
An Open Challenge.

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The first of the trials in connection with the prosecution of the twenty-two Communists arrested in the raid on the convention at Bridgman, Michigan, began on February 26th at St. Joseph. The prosecution chose to put William Z. Foster on trial first.

In this trial, as well as those to follow, the Communists, although defendants, will not be on the defensive. The trials at St. Joseph will be turned into an offensive against the prosecutors, a challenge before the eyes of the working masses of this country of the prosecutions which the Communists have had to meet since 1919.

When the Communist movement in the United States was first organized it was not an underground movement. The Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party were organized at public conventions held in Chicago in September 1919. The Communists acted upon the assumption that principles which were and are being publicly advocated in Germany, France and England and in many other countries could be publicly advocated in the United States.

The Palmer raids at the end of 1919 compelled the Communists to retreat temporarily from this assumption. The truth about these raids has only recently been told. The facts are hidden away in the Congressional record in the report made this year by the Senate Committee which investigated Palmer's record.

This report will be the justification of the Communist Party for being an underground organization and for meeting in secret convention

at Bridgman. The Communists have no particular love for underground life or for working in secret. They have nothing to hide. They desire nothing more than to proclaim their principles openly and publicly. They had to exist underground in order to exist at all. Under similar circumstances they would have no choice but to do the same.

The report on the Palmer raids tells why it was necessary for the Communists to go "underground." Communists have estimated the number of arrests in those raids at 5,000. The Senate Committee says that 10,000 were arrested, mostly without warrants and without any justification even under existing class laws. The report tells of brutalities and tortures and tortures, of a whole series of cruelties and illegalities perpetrated by the Department of Justice.

Out of the 10,000 Communists arrested and brutally mistreated, Palmer succeeded in deporting a few hundred foreign-born workers. Out of scores of citizens held under state laws as a result of 1919 raids, only twenty members of the Communist Labor Party were convicted, and they were released by the Governor of Illinois after serving a week of their sentences.

The whole history of the Palmer raids, which drove the Communists underground, shows that these raids did not have as their object prosecution for crime, but prosecution to destroy a movement which was feared by the capitalists who control the government of the United States.

The bugaboo of violence which the prosecutors and the press have tried to make of the Com-

unist movement will be met equally frankly at St. Joseph. In part it has already been destroyed by the exposure of the disreputable Burns' Detective Agency and similar organizations, showing that it is these private detective agencies that supply the violence.

No Communist advocates the use of violence in the class struggle in the United States today. Communists have better sense. No Communist has been convicted of an overt act of violence in the United States.

What Communists are charged with is the crime of telling historical truth. They have been bold enough to say that the slave owners of the South did not give up the special economic privileges which they enjoyed as a result of chattel slavery without a resort to violence. They have told the historical truth that no privileged class has ever yielded up its right to exploit and oppress without a trial of strength outside of the formal rules of the struggle laid down by law, without a resort to force and violence to protect its interests. It is a logical inference from this that the capitalist class which enjoys powers of oppression and exploita-

tion yielding its greater wealth than any class in history has ever enjoyed will not yield up its position without a struggle which will go beyond the formal rules governing the struggle for political power in the United States.

To say this openly, the Communists contend, is not a violation even of existing class laws. They will say it openly and in the court room of St. Joseph, from the public rostrum and in their press.

Palmer succeed in driving the Communists underground through his "red raids" of 1919. Daugherty and Burns expected to destroy that underground Communist movement through their "red raid" of 1922. The Communist answer to the Daugherty raid was to challenge the persecution of Communists before the labor movement of this country. This challenge has added to the support which the Communists had already won in the labor movement and has aided it in gaining what it desires most — the right openly to advocate its principles in the United States.

This right the Communists will defend in the trials in Michigan.

Edited by Mitch Abidor.

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