

# LETTERS FROM THE MILITANTS

## AN OPPOSITIONIST IN BERLIN

Berlin, Germany.

Dear Comrades:

The Party is facing a pretty serious situation. Based on Thaelmann's estimation of the revolutionary ripeness of conditions, the party press is developing ever more and more a "barrikadenphilosophie". At the other end, the social democracy, Seewering, Zoergiebel and Co., are more than meeting the fighting manifestoes of the Rote Fahne half way. After the general appeal of the party against the prohibition of the Red Front Fighters, the R. F. wrote that "all that the masses need is arms" and the police would be beaten to bits. At the Red October demonstration in Lustgarten the police answered with fighting cordons of Schupo (police) ready to attack. The nervousness of the police and the increasing boldness of the R. F. lead many outsiders to believe that the party has something up its sleeve, especially since it openly and daringly quotes Lenin's letter of September 17.

But from all that is apparent, the organizational weakness of the party can be felt. The party lost the cable-layers' strike, it failed to organize a militant resistance to the reduction of unemployment insurance and has not at all reacted on the Young Plan. I can't put my finger on anything definite, but witnessing demonstrations and meetings gives me the impression that the German Communist Party is not prepared for the task it seems to have set out for itself. I hope I have a wrong impression.

To add to this, there are the scandals in which party leaders or former leaders have had a hand. This doesn't increase—so say the least—the confidence of the masses in the party. Outside of that there is the struggle in the leadership itself. Neumann and Remmele vs. Thaelmann. A temporary truce seems to have been established but the whole affair breathes ill omens.

Brandler is developing along the lines indicated by comrade Trotsky in his various letters. He has established pretty firm connections with the Czecho-Slovakian, the French (Alsace-Lorraine) and the Austrian Rights, no doubt with Lovestone too. The strength of the Brandlerists here in Berlin is negligible. In the province there may be a different story. Thaelmer is making a great play for the shaky elements among the party members and the left social democrats with his "national program", which is an opportunist reform platform slightly favored with Leninist phrases. In contrast to the Stalinists, who call it the party of Lenin, the Brandlerists speak of the party of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. This seems significant to me. There lies a grain of their opportunist aims. Further, they bring forth the point that they mean to follow Lenin "in spirit", i. e., the "spirit" of Leninism, not its words (as—they saw—the Stalinists do, with their long quotations).

M. N. Roy is their Comintern expert. He writes long and demagogical articles, as equivocal as can be, about the leadership in the C. I. and the C. P. S. U., about democratic centralization, organizational problems, etc. On the first point, he is willing to give the C. P. S. U. a "place of honor" in the C. I. and nothing more. He begins by saying that the C. P. S. U. is quite correct in its line in Russia, only to end up with the old Bucharinist arguments about the collapse of the financial system, etc.

On the second point, he speaks of each party "working out its own national problems and the collective elaboration of the international problems," which means leaving a minimum of points for a program of international action, or a revival of the pre-war Second International. Number three: he thinks that since the parties, according to Platnitsky's last report, have not been able up to now to build their organizations on a factory nucleus system, they will never be able to do so and ought to give up the idea—which would make room for a broad opportunist policy in the trade unions.

Most generally, the writers in Gegen den Strom (Brandlerist central organ) draw the analogy between the crisis in the First International before its disruption and the present crisis in the Comintern. They seem to predict that just as the First International broke up because of anarchism, the Third will break up because of the ultra-Leftism of the present line which, they say, is akin to anarchism. Then they go on to speak of decades of peaceful growth and the need of mass parties "for which the Second International was founded" and so on.... The birth of the Fourth

International? By the dialectical fates it is thus willed! Already Hausen wants the slogan to be issued: We must become THE party and Thaelmer may shout ten times: "We are only a tendency (richtung) in Communism, but the little speculation about where the present line may end" breathes unmistakably with Hausen's words and spirit.

There is much to write about the Leninbund, but at present I'll confine myself to a few points.

From all appearance, the Leninbund itself and the International Left wing as well are passing through a severe critical period. In such a period it should be the duty of the various Left leaders to strive for clarification, for precision in theory and tactic. Unfortunately, we get no such picture from the doings in the Leninbund.

