, the debts incurred by the Communists were heavy. All this greatly complicated matters.

Well, we had to go out and borrow money. We did, and the campaign to rebuild the union started.

When as a result of our campaign, the International began to look like a union again and the time of the expiration of the agreements in the industry was approaching, we entered into negotiations with the employers with a program designed primarily to stabilize the industry. We realized that the work of stabilizing the industry is not the union's job alone. True, chaos in the industry, demoralization, affects the workers the most, but it also affects the manufacturers, the jobbers and the sub-manufacturers.

Our suggestion to all three groups of employers was a joint responsibility for the conditions in the industry, a joint control of the industry, a joint effort to stabilize the industry. How? By making each party to the agreement the only controlling factor in its respective field.

The association of submanufacturers is to be the only group in its field, and the employers are to deal with no other sub-manufacturers. The association of jobbers is to be recognized as the group of jobbers to which preference is to be given by the submanufacturers. The association of inside manufacturers is to be recognized as the controlling factor of inside manufacturing. And the

union is to be given every opportunity to control and guard the conditions of all the workers in all the shops.

The associations of employers accepted our proposition. They realized the necessity of a strong union for the purpose of reviving the industry just as we realized that only strong and responsible associations of employers can be of assistance in stabilizing the industry.

At our suggestion it was also agreed that a permanent joint commission be organized, of representatives of all parties to the agreement, for the purpose of joint control of the conditions in the industry. More than that, in view of the entry into the market of chain stores, mail order houses, group buyers, etc., this commission jointly as well as the union individually, will endeavor to enlist the cooperation of the reputable retailers in the effort to eliminate sub-standard shops which are detrimental to the industry.

And we went a step further. We suggested, and it was agreed, that the public be represented on the joint commission. We thought and think that the public is entitled to know under what conditions garments are made so that

(Continued on Page 4)

Loans, Bonds Bring in Funds for Big Organizing Drive—Thousands Clamor for Union Protection

By DAVID DUBINSKY

In May, 1928, Pres. Benjamin Schlesinger came back into office. His first task was to obtain funds to finance the union program of rehabilitation. In the midst of apathy and pessimism he succeeded in obtaining loans from outside sources. But the agreements were expiring in the summer of 1929, preparations had to be made for a possible strike and the loans were not sufficient.

At the recommendation of Pres. Schlesinger, the General Executive Board decided to issue bonds, which brought in a considerable amount of money. Our International began to look like a union again.

The obtaining of funds, however, was only part of the task. The union had to be rebuilt, the spirit and morale of the members revived, and agreements had to be negotiated with the employers.

We started a feverish campaign of organization. In this campaign, as well as in our previous fight against the Communists, we were assisted by the American Federation of Labor, especially by Pres. Green and Vice Pres. Woll, who took a personal interest in the revival

of our union. We appealed to the workers in the shops and at mass meetings, through the press and through our own literature.

The agreements were expiring. We entered into negotiations with the employers, and our members were aroused. They knew that the conditions must be changed, that they were intolerable. They were hoping that the negotiations with the employers would bring a better living for them. And they came back to us; they were again true and loyal union men and women.

Thousands were coming to the International offering assistance and demanding that the experienced leaders and trained strategists of our International regain for them the conditions lost under the rule of the Communists. They were clamoring for a union to protect them from the chaos and demoralization in the industry, in the shops. And our negotiations with the employers convinced us they too would prefer to enter into a contract with a strong and responsible union.

Put to the Test

The test soon came. We called a meeting at the 71st Regiment Armory which was addressed by Pres. Green and Vice Pres. Woll, in addition to Pres. Schlesinger and others of our International. The meeting was called to report the progress of our negotiations with the employers. That meeting was a huge success. For the first time in several years the workers came in thousands at the call of the leaders of the International. At the same time the Communists called a meeting at the Manhattan Opera House which showed their complete collapse.

We called our strike on July 2. The workers responded, the industry was stopped, and again we had the cooperation of the AFL. Pres. Green even assigned to us as special organizer Edward F. McGrady, one of the legislative representatives of the AFL, whose assistance during the strike was of inestimable value.

Within two weeks the strike was over. Conferences with the three employers' associations for the final settlement of the strike were attended by Lieut. Gov. Lehman and by Pres. Green, whose counsel and advice was accepted by all the participants in these conferences.

And when the strike was settled, the agreements now in operation were signed by all the parties at the City Hall and attested to by Lehman and Mayor James J. Walker.

It was the shortest general strike in the history of our union. It brought back the power of the International. It revived the spirit of the workers. The union is now re-established.

—AMERICAN FEDERATIONIST, Dec., 1929



Pres. Schlesinger and Secretary-Treasurer Dubinsky at a recent Bryant Hall meeting.

Victorious Strike Restores Mighty Cloakmakers' Union

NEW YORK, July 19, 1929—Thirty thousand striking cloakmakers Tuesday afternoon brought to an inspiring close a clean-cut, successfully waged struggle which sounded the death knell of the sweatshop. The most economical strike in the world, it was also the shortest strike in the needle industry. Not a wheel turned, not a bolt of cloth was cut, not a garment was produced in the two weeks of this extraordinary demonstration of labor.

The job was done the very first hour and only strategy and patience were required to consolidate the victory.

Production was 100 per cent paralyzed. The manufacturers were worried. They had challenged the union to show its strength, and the union showed it. Ten thousand strong swarmed into the 71st Regi-

ment Armory and demanded a strike and voted for it. Thirty thousand downed tools as one man and left the shops bleak and empty.

The manufacturers were worried. The Governor and the Mayor were worried. The Governor called a conference in Albany, which the union agreed to attend. The manufacturers, stripped of production, could do nothing else but confer. When union leaders, headed by Pres. Benjamin Schlesinger, Acting Pres. David Dubinsky and Isidore Nagler, general manager of the joint board, conferred in Albany, they had the silent power of 30,000 strikers behind them.

The union stated its minimum demands: The sweatshop must go; discharge of shop chairmen and active union workers definitely must be ended; Industrial Council shops must be inspected; unemployment insurance must be restored and there must be increases in wages to meet the ever-rising cost of living.

The Governor called more conferences. For the first time, the organized jobbers, menaced by the advent of chain stores and mail order competition, promised to behave. They promised to give all their production exclusively to American Association shops.

The Industrial Council bowed and gave up their demands for the 42-hour week, single pay Saturdays six months a year, and for piece work. The contractors gave up their demand for piece work. A joint commission was created, with the public prominently represented. The commission is to police the industry. No bootleg production! Down with the sweatshops! Observation, strict observation of union standards!

