
Report on the United States, Up to March 20, 1923. [Selections]

by Israel Amter

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 175, ll. 36-45.

LABOR MOVEMENT

indictment in the Michigan affair.

Communist Party.

City Convention of the CP in New York endorsed the CEC resolution by a vote of 34 to 4. Of the 13 delegates elected to the District Convention, 11 support the Party position completely, 2 hesitate. The leader of the opposition in New York was defeated by his own section, where the Lithuanians have the upper hand. The CEC of the Party anticipated no difficulties. (Information has since come that the Party convention unanimously adopted the CEC position — which means the practical liquidation of the underground party in America). It might be added that the Russians, Ukrainians, South Slavs, Jewish, Hungarians, Germans, Italians, and Lettish [Latvian] comrades supported the CEC. The Finns had long been for the open party. The Lettish comrades thought that the CEC was a little too hasty in liquidating the underground.

Workers Party.

The work is proceeding well. Up to date 300,000 [copies] of the Party program have been distributed.

The trial of the comrades in St. Joseph, Michigan, of course was a sensation and promises to have great effect on the labor movement as a whole (Special section on trial). Com. A. Wagenknecht, who attended the June and January conferences of the “Internationale Arbeiterhilfe” in Berlin, and who is a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party, was arrested at his home, charged with forging a passport. He has been released on bail. He is also under

United Front.

The Workers Party has issued a call to all unions, proletarian parties, fraternal organizations, farmers’ political and economic organizations for a united front on the questions of: amalgamation, protection of the foreign-born workers, international labor movement, recognition of Soviet Russia, removal of governmental obstacles to the development of the workers’ and working farmers’ movement. It issued a manifesto to the Farmer-Labor Party, Socialist Party, Socialist Labor Party, Proletarian Party, and the trade unions to unite for demonstrations on May Day.

Irish and Negroes.

The Workers Party has started work among the Irish and Negroes. The Negro committee was to report very soon.

N.B. The Party does not agree with the thesis adopted by the Fourth Congress [of the Comintern] on the Negro Problem. It is collecting material to be submitted to the Comintern. The problem consists in developing the social phases: the tenant farmer in the south and the industrial workers in the north.

The Irish campaign is based on the following facts: There is a clash in America between the followers of the [Irish] Free State and of the Irish Republic. The Free State faction is identical with “Tammany Hall,” the notorious job-controlling power of the Democratic Party in New York and to a great extent in the whole country. The Irish workers, the Party reports, are mostly for the Republic. The Party has de-

cided to cooperate with Larkin upon his return to Ireland, a committee having been appointed to confer with him. The Workers Party program for work among the Irish will be circulated among the bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labor, which is largely Irish. The intent is to cause a split among them.

Foreign-Born.

The campaign for the protection of the foreign-born has begun. The Farmer-Labor Party, the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Nebraska Federation of Labor, the Minnesota Federation of Labor, the Trade Union Educational League, and Workers Party have formed a National Committee. The labor organizations supporting the campaign number 425,000 workers. Local conferences are taking place in all parts of the country. There was a splendid meeting in New York to launch the campaign.

New Affiliations to the WP.

The Scandinavian, Czechoslovakian, and Romanian Federations, which were independent, having left the Socialist Party some time ago, have joined the WP. Negotiations are also in progress with the Armenian and Slovakian Federations.

Before the letter which the Comintern addressed to the Proletarian Party arrived in the US, the WP sent an invitation to the Executive Committee of the Proletarian Party to join. Negotiations are reported in progress.

Agrarian.

The Party reports that it has worked out a provisional program and put an organizer into the field.

Workers Party Candidate in Election.

The WP put up a candidate in the local elections in Chicago. The candidate polled 22% of the total vote or <illeg.> votes. The Socialist Party candidate did not receive 15% of the votes in spite of the fact that he was endorsed by the Municipal Voters League, the endorsement being featured by the *Daily News* and the *Tribune* of Chicago. This election shows

what can be done by the Party once it gets into action.

Open Letter to Debs.

