

Hooliganism Spreads to Brooklyn

An Open Letter to the District Committee of the Communist Party

December 16, 1933.
District Executive Committee, Communist Party, U. S. A.
New York, N. Y.
Comrades:

Last Thursday evening, a meeting was scheduled in the Brownsville section under our auspices at the Hoffman Mansion on the Subject "Does Russian Recognition Mean the End of the Third International?" The speakers announced to address the audience included our city organizer, Max Shachtman, and a member of the Brownsville Section Committee of your party, comrade A. Dasch.

Before the meeting actually began, a crowd of some forty to fifty members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League sought to break into the meeting without paying the admission fee and with the obvious purpose of disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting. In spite of this, and because the subject of the meeting was of such deep concern to the revolutionary movement that we felt it only proper to have present as many comrades supporting your standpoint as possible, we finally proposed to a representative of the party section committee; we will allow twenty League and Party members to enter the hall free of charge if they will pledge themselves to observe the customary procedure and order of a worker's gathering. To this proposal, the party representatives finally agreed. Twenty were admitted into the hall in the manner described above and they took their places quietly.

But immediately upon the opening of the meeting by the chairman, the party representatives—one after another—began a series of violent interruptions calculated to keep the hall in a turmoil and to prevent the meetings from proceeding. Neither the chairman nor anyone else of our comrades was able to utter a full sentence without being heckled and interrupted by the constant interjections of your members. Despite the fact that—as at all such meetings (whether called by you by us, or by any other labor organization)—arrangements had already been made by us, your members presented the outrageous demand that the "workers present elect the chairman"; then that "one of our speakers should speak first and the other last"; etc., etc. These absurd proposals were of course rejected by us. A proposal was however overwhelmingly adopted by those present to the effect that anyone deliberately interrupting from the floor when the chairman had already granted it to someone else, would be removed from the hall. The audience, composed entirely of workers, was indignant at the manifest attempt on the part of your comrades (who were obviously acting under orders from superior committees) to disrupt the meeting and prevent it from getting under way.

Tumult Brings Police
Worst of all is the fact that this tumult—especially unnecessary and condemnable in view of our announcement that the party representatives would be given adequate opportunity to speak in the discussion—frightened the hall proprietor to call the police. We sought to have them leave, but they refused. The effect, in a word, was that your comrades brought the police who, under the pretext of "maintaining order" were intervening in workers' disputes with the club.

The upshot of this disgraceful procedure was that the police finally assaulted the entire crowd with drawn clubs and brought the meeting to an end. In view of the growing movement towards Fascist conduct upon the part of the bourgeoisie, the conduct of your comrades is all the more reprehensible. Instead of making it possible to discuss workers' disputes untriedly, that is, on the basis of workers' democracy, you introduce hooligan methods into the labor movement which alienate workers and facilitate the black work of Fascism.

We therefore call upon you to take proper and deserved action against the ringleaders of the group which caused the riot and brought about the disruption of the movement. The names are Gilbert, Ross, Rubc, and Morris. More particularly, we call upon you to take action against those committees which are responsible for the mobilization of the Party and Y. C. L. comrades who were sent down to disrupt our meeting, for it is the superior instances which are more at fault than the comrades who are really the victims of their instructions.

We wish, further, to notify you that this Wednesday evening, December 20th, we intend to hold a mass meeting in Brownsville on the same subject, and with the same speakers. We intend to take all the steps necessary to prevent a recurrence of the scandal of last week, which was not, as you are well aware, the first time such attempts have been made by you to disrupt our gatherings. At our coming meeting, there will be representatives of various labor organizations whom we are calling upon to attend in order to render their judgment upon the responsibility borne by you or anyone else on any occurrence that may take place.

In conclusion, we feel obliged to declare that a failure on your part to reply to this communication cannot be considered by us as anything but a tacit affirmation of your intention to condone, which means to approve and repeat, the conduct of

your members. In that case, we desire to inform you that we will be duty-bound to take up this question in another manner until it is satisfactorily settled, that is, we shall energetically bring this issue before every working class organization within the reach of our members and friends, before every united front movement against Fascism and terror and persecution. There we shall have to demand of your representatives a public accounting for your conduct and your tactics given in the presence of workers, of whose attitude towards such methods we feel entirely confident. You must surely be aware that you, as well as every other organization, which is called upon to express its opinion on this question, will be held responsible by the working class for any position it may take.

Fraternal yours,
City Committee, Communist League of America (Opp.)
MAX SHACHTMAN, Organizer.