—JUSTICE

Need Strong Assns. And Able Union to Enforce Standards

By HERBERT H. LEHMAN
(U. S. Senator from New York)

The signing of an agreement between the union and the three employers' associations marks not only the termination of a strike of large magnitude, but in my confident opinion, gives promise of better things in a great industry.

It is perfectly evident to me that in a unionized industry, dealing with many hundreds if not thousands of manufacturing units, we must have, in order to maintain stability and promote prosperity, strong, enlightened employers' associations and a strong and ably led union. The strength of each necessarily reflects and augments the strength of all. Without strong employers' associations and a strong union, we will never have constructive and enforceable collective bargaining.

I appeal to the public to lend its aid in the fight to eliminate the sweatshops and the sub-standard shop. The Joint Committee, which is provided for in the agreement, will shortly survey shop conditions. It will be composed of citizens whose standing in the community will ensure the unqualified acceptance of their findings. I favor the widest publicity for their reports and I am confident that the public, when it knows the facts, will refuse to deal with any shop or with any merchant who manufactures or secures his merchandise in or from shops which exploit labor. I am certain that enlightened public opinion will never tolerate the exploitation of labor or unfair competition and will take its own means to correct an indefensible situation.

—JUSTICE, Aug. 2, 1929

Reading the Terms of Peace



—N. Y. Evening Journal
Secretary Dubinsky reads the tentative agreement reached with manufacturers at Webster Hall meeting, Feb. 12, 1930.

Shortest Strike in Cloak Annals Nets 3-Year Agreement

By LOUIS STARK
(Pulitzer Prize labor reporter)

NEW YORK, July 21, 1929 — To many of those present at City Hall several days ago when formal peace terms were signed ending a fortnight's strike of 30,000 cloakmakers (the shortest in the industry's troubled career), the occasion had something of the miraculous about it. Six months ago when the same men met to write a new agreement they lined up in bitterly hostile camps, ranged on opposite sides of an abyss into which nearly all felt they would inevitably plunge and drag their industry.

Last December the morale of the cloak industry appeared to be at its lowest ebb since the 1910 strike, when the agreement known as the Protocol of Peace brought a large measure of hope out of the chaos and confusion of the industry.

Despite the protocol, for nearly 20 years the industry has been buffeted by the adverse winds of strikes and lockouts. More recently it has also been affected by the rise of style as a factor in production, the growth of hand-to-mouth buying and the rapid development of chain store and group purchasing on a scale so vast that it could not be conceived of 20 years ago.

Now, with the signing of the new three-year agreement, the industry, in the opinion of its leaders, enters upon a new era, a period which it is hoped will be marked by cooperative endeavor, and that will mean the rehabilitation of one of New York's foremost industries.

On the suggestion of Morris H. Haft, president of the Merchants' Ladies' Garment Assn., the jobbers' organization, a joint commission was decided upon to supervise standards in the industry and to "police" all shops.

This feature, the importance of which it is difficult to exaggerate, is the keystone of the new covenant of the industry. It is upon this commission that the hopes of the industry center. The commission will be able to enter the sweatshops and sub-standard shops to which the organized associations have been denied admittance.

—NEW YORK TIMES

19,000 Going Back To Work Will Give Strikers Day's Pay

NEW YORK, July 16, 1929—No parades or playing of bands, as promised, marked the return to work this morning of 5,000 members of the ILGWU who have been on strike for two weeks. They simply registered, paid dues at one of the 14 strike halls or at headquarters of the joint board, 130 East 25th St., and returned quietly to their posts, most of them to 75 of the largest manufacturers.

The return of 19,000 of the 30,000 strikers to their work will be complete in a day or so, officials of the joint board said.

The 19,000 voted yesterday at Webster Hall to give one day's pay to the 11,000 still on strike and this money, about \$200,000, will be available by the end of the week, officials said.

—BROOKLYN EAGLE

40-HOUR WORK WEEK PUT INTO EFFECT IN LARGER N. Y. SHOPS

NEW YORK, June 3, 1928—Today brings the 40-hour, or five-day week for approximately 20,000 workers in New York City employed in the ladies' garment industry.

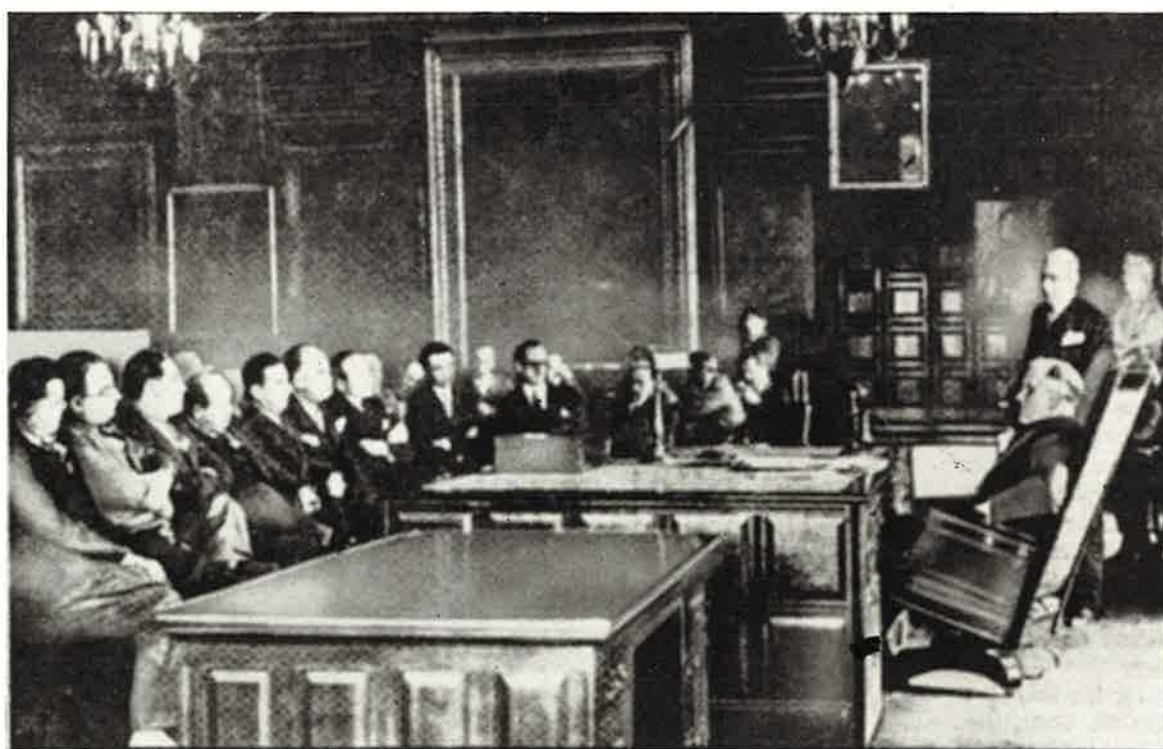
The new schedule affects the workers in the larger establishments, but does not extend to the smaller shops where some 15,000 additional workers are now employed. Efforts will be made by the ILGWU to extend the five-day plan to these smaller places, and it is highly desirable for several reasons that these should be brought within the scope of the agreement.

