

Needle Trades Alliance vs Amalgamation

A Statement by the National Committee of the Needle Trades Section of the Trade Union Educational League.

On the communication and draft of the constitution for a proposed Needle Trades Alliance, sent out by the General Executive Board of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of N. A.

IN the following statement there is no question raised as to the sincerity or well meaning of the officers who propose this plan. But it is imperative that we make clear the issues involved in this vital matter. The issues are (Alliance)—Federation versus Amalgamation.

In the communication that accompanies the draft of the reasons why an Alliance of all the Organizations in the needle trades is desirable and necessary is quoted the action taken at the conventions of the I. L. G. W. U. and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America without mentioning the fundamental difference between the two actions. This is a grievous, tho probably unintentional, error.

The quotation from the Convention of the I. L. G. W. U. is as follows:

The convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers, held in Cleveland, May 1-12, 1922, unanimously adopted the report of its Committee on Officers Report to the effect that:

"Even though the first attempt to materialize it did not bring forth the desired results, this convention should go on record as reaffirming its belief and faith in the desirability and the necessity of forming such an Alliance," of all the Organizations in the trades.

And it was further decided that "the incoming General Executive Board should be instructed to take steps in this direction and to endeavor to convert this plan into a reality. Your Committee has likewise read the letter addressed to this convention by the officers of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers, in which you are urged to proceed at once with this work. We appreciate the spirit of the communication and the convention should do its utmost to make a success of that Alliance. But at the same time we recommend that the working out of the procedure shall be left to the incoming General Executive Board, which will be in a better position to take the necessary steps in that direction."

Then follows without comment the quotation from the A. C. W. of A., 1922 convention:

The convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, held in Chicago, May 8-13, 1922, overwhelmingly adopted the resolution introduced by its Committee on Reports of Officers, the mandatory part of which reads:

"Resolved, That the incoming General Executive Board be instructed to negotiate with the other Organizations in the needle trades for the calling of a joint convention for the purpose of uniting these unions into one organization, and the incoming General Executive Board is empowered to make all necessary arrangements for such a convention."

The only opposition to the resolution passed at the convention of the A. C. W. of A. came from those who favored an Alliance as against an amalgamation. Careful readers will notice the difference in the wording of the two resolutions.

We are told that the basic principle of the new plan proposed is as follows:

May we, in conclusion, emphasize that our draft of a constitution for the Alliance, which we submit herewith, is based on the following fundamental principle:

While refraining from interfering in the structure of the existing Organizations, or in the practices that may have become rooted in the life of their respective trades, and which they may feel essential for the success of their work, it aims to give the Alliance enough cohesion and strength to enable it to promote the organization of all the needle workers and to become a really helpful and effective factor for the branches of the needle trade industry in which the separate international unions now function.

This is the weak point in the whole proposition and if it is the "fundamental principle" very little can be expected from this plan.

The militants of the needle trades industry must boldly face this "principle," that allows each separate international union to do as it pleases, and demand that they be welded into one great organization with departments fully capable of taking care of the craft interests of the workers. This is the only principle that will bring real solidarity of the needle workers.

The draft of the constitution is a lengthy affair. The name proposed: Needle Trades Workers Alliance of America. Its objects roughly stated: To promote solidarity. To promote organization of the unorganized. To give affiliated international unions financial assistance. To develop a research bureau for the benefit of all the affiliations. To investigate pending legislation and present the views of the workers to the press, legislative bodies and public officials. To arrange for legal advice to all affiliations. To publish a bulletin to be reprinted in the International Journals.

3. **Composition.** The Needle Trades Workers' Alliance of America shall consist of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, the International Furriers' Union, the Journeymen Tailors' Union and the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers, and such other unions as may become affiliated with it.

Conventions are to be held annually.

Representation—

(a) The annual convention shall consist:

(1) Of delegates from every affiliated international union as follows: International unions with a membership of not over 5,000 shall be entitled to five delegates; over 5,000 but not over 25,000 to ten delegates; over 25,000 but not over 100,000 to fifteen delegates; over 100,000 to twenty delegates. The membership of every affiliated organization shall be computed on the basis of the average per capita tax paid by them during the year preceding the convention.

(2) Of one delegate from every Local Branch of the Alliance.

(b) The method by which the affiliated organizations should elect their delegates to the convention of the Alliance should be determined by every affiliated organization in accordance with its own constitution and by-laws.

The representation as it is proposed will be almost exclusively of the officialdom. Without a large representation of the rank and file of the various organizations, it is hard to believe that anything like real progress towards solidarity can come out of the gathering.

Executive Council—

(a) The Executive Council shall consist of fifteen members as follows: Every component international union (Section 3) to designate two members to the Executive Council and five additional delegates to be elected at the annual convention.

(b) It shall be the duty of the Executive Council:

(1) To carry on the object of the Alliance and all the decisions of its conventions.

(2) To organize an office and establish such special departments as it may find advisable to promote the work of the Alliance.

(3) To appoint a paid Executive Secretary who shall devote all his time to the business of the Alliance.

(4) To elect a permanent Treasurer, Recording Secretary and two Trustees of the Alliance.

It will be noticed that there is no president, no executive head of the council. How this body could function without a permanent head it is hard to understand. The reasons for trying to avoid the necessity for filling this important position, are obvious. And admit of the cardinal weakness, that this proposition has not gotten its roots in the rank and file to whom this question of selecting a competent head to the organization would be a comparatively simple matter.

A Permanent Defense Fund is proposed.

Local Branches (corresponding to local Building and Metal Trades Councils) are proposed.

It is fully expected that all the International Unions will participate in the convention; therefore it is highly important that the rank and file and especially the militants of the organization become familiar with this vital matter.

It is our duty as militants to keep clearly before the rank and file the fundamental difference between this Alliance and the Amalgamation advocated in the quoted resolution passed at the A. C. W. convention. The arguments in favor of this alliance will be many and varied. Some of which are: the industry being different from all others, as the workers of one craft are all under one roof and members of one union. And that, therefore, they are not as ready for amalgamation as, for instance, the railroad workers with their many craft unions in one shop. The facts are that everyone who knows the needle industry admits that at least a majority of the International Unions in it are already in favor of amalgamation. And that the only excuse for not going all the way on the road of amalgamation is because it is necessary to placate some of those officials who are opposed to any real solidarity of the needle workers unions.

The proposed Alliance does not make any proposals that will lessen the expense of the duplication of the many separate International Headquarters, Staffs, Journals, etc., etc. On the contrary, it lays down as a basic principle the autonomy that will preserve this duplication and expense.

Should one desire it, a good argument in favor of amalgamation was published in the issue of the New York Times of January 11, to the effect that at a meeting of the dress manufacturers they had elected David N. Mosessohn to become, in the words of the Times, the "dictator" of the industry. "The action last night was regarded by the members as the first big step made to 'clean up' the needle industry from the manufacturers' standpoint."

It was pointed out that one of the duties of the arbiter would be to decide disputes between members and the concerns to which they sell and between members of the concerns from which they buy. It was proposed as a matter of the gravest concern that steps be taken at once to inculcate into the personnel of the industry ideas that would make for better and more ethical business relations between the manufacturers and the firms with which they do business.

To all this there can be but one answer, that now as never before the militants must demand nothing short of one highly departmentalized Industrial Union in the needle industry.

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