
Jobless Face Shotguns in Hands of Police: Meeting of Unemployed in Niagara Square is Ruthlessly Suppressed: Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council Denied Right of Assemblage — Many Thousands of Hungry Toilers Throng Streets Converging on McKinley Monument [events of March 6-10, 1919]

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The Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council of Buffalo and vicinity is a Russian Soviet and its members are possessed with the desire to overthrow the city government and help themselves, in the opinion of Mayor Buck.

That was the reason given by the Mayor for the prevention of the assemblage of the unemployed at the McKinley Monument on Monday morning [March 10, 1919] at the call of the Workers' Council. The constitutional right of freedom of speech and assemblage apparently did not enter into the question so far as the city authorities were concerned.

Chamber of Commerce in Deadly Fear of Bolshevism.

Mayor Buck doubtless echoes the fears of the Chamber of Commerce. Following the perfectly orderly demonstration of unemployed at City Hall last week there was consternation in the Chamber. A committee was appointed to deal with the menace of Bolshevism. The labor exploiters of the Chamber evidently consider insecure their seats on the backs of the workers.

As always the capitalist press has sought to minimize the unemployment problem that confronts the city, as it sought in the scant publicity given the affair to conceal the significance of the phenomenal response to the call for Monday's meeting.

But all doubt as to the number of Buffalo's unemployed, estimated now in the neighborhood of 40,000, was dispelled by the vast outpouring of jobless from every working class district in the city that sought to congregate at the McKinley Monument on Monday morning. Kept on the move by the police, they filled all the streets converging on Niagara Square for blocks away. Had the meeting been permitted it undoubtedly would have been the largest assemblage in the city's history.

Jobless Workers Face Shotguns In Hands of Police.

Ample preparation had been made to prevent any gathering in Niagara Square. A cordon of police was thrown around the vast area in the center of which towers the McKinley Monument. Every fourth bluecoat carried a sawed-off shotgun. The City Hall and Elmwood Music Hall were similarly guarded and for blocks away in every case policemen were posted.

Machine guns were understood to be held in readiness, as was the fire department to throw streams of water if it were deemed necessary. Adjutant General Berry was on the ground and according to published statements was prepared to turn out 15,000 soldiers.

At Black rock, from where it was thought a parade would start, policemen were in evidence in great

numbers. In fact it appeared almost the whole force was in use for the occasion. But the guardians of the law had nothing to do. There was no attempt at a parade or a demonstration and no semblance of disorder.

Unemployed Appeal to Mayor Buck.

Had the Solders', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council harbored the designs attributed to it by the Mayor, it would not have given the proposed demonstration the publicity afforded by the 38,000 manifestos distributed, a facsimile of which appears on page 6. It would not have sent the following letter to his honor:

March 6, 1919.

Hon. George S. Buck.

Your Honor:—

In behalf of the Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and Farmers' Council of Buffalo and Erie County, I beg to present the "Manifesto" with immediate demands and outline of ultimate aims.

The conditions at present in the City of Buffalo prompted a large number of the unemployed to form the above council and make plans and preparations for the immediate relief of the sufferings of more than 35,000 men and women and many thousands of children.

A committee of 15 is arranging a public gathering at the McKinley Monument for Monday morning, March 10th, at 10 o'clock and from there will proceed to the Broadway Auditorium in a peaceful parade. I request the Mayor and the City Council to advise the proper authorities to open the doors of that auditorium for the army of unemployed, free of charge, so that they may discuss plans for the solution of this question. I also request the City Council to divide the Broadway Auditorium into 4 sections — one for the English speaking people and 3 other sections for foreign speaking people, so we can speak from 3 or 4 different angles in the hall.

I hope you will make a thorough study of the "Manifesto" enclosed so you and the Council will appreciate the spirit that prevails among the members of this army of unemployed.

These are not times to belittle the unemployment problem; these times are more critical than the average person realizes. Many of these people have no bread in their homes; many of them have no money with which to pay rent; many of them have taxes and interest payments due which they cannot meet; thousands of soldiers and sailors are returning, which increases the number of unemployed to a great extent. The projects spoken of by the City Council are not going to provide immediate relief for the sufferings prevailing among these people.

We further wish to request the city authorities to provide a sufficient number of police for our parade.

Trusting to receive your full cooperation, we remain

Sincerely,

Martin B. Heisler,

For the Committee of 15 of the
Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council.

Mayor Denies Right of Assemblage.

Mayor Buck sent this answer to the jobless workers' appeal:

March 8, 1919.

Mr. Martin B. Heisler.

Dear Sir:—

I am in receipt of your letter dated March 6th [1919], requesting permission for a parade of the unemployed and use of the Broadway Auditorium at the end of the parade. Such a parade and meeting will do nothing to help find jobs for those out of work. The city government some time ago foresaw that there would be unemployment and has plans under way that will give work to many as soon as weather conditions will permit. The city, state, and national governments are aware of what unemployment exists and are doing all that can be done to provide work. Any who are in real distress may apply to the city's Public Welfare Department. Their cases will be investigated and if they are found worthy of help they will get it. As the meetings and parade which you have planned will serve no good end, the city authorities will not give you the use of its halls, its park, or its streets.