The larger manufacturers naturally feel that they are under a handicap in facing some 1,600 small competitors who have not accepted this limitation of working hours. A further extension of the new working plan would go far toward insuring its permanence. By bringing the smaller shops into the agreement, much more may also be done toward reducing the seasonal fluctuation in employment that is possible when they are a law unto themselves.

Experience shows that the large establishments are already providing more regular employment than the smaller ones. The latter, as a result of the demoralization following the strike two years ago, have tended to multiply.

—THE WORLD

Garment Industry Problems Placed Before Gov. Roosevelt



—Pacific & Atlantic
Once again, during February, 1930, Gov. Roosevelt and his special arbitrator, Lieut. Gov. Lehman, hear labor and industry leaders tell of garment trade stalemate.

Commies Selling Fake ILG Membership Cards

NEW YORK, July 27, 1928—Having discovered that the moribund Communist group, which operates as a full-fledged strike-breaking agency in the cloak and dress trade, is now peddling fake ILGWU union cards in the market, selling them at \$3.30 apiece, the New York Cloak and Dress Joint Board issued this week a warning to all workers to beware of this fraud and not to pay any attention to this latest money-raising scheme of the hard-pressed Communist charlatans.

—JUSTICE

Pinched for Disturbing the Employers' Peace



Police round up strikers for blasting the peace and quiet of (left) New York's streets during the dress walkout in February, 1930, and (right) Boston's Kneeland and South St. area the same month.

Program to Stabilize Trade Offered by ILG

(Continued from Page 2)

it may discriminate against sweatshop products.

One of the most important improvements is the modification of the so-called "reorganization" rights of the employers.

Our new agreement provides for only two reorganizations in the course of four years. Furthermore, according to the old agreement each reorganization was spread through an entire month whereas in our new agreement each of the reorganizations is to take place within one week only. Provision is made for the protection of the wages of the workers where reorganization takes place and that no discharge is made because of a worker's "performance of his duties in behalf of the union or of the workers in the shop."

I do not want anybody, however, to be under the illusion that this program was embodied into the agreement without a struggle. True, the employers were sympathetic to it but they were in doubt as to the ability of the union to carry it out, to enforce it. It required a general strike of the 30,000 cloakmakers of New York to convince the employers that we are alive again. The workers responded splendidly. Their interest was aroused by our systematic agitation, and their enthusiasm by the call to strike. It was a short strike, two weeks only, but it was productive of results. The agreement placed us on the road to order in the industry and we re-established the union in the cloak and suit industry of New York.

Now we are preparing for the performance of a similar operation in the dress industry of New York, which needs it probably more than the cloak and suit industry.

After that—to other markets!

—AMERICAN FEDERATIONIST, Dec., 1929

Refuse Checks!

NEW YORK, Sept. 26, 1930—All workers of the New York cloak industry, and especially those employed in contractors' shops are warned not to accept wages in checks, but to insist on payment in cash. There have been many cases of late where employers paid their workers in checks, and then gave up their shops. The checks have come back, and the defaulting employers cannot be located. The union is doing everything possible to collect the wages due the workers, but it cannot assume responsibility for them.

The union calls attention to the fact that, according to its agreement with the employers' associations, wages must be paid in cash. Cloak workers are urged to notify the union at once whenever an employer refuses to pay their wages in cash and offers them checks.

—JUSTICE

Cleveland Referees Reject Assn. Plea To Drop Guarantee

CLEVELAND, May 30, 1930—In a decision handed down at Cleveland, on May 24, the Board of Referees denied the appeal of the Cleveland Garment Manufacturers' Assn. for modification of the 40-week employment guarantees contained in the agreement with the ILGWU.

The system of guaranteed employment, which has been in force in the Cleveland market since 1921, will therefore continue without change during the life of the present agreement.

—JUSTICE

COMPETITION DRIVES WAGES DOWN EVEN UNDER WEEK WORK

If we are to be honest with ourselves, we cannot but admit that the week-work system in the cloak, suit and skirt industry, as it exists today, has not had the beneficial results which it was hoped would come from its introduction. The main evil which it sought to overcome, but which still exists, is the competition between worker and worker, between shop and shop.

Under the present week-work system, the union protects the wages of these workers so long as they remain in the same shop.

The result has been, of course, that with the great turnover in our industry, due to the enormous number of units annually going out of existence, the worker, when seeking a new job, is forced to compete through a lower wage with his fellow-members.

The advantage from this competition, of course, accrues to those firms which engage new workers. The large shops, which might desire to retain inside manufacturing on a large scale, are forced in many cases, through the competition of shops employing new workers at lower rates on goods of similar quality, to turn to the more profitable and less responsible role of jobbing. Competition between shop and shop is therefore not on the basis of superior production and efficiency but on the basis of the actual lowering of wages.

If this were not the case, it would be inevitable that the larger shops, with a more permanent footing, would have smaller overhead costs both during the busy and the slack seasons. The smaller manufacturing shops manage to exist because they produce cloaks cheaper than the inside shops by reason of cheaper labor and production costs. They are, therefore, a distinct menace to the welfare of our members.

—REPORT, ILGWU CONVENTION, 1928.

Control Board Rules Jobbers' Price Must Cover Union Rate

NEW YORK, Nov. 9, 1929—On Sept. 29, the Cloak Control Commission rendered a decision which it is expected will have an important bearing upon the stabilization of the industry and the elimination of sweatshops. Certain contractors refused to continue producing garments ordered by jobbers on the ground that the jobbers were not living up to their promise to abide by union standards. The jobbers complained that the contractors were breaking their agreement.

The commission decided that the jobbers should pay prices which would enable the contractors to pay union wages and observe union standards, and ordered the parties to form a special joint commission and agree on minimum production prices. If they fail to agree, the dispute is to be decided by the impartial chairman.

The arrangements which the employers have agreed to as necessary to curb cut-throat competitive practices indicate that they have finally located the sources of most of the difficulties of the industry. To a large degree, by this agreement, the employers have thus confirmed the principal contentions which the union has advanced throughout the history of the industry; that is, the need for basic standards in wages, hours and working conditions and for arrangements whereby employers would cooperate in eliminating competitive practices which depress the entire industry.

The attempt to gain the cooperation of large buyers in eliminating sweatshop conditions is a significant point of approach, particularly for a highly competitive industry which is largely at the mercy of these large purchasers.

