

A Tale of Two Cities

By J. B. Salutsky

The Conventions of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union and of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in Cleveland and Chicago.

THERE is nothing easier than to label a thing or an event. A living, complete reality is thus easily reduced to a formula, and there you have it: merely catalogue it and shelve it in your memory or conscience. But then—what? Then nothing.

Labels Don't Explain

A mere fact in history or in life, which is history in the making, is of no significance whatsoever unless it generates new force and determines development. And so is the knowledge of a fact of no value unless the fact is conceived in its living connection with what had preceded it and what follows it. Naked facts, torn out of their immediate environment, are but incidents or accidents devoid of much meaning. The knowledge of facts outside of their historical soil is fruitless, barren of results, and the labeling of facts, perhaps at times an easy pastime, is at all times a waste of time. Yet it passes quite often as judgment and it helps to create what the market is willing to designate as public opinion.

I. L. G. W. U. Not Reactionary, nor A. C. W. of A. Revolutionary

The two conventions of the two large unions in the needle industry held the other day in Cleveland and Chicago, are illustrations of the above. Here large gatherings of labor, organized and aggressive, militant labor made inroads into history, legislated their immediate future and determined, in so far as it can be determined, what their policies shall be in the days to come. But what do we see? The press, the transfer-agent of public opinion, satisfied itself with the recording of a number of happenings at these conventions, for the most part an uncritical sort of recording. It then had the happenings duly labeled, and the "movement" is ready to proceed to other "unfinished business," most likely to "finish" it in much the same fashion. The label is the finishing touch in portraying life.

The convention of the International Ladies Garment Workers was reactionary throughout, and that of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America was the one bright spot on the marred background of the American labor reality. Thus public opinion summed up the two momentous labor gatherings, and that is all so many of us are satisfied to know. But when we know all this what do we know? Even if a step further

is made and personalities are introduced to supplement the facts, we still are none the wiser. Suppose we accept, without critical analysis, the verdict of newspaper-made history that Benjamin Schlesinger, of the I. L. G. W. U., is a died-in-the-wool reactionary, and Sidney Hillman, of the A. C. W. of A., is the spirit incarnate of revolution, what then? How much more do we then know?

Opposition In Both Conventions Rather Weak

Only eight hours of travel divide Chicago from Cleveland, the seats of the two conventions, yet measured in units of political and spiritual advancement, as evidenced in the two needle industry conventions, it would seem that there is a quarter of a century of distance between the two cities. That much may be readily admitted if judgment shall be based on appearances. But is it right to do so? Does judgment by appearances lead us anywhere? Hardly, as a matter of truth.

But let us have a glance at facts.

The convention of the I. L. G. W. U. ran under the sign of fight on the left wing. In the convention of the A. C. W. of A. the left wing felt quite at home. As one onlooker termed it, there the opposition was extremely anxious not to embarrass the administration, otherwise it was rather comfortable. It would be interesting, then, to discern the objectives of the opposition or the left wing in either case. And this is not at all easy to do, as it was shown in an article in the preceding issue of THE LABOR HERALD. The opposition in the needle industry is not homogeneous, it is in the making as yet and it lacks both in clarity of vision and in oneness of purpose. And, it may be added, it also lacks most badly in training.

Some Objectives of the Left Wing

However, in as much as a liberal allowance for the newness of the situation permits, the following may be considered the program of the most purpose-conscious element of the opposition or left wing in the needle unions:

1. The democratization of the organization structure by means of introducing shop representation.
2. The consolidation of all needle unions into one concentrated fighting body.
3. Lining up with the aggressive world body

of the trade unions (the Moscow or Red Council of Labor Unions).

How the Conventions Differed on the Large Issues

On all of these issues the two conventions took a stand widely different.

On the first point the stand of the I. L. G. W. U. is definitely negative, whereas the A. C. W. of A. made an effort to meet the issue somewhere halfway. The convention of the A. C. W. of A. empowered the incoming administration to change the organic law of the union, wherever the demand for it will make itself felt. And it was let to be known that the general office is in favor of a change in the structure of the organization that would bring the shop as a unit nearer to active participation in the government of the union.

Again, on the issue of consolidation of the unions in the needle industry, the stand of the Amalgamated was decidedly positive. The A. C. W. of A. is for one centralized union in the industry and opposed to a loose federation of the needle trades, which is sponsored by the I. L. G. W. U. Whether a resolution of this kind is necessarily a step toward consolidation in the near future may be questioned, since it is known that the International (the I. L. G. W. U.) is determinedly opposed to such a consolidation.

