

## CHAPTER V

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMALGAMATED

The economic organization of labor has been called into existence by the capitalist system of production, under which the ruling class and the ruled class is based upon the ownership of the means of production. . . . A constant and unceasing struggle is being waged between these two classes. . . . Every oppressed class in history achieved its emancipation only upon its attaining economic supremacy. The same law operates also in the struggle between Capital and Labor. (*Preamble, A.C.W. Constitution, 1914.*)

As chief executive of your organization, I consider that I serve the interests of your organization best by serving the entire labor movement through the N.R.A. in the capacity of a member of the Labor Advisory Board. (Sidney Hillman at 1934 A.C.W. Convention. May 14, 1934.)

#### *Gathering Strength*

DURING the years 1914-1920, the Amalgamated became a real factor in the men's clothing industry. Through a policy of class conscious militancy it fought its way to the top and left its mark indelibly stamped upon the trade. The 44-hour week, for example, was achieved in this comparatively short period, and the ratio of wage increase was greater than in any other trade. Whereas only 15% of the workers in the trade earned \$20 a week or over when the A.C.W. came into existence, 85% earned over \$20 by 1920, with earnings for many workers running as high as \$50. Its membership by 1920 had grown to 177,000, in 40 cities and 145 locals.

Vigorous fights against the prevailing long hours and low wages were embarked upon immediately after the birth of the new organization. A bitterly fought strike in New York during 1915 resulted in considerable improvement in work-

ing conditions. Although union recognition was not achieved in this strike, at least 50% of the wage cuts made by the employers during the depression of 1914 were won back by the workers. Moreover, this was the first New York victory under the Amalgamated and served as the stimulus which led to greater victories. Shortly thereafter another New York strike achieved the 48-hour week,—the first time it had been won in the tailoring industry.

Meanwhile, the Chicago tailors continued where they had left off in 1910-11. Systematic organization work was carried on throughout 1913 and 1914 resulting in a strike of 25,000 in the fall of 1915. The viciousness and brutality of the police and the widespread use of spies and employer violence marked this intensely bitter strike. It was called off after a month and a half, with important concessions won but still without union recognition. The workers, however, returned to the shops as members of the union and the manufacturers had been taught a lesson. Recognition was only a matter of time. It was achieved in 1919.

#### *The New York Lockouts*

The Amalgamated was put to its first great test in New York in 1918-19. On November 9, 1918, the employers instituted a lockout which they had planned as the death blow of the Amalgamated. The workers, however, soon demonstrated that they had not lost their spirit of former years. They converted the lockout into a strike and they fought magnificently.

By the end of January, 1919, they had the employers on their knees. Formal recognition was achieved, the manufacturers being forced also to grant the 44-hour week.

Through this triumph, the Amalgamated became the first union to achieve a victory following the war and the first to institute the 44-hour week. Its prestige was tremendously enhanced. Word of the New York accomplishment traveled

to other centers and served as inspiration and encouragement wherever the union had a foothold. As a result Rochester, Chicago and other anti-union strongholds achieved recognition during 1919.

A year later the New York organization was again in open conflict with the employers. Attempting to take advantage of the post-war industrial deflation and unemployment, the employers felt that they had the union where it could not resist the reintroduction of the sweatshop. They therefore instituted another lockout in the latter part of 1920. Before this was over, it had spread in six months to three cities—New York, Boston and Baltimore—and had cost the Amalgamated over two million dollars (which was subscribed by the workers). But the union was again victorious.

In making this attack the manufacturers served an ultimatum upon the Amalgamated in December, 1920, demanding: individual bargaining, piece work, unlimited power to hire and fire, uncontrolled wage cuts, individual standards of production for remaining week-workers. The workers, true to their tradition, accepted the challenge. Some 30,000 of them assembled at 16 mass meetings in greater New York and Newark and unanimously rejected the ultimatum four days after it was issued.

William Bandler, president of the Clothing Manufacturers Association, then issued a statement that it was "no longer possible to recognize the A.C.W. as representing and acting for the interests of the workers in the New York clothing market." On December 8, six large firms locked out 16,300 workers and the following day an additional 7,000 were locked out, making a total of over 23,000.

It was during the course of this strike that the employers sued for dissolution of the Amalgamated as an incipient Soviet organization striving for the rule of the proletariat. Many injunctions were issued against the union, including Justice Van Sicken's famous decision that "Courts must pro-



tect capital."\* Damage suits aggregating about two million dollars were started by the employers.

The A. F. of L. was also brought in to do its bit. At the height of the struggle, Samuel Gompers declared editorially in the *American Federationist* that the Amalgamated had "betrayed the labor movement of America." In various centers to which the conflict spread the United Garment Workers deliberately signed contracts with employers who had locked out Amalgamated members. The Louisville Trades and Labor Council even expelled a delegate from the boiler-makers union who called the council's support of the U.G.W. "imperialistic and un-American."

At the end of six months the employers were again forced to make peace with the union. On June 2, 1921, terms embodying recognition of the union shop were signed between the Clothing Manufacturers' Association and the Amalgamated.

#### *The Chicago Agreement, 1919*

For nine years the Chicago market had remained a non-union Gibraltar. The strike of 1910 had resulted in the establishment of an arbitration apparatus, without union recognition, in the firm of Hart, Schaffner & Marx alone. The strike of 1915 left the workers' condition considerably improved and union membership had increased, but the major demand, union recognition, had been lost. A strike of cutters also failed in 1916, but organizational power continued to gain momentum thereafter, in spite of an intense counter-offensive by the bosses, backed by the courts and the police.

During 1919 strikes were called against many individual firms. Most of them were won. The organization campaign found in thousands of workers a passionate response. Individual firms were signing up in goodly numbers, granting the 44-hour week and substantial wage increases.

\* See below, p. 236.

During May the Wholesale Clothiers' Association, the Cut, Make and Trim Association and the National Wholesale Tailors' Association finally concluded agreements recognizing the A.C.W. These covered the entire market and Chicago was "100% Amalgamated."