A Protest Against Stalinist Gangster Attacks

Editor of Militant:
I was present at a meeting of the Left Opposition, on Dec. 14th, Thursday evening, at Hoffman Mansion, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The meeting had been called by the above group to discuss the Comintern and Soviet Recognition. In addition to this a former member of the Brownsville Section Committee of the Communist Party, Al Dasch, was to explain his views on the problems before the Communist movement.

The least the party and Y. C. L. members could have done was to come up to the meeting and discuss the matter intelligently. But—no, they chose the method of unthinking mass hooliganism to force their way in, and then justified this action on the ground that they were invited by Dasch's statement, a perusal of which shows nothing of the kind, urging only a city-wide meeting of the party and the Y. C. L. for the purpose of discussing the German question and Soviet Recognition.

But once in the party reps, Dubb, Morris, Gilbert, and Ross of the Y. C. L. showed that senseless bureaucratic suppression of thought heekling, cheap demagogic tactics, attempt at controlling a meeting not their own. I defy, any Y. C. L. or party member to cite an instance in which any opposition was allowed to raise objections from the floor to the established procedure of a meeting.

It was clear to all present that the majority were against the disgusting party tactics, tactics which I have knowledge are carried through with the support of the party leadership. This terrible heekling, which brought remarks from workers, such as "in my reactionary union I have never seen such tactics", or "shut up, you rat", can have no other effect than isolating the party, annihilating the good work it did, or could possibly do, and rendering it an odious sect. The panic created directly by the party leadership resulted in injury to outside workers.

All this, I am obliged to admit, yet being a very close friend of the C. P., despite the bureaucratic handling of my case against the corrupt leadership (Walsh, Horwatt and Co.), is a result of a whip being welded over the heads of the rank and file, the crying death of political education which leads, in general, to a policy of cheap, street-corner gangsterism and the use of the fist instead of the brain.

Every reasoning Communist, every member of the C. P. or Y. C. L. can have no other response to make to the display of repulsive party methods than to urge in his unit a condemnation of the actions of the party at Hoffman Mansion, to press for a thorough-going discussion on the German situation and on Soviet recognition—for, to allow such tactics to continue is to sanction the growth of black reaction in the party ranks, is to stifle that rich energy which streams from true Communist thought, is to sign away the working class, hand and foot, to the police department, is to crush what the bureaucrats have left of the revolutionary vanguard.

Comradely yours,
—W. C.
Former Member of the Communist Party (Brownsville)

MASQUERADE BALL

ON
New Years Eve
HOT JAZZ BAND
Germania Hall, 16th St., & 3rd Ave.
December 31st 1933

PRIZES FOR BEST COSTUMES

Admission: 50 Cents

Auspices: New York Local, Communist League of America (Opposition)

An Open Letter to the International Labor Defense

Dec. 16th, 1933.
International Labor Defense,
District Office
799 Broadway
New York City

We are enclosing to you a copy of the letter we have just sent to the District Committee of the Communist Party, New York, which is self-explanatory. You will observe from the letter that we are inviting a number of labor organizations to sit on the platform with our speakers at the coming Wednesday evening, December 20th, mass meeting of our organization, for the purpose of giving an objective judgment on any untoward occurrences that may take place at this meeting, such as a recurrence of the events of last week's affair.

We cannot impress upon you too strongly the depths of our feelings on this question. At such a time as this, when the labor movement should be girding its loins to drive out of existence any tendency to introduce the methods of reaction into the working class, it is tantamount to giving aid and comfort to the enemy when any section of the labor movement permits itself the practice of such methods as were pursued at last week's mass meeting. The International Labor Defense has as one of its declared aims the defense of workers' meetings from the police, and such an aim we and every other class conscious group heartily endorse. Such events as the Hoffman Mansion meeting disruptions, are directly responsible for the intervention of police in labor gatherings.

On this occasion, the police struck at us, as a small group. Tomorrow, they will use such situations in order to proclaim that no radical group may hold public meetings unless they are under police supervision; or else, they may declare that the radicals may no longer hold any public meetings at all.

It is your obvious duty to help avoid such a situation. We therefore invite you, as one of the organizations involved, to send a representative to our meeting for the purpose indicated in the enclosed letter. We look forward to an immediate reply to our office so that the necessary detailed arrangements may be made.

Fraternal yours,
City Committee, Communist League of America (Opp.)
MAX SHACHTMAN, Org.

PHILADELPHIA BANQUET
To Celebrate our Fifth Anniversary Benefit The "MILITANT"
On Sun. Dec. 24th 8 P. M.
at Our Local Headquarters
524 W. Thompson Street
Admit One Subscription League (Opposition) Philadelphia.