—INFORMATION SERVICE, Federal Council of Churches of Christ

Sigman Resignation Surprises Ex. Bd.; Schlesinger Named

NEW YORK, Nov. 2, 1928 — The second quarterly meeting of the General Executive Board, since the Boston convention, came to an end on Oct. 30, having lasted nearly a week and a half. It was a meeting filled with startling developments and tense, dramatic moments.

The outstanding events of the quarterly gathering of the executive leaders of the ILGWU were the resignation of Pres. Morris Sigman as president of the International Union, and the election of former Pres. Benjamin Schlesinger, until now a member of the GEB, as his successor. Sigman's resignation was tendered to the board on Oct. 25, and was accepted after a lengthy debate.

—JUSTICE

Special Assessment To Wipe Out Union Debt Is Suggested

BOSTON, May 16, 1928—To help wipe out a debt of \$1,850,000 in the New York cloak and dress unions, the ILGWU convention voted today to take a national referendum on a special assessment to be levied upon the entire membership.

Speakers at today's session pointed out that the Communists during the 1926 strike in New York spent \$3,500,000 of which \$850,000 was in employers' securities, deposited with the union to assure faithful performance on union agreements. These securities were held in trust and the International, after the Communists were eliminated from power, obligated itself to repay the securities.

—THE WORLD

Four-Corner Pact Delivers Blow to Industrial Chaos

NEW YORK, Feb. 14, 1930—This time it was the dress-makers' division of the International that made history. Led by Generalissimo Schlesinger and his brilliant General Staff, an army of over 30,000 New York dressmakers went over the top,

smashed the Hindenburg Line of industrial chaos and exploitation, delivered a mortal blow to the sweatshop in the dress industry, and placed their union, the reborn Dressmakers' Union, in a position of such strength that it can now exercise full control over the entire dress industry of New York, an industry that produces three hundred and fifty million dollars' worth of garments a year. And all this in the brief space of eight days!

It began Tuesday morning, Feb. 4. As the workers arrived in the garment center on their way to work, handbills were distributed among them which contained the strike call, summoning them to walk out of their shops at 10 o'clock that morning. And promptly at 10, they laid down their tools and marched out into the street by the scores, by the hundreds, by the thousands, until the garment district was jammed with workers on their way to the various halls provided for them by the General Strike Committee.

After a day of complete paralysis of the major industry of the metropolis, the Governor of New York State, Franklin D. Roosevelt, took a hand in the matter, as he had previously done in the July cloak strike and invited the union and the various employers' groups to send representatives to a conference in Albany in an effort to reach an agreement.

The following morning, conferences of the four factors in the industry—the union, the inside manufacturers, the jobbers and the contractors—began at the Commodore Hotel, New York City, under the chairmanship of Lieut. Gov. Herbert H. Lehman.

15,000 Picket

On Monday morning, the union arranged a demonstration of mass picketing the like of which had rarely been witnessed even in New York. Fifteen thousand workers picketed the garment district, with the result that the Communist scabs and their guardian angels, the "gorillas," had not even the chance of the traditional snowball in Hades. The dress trade remained virtually at a standstill.

Meanwhile, the conference continued, but without success. The union could easily have settled with each of the employers' groups, but in order to attain the main objective of the strike, which was the elimination of the sweatshop and the stabilization of the dress industry, a four-cornered agreement was essential. And so Lieut. Gov. Lehman was recalled in the hope that he might succeed in ironing out the difference between the jobbers and contractors.

An agreement was finally reached and duly signed on Feb. 11, at City Hall, in the presence of Lieut. Gov. Lehman and Acting Mayor Joseph V. McKee.

—JUSTICE

\$250,000 in Bonds Issued to Finance Organizing Strikes

When securities are offered for sale there is usually a recitation of facts almost as formal as the Litany. The nature of the business, its earnings, the equity of the securities, the purpose to which the proceeds of the offering will be put (whether acquisition of new properties, enlargement of factories, new equipment) are all set forth.

Strange would that customary formula have sounded if recited for a bond issue announced last week. The purpose of the issue of \$250,000 of five-year, 5 per cent gold bonds was to improve business of the issuing company by conducting a bigger and better strike of 45,000 employees. The name of the issuing company is the ILGWU.

The union's plans for enlargement and improvement are to be carried out by several strikes in the near future. A subsidiary in Toronto is authorized to call a strike of 1,800 cloakmakers. Another subsidiary consisting of 7,000 embroiderers in Manhattan is also directed to undertake a strike. Strikes are now under consideration in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Toronto, Baltimore, Toledo, Kansas City.

But the specific purpose of the bond issue is to finance a strike of 45,000 dressmakers to be called in New York.

The necessity for the issue is explained by the fact that some three years ago control of the New York subsidiary was seized by a group with Communistic leanings. They declined to accept arbitration and forced a strike which lasted for nearly six months, cost the union treasury some \$3,500,000 in cash reserve, the workers some \$30,000,000 in wages. The strike was a virtual failure. So the old officials stepped back in and reorganized.

Acting Pres. David Dubinsky declared last week that the bonds would be sold to affiliated unions and to "many wealthy men," that moreover the bonds were not mere promissory notes, but were secured by the union's assets (chiefly real estate), valued at some \$10,000,000, besides its large income from union dues.

—TIME, Aug. 19, 1929

STOPPAGE IN CLOAKS CALLED TO ORGANIZE NON-UNION PLANTS

NEW YORK, July 27, 1932 — A general organization stoppage in the cloak industry here was called this afternoon at 1 o'clock. About 27,000 workers will be affected, ultimately, according to union estimates, but the effect today will be felt by about 8,000 workers who are actually employed. Instructions for the unemployed workers will be issued by the union tomorrow.

The purpose of the organization stoppage, which follows the conclusion of an agreement between the three employers' associations and the ILGWU, is to organize the non-union shops, to restore pay reductions said to have been made in violation of the agreements, to establish limitation of submanufacturers, and to see that only union workers in good standing are put to work.

It is expected that the union will begin sending the workers back to the shops of members of the Industrial Council of Cloak, Suit and Skirt Manufacturers, Inc., and the American Cloak and Suit Assn., Inc., next Tuesday or Wednesday. By that time the necessary preliminaries will have been completed for most of these shops, and once started, they will continue to return to work rapidly.

—WOMEN'S WEAR DAILY

Spreading the Union's Message



Vice Pres. Hochman allocating bundles of leaflets to a committee of volunteers early in the 1930 walkout.

—N. Y. Evening Journal

Each Worker to His Post



Pickets receive pamphlets from strike committee, Feb. 4, 1930, at Bryant Hall headquarters.