By 1921 the Amalgamated had control of the ready-made clothing industry in New York, Chicago, Rochester, Baltimore, Boston, Milwaukee and other cities of the United States and Canada. Smaller centers soon fell into line. The union had established itself firmly in the industry.

#### *The International Tailoring Strike, 1925*

The last challenge to Amalgamated power as well as one of the most heroic struggles in its history took place in 1925. It resulted from a lockout by the International Tailoring Co. and its subsidiary, J. L. Taylor Co., in New York and Chicago, where union recognition had been forced in 1919. Although only 1,500 workers were involved, this strike in effect was a test case of the open shop firms, aimed at nothing short of the destruction of the union.

When the trade underwent an extremely bad year in 1925, carrying severe unemployment in its wake, the open shoppers thought the time propitious to break away from collective agreements. The International lockout was to be the trial balloon.

The workers took up the challenge and fought bitterly for 133 days, beginning in June, 1925. Police brutality, every device of the law and severe injunctions all failed of their purpose. Picket lines could not be broken.

The United Garment Workers, true to type, sent up scabs. Early in the strike the following advertisement appeared in the *Chicago Daily News*:

We have a few positions open. . . . You will be asked to join the United Garment Workers who are in the American Federation of Labor. . . . We want men who are not afraid to walk

through the picket line of the Amalgamated union, which is not affiliated with the American Federation of Labor.

But all was to no avail. The workers won again. The open shop bosses and the U.G.W. scab agents were once more sent scuttling.

#### *Cross Currents*

The Amalgamated came into existence with a crusading spirit and a lofty idealism which led it to the establishment of new landmarks in American labor history. It achieved the 44-hour week, increased wages and improved conditions. It conducted widespread organization work.

But the Amalgamated leadership of to-day bears little likeness to the spirit and tone of the early organization. It has grown polite, suave, cynical. Its class struggle philosophy has succumbed to a policy of class peace.

Signs were not wanting from its earliest years that the Amalgamated tide was beset by conflicting cross currents which were destined seriously to impede its effectiveness. From the beginning the Amalgamated was a combination of two different forces: the rank and file whose militancy and sincerity none could gainsay, and the leadership under the control of Sidney Hillman.

At first Hillman carried out the policies desired by the rank and file. The soil from which he sprang was the soil of revolt. The clothing workers demanded militant, class action. For it, and for the results it achieved, they were willing to work and suffer and sacrifice. Upon the outbreak of the Russian Revolution they rallied to it with a fervent loyalty.

Hillman saw and knew this and he rode the wave by catering to the revolutionary temper of his members. He surrounded himself with lieutenants like Joseph Schlossberg of the Socialist Labor Party and J. B. Salutsky Hardman, an expelled Communist, who could speak the "radical" language. Through the tremendous left-wing vitality of the

Amalgamated membership, Hillman established a reputation as a revolutionary leader of the working class. He made every pretense of being sympathetic to the left-wing movement and even to Communism. He organized the Russian-American Industrial Corporation to furnish technical aid to the Soviet Union.

But Sidney Hillman, even in that period, was not a revolutionary leader. He was a shrewd right-wing maneuverer, and as subsequent events demonstrated, the title of "mediator" was his only justified claim. At the very time when he was satisfying the tailors with radical phraseology and leading them in militant strikes, his machine was planting the seeds of class peace and reaction in the clothing workers' organization. The basis of his philosophy really lay in what came to be termed "business unionism," with avoidance of strikes as the cornerstone of the structure.

Systems of "arbitration" and "impartial chairmen," the very essence of class collaboration, had been foisted upon the membership from the beginning. As early as 1910, before the formal organization of the A.C.W., the Hart, Schaffner & Marx agreement did not recognize the union but set up an "impartial" Board of Arbitration for the adjudication of all grievances. This was the keystone of Amalgamated "labor statesmanship" which was later held up for universal adoption in all markets. It was held up by the A.C.W. as its outstanding contribution. Here was an expedient, in its own words, to "maintain equilibrium and prevent trouble"—the union proudly boasting at the time of the 1920 New York lockout that "This house [Hart, Schaffner & Marx] has had no strikes nor stoppages of work in the ten years since the arbitration agreements have been in force."<sup>1</sup> Strikes and stoppages are, as a matter of fact, strictly prohibited under the arbitration agreements.

The philosophy of the Hart, Schaffner & Marx agreement continued to be the main line of Amalgamated policy. The New York strike of 1918 was also submitted to the arbitra-



tion of an "Advisory Board" which, while granting the 44-hour week, also set up an "impartial chairman" in the market. The 1919 Chicago agreement also set up an arbitration board on a marketwide scale while the 1921 settlement in New York established a board of arbitration and impartial chairman machinery. To foist this upon the market and retain his union recognition, Hillman was willing to pay any price including the acceptance of wage cuts. In the 1921 settlement in New York, for example, part of the "gains" of the tailors included a wage reduction of 15%. Thus, even while some advances were being made, the seeds of reaction were being planted.

In point of fact, with the exception of the very earliest years when the temper of the militant rank-and-file could not be gainsaid, wage considerations had been sacrificed at every turn by the Hillman administration in the process of entrenching itself by currying favor with the bosses. Between 1916 and 1918, the most prosperous years the trade had ever known—due to the demands of the war—no serious struggles for higher wages were undertaken and the strike of 1918 came only as the result of an employers' lockout, when prosperity in the industry had already begun to decline. During the war, when employers were bidding against each other in the labor market, the union set out to prove that it was a "stabilizing" power in the industry. It forbade workers to accept wages higher than those provided for in their agreements. Many were even forced to stay on jobs paying as much as \$10 a week less than they were being offered elsewhere. A "high official of the union" was quoted in the trade press as saying that:

There are sporadic attempts here and there to gain further advantages from the present labor shortage, but the employers may rest assured that they will be protected by the organization against any disruption of existing agreements and understandings by groups of workers acting without the authority of the union. The organization is even prepared to expel workers who insist

on effecting changes in present schedules of wages and hours for their own individual advantage.<sup>2</sup>

The result was that wages during these years were lower in the well organized markets than elsewhere. No more seductive bait could possibly have been dangled before the employers' eyes.