The Worker directed an open letter to Debs asking his position on the question of the United Front in the Labor Party, as against the attitude of the Socialist Party in excluding the Workers Party from several conferences, such as New York, St. Louis, Washington, DC, but particularly because of their conduct at the Cleveland conference.

In connection with the above, it is interesting to note that the 58 votes cast for seating the WP delegation to the Labor Party Conference in NY were trade union votes. 88 of the 152 votes against seating them were of the Socialist Party. Eighty-eight seats were many times the valid proportion of seats the SP was entitled to as a result of its numerical strength.

Labor Party.

The Workers Party is part of the Labor Party in Chicago, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Rhode Island. The Trade Union Educational League referendum has been sent out to the 35,000 local trade unions of the country.

Communist Jewish Editor in Court.

Olgin, editor of the *Freiheit*, Jewish organ of the WP, published a letter, in which the charge was made that no militant worker is safe in the Furriers' Union. The writers of the letter gave facts and withheld their name from publication because of fear of being beaten up or expelled. Olgin, however, had the names. The union hailed him to court, demanding that he give the names of the men who said that "workers who criticize officials are not safe with their lives." Olgin refused to give their names, stating that the capitalist court was no place for such matters to be settled, and demanded that the union agree to submit the matter to a Labor Court.

The union, which had brought suit for libel, decided not to press the case. The *New York Call*, the Socialist Party organ, stated that to "confine the question of fact to a labor jury would have been to permit hates and suspicions to grow to fever heat." It declared

that the union performed a “distinct service” in forcing Olgin into court — a capitalist court from which he could not expect to get off so easily.

Subsequently the union denounced Olgin in most scathing terms, stating that he was not even fit to be brought into a capitalist court. It also denounced the “Workers Educational League, which probably is a Communist organization working inside the Furriers Union.”

This affair has created a tremendous stir in the union, which is bound to bear fruit for the Party.

Charges Dropped.

Charges that had been brought against Engdahl and Kruse during the war and for which they were convicted at the same time as Victor Berger for obstructing the war, in 1919, have been dropped. Engdahl and Kruse are members of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party.

Literature.

The Party has issued three more pamphlets: *The American Foreign-Born Worker*, “*Underground Radicalism*”: *An Open Letter to Debs and All Honest Workers*, *Defense in the Bridgman Communist Prosecution* (to be issued).

Russian Film.

A composite film, *Russia Through the Shadows*, is having tremendous success in the US. It is a film showing the progress of the Revolution. At a meeting in New York \$1,800 was collected after an entertainment. The enthusiasm was enormous. It is meeting with similar success in other towns.

Ferment in the Socialist Party.

In the belief that the SP has some good elements that must be induced to start a rebellion against the yellow leadership of the SP — as has been evidenced by...the agenda prepared for the SP convention in May — the WP Executive Committee has decided to have some Party comrades join the SP. They are to carry on their work under the slogans: Amalgamation against

the Leadership of Gompers; 3rd International against the 2nd and 2 1/2 Internationals; Labor Party against participation in primaries of the bourgeois parties.

There is no doubt that this will create a ferment in the SP, which will be noticeable at their convention. The actions of the SP and its press are so conspicuously counterrevolutionary that we should have no trouble in starting a revolt.

Young Workers League.

The Young Workers League, the legal organization of the youth organization, will have a convention on May 12 [1923]. They are organizing shop groups, which will one day supplant the local branches as the unit of the Party. There are 3,000 children in groups and schools under the leadership of Communist youth. The Liebknecht celebration was a great success in many towns. There are 41 branches of the League in existence, 2 more are joining every week. The relations with the Party, the Secretary of the League reports, are very good. The YWL convention will affiliate with the Young Communist International, but will retain the name YWL. The sentiment for this step is unanimous.

In Chicago the groups of the YWL are very active. At a meeting preliminary to big organizing work among the students was held with radical and liberal student groups.

