

A Significant Letter

(THE LETTER OF S. J. RUTGERS TO L. MARTENS)

Attorney General Palmer, who, in his anxiety to become President of the United States, leaves no stone unturned, made public recently, a copy of a letter from S. J. Rutgers, a member of the Executive Committee of the Amsterdam Bureau of The Third-Communist-International to L. Martens, the head of the Russian Soviet Bureau in America. This copy came into his hands through some mysterious, police-provocateur means.

In view of the fact that the contents of this letter ceased to be a secret, having become immediately upon Palmer's announcement the property of the whole bourgeois press, the Communist deems it permissible and necessary to break the wall of silence on this question, strictly observed by it until now, and to bring this letter to the attention of the comrades. This is all the more necessary because some previous letters from Russia, dealing with the same question in a somewhat different light—more favorable to Comrade Martens—were rather willingly and quickly made public both by Comrade Martens himself and by other official and semi-official and entirely unofficial sources of the Soviet Bureau.

It is not altogether out of place to mention here that not only some letters defending the position of Comrade Martens, but the whole question in its entirety as to the disagreements between Comrade Martens and the revolutionary Socialist organizations in America, long ago, with the able assistance of Comrade Weinstein, became the property of the street. This question was treated and "commented" upon by everybody not only in the pages of the slanderous sheet "The Socialist" (an organ of Gerber, Waldman, Tuvim and Co.) and New York "Pravda" (Russian organ of Weinstein and Co.), but even in the pages of the bourgeois press and in various Government-Senate, Lusk and other committees.

Only the Communist, Novy Mir and other Communist organs consistently maintained silence, because their position on this question was such that they could not deal with this question openly in the only dignified way—on principle and not merely in slandering of personalities—without risking the accusation of "divulging secrets of the Soviet Bureau" or "carrying on counter-revolutionary propaganda..." Now that the question is no longer a secret further silence would have no justification whatever...

For the present we will limit our article to the reprint of Comrade Rutgers' letter with the necessary comment.

This letter is all the more interesting because its author—a noted worker in the International Communist movement, a recent co-worker with Comrade Leon Trotsky in America and together with whom he founded the "Class Struggle," the first revolutionary Socialist magazine in English published in this country, and who later occupied a responsible position in Soviet Russia under the Soviet Government—not only knew Comrade Martens personally but was instrumental in his appointment as the head of the Bureau.

It is unnecessary to add that in this letter, Comrade Rutgers expresses not his personal opinion but the opinions prevalent in the official bodies of the Communist International; not only the official and responsible position of Comrade Rutgers in the Communist International but, as the reader will see further, a resolution on this and allied subjects passed at the recent conference of the Amsterdam Bureau supports this contention.

The following is the letter of Comrade Rutgers, as it appeared in the N. Y. World of April 15th (second morning edition).

The Letter of Comrade Rutgers.

"From your activities it was clearly demonstrated that you consider commercial representation and efforts for recognition paramount. Chicherin and other comrades agreed with this position. Although in nominating you, your capacity as engineer was not even mentioned or thought of. Your supposed clear conception of uncompromising Communist principles decided that you and not Weinstein was preferable.

"As far as commercial relations go, I had the good time of my life, when you started off rattling with millions and arousing some attention and some profit lust. As a beginning it was not a bad stunt but in my opinion you went much too far and were carried away by concentrating on the wrong side of the issue.

"Proposing commercial deals could very well have been left off until conditions could allow actual shipping. Such technicalities do not require much time. As a method to arouse interest in commercial centers, your very presence and some vague rumors about what is required and what can be given in exchange would have been enough; you could never expect to gain more or less detailed negotiations that even from a narrow point of view would arouse special individual interests instead of more general.

"Pressure From the Workers."

The efforts for recognition were of course more important and I understand that this is the crucial point for all your deeds. For I decidedly side with Nic. Hourwich; the main force in

recognition had to be the pressure from the workers.