MINNEAPOLIS NEW YEAR'S EVE AFFAIR
—Dancing Entertainment—Refreshments—
Sunday, December 31, 1933, 9 P. M.
at 2601 Elliott Avenue
Auspices: Minneapolis branch C. L. of A. (Opp.)
Everybody Welcome....Adm. Free

CHICAGO FORUM
Lecture by Albert Goodman
on
SOCIALISM IN THE SOVIET UNION

When and How It Will Be Achieved
Sunday Eve., January 7th, 8:30 p. m.
at the
National Socialist Institute
322 Douglas Blvd.
Admission 10 Cts. Unemployed Free
Questions — Discussion

LOS ANGELES ATTENTION THE COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF AMERICA (OPPOSITION)
Holds
OPEN FORUM
Every Thursday 8 P. M. at
224 S. Spring St.,
ROOM 218
ADMISSION FREE

GALA XMAS EVE AFFAIR
Sunday, December 24, 1933
Hot Band, Entertainment, Refreshments
Auspices: Communist League of America (Opposition)
Brooklyn Branch
Spartacus Youth Club
Brownsville Branch
151 Watkins St., B'klyn, N. Y.
ADMISSION 15c

An Apologist for Litvinov

The November 25th issue of the Militant was one of the best numbers to appear in the last few months. The Militant was the only revolutionary organ which gave a true analysis from the international proletarian point of view on the issue of Soviet recognition by the great imperialist power, the United States. The editorial in this number, the article by comrade Shachtman, not to speak of the letter of comrade Reese on the German party and the C. I., will remain historical documents for the vanguard of the revolutionary movement the world over.

Without fear the Left Opposition contrasted the diplomacy on Lenin's side and the diplomacy of the Stalin faction for the last ten years. The Litvinov-Stalin bargain and the price paid for recognition by American imperialism is a deadly blow to the international revolutionary movement. The Militant has pointed out clearly what points 3 and 4 of the pact mean from a Marxian point of view.

The Panic-Stricken Scribblers
As a result of this the Stalinist messenger boys, the Freiheit staff, became panic-stricken. An article appeared every day last week by the great theoreticians against the "Trotskyites", the Left Opposition the Militant. I am not a theoretician, am only a worker. Therefore I will not go into a polemic with every one of them but will simply show what Moisseye Olgin writes in the Freiheit of Nov. 20th.

"The counter-revolutionary Trotsky," he says, "wrote an article in 1931, and he predicted that the U. S. will become the strongest power in the world hegemony, and the U. S. dollar will be the dictator of the world over. After a year and nine months the world hegemony of American capitalism is now smaller, and the dollar at present is a weak dictator in the world market." According to Olgin all Trotsky's predictions fell through and were not correct.

I am not interested here to defend comrade Trotsky; this I will leave to Trotsky himself or to the editors of the Militant. But I would like to know, and thousands of workers would like to know from the Olgins: if the U. S. is so weak in the world hegemony why did Litvinov grant Roosevelt articles 3 and 4 which mean the elimination of the Third International from the Soviet territory? More: why did Olgin explain to the workers point 3 and 4 in the pact? Why shouldn't the workers know about this? And again: if Olgin says that for the last ten years similar pacts were signed with other powers let him show to which country was given such concessions as in articles 3 and 4.

Olgin's "Explanations"
"In 1921," Olgin continues, "the Soviet Government under Lenin's leadership sent protest notes to England, France, U. S., Japan, and China, for not inviting the U. S. S. R. to the disarmament conference. In 1922 the Soviet Government was represented at Genoa at an international conference for the first time. From this we can see that the Soviets under Lenin's leadership did speak about working together with other powers, and were not afraid to participate in international economic and political conferences. This shows that the U. S. S. R. in 1922 did not make larger concessions than she is making now."

I want to say that Olgin is confusing the issue. Who ever said that the Soviets should not participate in economic and political conferences? Only idiots will say so. It is true the Soviets in 1922 participated in the international conference in Genoa under the guidance of Christian Rakovsky who is exiled by Stalin somewhere in Siberia. At the Genoa conference the bourgeoisie of Europe demanded that Russia should suppress upon her territory all attempts to aid revolutionary movements in other countries.

What was the answer of the Russian delegation to the capitalist powers? "Gentlemen, we are ready to give you certain concessions, but hands off the Communist International." Of course this was the epoch of Lenin and Trotsky in 1922. What the imperialist powers could not get from Russia in 1922 during the famine period Roosevelt got from Litvinov in 1933. Is this because the Soviet government is today stronger than in 1922? Why did not Moisseye Olgin explain to the workers the stand of the Soviet delegation at the Genoa conference? Why falsify? Why not meet the issue in truthful manner? Why confuse the workers more and more?