As an organizing medium during the war period the "revolutionary" Hillman ran for "justice" to the National War Labor Board. Men's clothing workers were working on uniforms. Hillman, when interruption on army contracts was threatened (for example, at the John Hall Uniform Factory in Chicago) instructed the workers not to strike and wired a plea to the War Department. The latter, frantically anxious to have uninterrupted production, ruled in favor of collective bargaining in shops working on contracts for it.

Meanwhile the workers throughout the country were being held down by the apparatus of the "impartial" arbitrators. When labor was scarce this factor was not taken into consideration. For example a New York decision in the case of Marmer, Schiff & Stern on October 2, 1919, ruled that "The Amalgamated is always under obligation to furnish workers . . . and not to permit the breakdown of any working organization as a result of workers leaving when demands for increases are refused." In contrast, when conditions changed the following year and the Baltimore arbitrator on November 3, 1920, ruled in favor of a firm in a dispute over opening and closing hours he further laid down the principle that the "Decision is predicated on the present slow conditions in the industry. The chairman rules that under normal conditions the case would present a different aspect." It apparently made considerable difference whose ox was being gored.

Throughout these years the first signs of wariness were appearing among the workers, but the majority still mistakenly looked upon Hillman as a David who slew the Goliath of conservative impotency into which the labor movement had degenerated.

Employers and their spokesmen, however, were not long in recognizing another agent of theirs within the working class movement. Thus the National Industrial Conference Board, an open shop employers' research institute, in a booklet issued in June, 1921, observed that employers were testifying to the fact that these "union leaders become easier to deal with as they acquire increasing experience." And it continued, that the only evidence of the Amalgamated being a revolutionary organization consisted of "pronouncements by Amalgamated officials in speech and writing" but that their actual activities "give no certain indication of the ultimate aims of the Amalgamated." For, as a Chicago employers' representative put the matter, "while the Amalgamated leaders hold socialistic beliefs, in practice they 'save their socialism for the evening meetings.'" <sup>3</sup> And 13 years later it could still be said in employer circles that "Mr. Hillman enjoys the confidence and respect of employers with whom he has dealt. It is generally said of him in employer circles that he has never made demands on an industry that it could not meet economically, and he has been known to make concessions where the realities of the situation proved irresistible." <sup>4</sup>

#### *The Amalgamated in Business*

Having thus established itself in the good graces of the employers, the Amalgamated administration proceeded to engage in a wide variety of financial and business activities. Labor banks "to finance the class struggle," cooperative housing projects and ownership and operation of its own clothing manufacturing plant all put the former "revolutionary" organization into capitalist business on its own.

It soon began to act like any other employer and business organization operating for private profit. Organized as a labor union, its energies henceforth were dissipated in financial and business operations whose needs are obviously opposed to the interests of labor.

Thus the Amalgamated owns and operates two banks, the Amalgamated Bank of New York and the Amalgamated Trust and Savings Bank of Chicago, with resources of \$11,000,000 and \$9,000,000, respectively. The new orientation of the organization was illustrated when the New York bank handed its employees a 10% wage cut on January 13, 1933—the third since the previous June. Although representative of a "labor organization," the cuts were carried through in the arbitrary manner characteristic of any wage-slashing employer. The workers were not consulted; they were told.

"To find a safe place for the few pennies the worker has managed to hoard against a rainy day," was the alleged reason for entering the banking business. Then in 1923 and 1924 the union discovered an excellent medium for the investment of these funds. It began lending them to clothing manufacturers. It has carried out such a policy with various firms in Indianapolis, New York, Baltimore, Rochester, Cincinnati and elsewhere. For it is the obvious function of banks to lend money to bosses to pay bills and not to workers to pay rent.

A financial institution lending money becomes vitally concerned with its repayment. And so Amalgamated workers began being hoodwinked in additional ways. For example, when the Rochester Joint Board recommended to the union that a loan be made to the Braeburn firm, a part of the plan was described as follows:

The union employees of Braeburn were invited to participate in this loan, in a manner which will mean a weekly saving on their part. . . . The workers will contribute a sum equal to about ten per cent of their weekly earnings to a fund which will tend eventually to pay off the sum to be advanced by the union. . . . The workers are not to participate in the form of stock ownership, their function being to aid in the financing by paying off the loan to the union.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, a firm's ability to repay is contingent upon low costs of production consistent with security of profits.



Hence the Amalgamated became a direct participant in all manner of "efficiency devices" in these clothing shops—in other words, in wage cutting. "The Amalgamated statisticians, research men, and industrial engineers have supplanted the strike committeemen and picket line leaders to a great extent," wrote an admiring journalist in 1929. "They have studied the various and hidden elements of labor costs. They have looked earnestly into the opportunities for increased efficiency of operation. . . . They see the field more clearly than the manufacturers."<sup>6</sup>

It is none other than Sidney Hillman in person who announced the appointment of Samuel Schuchter to the post of production manager of Henry Sonneborn & Co., Inc., of Baltimore, in 1930. Four years previously the firm had borrowed \$125,000 from the union through its banks, of which about \$30,000 was still owing in 1930. Mr. Hillman's purpose in appointing Mr. Schuchter was "coöperation between the union and the firm in eliminating avoidable waste. . . . Mr. Schuchter will try to conduct the shop more definitely along the line of putting responsibility for running the shop upon the shoulders of the workers themselves."<sup>7</sup> It was in accordance with these principles that the Amalgamated officially proclaimed, "The idea of labor partnership is now in the men's clothing industry much more than an abstraction."<sup>8</sup>

In 1928 the Amalgamated itself entered the field of clothing manufacturing. A shop was opened in Milwaukee which began operating on a contract basis for Hart, Schaffner & Marx of Chicago. Members of the union in Chicago were thus deprived of work (the period of depression set in shortly after the project was launched) by an "out-of-town movement" fostered by their own union.