"All your hope either on small bourgeois individuals or parties like the S. P., artistic and political pacifists and middlemen is not only unfounded but contrary to well-established tactics. You will reply that it was not at all impossible that United States should make peace for capitalistic reasons without any pressure from the workers, and you may even have felt that in a certain situation an (insufficient) pressure to force things was detrimental to a capitalist peace. This, however, I consider opportunism of the worst kind.

"In the first place it is childish to think that if world political considerations caused the United States to make 'peace' your efforts could be of any considerable influence. In such a situation your half-baked radicals would not need your help to support and glorify Wilson, and it would be your duty as I see it, not to canvas Senators, etc., but to mobilize whatever forces there are among the workers to influence the kind of 'peace' and still more to use the situation for strengthening the American movement, because even in such a case ('peace' for purely capitalist reasons) result of peace depends upon the force of Labor all over the world.

"Peace" may even result in killing the revolution temporarily, if this is the signal for the world proletariat to stop whatever action is under way, for 'peace' means, of course, simply another form of fighting the Soviet Republic to the bitter end, with all crimes imaginable.

"All kinds of neutral diplomatic position looks to be an impossibility and a failure, although the appearance might have to be guarded for utilitarian reasons. But I understand that you did not stick to this position of neutrality and gave your sympathies decidedly more to the 'Centrists' with animosity toward the C. P. I will appreciate to learn more about the leading principles actuating you in these unfortunate conflicts with our most consequent comrades. Although your direct relation is with the Soviet Government, the matter involved no doubt touches the interests of the Communist International.

With best greetings and wishes, yours for the cause."

(Signature of Comrade Rutgers follows.)

The above letter is the final act in the conflict that has been brewing for a long time between Comrade Martens and the revolutionary organizations in America—a conflict which began from the first day of the appointment of Comrade Martens as Soviet representative and which during the early stages was confined to differences between Comrade Martens and Russian revolutionary Socialist organizations in this country and which later developed into a great struggle on principle of supreme importance. Into this struggle were gradually drawn all Left Wing Socialist and later Communist organizations of America; this was the very first source of disagreement and friction within the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party and indirectly, became one of the reasons of its splitting into Communist and "Centrist" camps.

The substance of the struggle on principle, which, during the whole year agitated the ranks of the Russian Communist Federations and the Communist Party of America is well-known to our comrades: it is a question of relations between the organs of proletarian dictatorship—Soviet Government institutions and the Communist International with its organs and branches in the various countries—the spiritual leader and inspirer of the revolutionary proletariat, and which first placed before them, as an immediate practical slogan, the very idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

What should be these relations? Comrade Rutgers in his letter says: "For I decidedly side with Nic. Hourwich..." Let us see how this point of view was formulated.

More than a year ago, during the first days after the appointment of Comrade Martens, before he even started his activities, when on the political horizon of the relations between him and local revolutionary Socialist organizations everything was peaceful and harmonious, and there were no indications of future storms, Nicolas Hourwich in an article in the N. Y. Communist, April 19th, 1919 (organ of the

* This struggle is by no means a purely local product developing exclusively under American conditions, and relations, as our slander-specialists would like to represent it. That this struggle has a universal character, based upon principles, — whatever the external forms of its expression are— and that it found expression even in Soviet Russia itself—is evidenced in an article by V. Sorin entitled "Communist Party and Soviet Institutions," which first appeared in the Moscow "Communist" and later was reprinted in this country in the Novy Mir and in the Communist. We urge the comrades to reread this very instructive article in the light of this discussion.

Left Wing of the Socialist Party) entitled "Problems of the Representative of Soviet Russia in America" wrote:

"Not for a single moment do we doubt the great importance of the purely 'diplomatic,' so to say, activity here of the Soviet representative. Still less are we inclined to doubt the magic power of the Russian gold—the influence of this gold on the minds and disposition of American plutocracy has already manifested itself in a most obvious manner. But, with all due allowances, giving due justice to all this, we should like to sound a warning to the American workers—and to Comrade Martens himself—against an undue exaggeration of the importance of his purely diplomatic-commercial functions here. We would consider it a fatal mistake if purely diplomatic-commercial 'efforts' become the centre of his activity.