What the Workers Said
After I read the Freiheit articles I went down to the market where the Jewish workers assemble. I wanted to hear their reactions on these articles, so I asked some cloak and dressmakers about them. They laughed, and when I asked them what was the joke one of them said, "Trotsky is a counter-revolutionist just as the Freiheit writes correct labor news every day." The next day I was with Millinery and Pocketbook workers and when I asked them what they thought about the "counter-revolutionary Trotsky", one of them pulled a Militant out of his pocket and said, "This is the first time I buy this paper; if these comrades are counter-revolutionaries I will soon be in their company."

Is it a wonder the last number of the Militant was sold out and is still in demand? The Freiheit articles were good propaganda for the Militant and the Left Opposition.

Impressions on a National Tour

A Panorama of Present Conditions of the American Worker

On my recent tour through the country I gathered impressions of a multicolored variety. In the first place one cannot fail to notice that after deceptive glamor of the early appearance of the New Deal the same old desolate appearance of the crisis has returned. One does not encounter so much the traditional nuisance, the traveling salesman, but the endlessly long freight trains still carry their loads of unemployed workers and homeless tramping youth roving from place to place in quest of some new way of getting by. The aristocratic appearing New England towns radiate the screaming colors of the blue eagle signs, proceeding westward, however, these become rather scarce. Here and there emerge little "Buy Now" parades. But the attempts to stage them daily fall flat. The throbbing hub of a busy industry is absent. Within the forest of smoke stacks in the Pittsburgh and Gary steel regions only a few belch forth their pallid clouds. In Buffalo and

Niagara Falls, however, the war industries and allied chemical industries are running full blast.

Decline of "New Deal" Illusions
Here one of our comrades told me of his work in one of the plants producing the means of chemical warfare for Uncle Sam. "Three days of work in one stretch is all a man can stand," he said. "After that must follow at least two days in a completely darkened room to avoid instant blindness." But jobs are scarce today. Yet the lifetime of a worker in such an industry is exceedingly brief. The eyesight gives out. Such are some of the blessings of modern capitalism.

But all is supposed to be well with the New Deal policy, although the defenders of its redeeming features, as a means of recovery, say it is at its cross roads. This is true in more than one sense. "Oh, yes," they agree—both supporters and opponents among the agents of privilege—"its social relation features are of positive significance."

They mean by that the code and arbitration board regulations which represent the attempts to tie the workers within definite bonds of collaboration with capital, entirely to the latter's advantage. That aspect has not yet become clear to the workers in general. But it is noticeable throughout, and more apparent as one reaches westward, that of the former implicit confidence in the NRA, which made it synonymous with recovery, with jobs, there is at least only a thin veneer left. What stands out the more clearly is the readiness to organize and the direct response from the workers to organization efforts.

Surge Toward Unionization
The first big "recovery" strike wave had just about reached its ebb when my tour began. Organization activities were no longer at their former height but neither had they entirely petered out with the blasting of the recovery illusions.

The truth is that the overwhelming numbers surging towards the existing unions, and decidedly towards the conservative unions, represented the instinctive mass reaction to the opportunities afforded by the NRA. Collective bargaining clause, supplemented by the heavily increasing economic pressure upon them. It came about with such a rush that the A. F. of L. leaders were taken by surprise. In fact it was not at all due to any aggressive action on their part. They served as an impediment, gladly collecting the initiation fees which came rolling in but resisting and sabotaging organization at every step.

In Kansas City, for example, one of our comrades began to undertake organization in a plant of industrial mass production. He collected an imposing list of applicants but found it impossible to pry the trades and labor council loose. He could get no attention from that outfit so entirely oblivious to interests of expansion and growth. What could one expect then from the higher circles of the hierarchy? It is true that the gluttonous mandarins heading the New York garment workers union had a special interest in organizing the whole industry as a means of wiping out the T. U. L. union in the field. But elsewhere no such competition existed as a serious factor, and their worthy associates did their level best to drive the workers back from struggle for union organization and for union recognition.

Fayette County Miners
That was the case with the Fayette County coke miners in their strike against the steel subsidiary of H. C. Frick and Company. Several times the glib-tongued, expert horse-traders in the class collaboration field, from John L. Lewis downward, pleaded with these miners to return to work and to trust to them and to Mr. Roosevelt to preserve the interests of union organization. But the miners stuck to their own fight for a union, and at that for the very union headed by Lewis and the others. Not that the miners were fooled by this gentry. On the contrary. When William Feeney came on October 3, to address a meeting near Uniontown of 15,000 strikers he was greeted with the shouts "You sold us out in 1922".