Now, on the point of international affiliation, the reports were rather misleading, in so far as the Chicago convention of the A. C. W. of A. as concerned. While the press had it, that "the left met with crushing defeat on the issue of international affiliation," the following is the truth in the case. There were introduced a number of resolutions advocating affiliation with the Moscow Council of Trade Unions. These resolutions came from locals and the delegates stood instructed by their mandate of election to have these resolutions brought before the convention. However, in the convention resolution No. 67 evolved and it met with the unanimous approval of all the left or opposition delegates. It also was favored by the administration and it was carried unanimously. None of the other resolutions favoring direct affiliation had any supporters or votes. It inevitably would follow, that there could be no "crushing defeat" under the circumstances, and there was none.

Resolution 67 reads:

Whereas, the whole tendency of modern times is toward the international co-ordination of all movements and enterprises, whether they be of labor or capital; and

Whereas, These are times of monster combinations of capital, over-reaching all national

boundaries, engaged in sinister attempts to defeat and crush the labor movement both within each nation and on an international scale; and

Whereas, A well-defined movement to defend the sacred cause of labor by co-ordinating our industrial organizations on an equally broad international scale is shown in the communications to the Amsterdam Trade Union International from the Moscow International of Labor Unions, inviting the former to participate in the formation of a United Front of all the labor unions of the world; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, in its Fifth Biennial Convention assembled, express its approval of the efforts for a United Front of all the labor organizations of the world, and give its heartiest co-operation in the fight against organized capital.

Adopted.

Only those who are intentionally blind could discover a defeat for the position of the left in the adoption of the above resolution. But it is an old story that with so many wish is the father to the thought.

The I. L. G. W. U., whose defenders—right or wrong—talk a great lot of unity, would not stand for any "Moscow nonsense," even be it a genuine effort to bring about unity of all labor.

If the actions on the just enumerated three cardinal points is to be taken as the basis for judgment there would be reasonable ground for the notion that the I. L. G. W. U. turned reactionary and the A. C. W. of A. has gone decidedly radical in those convention days. But is it really so?

Why the Difference in Attitude

One cannot escape facing the following question, and the question is to be answered if we are to understand what's what.

The question is—What is really responsible for the difference in attitude taken by the A. C. W. of A. and the I. L. G. W. U. on a number of points of great significance? Was it due to a difference in leadership or was a different composition of membership responsible for the difference in attitude? Or—perhaps there was really no such great difference at all in the attitude of one organization or the other?

As a matter of fact, some ten years ago, one would find an exactly reversed situation with regard to the organizations under consideration. The I. L. G. W. U. was then the one radical organization, and the United Garment Workers of America, the parent body of the present Amalgamated, was reactionary in many respects. Since then the leadership of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union has changed and in so far as the personnel is concerned the change was rather toward the more progressive type. And the split that has taken place in the United

Garment Workers of America and caused the growth of the Amalgamated was not a split along lines of radicalism, or industrialism, or internationalism, only questions of autonomy and leadership were involved in that controversy. Why then the great change?

The make-up of the two organizations, in so far as the membership is concerned, is not different. The same racial groups, practically distributed in the same ratio, make up the I. L. G. W. U. and the A. C. W. of A. The industry, that is the market, the technique, the earnings are closely neighboring, except that the system of work prevailing in the women's wear industry still retains a greater part of mechanical skill, whereas in the production of men's clothing the operations are further simplified by a wider application of machinery and by a minute specialization and division of labor.

Logically speaking, there should not be room for a great difference in tactics, if actions of large bodies are motivated by environment.

Of course, it is inconvenient to discuss the problem of leadership since it involves the analysis of personal motives or abilities. Yet it would be nothing short of violation of truth to assert that the leadership of the two organizations differs very widely on the point of radicalism, at least in so far as formal profession of faith is concerned. In point of fact, the leader of the I. L. G. W. U. is a prop of the Socialist Party and President of its most powerful daily paper publishing company, whereas the head of the A. C. W. of A. is politically non-attached.

Bossing or Leading

There is, however, one difference in the make-up of the leadership of the two organizations, and rather a vital one. It lies not in any official label but in the very conception of leadership. In one case it is an attempt to boss a situation that is underlying the policy of the leadership, whereas in the other case the tendency is to lead, to control the situation by creating or accelerating the conditions of the situation. Benjamin Schlesinger is a red-card Socialist, and Sidney Hillman will tie himself with no political group or philosophy. Yet the one succeeded in having even his own party members oppose his policies, whereas in the other case, the administration appears to be the expression of the living spirit of the entire organization. It is the great, old yet ever new problem of leadership that is to be looked for in the search for light in the situation.

