

Go to an A. F. of L. convention, where they are all together, and look 'em over. "Working men?" you will think. "I must have gotten into the wrong place. This must be a meeting of the National Manufacturers' Association," so sleek and plump and well groomed the bunch will be. Presently you will spy out a worker, a "rough-neck" delegate, of which there are a few, and approach him with your doubting. And he will most likely say: "You are in the right place alright, but these guys are national manufacturers, at that; national manufacturers of antediluvian bunk." And if you stick around a couple of days you will go away convinced that the roughneck was right.

### Gompers, the Static Type of Leader

Brother Gompers is a typical example of the stand pat type of labor man. His mind has not been affected in the least by all the changes that have taken place in our economic structure during his official life of more than 40 years. Steadfastly he adheres to ideas and tactics that were 40 years behind 40 years ago. Forty years ago he might have been excused on tactical grounds. Then he might have said with some show of wisdom: "Let us go slow for a while till we get the unions well on the way; then we will push out our educational matter and lead the workers up to a knowledge of their actual status in so-

ciety." Forty years have elapsed and no educational matter has appeared. He has learned nothing himself and bitterly denounced as "unprincipled radicals" those who have. He hobbles about insisting that what is is not. Like all old men he lives in the past. The future to him is dark as night. The present he dimly sees.

Such men are a positive menace to the labor movement. It is a social crime to keep them in the leadership of a young and vigorous movement that requires the utmost of activity and forward vision. The labor movement must have young men, men who live in the present and know how to grapple with its perplexing problems, while keeping a steady eye on the future, the goal, without which any handling of the labor problem leads to chaos and confusion.

While men of the Gompers type remain in control the movement will remain static. But there are hopeful signs ahead. Due to the untiring work of the "unprincipled radicals," the workers are waking up and have begun to cast off the incubus of false leadership. They are taking the leadership into their own hands and once the rank and file gets under way the old guard will be quickly cast into the dump. Labor will then be on its way to come into its own. And its own is all. All that Labor produces shall belong to Labor. Any other formula is false.

## The Clothing Workers Stir

By Joseph Manley

SOMETHING of a sensation was caused in union circles recently when the entire officialdom, including the business agents, of the New York Joint Board (District Council) of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America resigned in a body. This unprecedented action was a dramatic climax to a long dispute that has gone on between the "rights" and "lefts." The resigning officials were of the "rights," and they quit under pressure from the "lefts."

The New York Joint Board was headed by a leadership of the *Forward* type, and dominated by that paper. Conditions were most unsatisfactory. Standpatism was in the saddle, and the Joint Board was bankrupt, financially and otherwise. It owed \$200,000 to the General Office and \$300,000 to other sources. Demoralization set in among the rank and file, and they stopped paying dues. Instead of correcting the evils at the bottom of this discontent the old officialdom and the *Forward* which attempts to dictate the policies of all the needle trades unions, launched

into a bitter campaign against the "lefts," accusing them of carrying on propagandea for non-payment of dues. This added fuel to the flame.

Upon the eve of the Joint Board elections several weeks ago the crisis reached the breaking point. A circular appeared and was circulated among the membership. It recited a series of serious charges against the officialdom of the Joint Board, and it was signed somewhat obscurely as coming from the "United Campaign Committee for all the Locals." This was the signal for a bitter attack from the *Forward*, which branded the whole surging rank and file discontent as being caused by "union busters," "splitters," "lefts," "Communists," etc. All of which worsened an already bad situation.

### The Election Tangle

Just at this critical juncture, the Amalgamated Shop Delegate League, which up to this had been trying to function as a forum for the expression of left wing ideas of the militants, and which was made up mostly from members of locals 3 and 5, took a hand in the affair. Their



first important act was to repudiate responsibility for the issuance of the above-mentioned semi-anonymous circular, and to set forth their own ideas in a circular gotten out under their own name. Then they affiliated their group to the Trade Union Educational League, agreeing to its principles and policies. This step was a turning point in the development of the left wing and it went a long way towards bringing about the necessary responsibility in the situation.

As the fight heated up the two Jewish labor dailies, the *Forward* and the *Freiheit*, found themselves in sharpest opposition. The *Forward* began the attack by issuing slanderous articles against everybody and everything connected with the movement of the rank and file against the local officialdom. Then the *Freiheit*, the "left" daily, got into the fight also, sharply exposing the *Forward* and all its works. Emotion and excitement ran high all around.

In the midst of this turmoil the elections for the Joint Board took place. The announced result showed the "right" candidates to have been elected by a sweeping vote. The *Forward* loudly hailed this as a great victory for its forces and the officials of the Joint Board; likewise as a repudiation of the charges made by the "lefts." But the jubilation was short lived. The rank and file, enraged at the manner in which the elections had been conducted by the local officialdom, raised their voice in angry protest.

#### Turning of the Tide

They called a monster mass meeting of members in Cooper Union to register their objections. Speakers charged that ballot boxes had been stuffed, voters intimidated, etc. The meeting demanded new elections. It also insisted that the many locals, which the officialdom had been juggling so long for its own benefit, should be amalgamated, and as the real remedy for the evil conditions complained of, that the shop delegate system be gradually installed. At this protest meeting a representative of the General Office of the A. C. W. of A. was present. He admitted that the Joint Board system in New York had broken down and he promised that the rank and file would get justice. The Italian workers are a big factor in the New York clothing industry, and they added power to the demands of the protest meeting by declaring that their big local, No. 63, would withdraw from the Joint Board if the elections were allowed to stand.

At the ensuing meeting of the Joint Board a solution, presumably coming from the General Office, was proposed by Manager Blomberg. In effect the proposal was that the elections should stand, but that the various locals should have new elections within sixty days, that they should

have proportional representation on the Joint Board, and that the large locals should elect their representatives to the Board of Directors, the custom previously having been for the joint Board to elect its own Board of Directors.

The feature of this Joint Board meeting was a speech made by General Secretary-Treasurer Schlossberg in support of the proposition put forth by Manager Blomberg (who is a member of the General Executive Board). Schlossberg's speech was filled with sincerity and emotion, and he made such an impression that in spite of the bitter attacks made upon Blomberg's proposition it carried. The right wing voted against and the left wing for it. The "lefts" went along with it, not because it coincided with their program entirely, but because it seemed the only feasible way to preserve the organization from disruption.

#### The Joint Board Resigns

It was at this point, shortly after the majority of the Joint Board had accepted the proposition and the General Office was in the midst of preparations to carry it out, that the entire officialdom resigned in a body. Their aim was, no doubt, to hamper the General Office in bringing order out of the chaos. But the effect of this wholesale quitting was the opposite of what was expected. It has shown to the rank and file the true colors of their former officials.

In the face of this new crisis, the General Office immediately appointed a set of temporary officers for the Joint Board. And as this article is being written, the locals are now engaged in electing a new set of business agents and representatives. Without doubt a very large percentage of these will have strong left wing sympathies. Sydney Hillman, who was absent in Russia during these stirring events, has now returned and is taking an efficient hand in straightening matters out.

In this fight the left wing did not handle themselves as carefully as might have been wished. This was because of lack of organization. But they are profiting by this experience. Moreover they have made a lasting impression on the general rank and file. It was their burning fervor, sincerity, and militant courage that brought about this denouement, resulting as it did in the wholesale resignation of the yellow leadership. This discredited leadership is now left high and dry, where the rank and file will insist that they remain. For a long time it has been said that "the *Forward* can make an organization and can also break it." But this boast was exploded in this affair. Now it has a hollow sound. After this cleansing of their organizations, the New York clothing workers, getting a new lease on life, are going to push on faster than ever.