In New York, a campaign on child labor has been started by the League. They plan an organized Child Labor Council with the support of the unions and young people’s organizations. During the knit-goods workers strike in New York, they issued their first strike leaflet. It was pronounced very effective.

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The Freiheit.

The Jewish organ of the Workers Party is putting up a splendid fight at the present time. Just now there is a decided offensive on the part of the unions in the needle trades, which are controlled to a great extent by the Socialist Party through their organ the *Jewish Forward*. The unscrupulous leaders of these Jewish unions are being mercilessly exposed by the *Freiheit*, which is leading the fight for the left opposition.

As a result, the fight is taking on big dimensions. Were it not for the paper, however, the Jewish comrades would be unable to wage the struggle that they are. The *Freiheit* is one of the few foreign language papers that the Party has which is an *American* paper.

Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party is quite active. Debs is conducting an apparently successful lecturing tour for the Party. Hillquit has been exceptionally active this winter. In the New York district, the party leaders have been kept on the qui vive by the fight that the Communists are making in the unions.

Socialist-Revolutionaries.

New York Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries — 22 in number — have offered to take the place of the SRs in Russian prisons. They say they are complying with the offer supposedly made by the Soviet government through a dispatch to German papers, the author of which is presumably Krylenko. They publish a letter sent by the SR group in Berlin to Krylenko, in which the practices and justice of Soviet Russia are condemned but in which they offer to act as hostages. The New York SRs were reported to be picking out the men to send.

Farmer-Labor Party.

The Farmer-Labor Party is conducting a referendum on the question of holding a convention of the party in July. If the referendum is carried, an invitation will be sent to all labor, farm, and political groups to effect “complete unity of political forces of the entire working class.” It is obviously the intention of the Farmer-Labor Party to make itself the nucleus of the Labor Party which is in the making. In doing so, the FLP is estranging the major labor organizations, such as the miners and railroad men, without whose help the Labor Party will be a farce.

Labor Party.

Labor candidates capture the town of Rochester, Minnesota. This is the first time that they have a

clear majority. The workers have partial success in other Minnesota towns. These elections show that independent political action is taking hold.

In Los Angeles, California, the machinists, remarking that candidates endorsed by unions already have the approval of capitalist groups opposed to organized labor, are now demanding that the machinists favor a Labor Party. There is no doubt that the experiences that the workers are now passing through will open their eyes to the necessity of a Labor Party.

Foster Trial.

Just before the trial of Foster was to begin, the Republican County Convention in Berrien County, Michigan took place. At this county convention, Judge White, who was to try Foster and the other 21 defendants, was renominated as judge. The convention also adopted a resolution condemning “red” activities. At the same time, the local American Legion Post also held a meeting at which they demanded a fair trial for the “reds” but denounced them for their subversive propaganda. The purpose was clear: to create an antagonistic atmosphere which would positively condemn the comrades.

As a result a motion was made for change of venue, that is that the case could be tried before a different judge and jury that would not be so prejudiced. As a matter of course, the motion was denied.

Just preliminary to the trial, 10 other comrades who were under indictment also for attending the convention voluntarily surrendered, and were allowed to be at liberty to procure their bail, which was placed at \$1,000 each. In comparison with the \$10,000 and \$5,000 demanded for the others and the mistreatment that they suffered, it was clear that a change of policy had taken place.

Just before the trial began, the Workers Party Central Executive Committee issued a statement to the effect that the defendants would repudiate the idea that spies engineered the convention, drafted the resolutions, etc. This would indicate that [lead defense attorney Frank P.] Walsh’s line of attack and defense was rejected by the CEC of the Party. It evidently was Walsh’s intention to prove that the Department of Justice had entrenched itself in the Party to such an extent that it had provoked this convention at which it

made a raid. According to American law, if it can be proven that a man commits a crime at the instigation of an officer of the law, he cannot be convicted for the crime.

This had been Walsh's intention when taking the testimony of the spy Ballin, but it was understood that he would change the policy. Evidently he did not do so, so that the CEC of the Party had formally to force him to do so.

