

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## **Sidney Hillman, Statesman of American Labor by Matthew Josephson**

Review Author: Walter B. Hogan

*Philippine Studies* vol. 1, no. 2 (1953): 189–194

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

reality. This real prolongation of the individual, this irradiation in external things through the medium of labor—which is at once a material and a spiritual activity—is the principal metaphysical basis for the right of private property.

The author, in a note to his enlightening paper, maintains that “in antiquity, little import was placed on *labor* as a title of possession.” And the reason he gives for the “re-valuation of labor” in modern times, a re-valuation, which he considers “one of the greatest advances which only now can be said to have been attained”, is precisely because labor is now being looked upon “not simply as a means of producing wealth, but at the same time as personal value.” Having discussed the metaphysical foundations of the property right, the author goes on to answer the intriguing question: “If the right to private property is a natural right, why, then, do not all men have an equal share in ownership?” This paper on property complements another entitled: “Personality: Thomist Affirmation—Communist Negation.”

Two of the most thought provoking studies are Lattanzi's “The Best Argument Against Communism”, and “The Psychological Complex of Communism” by Fr. Morlion, O.P. Lattanzi's study whets our appetite to know more about the two “sacred Marxist texts”, whose contents proved so devastating to the Communist cause in Italy. We would like to know whether Palmiro Togliatti's translation of these books has been retranslated into English. “Science in Soviet Culture” by Fr. Wetter, S.J. offers good factual argument against so-called Marxist intellectuals. A penetrating study of the criteriological problems involved is Magnino's “Communist Ideology and the Philosophical Problem of Truth.”

It is to be regretted that the book contains no index. An index seems to be especially necessary in a work of this kind, in order that the reader may make future reference to lines of argument that offer promise for further study.

ARTHUR A. WEISS

---

SIDNEY HILLMAN, STATESMAN OF AMERICAN LABOR. By Matthew Josephson. Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City, N.Y. pp. 670. \$5.00

Mr. Josephson has given us a grand big book, 670 pages in all, but there is not a dull page in the lot. The reader will be rewarded richly, whether he seeks a warm human story, an excellent running history of major trends in industrial relations in America through all the years from 1909 to 1945, or an object

lesson in how Capital and Labor must work together here in the Philippines if we are to make our economic order work.

As a human story there is more than enough to go around. It is not surprising that Sidney Hillman could spend almost every waking minute of his adult life working in one way or another for the improvement of the living conditions of working people. Before he was twenty years of age this Hebrew of Russian nationality knew arrest and prison for the crime of protesting inhuman conditions under which his fellow townsmen were forced to work.

Born in a Lithuanian village, March 23, 1887, Sidney Hillman was guided by his parents into a school for future Rabbis. But it seems that the world of wages and hours, of sweating workers and a labor movement that had to operate as the darkest kind of conspiracy, in secret, for fear of government agents, stole his heart from the beginning. He left the rabbinical school and took a job as general cleanup man and errand boy to a chemist. But he ran too for the underground labor movement, and at the age of seventeen was thrown into prison and tortured for leading a procession to voice the worker's complaints. Released after some four months of prison life, he resumed his activities directly for labor, and indirectly for the Social Democrats and political change. Prison caught up with him again and only the Czar's proclamation of amnesty in 1905 freed him. Twice imprisoned and now wanted again by the police, still only nineteen years of age, this amazing fellow had to take a false passport and flee first to Germany, then to England, and in 1907 he sailed for the United States. On board the steamship with him were thousands of immigrants, most of whom would melt into the American industrial machine scarcely to be heard of again. But Sidney Hillman never quite melted into any background.

Starting as just another non-English-speaking immigrant in the Chicago clothing industry for Sears Roebuck at \$8.00 a week he was to be in late years the recipient of a note:

I cannot delay longer telling you how deeply I appreciate the splendid job you did from start to finish. Hope to see you soon. Affectionate regards,

