

# Where Is NMU Heading?

By George Morris

(First of two articles)

Where is the National Maritime Union heading? You hear this question in all labor circles. The seamen themselves are wondering and asking. Most people have been bewildered by recent events. For 10-12 years, since the memorable strikes that gave birth to it, the NMU was viewed as labor's foremost progressive union. It generally set the tone on issues and struggles. Its ranks were considered most solid against all divisive weapons of employers.

Today it is perhaps the most faction-torn union in the country. Red-baiting is running wild. Hardly an issue of the Pilot goes by that does not have pages of solid type of factional statements, personal attacks and charges and counter-charges that only serve to tear down the union's structure. Energy is spent in internal strife. Collective bargaining elections are being lost at an alarming rate.

## STRUGGLE WITH SHIP OWNERS

And this, in face of the following:

The approaching June 15 deadline for which a strike poll is being taken, with the shipowners showing far greater interest in anti-labor bills and the new injunction power the government received, that in wage negotiations.

Special legislation is being pressed against the maritime workers designed to kill the effectiveness of their unions.

The shipowners, through their spokesmen at Congressional hearings, have made it plain that they strongly depend on red-baiting in their next test of strength with unions.

Harry Lundeberg and his crowd in the AFL's Seafarers International Union, are moving aggressively and openly to work hand-in-hand with the shipowners to "drive the NMU off the waterfront." He openly declares that his weapon as that of the shipowners, is the splitting technique of red-baiting. Lundeberg's union now has the audacity to serve notice upon new shipowners that if they call for crews from the NMU they will be stuck.

Increasing numbers of seamen are roaming the beaches as ships are being transferred to foreign registry for manning by low-paid foreign seamen

Judging by the decisions of the NMU's highest body, the National

Council, the union continues to follow its traditional policy of progressivism. Decisions and resolutions call for maritime union unity in the wage fight. Aggressive campaigns are mapped on all other issues facing the union. The government's Greco-Turkish loan is sharply denounced as imperialism and proposals to persecute the Communist Party are opposed unequivocally.

The difference is this: while in the past decisions were followed with vigorous teamwork among the leaders to put them into effect, today they remain on paper in the union's files. President Joe Curran is too busy fighting "reds" and keeping the pot of internal strife continually boiling.

## SURROUNDED BY RENEGADES

He has surrounded himself by a collection of advisers, irresponsible elements more noted for their factionalism and hatred for the Communist Party than for their achievements in the labor movement. The ringleaders among them, renegades from Communism like M. Hedley Stone, Charles Keith and Tom Ray, are working under the direction of an outside group led by William F. Dunne and Sam Darcy. The latter two, were expelled from Communist Party ranks for left opportunism and factionalism. They give the spiritual guidance for factional revenge attacks upon the Party that threw them out.

They view the NMU as just the happy hunting ground. Thanks to inspiration from other sources, they have allies for their disruptive work.

The other allies consist of the customary shipowner agents, some of whom parade as loudmouthed "militants"; a few Trotskyites (Socialist Workers Party) and friends of Harry Lundeberg. As is now well established in the NMU's history, all those groups blossom out when negotiations roll around. They are a part of the "collective bargaining process" in the maritime industry.

Only in former days Curran was on the side of those who fought

these elements. Today he is their mouthpiece and out-rebait the most red-baiter.

The red-baiter pattern in the maritime industry, just as in some other progressive unions of the CIO, follows closely instructions in the Chamber of Commerce manual on procedure to form an "anti-Communist" caucus and how to keep it going. The elements most loved by the corporations are advised that "as their allies they may have some proletarian groups such as Socialists and Social Democrats and non-Stalinist Communist groups" (Page 42, Communists Within the Labor Movement, published by the Chamber of Commerce.)

The same "manual" feels heartened by its red-baiting recipe noting that "the first instance of restiveness was when Joseph Curran of the National Maritime Union engaged in an all-out struggle with the Communist officers associated with him."

The cry of "Communist control" raised by Curran is only a smoke-screen to hide the real conspiracy, inspired by this unholy alliance of outsiders to establish dictatorial control over the union and purge it of progressives.

The seamen remember one costly lesson in 1938 when a combination similar to the one ganging up against the NMU today, was headed by Jerry King and reinforced by mobsters, almost seized the union. At that time, Curran, after considerable dilly-dallying threw his lot in with progressives.

Today it is he who has taken over Jerry King's technique. Just like Jerry King did, Curran now screams "outside control" and "reds."

The cry of "Communist control" isn't new. It has been raised by the union's enemies since its inception. Communists have been among

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the union's leaders since its birth. But for some 12 years Curran found no "Communist domination" and raised no objection. He was himself called Communist for most of that period.

Curran has not explained what it is that brought the threat of Communist Party "control" now although there hasn't been a major change in policy or leadership since the union was born.

The change is obviously with Curran and his decision to become president of a clique rather than of the union. The clique, primarily interested in attacking the Communist Party and splitting the union is playing ducks and drakes with the economic interests of the seamen and the very life of the NMU.

The shipowners are having the grand laugh. They see the prospect of repeating the postwar twenties. They will if the seamen let shipowner and Chamber of Commerce policies guide them.