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# Letter to the Department of Justice in Washington, DC from Anna Louise Strong in Seattle, Dec. 14, 1917

Document in DOJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA collection M-1085, reel 934.

December 14, 1917

Department of Justice  
Washington, DC

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to ask if it is in accordance with your accepted policy that your agents, when they have no evidence on which to prefer charges against men, should go out of their way to secure the discharge of individuals against whom some unknown person has made vague and general accusations.

At a meeting of the School Board last night — a board of which I have at present the honor to be a member† — a letter was received from Charles Petrovitsky, acting Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Investigation, calling our attention to Mr. Kilian, professor of German in one of our high schools. This letter charged Mr. Kilian with being a “rabid pro-German” and warned us to “protect ourselves” and see that his “activities and mouthings be curbed.” It went on, however, to state that Mr. Kilian had committed no overt act whatever.

I would not mention this incident were it not



that it appears to be the policy of the representatives of your department in this neighborhood to attempt in this manner to secure the discharge of persons whom they cannot themselves prosecute. I have known several other cases. When approached by the secretary of the Board, they were most discreetly vague as to their source of information regarding Mr. Kilian. In fact, it is quite commonly felt in this vicinity that persons with personal grudges need only call in the Department

of Justice and lodge complaint, in order to make life miserable for the person they complain against.

I am not acquainted with Mr. Kilian myself. I find, however, on inquiry, that he has a son in our navy and a daughter in our Red Cross. He has no use for the Kaiser. He does not want Germany to win. Having, however, been born in Germany, it is not entirely surprising if he entertains the pious hope that the United States may see fit to conclude peace sometime before the entire German people

is completely crushed. Even regarding this matter, however, he has been most discreet in his remarks since war began.

War is an unhappy business. But some depart-

†- Anna Louise Strong (1885-1970), the daughter of a local minister, was elected to the Seattle School Board in 1916. This letter was passed along to the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Investigation on Jan. 3, 1918, according to a date stamp on the document. In March 1918, Strong was recalled from the Seattle School Board by voters in response to her unabashed anti-militarism. Strong thereafter wrote a column for the *Seattle Union Record* called “Our Russian Information Bureau” in 1918-19, publicizing transpiring events in Soviet Russia. She also continued to write free-form political poetry written under the pen name “Anise.”

ments of the government and some officials seem to be acting in a way which promotes unity among the American people, and allays dissension within our borders. I mention especially the President's address regarding our "war-aims," and the various actions of the War Department in connection with exemptions, conscientious objectors, labor standards in filling army contracts.

It has become increasingly evident, however, at least in this vicinity, that the activities of the Department of Justice are doing more than any other one thing to create distrust, suspicion, and dissension among the American people. If the Department were run in the direct interest of Germany, it could not be more effective in that direction. We have had Berild and Peterson, two insignificant persons, thrown into jail for 80 and 100 days respectively, brought to trial, and when the jury disagreed, held for another trial; only at last to have the case thrown out, on motion of the District Attorney, because there was no evidence. If there was no evidence, why this expensive prosecution, and this deprivation of liberty?

We had a round up of so-called "anarchists," which covered the front page of our local paper, leading timid citizens to believe that 100 "anarchists" had been apprehended, who were plotting to murder the President. The men were held incommunicado, and not even their names or alleged crimes were allowed to be given out. Little by little, however, it began to be discovered by labor unions here that wives of good union men were wondering whether their husbands had met with foul play or had been secretly imprisoned in some raid by the Department of Justice. It is even alleged in union circles that the persons thus secretly held were merely the subscribers to a certain Italian revolutionary paper, together with a group of ig-

norant Russians, meeting in a class to learn to read and write English. I have not investigated these facts myself, but I do know that one by one, some of these men are being let out, and that no one is allowed to have information concerning the number still held or the charges against them.

On another occasion the papers gave prominence to the discovery of a box of dynamite fuse, and District Attorney Clay Allen made much of it in an interview, and attributed it to IWW plots against the city. Yet a rancher was willing to state in writing that the fuse belonged to him, and had been bought cheaply at an auction to blow up stumps with.

Wild accusations and attempts to injure persons and organizations who cannot be prosecuted because of lack of evidence does not tend to create confidence in the government. There is, in fact, among the working people of this district, widespread distrust and fear, and the belief that on any grounds, or on no grounds, any one of them may at any moment be arrested, secretly imprisoned, and dealt with according to the good pleasure of the authorities. I know myself, for instance, that the moment this letter of mine is referred to the Seattle office, you will doubtless be told that I am unbalanced, or wildly pro-German, or that some other accusation will be made against me. And yet it is my hope that somewhere in your department I may reach some person who sincerely desires to create within this country the unity of democratic loyalty, rather than the hidden disunion of fear, and who will realize that this method which you are now taking is not the sensible way in which to treat the citizens of a republic.

Very truly yours,

*Anna Louise Strong.*

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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