—N. Y. Daily News

Ingersoll Upholds 14-Machine Clause in Council Agreement

NEW YORK, Nov. 7, 1930—Raymond V. Ingersoll, impartial chairman of the cloak and suit industry, in a decision rendered on Oct. 28 involving a complaint against the firm of Benjamin Levy & Sons, New York, for not maintaining a standard union shop, confirmed the inviolability of this section of the collective agreement in the New York cloak market. Specifically, the firm was charged with employing but nine operators of the required minimum of 14, while sending out a substantial amount of work to outside shops.

Mr. Ingersoll's decision, upholding the contention of the union, decreed that the firm employ at once three additional operators and put to work two more workers in its inside shop as soon "as stock production for the spring season gets under way." To allow no misinterpretation of this decision and to lay at rest any possible wrong construction that might be placed upon it, Mr. Ingersoll, in a supplementary statement issued on Nov. 3, emphasized the point at issue in the following words:

"The decision issued by the impartial chairman's office on Oct. 28 in the case of Benjamin Levy & Sons did not involve any modification of the collective agreement be-

tween the union and the Industrial Council.

"In this decision the 14-machine operator standard contained in the agreement was upheld but the firm was given time to adjust its affairs for the full application of the standards."

—JUSTICE

MORALE ON 7TH AVE. HITS ALL-TIME LOW; ILG LOOKS TO NRA

By GEORGE BRITT

NEW YORK, June 23, 1933—"If we could get a minimum wage in the needle trades actually insuring \$15 a week, it would be 400 per cent better than we average now," a high official of the ILGWU remarked today.

Seventh Ave., that broad thoroughfare which is jammed from 34th St. to 40th St. every noontime with a gesticulating and rampant swarm of clothing workers, has reached its all-time low in morale and in financial deflation. Just one hope remains—the National Industrial Recovery Act.

Yet Seventh Ave. this past spring had, in some respects, a fairly good season; the clothing trade remained, uniquely in New York, a billion-dollar industry in the depression year of 1932. The outlook for the fall is reasonably good. That is, a lot of garments will be sold.

But at such prices—the lowest in memory! And that is the basic factor in all the pitched battles, the discontent.

Cut-throat competition has transformed the market more than ever in a price race, with the higher grade \$8.75 and \$6.75 lines of dresses supplanted by \$2.25 and \$1.37 lines. The workers, on the other hand, have to put practically as much time on the cheaper lines as on the more expensive.

—WORLD-TELEGRAM

Drive on Saturday Work Starts; Union Groups Check Shops

NEW YORK, Feb. 3, 1928 — The drive against Saturday work in the cloak and dress district of New York, begun last Saturday morning, got away to a flying start.

Several hundred active union workers, including a number of officials and shop chairmen, assembled in Bryant Hall, 42nd St. and Sixth Ave., at 7 o'clock in the morning, and, after having been divided into small committees by the chairmen of the campaign, started out for the shops to which they were assigned.

The committees, consisting of six persons each, visited the shops along West 25th, 26th, 27th, 37th, 38th and 39th Streets, located between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. A number of shops were found closed.

—JUSTICE

Valiant Dressmakers Smash Attempt to Restore Slavery

NEW YORK, Mar. 9, 1932—The dressmakers' strike in New York has just ended. The settlement is a reasonable compromise, whose exact terms are not important. What is important, from the public's point of view, is to know that almost certainly the settlement is only a temporary one. Sooner or later — and probably sooner — the workers will again be obliged to resort to strike tactics.

This strike was, of course, only the latest in a long series of revolts against conditions in this branch of the needle industry. Beginning with the great strike in 1909, when the first effective union was established among the dressmakers, the demoralization produced in the industry by the uncontrolled forces of competition has been reduced to some semblance of order and decency only by periodic uprisings of the workers.

Wage Tragically Low

Working conditions, bad enough before 1929, have, during our latest depression, fallen to the standards prevailing in the pre-war sweatshops. Few who have not had the occasion to observe at first hand the devastating effects of bad business can realize how completely the thousands who work for a living in the needle and textile industries have borne the full brunt of this depression in savage slashes of wages and in the total loss of the industrial rights for which they fought so courageously in the past. Nor was there any sign, before the strike was called on Feb. 16, that the industry itself could be expected to take any measures to arrest the decline.

For the present state of affairs the manner in which the trade is organized is as responsible as the depression itself. Always an industry of small, changing and irresponsible employers, it reverted, under the stress of unfavorable post-war conditions, to the uncivilized methods of doing business which had prevailed before the union was first organized. Seeking the easiest way out of a difficult situation, many established manufacturers and more new ones succumbed to the methods of cutthroat competition. They abandoned their own shops, farmed out their patterns and work to contractors employing on the average hardly more than ten persons in a shop; reduced costs of production ruthlessly by playing off one contractor against another. Through it all they refused to regard themselves as manufacturers and, consequently, to accept any responsibility for working conditions.

With these problems the union

has struggled for more than 10 years. The control it managed from time to time to establish has again been dissipated by the depression. From the beginning of 1930, the non-union area has spread; wages and prices have been further reduced; and all pretense at effective regulation has been virtually abandoned. After two years of depression some 26,000 workers, 70 per cent of them women, were employed on miserable terms in more than 2,500 shops.

When the agreement between the union and the employers in the industry terminated at the end of last year, the latter entered the new negotiations with demands calculated to aggravate conditions already intolerable. They insisted upon additional wage cuts. They sought to increase the excessive unemployment of the waistmakers by demanding unlimited overtime without extra pay and unlimited work on Saturday, thus rejecting the practice of the equal division of work, which, in this depression more than in any other, has been so universally urged upon American industry.

Seek Free Discharge

Finally they undertook to destroy the remnants of union control by asking for the continuous right of free discharge and, what is worse, the right to discharge once a year 10 per cent of the work force of each employer. With the employers holding such an attitude toward the problems of both the industry and the union, a strike designed to force fundamental reform was inevitable. In its counter demands the union proposed measures not alone essential to the barest requirements of labor but to minimum standards of prosperity for the industry.

It is a high tribute to the courage and foresight of the dressmakers that, after years of starvation wages and the sufferings of unemployment, they were willing to face the added hardships of a strike for the purpose of reviving the power of their union and improving ever so little the conditions of themselves and their fellow workers, and that they have won even a partial victory, in these times, is an equal tribute to their solidarity and spirit.

—NEW REPUBLIC

SEEK TO EQUALIZE LABOR COSTS WITH SCHEDULE OF RATES

The dressmakers' strike of 1932 was principally a defensive fight.

And in this sense, this strike, called in the midst of a terrible economic situation, with unemployment and destitution raging on all sides, when many old and strongly entrenched labor organizations are continually being forced to accept wage cuts, should be regarded as a real achievement.