The procurement of the jury elicited many startling questions on the part of the counsel for the defense, a Mr. [Humphrey S.] Gray, a liberal lawyer and banker of St. Joseph, Mich. "Would you be prejudiced against the defendant if it appeared in the evidence that he believed that no great social changes have been achieved in past history without a resort to force, and that it was his belief that when a majority of the workers and farmers of the United States demand a change which will abolish the private ownership of the industries of the nation by the capitalists, though they are in the majority, this change will not be achieved without a resort to force, because the capitalists will not give up their privileges without a struggle, although the defendant does not advocate any act of force or violence now?"

As the juror thought he might be prejudiced, the lawyer answered: "Then you believe that the Declaration of Independence should be suppressed because it advocates the fundamental right of the people to revolution, if necessary by force?"

When he offered to read a letter by Thomas Jefferson on the subject, it was objected to by the prosecution, who stated: "We object to getting the influence of Thomas Jefferson on the minds of this jury."

Three counts (i.e. charges) were dropped by the state against Foster, so that he stood under but one charge: that of participating in a conference having as its program to overthrow the government.

After great difficulty, a jury composed of nine farmers, one grocery man, a non-union railroad man, and a housewife was procured. There is very little industry in the neighborhood. The atmosphere, as a consequence, was very conservative. The lawyers for the defense were the well-known labor lawyer, Frank P. Walsh and a banker of Benton Harbor, Michigan, who, being also an attorney, got interested in the case — as a matter of "rights" guaranteed by the constitution of

the US — and despite the opposition of the Board of Directors of the bank, undertook the case together with Walsh.

It was clear from the beginning that the defense would admit that it was a Communist Party convention but that the Communists had a perfect right to meet. They would declare that they had the right to assemble and discuss problems of the working class.

Walsh in his opening statement spoke of the raids on the Communists in January 1920, which drove the party underground. More than 6,000 men and women were arrested. The purpose of the convention was to bring the party once more into the open, he declared, as a legal party. The evidence would prove that the secret service agent, [Francis] Morrow, cast the deciding vote that kept the party an illegal party. The decision was later reversed by a New York Conference, at which the Communist Party was disbanded and the Workers Party took its place, he contended.

The prosecution made the usual charge of intent to overthrow the government, institution of a dictatorship, etc. He said that the Herrin "mirders" were lauded and the workers were advised "to take their guns and close down those scab mines and paralyze state machinery by military action." He said he would prove that "money from Russian sources financed in a large measure, if not entirely, the expenses of the convention."

The spy testified that Foster attended the convention as the industrial organizer of the Communist Party. He gave details of the proceedings, and gave all names correctly. He told about "Arnold Losovsky and two others representing the Comintern" being present.

As the man is not a very intelligent fellow, it is evident that he has been coached and his memory primed for the event.

Just about the time of the trial, a message of sympathy came from Japanese workers who had heard of the trial.

It was obvious that the trial would be quite lengthy. Reports occupy the front page of the capitalist papers.

Larkin Forbidden to Enter Canada.

Jim Larkin, who was to make a speech in Canada, was held up at the border and not allowed to enter, on

the grounds that he is an “undesirable.” When asked if he is a British subject, he answered: “Of course not, I am a citizen of the Irish Republic.”

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Strikes.

This period has been marked by the continuance of the offensive on the part of the workers, who are demanding higher wages. This particularly so in the needle trades and textile industry. In some cases, the workers have received increases without a striking or threatening striking. The manufacturers realize that they will have to raise wages or lose their workers. This is due to a great extent to the demand for labor, small immigration, and the starting of the open air industries....

There are two organizations fighting for the leadership of the workers — the Textile Council, which is a federation of several craft organizations and the United Textile Workers of America, which is affiliated with the AF of L.

Wage Increases.

Wage increases have been granted to the textile workers in Rhode Island. The American Woolen Co., which has 60 mills, employing 36,000 workers, voluntarily increased the wages 12.5%.

Coal Industry.