The union leaders immediately placed the plant upon the most highly rationalized basis possible, known in the trade as the "X construction plan." The result was that many of the 235 workers in the shop (formerly employed on the same premises by another firm) were unable to earn as much

as they did before the union came into control of the plant, although fewer workers were turning out more suits.

After 3 and a half years Hart, Schaffner & Marx could no longer supply this shop with work and it became a "white elephant" on the hands of the union. In consequence the union organized it on a coöperative basis, changed the name to Style Builders Coöperative and sold the \$25,000 worth of stock at which the firm was capitalized to the former workers in the factory.

#### *The "New Unionism"*

We shall note in a subsequent chapter\* the policy of "re-adjustments" and "production standards"—in reality outright speed-up—which became the keynote of Amalgamated policy after 1920. "Here is the peace that makes it impossible to think of war," asserted Mr. Hillman on one of the many occasions when he sat at the banquet table with clothing employers.<sup>9</sup>

The basis of this peace has been a steady barrage of wage cuts, with the union officials all the while maintaining the fiction of "no cuts." For another contribution of Mr. Hillman to the "higher strategy" of labor has been the policy of "no marketwide reductions." Instead he inaugurated a policy of "individual readjustments" under which the union "meets with certain manufacturers to study their problems" and "in a coöperative spirit" consents "to consider each case on its merits."

And in turn each 12½% wage cut, for example, would be presented to the workers by the union as a "decided victory." "For," the union representative would say in effect to the workers, "they demanded a reduction of 25%—think of it!" Thus the Amalgamated machine in league with the manufacturers, specialized "in a coöperative spirit" in working up schemes to put across wage cuts in the shops. And these were perpetrated without the attendant strikes and other

\* See below, pp. 189-191.



embarrassing actions to which the workers would have resorted had not the union machinery been on the scene to facilitate matters for the employers.

Speed-up or "standards of production" were likewise sold to the workers only through the coöperation of the union officials. Many of the rank and file delegates at the 1920 convention, which empowered the executive to work out methods for the adoption of this practice, denounced it as "slavery" and a revival of the "task system of the sweat shop." But Mr. Hillman insisted that "The inefficiencies and waste of production to-day gives us a law of the jungle in industry. It is for the union to bring in a reign of real law and order into the industry. . . . The decision we make now is a decision of the very life of the Amalgamated and its future."<sup>10</sup>

By the use of such lofty phrases the workers were induced to vote themselves out of jobs. For under capitalism "efficiency" means nothing more nor less to workers than shorter seasons, unemployment, speed-up and virtual starvation. But when workers lost their jobs, Mr. Hillman was ready, as always, with another scheme helpful to the employers. When, in 1926, workers were driven out of the trade by the Amalgamated as a result of the introduction of new methods and higher output per man, 150 cutters from the Hart, Schaffner & Marx shop were given \$500 each (one third of which was deducted from the wages of those remaining in the shop) as the price of their exit from the trade. In the publicity which accompanied this gesture, the members of the union were expected to forget that between 1923 and 1925 alone, about 20,000 fewer workers were employed in shops making men's and boys' clothing.

After such moves it was only fitting that there should have been established in 1929 at the University of Chicago the "Hillman Fellowship in Economics and Industrial Relations" paying \$1,000 each year to some able and promising young student to whom Mr. Hillman could stand as a beacon

of inspiration. And about a year later, Dr. Leo Wolman, economic advisor to Hillman, was appointed professor of economics at Columbia.

The "new unionism" to which the Amalgamated was by this time so completely committed was described by Dr. John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin, a man who had long been close to the union. Speaking about the Amalgamated at hearings held before a U. S. Senate Committee in December, 1928, he declared:

I have students who have been labor managers in industry, and they tell me that the union has lost its ginger, its pep, and is turning to try to help the employers make profits. . . . [There has taken place within it] a change from an attitude of confiscation, the confiscatory attitude of the immigrant, largely Jewish laborers, and entirely communistic, over to a coöperative organization helping the management in making more profits, and they sharing of course.

The same organization which was once sued for dissolution on the grounds of striving for the rule of the proletariat was able to state approximately 10 years later:

Five years ago we spent \$250,000 in a campaign against reds. We have ejected them from our union and they have no voice in its affairs. Does it seem likely that some of the most conservative clothing manufacturers of the city would deal with us if we were a red organization?<sup>11</sup>

And with the "reds" ejected the Amalgamated was now dealing with men of a different political stripe.

"Three men spoke from the stage of Witherspoon Hall in Philadelphia Saturday night," wrote the *Daily News Record* on December 8, 1930, "who in a former decade would have strongly opposed each other, in a former generation would have fought each other, but spoke with common harmony of purpose. Any platform including Gerard Swope, Henry P. Kendall and Sidney Hillman could not fail of strong interest, particularly at such a time as this."

Thus far "we are but at the threshold of coöperation in industry," announced the Amalgamated officially through the



editorial columns of *Advance*. The occasion was in December, 1929, when Lt. Governor Herbert Lehman of New York, Sidney Hillman, Jacob Billikopf, impartial chairman of the New York clothing market, and William P. Goldman, treasurer of New York Clothing Manufacturers' Exchange, were the principal speakers at a dinner tendered by this employers' association.

*The Nash Agreement*

The essence of the new line of policy and trade union philosophy which had been adopted by the Amalgamated administration was exemplified clearly in the agreement entered into in 1925 between the A.C.W. and the A. Nash Co. and its subsidiary, the Schaefer Tailoring Co., of Cincinnati.