The administration of the I. L. G. W. U. had its convention under its complete control. It could have its way without resorting to wholesale political murder of opposition delegates. Yet

it did so. The spirit of vindictiveness was manifest throughout the sessions of the body. And also did the administration of the A. C. W. of A. have the convention under its full sway. The opposition was numerically weak, consisting of the disgruntled elements, controlled by the politics of the Jewish Daily Forward, politics foreign to the life of the organization; and of the left wing groups who had constructive or misguided notions of organization reform, but throughout confined to the problems of the union. But the administration did not seek to antagonize the opposition by fighting their ideas because of the spiritual fatherhood. It tried to meet squarely every issue as it arose, and the result was exceedingly gratifying. No one left the convention "licked," unless he came for what he was not supposed to get there. A "defeat" on a point of principle, in a union, is never a *casus belli*, never causes animosity, if the fight for or against the principle is a gallant one. That much in favor of the A. C. W. of A. leadership will be conceded by any one who saw the convention in operation.

To sum up: The two conventions did not differ very widely in point of radicalism. Both remained on the safe ground of reality in so far as the actual problems concerning the life of the organization are considered. But, whereas one body, blinded by a partisan animosity and by a perverted notion of bossism instead of leadership has created ill-feeling and narrowed down the sway of the convention to the degree of pure-and-simplism of a most primitive type, the other organization managed its way through difficulties and presented a sight novel in the practice of the American labor movement. It was not so much the actual difference in the attitude taken by one organization or the other, on one point or the other. It was the method of approach to a solution of the problems of the movement that divides the two otherwise similar organizations.

CHILI

THE industrial, commercial, and agricultural employers of Chili have just combined themselves nationally into an organization called the Association of Industry. It is headed by a General Council, composed of one delegate from each province, and one from each industry. The Association intends "to take all possible steps with a view to harmonizing the legitimate interests of employers and workers." It declares it will "defend the right of the individual to work by all means in its power and will give assistance to members who are faced with difficulties owing to sympathetic strikes and similar disputes."

Dr. Joseph Goldstein, "Russian expert," is quoted by the Chicago Tribune to the effect that "End of Soviet Regime is Near." Where have we heard these "news" before?

From George to Dick

Dick Harridan, Engineer, St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Friend Dick:—

We all reached home sober and feeling better for the trip. But since coming back from there I have been thinking over some of our kitchen-table discussions regarding the union, its policies, etc., and I want to put my side up to you in a workable form so you wont fail to understand clearly the point I wanted to make. Here it is:

You are an engineer and probably understand an engine and what it will do better than I do. Now suppose you had a heavy train, say 2,000 tons, to move, and it was all ready and you were anxious to move that train to its destination in the least time and at the least cost; and suppose your future more or less depended upon your making a good showing on this particular trip.

You find it will take equal to a 160 ton engine to do the work, and you are told to select your power to make the run. Suppose you go over to the roundhouse and find that they have 16 engines of 10 tons each, and one engine of 160 tons, ready for the road. Would you take one engine of 10 tons and make 16 trips? Or would you take the 16 engines and make one trip, taking coal 16 times and water 16 times, and calling 16 more tallow pots, and taking chances on 16 sets of machinery getting out of order and chances of all not starting together, or some being in reverse when you started, or maybe an engineer asleep on the job, or playing hookey to same steam?

Or would you take the 160 ton engine, where you had the whole power necessary concentrated in the one lever under your own hand? I ask you, as an intelligent engineer, which of the three would you do?

There can be no question at all about your answer. You would take the big engine. You would do the job in a workmanlike manner. Sure, you would.

Now the railroad workers have just this kind of a practical proposition before them at the present time, and they are trying to combat the railroads by using the 16 little engines, or Brotherhoods, against the companies who are using the biggest engine they have on hand, and who are trying hard to construct one still bigger by misusing the power of Government, if necessary, to whip us. You might not be able to get all the power out of the big engine, or general amalgamated union, at first, but you would soon be able to handle it and to get definite results.

If we cannot combine all our organizations into one, as you seem to fear that we can't, then we must admit we haven't as much intelligence as the railroad companies have. If such is the case we are a bunch of incompetents and our cake is dough under any circumstances. Think it over, and look around your yards to see if you haven't got a railroad spy among you and the boys, suggesting the ideas you expressed the other night, because such ideas are in perfect accord with those that the companies wish you to hold. Perpetuating craft divisions amongst us fortifies the companies and makes them unbeatable. Amalgamation of our many unions into one is the only thing that will give us sufficient strength to defeat them. We must have a general railroad union.

With kindest regards for yourself and all union men and the friends that assembled Saturday night, I am, As ever,

GEORGE