

# Union Election Lessons

## Some Reasons for Local 302 Result

By Rose Wortis

Now let us briefly examine in greater detail the situation in these three locals to see to what extent our general conclusions apply.

Let us begin with Local 302. The partial upset in the administration in Local 302 came as a surprise in labor circles. (The main administration candidates were defeated by a small vote ranging from 16 to 75. It elected only three business agents and two executive board members out of 8, and one Joint Council delegates. The rest of the candidates were elected on the opposition slate.)

Local 302, representing some 6,000 organized workers, was for years known as one of the strong, militant, progressive locals in New York. The cafeteria workers, who before Local 302 came into existence were known as among the most exploited workers in New York.

For years the workers were divided into a small union affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League on the one hand and an equally small local in the AFL dominated by racketeers.

### ACHIEVED UNITY

During the upsurge of organization in 1933 and the trend toward unity, the cafeteria workers were among the first unions to achieve unity within the AFL. With their ranks united, they quickly cleared the racketeers from the union and the industry. Local 302, united and cleansed of its corrupt elements, entered upon a period of mass growth. The small divided locals were built into a powerful organization of some 7,000 to 8,000. The most powerful chain cafeterias such as the Thompson, Stewarts, etc., were organized. The conditions of the workers were greatly improved, their wage standards raised. With the elimination of the racketeers who victimized both the workers and the employers, the unions established contractual relations with the Association for the overwhelming majority of the workers in the industry.

The local has made important progress in the organization of the workers in the Automat, with every possibility that this time its work will succeed in establishing the union in this open shop chain. The union also developed activities on the broader issues affecting the labor movement and the nation as a whole. Especially in this time since our entry into the war. The war activities conducted by Local 302 received public notice from the various war agencies. All these ad-

*[This is the second of a series of four articles by Rose Wortis on recent local elections in Cafeteria Employes, Local 302; Musicians, 802 and Teamsters, Local 807, all of the AFL. The first article appeared yesterday.]*

vances were achieved under the continuous leadership of Sam Kramberg who served as its secretary since unification, assisted by his progressive colleagues.

### WHY THE UPSET?

How then can we explain the sudden upset? It is not in the best interests of the progressive forces in the local to gloss over such developments or explain them away, but rather to examine the causes for the set-back so as to draw lessons not only for itself but for the labor movement generally, and as a result of such examination of the work to turn these defeats into victory.

In my opinion, there are several basic causes for the upset. Some may be peculiar to the local, others fall in line with the more general problems raised previously.

### VARIOUS GROUPS

In the first place, how does it happen that in this period when there is a general trend toward unity among the win-the-war forces, irrespective of political differences, there should have been such a sharp contest for leadership in a local which even during more trying periods, when differences on basic issues were sharp, maintained unity in its own ranks?

Since its origin there were various groupings in the local—the left progressive elements coming in the main from the TUUL; the conservative elements from the AFL; there were groupings based on national lines—Spanish (mainly unskilled workers), Greeks. The local was burdened with a Thomas-Trotzkyite disruptive group whose main purpose was to prevent the unification of groups and the

elimination of groups and clubs in the local.

The left progressive forces, though successful in maintaining unity on the top for many years, did not prove themselves equal to the task of uniting the rank-and-file followers of the various group leaders. Old factional divisions persisted even when the political base for these divisions had disappeared through the democratization of the union which gave workers, irrespective of their political opinions, an opportunity to voice their views, propose their policies directly through the union.

The disruptive Trotzkyite group for years exploited every shade of difference between the various trends and national groups, systematically fostered disunity, played on the ambitions of individuals for leadership, exploited every difficulty facing the union in the course of its work, magnifying the least mistake and failings of one or another individual leader. Unfortunately, the administration was unable to isolate these disrupters. As a result of this systematic work of disruption, they finally succeeded in provoking a split. They achieved their aim. The united administration, under whose leadership the union made real advances, was split. All groups made an unprincipled united front against the administration.

The administration did not sufficiently exert itself toward the breaking up of such an alignment being over-confident that by defeating this united opposition the conditions will be created for achieving the objective they have been striving for—to eliminate group politics in the union. To this the administration pledged itself in the event of victory.

## Negro Youth Get 2,000,000 Tons of Scrap