Arthur Nash, president of the concern, was a religious fanatic who had carried on relations with his employees under a "Golden Rule" plan—a sort of company union. Taking over a contract clothing shop in Cincinnati in 1919 he found the force composed of women and girls earning from \$4 to \$6 a week. In the period which followed he changed his line of work, enlarged his business, thrived financially and in the spirit of the "golden rule" raised the wage level in his shop to \$12. This had, in reality, been necessary in the light of a series of objective conditions which surrounded his operations when his business began to expand into the largest direct from maker-to-consumer clothing business in the world.

But "Golden Rule" Nash would have none of the Amalgamated, and attempts to organize his factory were repulsed at every turn. Feeling between the two became extremely bitter. In 1921 two bulletins were distributed by the Amalgamated to the Nash workers one of which, entitled "The Amalgamated versus the Golden Rule," set forth the position of the union, exposed the rôle of Mr. Nash, and urged the workers to join the union. In response, Mr. Nash summoned

his employees to a meeting and railroaded through (in his presence) a "workers'" resolution that:

It has always been the policy of our Company that our shop be open to the employment of union and non-union workers alike. . . . [But] the A. Nash Company is hereby instructed by all the workers in mass meeting assembled not to employ members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and that all members of the union now working for our Company be required to surrender their membership, or resign.

In the following four years, however, the Amalgamated had about-faced. It was now selling "unionism" to employers instead of organizing workers. Instead of a tireless organization campaign among the Nash workers, Mr. Hillman decided to convince Mr. Nash to allow his shop to be organized and to "sell" him the idea of the advantages to the firm of such a move. Hillman even disavowed the previous militant activities of the union within the Nash plant, going to the point of writing to Mr. Nash, "I take this opportunity to convey to you again my sincere regrets regarding the unauthorized statements made in the past by some who represented the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in Cincinnati."

Finally Mr. Nash was "sold." He called his workers to a meeting which was opened with prayer, harangued them to have faith in him, trust his judgment in looking out for their best interests—and to please vote to join the Amalgamated. In the standing vote which followed many believed that the workers had voted adversely, the *Daily News Record* reporting the next day that "some believed that the vote had failed," while the Cincinnati *Times Star* reported that night (December 10, 1925) that the Nash employees had voted not to join up. However, Mr. Nash, as chairman, declared that the majority had approved and called the meeting to a close—with a prayer. The Nash employees had been "organized."

The agreement which followed was a typical Amalgamated document. Working hours were to remain unchanged; wage considerations were to be referred to a committee for con-

sideration; an "arbitration board" was set up to consider disputes; and full power of discharge and discipline remained with the employer.

Although the workers received little, Mr. Nash was well paid for sending his workers into the union. A Nash subsidiary was soon after found to be losing money. The union assembled its best technical advisors from New York and Chicago to straighten out the knots, rationalize the plant and teach the executives "scientific management." Inside of a year the subsidiary was piling up profits. Representatives of the firm visited the union regularly. There they would hear talk not of workers' grievances, but of technical problems such as elimination of waste, improvement of skill and quality and "efficiency." Mr. Nash had at his disposal also the financial experts of the union and the union bank also served him in various capacities.

At the next convention of the union, held in May, 1926, "Golden Rule" Nash, an employer of labor, was the principal speaker.

#### *Counter-Offensive*

Although the faith of the Amalgamated rank-and-file in Hillman had been strong, it was not everlasting. As they saw the bosses receiving back from the Amalgamated through "conciliation and good-will" those things which had been won at the cost of their own blood and suffering, they rose in revolt. As they saw the Amalgamated drift back to a point where it was indistinguishable from the United Garment Workers from which they had seceded, they began gradually to oppose the union machine.

In the years following 1923 a powerful rank-and-file opposition developed against the Hillman administration. This revolt grew out of the burning needs of the tailors. Those who had not lost their faith and class-consciousness organized in a solid left-wing group. They wanted an honest, fighting union. They wanted to be saved from the destitution and

ruin which they saw creeping upon them. They wanted a decent living. And they realized that to achieve these ends they needed a militant union controlled by the workers.

#### *Smashing the Opposition*

The appearance of an organized opposition did not catch unawares those in control of the union. And they were not wanting in ingenuity when they set out to smash the insurgents. Instead of rectifying the abuses which were complained of, they determined to destroy those who dared complain.

Men of "stern nature" who would "know how to deal with the lefts" were brought back into the organization. Corrupt and discarded though these people were, they were "the boys" needed for the job at hand.

One of the first of these was Harry Cohen—an ex-official who had formerly been found guilty of corruption by the organization. In 1921 Hillman said at a meeting in Manhattan Lyceum, New York City, that "H. Cohen can never come back into the Amalgamated without stepping over my dead body." Secretary-Treasurer Schlossberg had declared that he would resign before he would ever again sign a check for H. Cohen. But this same discredited H. Cohen was now put back on the union payroll. Another similarly rewarded was one Alex Cohen, who had likewise been driven out under charges of corruption.

The Socialist, Abraham Beckerman, was also brought in to clean out the "reds." Without an election Hillman made Beckerman manager of the New York Joint Board. Beckerman was ideally suited to the task of crushing a left wing and keeping workers in submission. His connections with the underworld were excellent; the police were his old pals; he loved to play the part of a czar.

Beckerman and his cronies proceeded immediately to break up protest meetings; members who "couldn't keep their



mouths shut" were beaten and blackjacked; murderous attacks were made on dissenters.

In this "pogrom," as the workers termed it, not only were individual members thrown out of their shops, expelled and blacklisted, but whole local unions, such as Operators' Local 5 of New York City and the pressers' local of Rochester, were suspended and "reorganized." Local 5 was one of the largest in the New York organization but it was led by the left wing and had carried on a fight against the leaders of the New York Joint Board. "We, the responsible and active members of one of the largest locals in the country," said the members of this local in a leaflet entitled *Why We Were Expelled*, "could no longer tolerate the sad state of affairs with which the tailors were confronted." For which activity they "got theirs."