Aside from the internal weaknesses there is a lack of sharp demarcation from the Rights. In more than one case, articles in the Volkswille might easily have fitted into Gegen den Strom, especially those articles of a critical nature. But to get back to the internal troubles. The muddled theoretical articles of Urbahns in the Fahne des Kommunismus remind me a great deal of the party discussion in the U.S. before the last convention, where the inge-

nious "apex" and "exceptionalism" theories were ingeniously balled up. The same sort of hash is served us by Urbahns in his theory of the hybrid state (Zwitterstaat). After the attacks of Trotsky and the Leninbund minority, he has twisted and bent it until it looks like a pretzel. Born to defend the unclear and equivocal position he had taken in the Sino-Russian question, the theory is now the basis of the entire line of the Leninbund majority led by him.

He took Trotsky's theory of the Kerenky up-side-down period as a base. Naturally, we would assume such a period to be one in which government (the representative in this reversed state of the proletariat, as them, the bourgeoisie) is defending "incompetently" the last positions of its class. But Urbahns does not seem to want to think naturally. He leaves Trotsky here and goes back to quote from Lenin against him. Without the slightest understanding and in the best eclectic manner, he draws in the self-evidence argument of Engels, which Lenin discussed in "State and Revolution", viz., that even after the revolution, the classes do not immediately cease to exist, that for a long time the economically stronger class remains the bourgeoisie, because of its international connections, etc.

Combining this with the Marxist theory (in a most blind manner) that the state is the organ of the economically stronger class, he produces his Q. E. D.: Stalin represents the bourgeoisie in truth, but only sways between the classes at present for some mysterious reasons. But if the state is the organ of the economically stronger class, and the bourgeoisie, long after the revolution, necessarily remains the stronger class, we can ask the question, Did not Lenin then also represent the bourgeoisie (in reality!)? Which is what the ultra-Lefts actually claimed at the time of the Nep.

With revolutionary greetings,  
S. GORDON

## STALINIST PROGRESS IN K. C.

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

A few weeks ago a news item was published in the Daily Worker, under the heading "Big Anniversary Meeting in K. C." Among other things in this account, there appeared the following: "One of the biggest and most successful mass meetings ever staged in Kansas City was held on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution." But sadly enough, further on we learn that over one hundred workers attended this tremendous mass meeting. Judging from the ability of the Daily Worker writers and editors to exaggerate, it is a safe guess that there were no more than 80 people present. Had there been over one hundred present the account would have been sure to claim over two hundred.

Allowing for the possible ignorance of the story writer, there is no excuse for the ridiculous claim on the part of the editors. Any worker in or around K. C. whose experience in the movement goes back more than a year or two can recall dozens of mass meetings attended by from 300 to 900 workers. Between 1918 and 1925 there were scores of such meetings. Seldom were there less than 250 present during this period and on several occasions the Labor Temple which seats about 1800 was packed.

Kansas City has a tradition in the movement which is second to none and any worker who took part in these meetings during the above mentioned years will never forget the merciless persecution of our movement by the forces of reaction. There were meetings broken up, arrests, jailings, clubbings and frenzied press articles galore. The K. C. police, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion, the K. K. K., and the press were as one against us. No fiercer or blacker persecution of our movement ever took place anywhere in America. Truly there was a united front of all reactionaries.

Yet, through it all the militant workers of K. C. steadfastly refused to be intimidated. They stood their ground and fought for their rights. And it is well to remark here that these meetings were mostly conducted under the leadership of those who now stand with the Communist League (Opposition).

Under the leadership of the Lovestoneite Holy Rollers, the Party in K. C. not only made no progress but rapidly disintegrated. Evidently, under the leadership of Bill Foster and his latter-day saints, who were selected by Stalin to wear Lovestone's spurs and high boots and who are now clumsily aping Lovestone's methods, the Party there is faring no better when they are compelled in the 9th period to boast of a meeting of a mere handful. The workers of K. C. have voted against Stalinism with their feet. The job of bringing the many hundreds of progressive and radical workers, who have become disgusted with Stalinism, back into contact with the movement remains for the Communist League.

—JOHN MIHELIC.

## WORKING IN GRAND RAPIDS

Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dear Comrades:

It was away from Grand Rapids for a few months. Now I have returned and found many copies of the Militant and your letter awaiting me. I am glad to read the Militant and distribute it among the Party members.

We are trying to work among some Russian comrades. I have found out that a Russian group was expelled from the Party a few years ago. If you will send me some copies of the Russian Bulletin of the Opposition, I am sure it will help us among the Russian workers. They will be able to understand things better in that way than through my explanations.