And further: "Comrade Lenin has stated that the final triumph or the ruin of the Proletarian Revolution in Russia depends on WHETHER THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OF THE PROLETARIAT AND PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES WILL COME TO ITS ASSISTANCE. And in this phrase one finds the KEY FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION!

"Under present-day political conditions, the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries is the main thing, is the center of gravitation, is everything—both for proletarian Russia and for the emancipation of the proletariat of all the world. The success or failure of the proletarian movement, THE STRENGTH OF THE BOLSHEVIST MOVEMENT, in countries ruled by capitalism, is at the present moment a barometer of the 'favorable,' or openly hostile, attitude of capitalist government towards Soviet Russia.

"The establishment of commercial intercourse between Russia and capitalist countries, with all its intrinsic advantage for the economic life of Russia, is on her side to a certain degree similar to the signing of the Brest Litovsk treaty, merely a means to 'gain time.'

"All the foregoing, in our opinion, tends to indicate a 'line of behaviour' for the revolutionary, Socialist organizations of the American proletariat, as well as for Comrade Martens as the representative of the Russian Soviet Government.

"The center of his attention, the ever-constant 'compass' directing his activity here, should be the interests of the revolutionary Socialist movement among the American Proletariat, the interests of the advance-guard, the hope and guarantee of the success of that movement—THE LEFT WING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY.

"We are fully aware that in his manifold activities he may not always, or even frequently, be in a position to act UNDER THE BANNER of the Left Wing; but he should take great care that his attitude does not provide 'bait' for the Right and 'Moderate' social organizations, thereby unconsciously to 'stab in the back' the only bulwark and hope of proletarian Russia—those whom it invites to its International Communist Congress—the Left Socialist Wing."

Compare the above-quoted conclusions and recommendations with those formulated a year later in Comrade Rutgers' letter and note the striking similarity...

Comrade Sorin in his article in the Moscow "Communist" previously alluded to, draws the very same conclusions, from an analysis of the very same question in substance, though transplanted from a foreign to what would appear a more favorable soil, Russia itself. But Comrade Sorin formulates his conclusions even more sharply and definitely: "The party, which is comparatively safer from demoralization, should strengthen its control over the Soviet factions and place Soviet officials under its control and supervision... The Communist Party is, always and everywhere, superior to the Soviets."

Such similarity in opinions and conclusions is not a mere coincidence. All these conclusions and opinions, expressed by different people at different times and different places were dictated, essentially, by Communist thought. On this question, this was the only possible Communist conclusion!

A year ago the N. Y. Communist made a "diagnosis" of the situation and prescribed for the "patient," Comrade Martens, just what his political course should be and what "diet" he should follow. A year later, another "physician"—Comrade Rutgers—is compelled to call attention to a serious "disease" which had developed because the "patient" had not followed instructions and "diet" prescribed for him.

Had Comrade Martens followed the Communist advice given to him a year ago, had he guided himself in his activities first and foremost by the interest of the world Communist movement in its entirety,—he would have escaped those fatal mistakes and errors, those humiliations and compromises, which did not help him to accomplish even those very modest and limited aims which he had set out to accomplish, but which, on the contrary, greatly harmed the American Communist movement slinging into his ranks, and into the minds of its members, the greatest disorganization and demoralization. This is exactly what we predicted and we are sure, he is himself convinced of now.

We do not mean to say that if he had adopted the Communist method that his "immediate demands" would have been accomplished by this time. Oh, no! We are far removed from such an assumption! We do not dobt for a single instant that if his (Comrade Martens') activity had been more striking, aggressive (we do not speak of its revolutionary character) and more consistent, if at times,

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* And certainly to the Soviet Bureaus, we must also add.