Another way in which the machine remained in office during this period was explained a few years later by a member of the Toronto organization:

It was in the election of 1925 that the corruption of the officialdom was concretely brought home to the membership in Toronto. In that contest, the "trusted" manager, H. D. Rosenbloom, a servile upholder of general office policies, was opposed by James Blugerman, a class conscious and militant worker. The former manager, of course, had the full support of the national office and was "re-elected." The machine triumphed. Reaction was in the saddle once more.

But six months later, worse than an explosion took place. As usual, when "thieves fall out," the truth leaks out. It was a man who was himself part of the reactionary machine who came forward with the startling news. The election had been a fraud. Faked ballots had been used.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout this entire campaign of terror the union machine was supported by the Jewish Daily *Forward* as well as by the Socialist press and the Socialist Party. Between these elements and the Hillman bureaucracy there developed a kinship which was cemented closer and closer with each successive stage of the struggle.

### *What Happened to Dissenters*

Those who led in the struggle against corruption were shown no mercy. They were thrown out on the streets.

On August 1, 1929, the *Daily News Record* explained this policy urbanely when it declared:

The policy of expulsion adopted by the A.C.W. against ring-leaders and chronic trouble fomenters at least cured most of them of the attacks of violence to which they were subject, reducing some to the status of peaceful union members and removing others entirely from the industrial sphere.

A more realistic eye witness told the real story of some of these "chronic trouble fomenters"—men who stood up for their own rights and those of others:

Passing by a tailor-store in Rochester, N. Y., my eyes sighted the figure of a man well known to me. This man, bulky, and fair complexioned, stood operating a Hoffman pressing machine, stopping on occasion to explain something to a man near by. The sight of this man, Pete, surprised me. What was he doing in that little, two-by-four establishment? Was he not chairman of the pressers' local of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America? Was he not employed in a large clothing shop operating under an agreement with his union? Is not Pete one of the most sincere and active trade-unionists of his city? I inquired. "Expelled from my union and blacklisted by the bosses," was his reply.

A few weeks later I was having lunch in the "Automat" on Fourteenth Street, near Union Square, New York. In the crowd jamming its way out, I noticed a man with a portfolio in his hand. It was none other than my old friend Sam, a loyal and active member of the Children's Department of the A.C.W. of A. I rushed up to him and asked the meaning of the dilapidated portfolio. "I'm blacklisted," he replied, "selling books for a living."

My search for work took me to Philadelphia. On the corner of Locust and Eighth Street stood N—, a young worker whom I met during a previous visit to that city. He was then chairman of the Amalgamated Branch of Philadelphia, trustworthy and honest, considered so even by his opponents. "How are things

with you?" I inquired. He replied, "I'm expelled from my union and out of a job."

"Expelled and blacklisted" is the inevitable answer. These "eliminated" victims soar into thousands. Every organized clothing center has its staggering quota. The methods of dealing with these insurgents are uniform. The details are shocking but the results are "satisfactory" according to an official of the union. . . .

I know of a case where a man who complained against piece rates in a certain shop in Rochester, was called before the manager of the union, his union book taken away from him and told to "get to hell out and stay out," being no more a member of the union. That worker is still looking for work. . . .

You find them in every "organized" clothing center in the United States and in a lesser proportion in Canada. Scores of able organizers, workers who have proved their ability as leaders, honest and devoted to their organization are deprived of their means of livelihood, forced to enter other industries in which they are total strangers as a result of this pernicious practice on the part of the union leaders and the bosses. Many of those blacklisted have taken other roads. The cleaning and repairing business has been reinforced. Dishwashers and common laborers make up a considerable number, and the rest, by far the majority, trudge the streets vainly seeking for jobs.<sup>13</sup>

The case of Bonchi Friedman was typical. An active member of the union since 1916, Friedman served three months in jail for activities for the Amalgamated when that union was militant. In the course of his untiring work in the labor movement he was an inspiring union organizer and one of the victims of the Palmer Red Raids in 1920. Later he became a member of the Board of Directors of the Amalgamated Shirt Workers Joint Board as well as a member of the Executive Board of Local 248 and a member of that local's grievance committee. In 1921, a full-time organizer, he was crippled by the police when leading a strike. As late as 1926 he had been asked by his Joint Board to return as an organizer.

But in February, 1929, Friedman had acted as chairman of a two-day conference of shop representatives called to find

a method of combating sweatshop conditions and to spur the union into action in such a movement. The leaders of the Shirt Workers Joint Board of the Amalgamated immediately communicated with the owners of the Chapin Shirt Co., where Friedman was employed. The bosses complied with the request of their agents in the union's offices. Friedman was fired and he has been out of the industry ever since.

"Of course you were fired because you criticized the union office," one worker testified that he was frankly told by Bellanca, an official of the Hillman administration.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, however, active Hillman supporters seldom know the meaning of unemployment. They are sent up to jobs at times when others have to wait in line for months.

The money collected for the unemployment insurance fund also served as a tremendous weapon to whip the recalcitrants into line. Although insurance payments are supposed to be made on the basis of the workers' shop records, in practice the office came to rely upon the recommendations of the business agents for the distribution of insurance money. The recommendation for lackeys would in all cases be immediate and favorable. Those, on the other hand, who had incurred the displeasure of the corrupt agents for fighting questionable deals with the bosses, or for any other cause, would find their just claims ignored or denied without recourse or appeal of any kind. The unemployment insurance plan of the organization became a whip and a source of power—a medium through which to make friends and punish enemies.\*

#### *Hillman Emerges Victorious*

It takes stout hearts and an unbending spirit to stand up under this type of persecution and terror year after year

\* For a complete exposure of the corruption practiced by the A.C.W. in the administration of unemployment insurance funds, see Louis Kirshbaum's pamphlet, *Justice for Organized Workers*. The author of this work is a worker who was himself defrauded of his insurance for fighting corrupt connivance between a business agent and boss to the detriment of the workers.



without yielding sooner or later. "What's the use?" became the attitude of many of the workers involved. "It's no use fighting against the union and the boss combined." By 1926 much of the opposition began to lose its fervor. All save the most steadfast came to feel beaten and crushed. They hated Sidney Hillman and all that he represented, but they paid their union dues, stayed home from union meetings and kept their mouths shut. Only an opposition nucleus remained.