Fraternally yours,  
FRED. WEDLER

## The Fight of the Chicago Cleaning Shop Workers

In the lockout of 2,500 Chicago union cleaners and dyers, lasting for a period of two weeks, during the month of November, the workers clearly recognized the issue as being the one of the continued life and existence of the union. It therefore becomes a rather sad commentary upon the situation to find these workers lack at their jobs on open shop conditions pending further negotiations. That this could be accepted with nonchalant ease by the officials is, of course, not to be wondered at.

However, one should not forget that after all, even under open shop conditions the union has what the bosses almost look upon as the whip in the ownership of a large cleaning and dyeing plants, the buildings of which are just being completed. Ostensibly this plant and the union president were the issues in the conflict, made to appear so by the bosses as a better public front; but the real issue becomes clear when one understands the struggle as it began in 1927.

### The Bosses' Anti-Union Drive

At that time the bosses started a campaign to crush the union. The union countered with a threat to establish its own co-operative plant and began active preparations to sell stock to its own members and to those of other Chicago unions. The bosses changed front and signed an agreement granting the workers the 44-hour week with a guaranteed seven months' employment per year, also agreeing to give one week's notice before discharging any worker and to paying an amount equal to 2 per cent of the weekly wages into the workers' unemployment fund.

This agreement was lived up to until six months ago when the bosses again began their campaign to crush the union. Their first act was the employment of an expert union smasher, coming from the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, a certain Clayton Patterson, with a past record in the 1919 steel strike and in the breaking of the telephone operators' strike of St. Louis, Mo. He became the secretary of the Master Cleaners' Association and added some specific features to the new line of policy. New workers were broken into the trade, the bosses going to the extent of paying their union initiation fee of \$25.00, hoping thereby to have one set of workers to rely upon against the older union members. The union countered with raising the initiation fee to \$200.00, a line of action in perfect harmony with the conceptions of narrow craft, job trust unions. A better way would have been to make real union men out of all and then tell the bosses what they could not do.

The bosses stopped any further payments to the unemployment fund and went ahead with preparations of their side of the fight. The union started to build a million dollar plant to be known as the "Super-Method Cleaners and Dyers, Inc.", funds having been realized from stock sales to union members. While workers' co-operative enterprises naturally have great value, it is certainly no solution in a case like this where the life of the union is at stake. Additionally it carries the great danger of becoming a pure and sim-

ple corporation in which the officials would all the power and finally have it become, to all intents and purposes, their private property.

### Bosses Declare a Lockout

The lockout was declared, the bosses concentrating their publicity campaign against the new plant and against the union president, Ben Abrams. The bosses demanded his removal; even went to the extent of a cheap police frame-up stunt, the result of which was rather to increase any prestige he might enjoy. To the workers, however, who remembered conditions prior to the advent of the union with a ten to fourteen hour day at \$25.00 per week, the issues of this fight lay much deeper. They know it was a matter of the very life and existence of the union and they stood solid together, Negro and white. About two-thirds of the membership is Negro. It was somewhat strange to have the demand for removal of the officials coming from the bosses, particularly when coming with a lockout notice, "promising" a later return to work without a union.

Ben Abrams is a type of the A. F. of L. official who a little more than ten years ago posed as the Left of the Socialist Party and since went through an evolution to a complete reactionary position; one of the type who will sell the interests of the workers for a consideration, making necessary that the membership watches very closely the negotiations now going on with the bosses. Yet to join in the chorus of the capitalist press to call this whole fight just another racketeering battle as the Daily Worker did, is incorrect. A struggle involving the existence of a union of 2,500 members and their union working conditions is not a matter of racketeering regardless of the performances of the bosses' agents.

In the negotiations taking place after one week's duration of the lockout the bosses showed clearly that their effort was to change the conditions of wages and working hours. With several break-offs, these negotiations are still being continued. The workers are back at their jobs, some of the most militant ones having been discriminated against under the excuse of the slack season. At present the workers have no agreement and practically the only union recognition represented is the fact that there are negotiations on.

Yet the bosses know perfectly well that the union members, during the period of the two weeks' lockout, displayed their solidarity and they did not dare carry their threat through to the end of opening up the plants with scab labor. This makes them hesitant. Nevertheless the struggle is of such a sharp character that only the greatest alertness of the rank and file members can serve as their security. The negotiations must be watched very closely. Only the conscious militant elements combining themselves and fighting as an organized Left wing can guarantee that rank and file interests will really be protected.

A rank and file Cleaner and Dyer.