The signature was that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the "splendid job" Sidney Hillman did was the vigorous organization of the labor vote behind President Roosevelt in the 1944 presidential elections. He was at that time chief figure in organized labor's political action committee. His importance as a national figure was recognized by the fact that the Republican Party made his influence on Roosevelt a campaign issue of the first magnitude. By that time he could look back through thirty-five years which had seen his first effort to organize a few dozen fellow workers

in Chicago, blossom into the powerful and responsible Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. With Philip Murray, John Lewis and others he had organized the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and had nursed his own union through depression years, attacks from organized gangland, deaths on the picket line, into the highly respected union of today, which includes practically all the workers in the men's clothing industry, runs its own Amalgamated Banks and operates housing developments and other social services for its 350,000 members. His last great effort to establish world-wide labor organization was to come upon unhappy days. The World Federation of Trade Unions, which Hillman helped to establish, quickly became a political tool of Soviet Communism and has now been disowned by responsible trade-union leaders all over the world. But that was an unhappy ending never intended or foreseen by Sidney Hillman. Death came to Sidney Hillman according to the pattern of his life, all in a rush. He suffered a heart attack brought on by years of unbelievably intense activity, and died within a few hours at his Long Island home on July 10, 1946, only fifty-nine years old but with a body worn through to complete exhaustion.

The book contains so much rich material on the impact of Sidney Hillman upon the American labor movement that a few observations will have to suffice. Through the years Hillman built what is probably the nearest thing to a vocational group or industry council (the organic structure of employer and worker cooperation advocated in the Papal Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pope Pius XI) in close cooperation with enlightened employers of the men's clothing industry. What is notable is that it was very often Sidney Hillman who enlightened the employers, even in respect to that which was good for the employers themselves. The men's clothing industry is now a highly integrated entity, self-disciplined in the interest of owners, workers and the common good, by a regulating board made up of equal numbers of representatives of owners and workers with a neutral chairman mutually chosen and mutually recompensed by owners and workers. This board (and many similar smaller boards on plant and regional levels) sets standards of compensation for the many operations involved in the manufacture of men's suits and coats. It has, as always desired by Hillman himself, taken "the laboring man out of competition" and put competition where it belongs, in styling, efficient management, sales efficiency and quality. There has not been a major strike in the men's clothing industry for the past thirty years. The record is all the more to be marvelled at when one recalls that the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America was born in bitter strife after the turn of the century with year-long strikes, and violent repression employed by employers through the police fully backed by court injunctions.

Perhaps the best symbol of the solid progress that has been made can be found in this. In 1918 employer Jeremiah Hickey would not even stay in the same room with Hillman. Government war-time negotiators trying to settle the labor dispute between them had to dash back and forth between the room occupied by Hillman as the representative of labor and that occupied by Hickey and other employers. But in 1948 when the National Planning Association, a non-partisan, non-profit group, went in search of cases to illustrate the causes of industrial peace, they chose the relations between Mr. Hickey's Hickey-Freeman Company and Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America as one of their models. The National Planning Association found that,

The class warfare aspect of unionism is missing at Hickey-Freeman. The union identifies its fortunes with those of the industry... The Company accepts the union as naturally as it does the lawyers of the firms with whom it does business. (Causes of Industrial Peace Under Collective Bargaining—Case Study 4, National Planning Association, Washington, D.C.)

The events narrated in Mr. Josephson's book explain why, and Sidney Hillman's absolute honesty and extraordinary genius for human relations make up a large part of that why. Employers themselves paid generous tribute to this man. Through all the years of sometimes critical discussions, no voice was ever raised even to hint that Sidney Hillman had any other interest but a fair deal for all.

In a speech shortly after the settlement of the first Hickey-Freeman dispute, Sidney Hillman said:

A great change has come over this city... For the first time in the history of the Rochester Clothing Industry the employers and the employees are meeting on an equal basis to discuss the grievances of the employees. Not so long ago the rule was autocracy, benevolent autocracy, to be sure, but it was autocracy just the same... The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) desires nothing but peace in the industry. But we want a peace that will be an honorable peace. We don't want a Prussian peace in our shops... At this time when the whole world is bleeding so that freedom and right may prevail, the employer who fights to prevent the organization of workers is stabbing his country in the back... No man can claim to be free unless he has a wage that permits him and his family to live in comfort. (p. 175)

These excerpts give an insight into what Sidney Hillman believed in and religiously adhered to. Workers must be free to organize. Once organized the union must consider the good of the whole industry and must seek peace with the employer. But there must be no "peace at any price" attitude. There must be peace based on justice and mutual respect. For that theory of industrial peace, Sidney Hillman was prepared to fight and did, when necessary.