Conditions among the tailors became still more deplorable. The Amalgamated as a splendid, fighting organization was no more. But Hillman and his cronies ruled the roost. To them that was all that mattered. The "Left Wing Is Beaten, Says Sidney Hillman," reported the *Daily News Record* in a headline on December 9, 1926; he "Assures Manufacturers of Rochester of Future Peace," it continued.

At the hand-picked 8th Biennial Convention of the union in 1926 there was no open opposition. However, as one reporter could not help but observe, "The rank and file of the delegates swallowed things without really sufficiently digesting them. There had been too much self-satisfaction in the convention, too many noisy and unintelligent demonstrations with rattles and whistles."<sup>15</sup>

The convention was a joy ride to the henchmen and a window dressing for the public. There were flowers, bands, banquets. Money was no consideration for, after all, the membership will pay!

#### *Demoralization and Disintegration*

The accumulated force of objective conditions and the ineptitude and corruption of the union found the A.C.W. unable to weather the storm of the crisis. Between the years 1930-33 it declined rapidly.

The Amalgamated bureaucracy no longer knew how to fight. Its very existence had become dependent upon the

employers' coöperation and good-will. Without them it was lost.

But many employers were beginning to question the continued need of the union as a tool for their successful operations. "Exchange spokesmen," pointed out the trade press, "suggest that whereas the union formerly had the sympathy of those manufacturers who desired to see uniform costs established, the sentiment is now more strongly in opposition to an increase because of recent developments."<sup>16</sup> The union could only maintain the bosses' good-will on the basis of greater and ever greater concessions.

Beginning with 1929-30, the union began to disintegrate. By 1932 the organization was in a critical condition, financially as well as morally. Hillman began speaking on a wide scale, and with a pompous air of congealed greatness, on how to save capitalism through planning, through leadership, through "self-government" in industry. But on the whole it was a very feeble and pathetic plea.

With conditions in the organization completely demoralized, it became difficult to keep up even the semblance of a union.

At the end of 1931 the union officials *claimed* a national membership of only 70,000,<sup>17</sup> though it is doubtful if they actually had 50,000. The number continued to slide steadily downward until the fall of 1933. Baltimore became a virtually non-union market; in Boston very few members were left; in Montreal there was a spontaneous revolt which led to a short-lived new union; the union openly admitted "the weakness of the New York organization and the lack of organization in the out-of-town centers";<sup>18</sup> in other markets the situation was similar.

The members were in a fighting mood and by the end of 1932 there was a crystallizing sentiment in New York favorable to an offensive for higher wages. The officials headed this off by a fake "demand" upon the employers for a 15% increase upon the expiration of the existing agreement. "We

not only demand this increase," the membership was assured, "we mean to get it."<sup>19</sup> Then followed the usual protracted negotiations—just long enough to permit the workers' wrath to spend itself—whereupon the officials suddenly announced that "the chances of the union securing a wage increase are rather slim," though, of course, "if conditions should improve and the remaining weeks of the present season should face revived activity in the shops, it is conceivable that a real wage increase might be secured."<sup>20</sup> Instead of a strike to enforce the pretended demand for a 15% increase, a stoppage was called "for registration purposes." A new agreement was signed in the Mayor's office on the bosses' terms.

It was noteworthy that during the stoppage workers were called to halls to register but no meetings were held. The officials feared that if the voice of the workers was not suppressed they would raise demands, take matters into their own hands and convert the stoppage into a real strike.

The chaos of the organization was so great that the office could not afford the expense of holding its 1933 convention and maneuvered a referendum postponing it until 1934. The organization's weekly periodical, *The Advance*, was reduced first to a bi-weekly and later to a monthly, with its language sections abolished. In New York things became so bad that bankruptcy was averted only by a merger of locals, the reorganization of the Joint Board and the appointment of a dictator, Charles Weinstein, a Philadelphia union official, who was rushed to the scene by Hillman to take charge of the New York Joint Board affairs.

With the union facing collapse the "higher statesmanship" of Sidney Hillman could only resort to a series of speeches praying "for a general upturn in business."

#### *The Amalgamated and the NRA*

With the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in June, 1933, the union began to recruit members very rapidly. By May, 1934, the membership jumped to 125,000

members. What the A.C.W. had failed to do along lines of aggressive trade unionism, which would bring permanent benefit to the workers, was temporarily accomplished once more by government-employer-union collaboration.\*

As much as three years before the enactment of the NIRA, Sidney Hillman had advocated before the Academy of Political Science and elsewhere that "the government must eventually step in and regulate hours and wages in industry." To him the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act represented "the realization of a dream." This same union which at its initial convention had passed a resolution that "in the class struggle raging throughout the country, the powers of local, state and national government are being used by the employing class against the working man," and had advised "the members of this Organization to support their own political party which stands loyal to the working class, and whose aim is the emancipation of the working class from wage slavery," now contended that for the correction of existing abuses "authority and power lie within the Congress of the United States"<sup>21</sup> and that "the success or failure of the country's future is bound up with the success or failure of the governmental experiment."<sup>22</sup>

The union not only came to rely upon the good offices of the government for the organization of the men's clothing industry, but through its officers it became simply a cog in the machinery of the capitalist state. Leo Wolman at first headed the National Labor Board and later became "impartial member for the government" on the mediation board appointed to settle the threatened automobile strike in the spring of 1934. As the member casting the deciding vote, he proved to be the most reactionary of the members of that committee in his attitude toward organized automobile labor. Jacob S. Potofsky, assistant secretary-treasurer of the A.C.W., was sent by the government to drive the Puerto

\* For the position of militant labor toward the NRA, see pp. 57-58, 143, 241.