A schedule of uniform piece rates was introduced, to become operative within 15 days from the day of the settlement in all shops, inside or contractor shops, and all piece rates are hereafter to be settled on the basis of this schedule. This schedule is to provide definite rates for as many parts of the garment as possible, to be fixed on the \$1.10 per hour minimum basis provided in the agreement.

To understand the importance of this piece rate schedule, we must take into account the method by which piece prices were being settled until now. The industry had no fixed price for any part of the garment of any standard line of merchandise. Each shop would fix its own prices and each price committee had to bargain and haggle with the employer in order to wrest from him the best price possible. The result was that shops working on the same line of merchandise, often for the same jobber, would have different prices for labor, and, in this manner, workers of one shop would compete against workers of another.

The purpose of this schedule is to do away with this competition. This schedule is being prepared for the entire trade. Each part of the dress, each operation will have its definite prices and employers will be forbidden to offer to their workers lower prices than those arranged under the schedule.

—REPORT, ILGWU CONVENTION 1932.

Stripped for Action



Tempers flared during September, 1933 garment strike in St. Louis.

FIRST LADY OF PA., IRATE AT LOW WAGE, GOES ON PICKET LINE

By FLOYD ANDERSON

The wife of the Governor of Pennsylvania was so aroused by the conditions she discovered that she joined the pickets in front of sweatshop factories where employees were striking for improved working conditions and higher wages. A committee authorized by the General Assembly has been making an investigation of sweatshops in the state, with developments showing very long hours and starvation wages, sometimes as low as \$1 a week.

Connecticut is as bad. About two years ago the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor undertook a survey of the sewing trades in the state at the request of Gov. Cross. The survey covered between 60 and 65 per cent of the state's wage earners in the clothing industries. A median wage of \$12.35 a week was shown for 7,631 women, as indicated by the following table:

Hours Worked	No. of Women	Median Wage
Less than 36	830	\$8.45
36 and less than 40	316	11.45
40 and less than 44	697	13.60
44 and less than 48	1,120	13.80
48 and less than 52	1,184	14.10
52 to 55	450	15.00
Over 55	215	16.35
Hours not reported	2,819	11.30

The runaway manufacturer comes into a town and rents a loft in the cheaper section. In most cases, he has been driven out of New York State because of union requirements and more stringent laws. He puts up power sewing-machines, and his material comes from New York, cut out and ready for stitching. A few signs about town, or some newspaper advertisements, bring operators to him—mostly inexperienced women and girls. The promoter of this shop tells them that at the beginning they must not expect much, but as soon as they gain experience they will receive higher wages. And so at the beginning he offers them as little as he possibly can, and works them as hard as possible. Then after two or three weeks, he disappears some night, taking his machines with him, and leaving behind him disappointed and worn-out workers who often have not even been paid the small wages promised them.

—THE COMMONWEAL, Aug. 18, 1933.

NEW COAT CONTRACT PERMITS UNION TO EXAMINE FIRM BOOKS

NEW YORK, September, 1932—The cloak industry of New York is back to "normalcy."

A week ago, the general strike committee of the Cloak Joint Board, which directed the stoppage operations for several weeks—from July 17 to Aug. 18—met for a final session and turned over all its functions to the regular departments of the union. Before dissolving, the strike committee received reports from all its subcommittees and from Pres. Dubinsky, its chairman, covering not only the stoppage activities but the negotiations with the employers' associations and the agreements concluded prior to the stoppage.

What has the stoppage won?

1) A collective agreement with all associations for the current year; 2) established firmly the principles of week work; 3) drastic limitation of overtime work; 4) participation of the union in the establishing and enforcing of minimum production costs.

In addition, the new agreements incorporate a number of other improvements, such as the installation of uniform sets of records and books in each firm relating to payrolls, labor costs and outside production, to facilitate union control over these points in the agreements; new provisions enlarging the union's right to examine books; widening the authority of the impartial chairman to levy fines for second offenses by employers; defining the obligations of employers to old workers; and rules governing collection of back pay in cases of improper compensation.

\$5 Reduction

On the debit side of the ledger, there is the one item of a \$5 wage reduction. But as we consider that the employer had demanded that the wage scales be reduced 25 per cent, namely, to the standard of 1919, and that every other labor union in the country has conceded much larger wage reductions to employers in the past three years, this \$5 wage cut should not be viewed as a calamity. Of course, the union fought hard to avoid even that, but it is apparent that conditions being what they are, it was the best that could have been achieved.

—JUSTICE

S O S for Garment Strikers



—N. Y. Daily News

The Service of Supply Station set up at 142 Second Ave. by ILGWU to feed strikers during 1932 walkout.

Code Offers Best Means To Wipe Out Sweatshop

NEW YORK, July 5, 1933—The sweatshop has returned to American industry in its worst form, and groups combatting the exploitation of workers are following with intense concern Washington proceedings on the fair practices code to be drawn up under provisions of the National Industrial Recovery Act, hoping that this code will make the present \$4-a-week wage for 70 hours' work impossible.

Proof of the situation in the garment industry may be seen on every hand in fly-by-night stores of the bargain or receiver's sale variety throughout the United States.

While the jobber is the key to the era of cut-throat competition, the contractor alone knows the hardships endured by the workers, who have practically no escape from his decisions. Such a situation not only oppresses the workers, but exerts a powerful influence to depress the general conditions of the industry. And in the wake of the sweatshop with its mismanagement of the common welfare and ignorant wastage of human effort, is an inevitable train of child dependence and delinquency and old age for which, on debased wages, no provision can be made.

According to David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU, representing the workers of an industry which employs 182,000 women throughout the nation, "it is all due to the mad scramble for cheaper dresses forced on us by the jobbers."

"In 1930, dresses averaged \$9 retail; in 1931 and 1932, \$6, and in 1933, the price dropped to \$3," he said. "Now we have \$1.75, \$1 and 50-cent dresses. There seems to be no bottom.

Mad Desire for Profits

"Even at the low prices prevailing for dresses, I believe a better wage could be paid the workers if it were not for the mad desire of jobbers to make speculative profits."

The merchant demands rush delivery. Plenty of workers are to be had, and the manufacturer mans his plant for night and day work. The huge machines roar endlessly; the workers are pressed to the limit of their endurance, and in a week it is all over. The whole force is laid off and the factory shut down until the wasteful process begins again with another rush order.

On terms, then, of racketeering, cut-throat competition and sweated labor, Seventh Ave., main stem of New York's biggest industry—garment making—has been able to remain a teeming thoroughfare throughout the slump. With prices the lowest in memory, this industry has stayed at the top of the city's production list.