Along about 1919 Mr. Hillman proposed to the leading clothing manufacturers that they organize all the clothing manufacturers into an employers' union and that, being so organized, they set up with the representatives of the Amalgamated "some sort of national joint council". Even some of his fellow labor-leaders had misgivings and told him so. Mr. Potofsky, lifetime friend and co-worker who later succeeded Hillman as President of the Amalgamated, remembers protesting, "But, Sidney, you are strengthening our enemies. Look what you are doing—why, you are building up a trust, a National Association of Manufacturers in our trade." But Mr. Hillman saw what so few industrialists all over the world seem to see, that it is the task of organized labor and organized employers to meet and set standards for the whole industry, if wholly unprincipled competition and ultimate disaster are to be avoided. He saw that it is a question of voluntary regulation of industry by Capital and Labor for their own and the general good, the alternative being complete confusion or some form of undesirable State dictation.

It is a tribute to the skill of the biographer that the reader is scarcely aware of him at all. It is Sidney Hillman not the author whom the reader meets, comes to know and admires. That is a fine and too often missing quality in a biography. Too often in biographical work the reader gets the disturbing impression that he is reading only what the biographer thinks of the subject or what the biographer thinks the hero of the piece should have thought and done. Mr. Josephson from start to finish tells us who Sidney Hillman was and what he did. Quotations which are gems range throughout the work and let Hillman speak authoritatively on his own views. The amount of research which the book must have involved stirs our admiration for Mr. Josephson. The style is clear and flowing and the reading is easy and pleasant throughout.

In thinking of the social problem as found in the Philippines one cannot help feel that this book is a rich treasure house of applicable ideas and techniques.

Sidney Hillman was essentially a practical engineer of industrial relations. Nowhere in the book is there a clear summary of his social philosophy. That is probably not the author's fault. It is doubtful if Mr. Hillman himself ever thought his way through to an architectonic view of life or of industrial relations as part of that life. He rather worked from day to day with certain sound postulates, the dignity of the individual, the crying need for justice supported by logical organization. He was impatient with the Socialists who tried to fit every event into their Utopian outlook. He fought the Communists in his own union to a standstill and to eventual complete defeat. The book brings the reader close enough to Hillman to make the reader sorry that such a fine man never seems to have benefited by the warmth and inspiration of religion.

His practical outlook seems to have been a fervent and unselfish love of his fellowman, a zealous energetic devotion to improving man's condition on earth. One wishes that there could have been someone, a first lieutenant perhaps, to bring Sidney Hillman into contact with the warm vibrant teachings of the Papal Encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Hillman found by trial and error much that is advocated by the Popes. It would have been so much finer for him and for all his workers, if he had also the solid foundation of the dignity of man as a child of God. He would have been so much more comforted and supported in time of trial, if he knew that the solidarity which he so earnestly sought finds thrilling justification in the doctrine that all men are sharers in the same brotherhood of Christ, that an understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ gives so much more meaning to labor unions and industry councils. But alas, Catholic leaders who could have supplied Sidney Hillman with these dynamic realities, simply did not exist, not at that time in the clothing industry. Despite the fact that *Rerum Novarum* was sent to all the Catholic world in 1891, sixteen years before Sidney Hillman landed in New York, its saving teachings remained unknown to most Catholics. One watches the great accomplishments with a certain sense of sadness. The things he did were fine things, things which badly needed doing and he did them well. He could have done them with so much more inspiration if Catholics had been available in the labor movement to show him that all the things he was trying to do are dear to the heart of God and dear to the heart of Holy Mother Church. Had there been such, the very real gains which Mr. Hillman made for justice would also have brought the people nearer to the Heart of Christ into the bargain.

WALTER B. HOGAN

---

**BRAIN-WASHING IN RED CHINA:** The Calculated Destruction of Men's Minds. By Edward Hunter. The Vanguard Press, New York. 1951. pp. viii-311. \$3.50.

**NO SECRET IS SAFE:** Behind the Bamboo Curtain. By Mark Tennien of Maryknoll. With an Introduction by Cardinal Spellman. Farrar, Strauss and Young, New York. 1952. pp. 270. \$3.50

**OUT OF RED CHINA.** By Liu Shaw-Tung. Translated from the Chinese by Jack Chia and Henry Walter. With an Introduction by Dr. Hu Shih, former Chinese Ambassador to the United States. Duell, Sloan and Pearce—Little, Brown and Company, New York. 1953. pp. xxvi - 269. \$4.00