The attorney for the United Mine Workers had informed the employers that the miners would accept a wage cut. The officials of the UMWA officially repudiated his statement and declared that under no circumstances would they accept a reduction. The UMWA declares that the wage at the present time is only \$700. The bituminous [soft coal] agreement runs till April 1924, but the anthracite [hard coal] expires in August 1923. This is supposed to be a warning.

District #26 of Canada denounced Lewis, President of the UMWA for his stand against the Red Labor International. They ask him further to prove that the RILU aims to destroy the unions.

Howat declares that he will not work for the formation of another miners' union, but, on the contrary, will fight for reinstatement. He says the officials have control of the publicity channels but that he will fight it out at the next convention of miners.

The UMWA informed the National Coal Association that it would assist it in running down those who dynamited the mines in Western Pennsylvania. In making this announcement, the editor of the *Mine Workers' Journal* added that the Communists are trying to injure the mine workers' organization openly and by boring from within.

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Syndicalist Laws.

The Michigan State Federation of Labor has denounced the [Michigan] syndicalist law as a piece of class legislation against labor and pronounces it of the most vicious type. It also points out that the law comes under the heading of “strikes” in the code.

The Central Trades and Labor Council of New York has demanded an investigation of Burns for the use of public office and funds for illegal purposes.

Labor Trials.

In the second trial at Herrin, Illinois, as a result of the killing of 22 non-union miners, proof will be adduced that the real murderers were the armed guards who brought with them instruments of death and destruction.

Eight IWW have been convicted of Criminal syndicalism in Los Angeles. They put up a physical fight in the courtroom, declaring that they were not given a fair trial. They were overpowered and removed.

Sacco.

Sacco, co-defendant with Vanzetti in the famous trial in Massachusetts, went on a 30 day hunger strike in order to force the government to grant him a new trial. He was forcibly fed, and finally consented to take food.

Two important witnesses in the trial state that they were forced to recant their statement against Sac-

co-Vanzetti under duress. One of them was down and out; the other, a woman, was threatened with the exposure of her past life.

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IWW.

Elmer J. Smith, attorney for the IWW in Centralia [Washington], was prevented from speaking in Centralia. He opened the meeting by [reading] the first amendment to the Constitution of the US, whereupon the meeting was closed by police. It was evidently a notice to the IWW that freedom of speech does not exist in Centralia.

The IWW have made a vicious attack upon Soviet Russia, alleging that Socialist Russia, as the official organ of the IWW, *Industrial Solidarity*, calls it "has made an alliance... *<balance of article illegible>*

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KKK.

The indictment of the KKK by the grand jury in the Mer Rouge case in Louisiana failed. The Attorney General declared he will prefer charges against 45 accused persons.

It is asserted that there are 76,000 KKK members in New York City, comprising policemen, detectives, judges, etc.

Junior KKK.

A circular found in Brooklyn shows a plan to organize Junior KKK. In some circles the whole thing

is ridiculed.

Italian Fascisti in the US.

The Italians have formed a Fascist movement in the US. They call on the workers to join the labor unions and to perform the work there that the Fascisti in Italy have done. At a certain meeting, they were called upon to fight Bolshevism. The Italian ambassador at Washington has warned them to be law-abiding and states that he will have nothing to do with the movement. The organization must be non-political and contain only the "best elements."

The Italian population of the US has split up on the question of Fascism in the United States. The labor movement is organizing against the movement.

Carlo Tresca, a well-known Italian anarchist, is taking a prominent part in the anti-Fascisti campaign. At an anti-Fascisti meeting in Lawrence, Massachusetts, a Communist speaker was attacked by an Italian-American mob. A big fight ensued.

The anti-campaign is starting in New York. Money is to be raised also for the fight against the Fascisti in Italy. The Communists are taking a leading part.

Unquestionably the Fascist movement will gain great headway. Although it is clearly illegal in its intention and structure, the American government is doing nothing to prevent its growth and activity. There is merely the wish being expressed by the press that they should not become too violent. The Fascisti have adopted patriotic slogans, which are bound to win them immunity.

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Edited by Tim Davenport.

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