The gypsy contractor does business on a shoestring, choosing for his location places outside the inspection rounds or in a state where labor laws are laxly enforced. In New York State he prefers Long Island, Staten Island and Westchester County, or he goes to Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, trucking his stuff into the retail center at night.

Ruthless Exploitation

A survey by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Labor and Industry described these employers as "men with inferior business caliber who probably could not survive at all if it were not for their willingness to be entirely ruthless in exploiting labor."

In their desperate need for work and wages, girls and women jump at the invitation to "sit down right now at a machine and go to work";

they do not venture to inquire about wages and, indeed, some are told they must work a week, or even two, as learners. Even experienced workers are having to accept this invitation. At the end of the "learning period" they are told their work won't do and they are dismissed for a new group. By this trick a contractor can get several thousands of dresses sewn for almost nothing.

Thus is the plight of the women and girls of the needle trades being added to the saga of the southern textile operatives, the Kentucky miners and jobless wanderers.

—CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Their First Strike for Dignity and Security



With signs they themselves made, these South River, N. J. garment workers on Aug. 30, 1932 told their boss they'd had enough and walked out.

Contractor Pares Wages To Survive Competition

By WILLIAM BILEVITZ

It is in the contract shop that sweated conditions usually prevail. Such a shop is frequently operated by two men. One is busy securing orders from New York manufacturers, who see in the contract shop a means of cutting down their high labor costs.

These manufacturers supply the contract shop with the material, already cut, which is to be sewed together and converted into the finished product.

The second partner takes charge of production in the shop in Connecticut, receiving the cut material from New York, and sending it back when completed to the manufacturer under contract. The difference in labor costs thus saved is considerably in excess of the cost of transportation.

There are so many of these contract shops, not only in Connecticut, but also in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, that the competition for the comparatively few available orders is very intense. In the mad scramble for contracts, it is therefore not surprising to find the shops undercutting each other to such an extent that their margins of profit often disappear entirely. The only way in which they can meet this cutthroat competition and the pressure exerted by popular-priced chain stores promising volume-buying is to reduce the wages of their employees.

Since Connecticut has no law compelling registration of establishments employing labor, it is impossible to determine how many of these contract shops are now functioning. Miss Helen Wood, formerly industrial secretary of the New Haven YWCA, and now industrial investigator for the Connecticut Department of Labor, estimates that there are approximately 100 such shops in New Haven and an equal number scattered throughout the rest of the state. Certainly enough of them have been unearthed to indicate that the contract shop is a thriving Connecticut institution.

It has already been stated that the labor laws of the state are quite lax. A comparison of labor legislation in Connecticut with that of New York or Massachusetts will

amply justify this assertion. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence that the contract shops, as well as some of the regular factories, have scant regard even for the existing legislation.

State labor investigators have found numerous cases in which wages have been withheld, and minors have been employed without

school certification. Hundreds of women have been found working more than the legal 55 hours a week.

Still other cases have been uncovered, where employees were given homework after spending 50 or more hours a week in the shop. In such instances other members of the family, from mother down to younger sisters, frequently assist in completing the work through long hours at night. Even Sunday has been converted into another day of drudgery for scores of Connecticut needle-trades girls.

These conditions have repelled even the old-time Yankee manufacturers of the state. But the rate of pay in the contract shops has amazed and repelled them still more. Thousands of girls can be found through the state whose weekly wage on the basis of piece work averages from one to six dollars.

—THE NATION, Nov. 16, 1932

CONN. GIRL RELATES PERILS OF WORKING FOR FLY-BY-NIGHTER

By W. W. SHEPHERD

CONNECTICUT, November, 1932—In Middletown a company was making women's coats, which retailed at about \$35.

A girl would come to this plant and ask for a job—and get it, instantly.

Pay day in this place came for a girl when, finally, in desperation, she made bold to tell her employer that she must have some money.

The employer would reach into his trousers pocket and pull out a handful of change. He might ask a girl how long she had worked or how many cloaks she had sewn, or he might not. It all seemed to depend on his mood.

He would hand out the cash, according to his whim. Many such employers paid in cash in this way. The girl took what the boss gave her—and shut up. One defenseless woman with two children received \$1.40 for two weeks' work in such a place. Fifty cents, 75 cents, 69 cents for the work of from four to 10 days were payments that were uncovered.

One girl on the witness stand in a sweatshop case declared: "Why, I get more money for testifying one day than I got for a whole week's work in the factory. Here I have a chair to sit on but the girls had to bring their own chairs to the factory where I worked, or stand all day at their machines." She was referring to the fact that the "fly-by-nighters" do not move bulky chairs in their gypsy-industry trucks.

They have no locks to move, either. Most of the girls in these sweatshops testify that they are even asked not to wear wrist watches. In some places the girls are not allowed to talk to each other. No one ever seems to know what time it is, unless some street clock can be seen through a window or the town-clock chimes tell the secret.

The noon hour? Well, that comes when the boss shuts off the power and the machines stop. Lunch is over as soon as the boss starts the motor again and yells to the backward ones to "get to work."

—COLLIER'S

Victory Rallies to Greet 5-Point Dress Agreement

NEW YORK, Aug. 21, 1933—With all details ironed out between employers and workers, the 60,000 dressmakers in the metropolitan area who went on strike Wednesday were to hold victory demonstrations today and cast their formal votes to return to work tomorrow.

The last problem was solved yesterday after the third consecutive all-night session of representatives of both sides with Grover A. Whalen, the NRA mediator.

One division of workers was to march today through the garment district from Bryant Park to 34th St. and Eighth Ave., while another marched from Madison Square to Bryant Park. They were to disband and reassemble in 16 meeting halls in various parts of the city to put their signatures on the five-point agreement which the union leaders drafted with the employers. The agreement was ratified yesterday by 1,100 shop chairmen at a meeting in Webster Hall.

About 10,000 jobs will be created under the new arrangement, Mr. Whalen said, thus proving the efficacy of the NRA. He asked Gen. Hugh S. Johnson, the National Recovery Administrator, yesterday to

postpone the hearing scheduled for Tuesday on the proposed code for the dress industry. It will be held Wednesday in Washington.

The five provisions of the agreement are recognition of the right to bargain collectively, a 35-hour week, assumption of responsibility for enforcement of working hours and wages by jobbers and manufacturers, minimum wage scales and the limitation of the number of contractors with whom any jobber or manufacturer may deal. Details of this last point will be worked out in Washington.

—NEW YORK SUN

Penn., N. J. Conn. Garment Workers JOIN THE ILGWU

NEWS-HISTORY

Editorials

Out of the Abyss

As we look today in retrospect on the seven years since the International took over the wreckage of the cloakmaker strike toward the end of 1926 and proceeded slowly and painfully to build anew upon its shambles, we often wonder how this conversion of chaos into a semblance of order had been at all possible.

