
The “Spy” Story.

Published in *The Toiler* [Cleveland], whole no. 125 (July 2, 1920), pp. 1, 4.

(Editorial Note: The Toiler prints the following statement in regard to the charges against Louis C. Fraina for the information of its readers, without expressing any opinion as to his guilt or innocence.)

The *New York Call* has found a new way to cover the reactionary character of the Socialist Party. The organization which it supports has become so thoroughly discredited among the workers of the country that it can no longer expect support by presentation of its principles. It has therefore adopted the policy of trying to undermine those organizations which really represent working class principles.

Recently Attorney-General Palmer made a statement before the Rules Committee of the Senate, defending his department against the accusation that it had planted spies in the Communist Parties. In this statement he took up the charge that Louis C. Fraina was an employee of the Department of Justice, stating in answer the facts in regard to an investigation of the charges against Fraina, which was made by representatives of the Soviet Bureau and members of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party.

In answer to this a statement was made by Santeri Nuorteva, of the Soviet Bureau. A copy of Nuorteva's statement was furnished to *The Call* with the understanding that it would print the full statement in the form of a statement and not endeavor to make a news story out of it. In place of keeping the promise, *The Call* published a garbled account of the matter, using such portion of the statement by Nuorteva as suited its purpose, and followed this up with an editorial trying to bolster up the Socialist Party, by the suggestion that the whole Communist movement was infected by spies and agent provocateurs. In addition to a number of insinuations not based upon facts, this editorial contains some outright lies.

Since the investigation made of the charges against Fraina has been given publicity, there is no longer any reason for not stating the facts, which are as follows:

An agent of the Department of Justice named Peterson was assigned the job of spying on the Soviet Bureau. This man endeavored to ingratiate himself with Santeri Nuorteva, Secretary to L.C.A.K. Martens and in the course of conversations with him made the statement that Louis C. Fraina was employed by the Department of Justice.

When, early in December [1919] Fraina was directed to leave for Europe by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America to establish connections with the Communist International, he requested the Soviet Bureau to give him credentials which would enable him to enter Russia. These credentials were refused because of the insinuations against Fraina made by the man Peterson.

In order to clear up the matter representatives of the Soviet Bureau and members of the Central Executive Committee made an investigation. A meeting was held at which Fraina was confronted with the Department of Justice agent, Peterson. At this hearing Peterson stated that he had seen Fraina in the New York offices of the Department of Justice on 3 occasions. Two of these dates he fixed definitely, the other he was unable to fix. The two dates so fixed and which he insisted upon as being the correct dates when Fraina was at the Department of Justice in New York were September 7th and November 15th.

Peterson also stated that he had seen in the files of the Department of Justice reports supposedly made by Fraina and cancelled checks covering payments to him. These checks he stated were made payable to Fraina and were endorsed by him and the checks, after passing through the bank were filed in the file con-

taining Fraina's reports.

Peterson also gave a description of a man he thought was Fraina. When he was brought into the room in which the hearing was held he was asked to state whether he could identify any of the persons present as Fraina, but was unable to do so. (It must be stated here that Fraina's appearance had changed somewhat.) During the progress of the investigation Fraina cross-examined Peterson, and after a question or two Peterson stated, "You are the man." It must be said, however, that the description given by Peterson of the man he saw in the Department of Justice offices was not a description by which those who have known Fraina during his work in the movement last fall would have recognized him.

During the cross-examination of Peterson by those present, many dubious points as to his motives and as to the reliability of his story were developed.

When the cross-examination was over Fraina made a statement in reply in which he brought out that September 7th [1919] was the last day of the Communist Party Convention and that on that date, as could be verified by a score of people, he had been in the city of Chicago, attending the convention session in the morning and a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the party in the afternoon. In the evening he was at a restaurant in the same city with a party of comrades. On November 15th, another date definitely fixed, he attended a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party in Chicago as could be verified by 12 other members of the committee.

As to the checks which the informer claimed to have seen in the file supposed to contain Fraina's reports, anyone familiar with modern accounting methods would smile at the proposition that returned checks should be filed in the individual file of the person to whom they were issued.

When the investigation was completed those present were asked to state whether they were satisfied that Fraina had been exonerated, and all but 2 members of the Bureau agreed that such was the case. The other 2 persons still had some doubts although admitting that there was no clear case.

The stenographic report of the hearing was later submitted to the Executive Council of the Communist Party and the Translator-Secretaries representing the Language Federations in the National Office and it was their unanimous verdict that Fraina had been exonerated.†

The Call endeavors to base its insinuations upon the fact that Fraina was not arrested last November, while others were, and that he was able to leave the country. Those familiar with the facts know that Fraina was in hiding for a month before he left the country and that he left secretly, as many other persons have been able to do.

Publicity is given to the facts in regard to the Fraina charges in order to show the reprehensible tactics which the Socialist Party publications are ready to resort to in order to discredit rival organizations. In this matter *The Call* and other Socialist Party papers which have copied its article shave outdone the slimmest work of the capitalist kept press.

†- The image of "Translator-Secretaries" sitting in a "National Office" was a projection of circa 1918 Socialist Party practice into the future. In reality, the Secretaries of the semi-autonomous Language Federations of the Communist Party of America were not centralized in a single location. They were important independent political actors in their own right and had their own offices in the underground.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.