I have a right to expect a reply in a reasonable time stating what you intend to do in regard to this matter. That is not a matter to which the party can remain indifferent. No revolutionary organization worthy of the name permits important members of their organization to spread such rumors on their individual responsibility without calling them to task. Hoping to hear from you very soon, I am:
Very sincerely yours,
FRANK HALSTED.

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"Throw him out." He was unable to speak and left the meeting.

Even this very early stage of the "new deal" for the workers heralded the coming deep conflicts between the rank and file and the reactionary union leadership. The distribution of the roles in this case showed the miners defending the principles of unionism against the officials of the very union involved. It may be argued that this is not a new phenomena in American labor history. That is true. But by occurring at this time it has a special significance for the future. Today the NRA class collaboration machinery is based upon arbitration boards which tomorrow will be turned into means of suppression of strikes and, thereby, suppression of the very life of the trade unions. With this machinery the union officials remain sewed up, for today and tomorrow, because they are agents of capitalism. And with this the rank and file interests will come into ever more decisive conflict. It is from conditions such as these that the coming great labor struggles will find their roots within the unions in serious revolts against the reactionary policies and against the officialdom. Thereby the path will be prepared for a new unionism.

Failure of Stalinist Unions
That this path will not be found through the T. U. L. unions under control of Stalinism is only further verified by the most recent experiences. Today one can find no trace whatever of the National Miners' Union in the important fields along as far west as Illinois. The thousands of miners of Pennsylvania and Ohio, who two years ago struck under the banner of the T. U. L. union, were this time striking, and just as militantly, under the banner of the A. F. of L. striking for the rights of union recognition which the NRA was supposed to grant.

With the NRA came the rising curve of commodity prices the effects of which are felt very directly. "The NRA is just so much bunk", has now become a quite common expression, not only among those who still tramp the streets in vain search for jobs, but amongst the employed as well. For then the low wage standard resulting from the crisis is a serious reality. It is difficult to make ends meet. A grim determination is beginning to make its appearance within their ranks. One feels perceptibly that the present lull after the first strike wave is the calm before the next storm sure to break soon with the force of a hurricane.

Conditions of the Unemployed
And the unemployed? Amongst them are many signs of a sluggish adaptation to the low subsistence level afforded by the miserable relief rations. But these do not predominate. Most of the various mutual self-help enterprises, based upon begging and upon barter of labor for goods, which flourished for a time in several smaller cities, could not survive the realities of class society. Instead relief work, or "working for the city", as it is called by some who hope to invest it with a non-existing dignity, is becoming a regular institution in many cities. It means to do regular work for a relief pittance either, in cash or in groceries bearing no semblance to a wage. And often it is on such projects that regular wage labor is directly eliminated. Yet it becomes compulsory for those who need the grocery basket.

If spite of all this there is no sign anywhere today of an all-embracing unemployment movement. What exists is only the isolated local groupings; and of them there are few. In Minneapolis the Left Opposition has infused new life into the unemployed movement. In Chicago one finds still the Workers' League and locals affiliated to the Borders Committee. On a whole the issues of the unemployed receded into the background for a time with the advent of the NRA ballyhoo. The movement, such as it was, experienced a decline. But that does not tell the whole story.

Catastrophic Position of Official Party
Alongside of the decline is recorded the failure of the movement or the tendencies within, mainly those of the official Communist party and of the social reformists, to at any time seriously aim for the indispensable united front. From this movement is now suffering the consequences. The Unemployed Councils, directed by the official party, which first emerged with the powerful spontaneous demonstrations, with the auspicious opportunity, during the early part of the crisis, have either entirely vanished or, went amounts to the same thing, lead a purely paper existence.

In general the decline and the sinking into disrepute of the official party is so outstanding as to be catastrophic. In city after city, not in the least in the mining and steel regions, I made the same observation. The official party is discredited to the extent of reflecting unfavorably upon the ideas of Communism in general. Again and again I would hear reports of workers saying, "I am through with Communist Party", or, "I quit the Daily Worker some time ago." How clearly did this illustrate the reactions thousands of workers who have been repelled by the emasculated party of Stalinism. For the Left Opposition this means more emphasis on the duty to build anew a revolutionary party in the United States. Our part in this task will be reported in another article.

—ARNE SWABECK.