Though beaten and discredited, the disciples of Moscow kept hampering and obstructing the revival of the union. Wherever they could, the Cominies set up dual unions, but the union membership, though detached from its old moorings, as a rule shunned these rival outfits. The formation in 1929 of the "Needle Trades Industrial Union" marked the finale of Communist adventure in dual unionism in our industry.

* * *

Yet, while the "civil war" was over, its ravages were still felt in every "limb" of the International. The transition period bluntly was calling for a new deal in leadership, and the 1928 convention, luckily, was able to furnish it. Benjamin Schlesinger's return to the ILGWU, first as executive vice president, then as the union's president following Sigman's resignation a few months later, brought back to the union at a crucial moment a leader with exceptional promotional talents. Within a half year, David Dubinsky, a vice president since 1922 and manager of Cutters' Local 10, succeeded Abraham Baroff as secretary-treasurer of the ILGWU.

The bleak days, however, were far from over for the union despite heroic measures by its leadership to put it back on its feet. The Great Crash in October, 1929, struck hard at our industry, too, and as Communist sabotage and outright scabbery continued, the ILGWU by 1931 dropped to its lowest enrollment since 1909-1910. The next year, however, saw a new turn of history's wheel. America, still groaning beneath the Hoover Collapse, looked forward to a new deal.

* * *

It's late in the fall of 1933 as these lines are written—and what a miraculous change in the national economy, what a metamorphosis in our own industry, what a change in our organization! Within a half year, our old unions everywhere have come to life and new locals have sprung up by the dozens all over the land.

"Now Keep Him Out!"



—Enright in N. Y. Evening World

Gov. Roosevelt Lauds Mutual Peace Efforts

By FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
(President of the United States—
1932-45)

The making of cloaks and suits constitutes one of the greatest industries in this state, producing each year for use throughout the country merchandise valued at hundreds of millions of dollars. Naturally, the prosperity of this industry and the welfare of those engaged in it are of concern to the entire state.

Of many accomplishments in your industry you can justly be proud. These are due to the enterprise of employers, the taste of designers, and the skill of the craft workers.

In your industrial relations you have developed along the most progressive and enlightened lines, the principle of collective bargaining. I am told that, while collective agreements are in force, thousands of minor shop disputes are settled amicably without even the necessity of final resort to the judgment of the impartial chairman, whom you have jointly chosen.

Of course, I understand that all parties reserve full liberty of action upon the expiration of the collective agreements. Such a time has now arisen, and thus far you have not been able to agree upon the terms of new contracts. Naturally you have some divergent interests and points of view. That is characteristic of all human affairs. I am impressed, however, with the fact that you have worked together in many situations and that you must at least understand each other's purposes and problems.

My wish is to remind you that you have great common interests to preserve and to advance. Surely none of you wishes a repetition of the long and disastrous strike of three years ago, in which an entire season was lost and from which ever since you have all been suffering.

The usual shortness of your seasons is a handicap which is always a burden to all factors. You are all far too intelligent to wish to further shorten a season's work by any prolonged stoppage which can be fairly avoided.

In an industry broken up into so many relatively small producing units, strong and comprehensive organizations both of employers and of workers are of highest importance. Surely, you should be able to work together heartily to spread such enlightened industrial standards as you can agree upon into the less fair and progressive portions of the industry.

More complete organization and stabilization is the great need. Unfair competition and the depression of standards in unregulated shops undermine the honest efforts both of workers and of employers.

—LETTER TO BENJAMIN SCHLESINGER, July 2, 1929

Board Acts to Insure Jobs for All Cloakmen

NEW YORK, Jan. 30, 1931—The Board of Directors of the Cloak Joint Board, at a meeting held Jan. 26, voted unanimously to call upon all cloak employers in the New York market to forego overtime and Saturday work during the present spring season in all shops where there is room for additional workers, in an effort to relieve unemployment in the cloak trade.

—JUSTICE

"Padlocked"



—Harding in N. Y. Evening Journal

Novel Ordeals of An Impartial Chairman

By PROF. JACOB H. HOLLANDER
(Was Professor of Political Economy at Johns Hopkins
University)

The Cleveland garment industry has been more or less dominated by the agreement entered into 11 years ago. In 1922 I became associated with the industry, first as a member of the Board of Referees, and very soon after that as impartial chairman.

All I can say is that I survived and am still holding my job. I haven't found it easy to shake it off. Again and again I have asked to be relieved, but other considerations always prevailed.

I remember that one of the parties in one decision said, "Yes, we notice, Doctor, we get the kind words and the other side gets the decisions."

Nevertheless, as far as Cleveland is concerned I submit that the record is really remarkable in the history of American industry. For 11 years practically there has not been a day's interruption of work in the establishments governed by the agreement. That has been brought about through an increasing efficiency on the part of the executive representatives of the union and of the association.

The arbitral hearings would impress anyone who has ever attended them. We rarely, if ever, have a lawyer present, and when we do we are always sorry for it, but they are held with great dignity. The day of table-banging and loud shouting is over. The hearings are carried on with quiet dignity, and above all, with expedition.

Our Cleveland experience also throws interesting light on another feature of the arbitral machine, and this is particularly applicable to smaller communities where the problem of maintaining arbitral machinery is often very serious because of the expense. My predecessor had been receiving a very large salary, and that was a serious handicap. It was possible to arrange for a very moderate per diem.

I remember our good friend, Judge Mack, thought it was rather a good joke that an impartial chairman in Cleveland like myself should

live in Baltimore, but one of the astonishing successes has been the extent to which it has been possible for the impartial chairman to be absent from the scene.

In the last three years I have never had occasion to come out here more than once in six weeks; sometimes once in three months. That doesn't mean that innumerable small controversies have not arisen, but they have come to a thrifty realization that every time I come means money out of their treasury. The great bulk of such small differences have been adjusted, and instead of the wet-nursing process which results from a resident impartial chairman, we have had the realization that my visit is like the doctor's, blessed when I don't come.

One of the problems which Cleveland faces is the complete organization of the industry as far as the employers are concerned. I cannot believe that there are insuperable obstacles in the way. I believe the day of the anti-unionist as an effective force is passing.

The larger problem which, it seems to me, confronts your union, and toward the solution of which it has made notable strides, is to bring home to the manufacturer, to the employer, the day of localized activity, localized policies is past, and that his business plans in the way of organization and of relationship to his labor force must take into account not only the other production centers, the consuming public, but all of the factors which have become so influential and the existence of which he has been so slow in perceiving.

—REPORT, ILGWU CONVENTION, 1929.