Rico section of the men's summer clothing industry into line behind the NRA. Sidney Hillman became a member of the Labor Advisory Board, labor member of the clothing code authority and, upon the reorganization of the top apparatus of the entire NRA administration after the withdrawal of Gen. Hugh S. Johnson, was appointed by President Roosevelt one of the administrative board of five to take over supervision of the NRA.

Thus the Amalgamated took its latest official plunge into open collaboration and identification with the employers and the capitalist state. "The general executive board of ACW," declared that body in November, 1933, "goes on record as supporting every activity of the NRA," adding: "This is not the time for any portion of the workers in industry to hesitate for a single moment in upholding the hands of Pres. Roosevelt and the NRA."<sup>23</sup> As to how the blessings to be bestowed by the new scheme of things were to be achieved, Hillman merely added, "In our industry most of the manufacturers will do the right thing under the code."<sup>24</sup>

In his new capacities as publicity agent for declining capitalism, Hillman was not found wanting. When, for example, the Darrow-Thompson National Recovery Review Board exposed the monopolist tendencies of the NRA in the summer of 1934, it was none other than Sidney Hillman who captured the front page headlines with a bitter attack upon the board's findings. Although thus rising to the defense of finance capital and attacking the Darrow Board, Hillman could find nothing to say against the strike-breaking rôle of the government apparatus which was being used against the workers in Toledo, San Francisco, Minneapolis and other places where strikes were in progress.

The A.C.W. officials, however, have not fooled the rank and file of their membership who, while Hillman occupied well-paying berths in the government, were feeling the full effects of the "blessings" of the NRA, through intensified speed-up, lay-offs and the rising cost of living. They are

given little chance to speak up within their organization, but whenever they get the opportunity they give an indication of the stormy road Hillman and his officials are paving for themselves. The few rank-and-file delegates at the 1934 convention were scathing in their condemnation of the effects of the NRA in operation, as well as of the practices of their organization.

*Readmittance into the A. F. of L.*

In October, 1933, the Amalgamated reaffiliated with the A. F. of L. Men of the stripe of William Green and Matthew Woll had long recognized Sidney Hillman and his administration as kindred spirits. Reaffiliation thus became merely a matter of ironing out jurisdictional differences with the United Garment Workers and reëntrance into the Federation was accompanied by none of the obstacles and reluctance which met the efforts of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union when it proposed merging with A. F. of L. unions.

Between the United Garment Workers and the Amalgamated a truce was not difficult to achieve and on October 12, 1933, William Green, president of the A. F. of L., announced that the Amalgamated's application for a charter had been approved by the executive council. Under the terms of the agreement the U.G.W. was to retain the few men's clothing shops that it had, with the Amalgamated obtaining jurisdiction over the men's clothing industry as a whole. The work-pants industry was to remain within the province of the U.G.W., with the Amalgamated retaining such shops as it then held. Each union was to keep whatever shirt shops it had, future organization work in that industry to be carried on by agreement and arrangement between the two unions. Thus no jobs held by the officials of either union were to be jeopardized.

The clothing bosses were elated at the news and they "were outspoken in their pleasure that his [Hillman's] in-

fluence is now to be extended to a wider field." <sup>25</sup> Amalgamated members were not quite so elated but Hillman knew how to handle that. At the 1934 Amalgamated convention, a resolution attacking the top officials of the A. F. of L. "was expunged from the record." <sup>26</sup>

### *The Opposition Within*

The opposition within the A.C.W. under present conditions functions under the greatest difficulties. With a total abrogation of inner-union democracy, with workers thrown out of their shops and denied their very bread and butter for mere possession or distribution of a leaflet, with the officials stopping at nothing in dealing with those who oppose them, open and organized group activity against the administration becomes an exceedingly difficult task.

But despite all efforts to suppress it a militant opposition has kept itself intact—with a headquarters, program and outspoken defiance of Hillman and the other union officials.

The program of this opposition was embodied in a document called the *Tailor Bulletin*, dated August, 1934, and issued by the "Rank and File Committee of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers." It read, in part, as follows:

The tailors of course cannot depend on Hillman who is being presented with medals by the boss institutions and who is the official agent of the Roosevelt government. Hillman, of course, cannot resume the past, nor plan any struggles in the future, and it remains for the tailors themselves to do it. . . .

We cannot think of any trade where the conditions of the workers have been betrayed so openly as has been done in the tailor trade. . . . Just recall the continuous wage reductions that have been practiced with the help of the Hillman machine. Recall the continuous reorganizations by which thousands of tailors have been thrown out of the shops to meet starvation. The black-jack has been the language of the Hillman machine. Terror has been the only education given to the workers. . . .

The money for the Unemployed Insurance which was supposed to help the unemployed and hungry tailors and their families, turned into a source of graft and corruption for the machine

agents. . . . Hillman has abolished almost completely democratic rights for the members. Elections in the Amalgamated are merely mockery. . . .

The Rank and File Committee proposes:

For the abolition of piece work. . . . For a minimum wage scale. . . . Equal distribution of work among all employed in the shops during the slack season. . . . Manufacturers shall be fully responsible for the wages and all other conditions in their contracting shops. . . . The Unemployed Insurance Fund shall be managed by committees elected at the locals. . . . Abolish the check-off system of collecting dues through the bosses. Full democracy in the union, with full meetings at least twice a month; with full rights of the workers to speak and express their opinions. . . . The right of the workers to strike for better conditions. . . . All expelled members to be reinstated. . . . Exempt stamps for unemployed with full rights. . . . The Amalgamated shall not allow Hillman's service to the government through which he helps to bring Fascism in the trade unions. No official of the union shall be allowed to accept any position on any board of the capitalistic government. . . .

This was written by shop workers who cannot be frightened into submission by the Hillman machine. For the present, however, the majority dare not signify their assent to these words openly. But their bitterness is deep and their hatred is intense. One day this latent opposition will crystallize.