The first 3 of the "immediate demands" which you make are so absurd that to even talk about them could have no result except to arouse discontent among some who are without sufficient understanding to see that they are absurd. There is no social or economic wrong in this country which cannot be righted through the ballot. Let me advise you to warn your followers that no revolutionary Soviet organization can be set up in Buffalo, for the whole force of the city government, with the power of the state and the nation behind it, will be used to stop any attempt, and any who try it will only bring disaster upon themselves.

Yours very truly,

George S. Buck,
Mayor.

Workers Appeal to Socialist Party.

On receipt of the Mayor's letter the Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council, insistent on its constitutional rights of freedom of speech and as-

semblage, appealed to the Socialist Party as the only political organization having the interest of the working class at heart.

Accordingly a meeting of the Socialist Party was hurriedly called for Sunday morning [March 9, 1919] and a committee was elected to wait on Mayor Buck in behalf of the unemployed army. The committee consisted of Franklin P. Brill, Frank Ehrenfried, Eustace Reynolds, and D'Arcy Milliken, with Mr. Brill as spokesman.

The committee say the Mayor, on his return from church, [heard a protest] against his "anarchistic" stand and...freedom of assemblage [was demanded] for the unemployed workers, who had no other means of venting their pent up misery and bringing their condition to the attention of the community. The Mayor was told assurances had been given the Socialist Party that there was no prospect of violence.

Shorter Hours Only Unemployment Solution.

It was pointed out to the Mayor that the first immediate demand in the manifesto issued by the council of Soldiers, Sailors, Workers and Farmers was the only solution of the problem of unemployment now at hand. It was up to employers to reduce working hours and give work to everybody. Manufacturers had made huge profits during the war and they should now forego a portion of their profits, opening their factories to the suffering thousands on the streets.

But it didn't appear from the Mayor's talk that there was any chance of this. He said manufacturers had accumulated products in the making of which war wages had been paid, and seemingly they would sacrifice nothing in the present crisis.

As to the meeting on Monday morning [March 10, 1919], the Mayor remained obdurate. He told the committee that the City Council was perfectly alive to the situation and he said the Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council was a Russian Soviet. They aimed to overthrow the city government and help themselves and there would be nothing doing in the way of a meeting on Niagara square.

Police Chief Scouts Idea of Hunger.

The committee reported to the meeting of the Socialist Party, still in session, and with the addition of Martin B. Heisler, organizer of the party, was sent to intercede with Chief of Police Higgins.

The chief was powerless, being under instructions, but he promised to communicate with the Mayor. He scouted the idea of the unemployed being hungry, though. He said that as a police officer he had acquired a considerable knowledge of "foreigners" in the city. There wasn't a man among them who hadn't more money than he had, he said, and he had been working since he was 12 years old.

The committee told the chief on leaving that if there was any violence on Monday the blame would lie with the city authorities. The Mayor had been told the same.

On hearing the report of the committee the party meeting drew up a letter to Mayor Buck which was also sent to all the newspapers. It was hoped that the Socialist Party's position might get publicity in the press but the hope was in vain. No paper printed the letter. And right here it may be said that the only way to counteract the misrepresentation of the Socialist Party by the kept press is to put the circulation of *The New Age* where it ought to be. This is the letter sent to the Mayor:

Hon. George S. Buck, Mayor.

Dear Sir:—

At a special meeting of the Socialist Party, Local Buffalo, held March 9th [1919], the undersigned committee was elected to reply to your letter of the 8th inst. to our organization.

You seem to be working under the misapprehension that the Socialist Party, Local Buffalo, is the instigator of the parade and mass meeting scheduled for March 10th, 1919. We beg to lay before you the facts as they really are.

The unemployed of the City of Buffalo organized last week, and a committee duly elected by them called on our organization to assist them in their endeavors to obtain the assistance of the municipal and state authorities to alleviate the conditions brought on by their unemployment. Our organization, which is the only organization in the world that has the interests of those who work at heart, is duty bound to stand by its principles to help those in need of assistance and advice in solving the problem of unemployment at this critical moment. Therefore, the Socialist Party, Local Buffalo, approved of our organizer, Martin B. Heisler, acting in conjunction with the Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and

Farmers' Council of Buffalo and waiting upon your honor and the honorable City Council for the purpose of enlisting your aid in the solution of the problem.

The organization formed by the unemployed of the City of Buffalo has decided to assemble in mass meeting for the purpose of discussing and finding ways and means for the solution of the problem of unemployment and its accompanying misery. Your suggestion that those who are in real distress may lay their cases before the Public Welfare Department "and if they are found worthy of help they will get it," implies, first, that they must submit themselves to a lengthy investigation; second, that their cases must be worthy; lastly, that then they will receive "charity." This is just what the unemployed refuse to accept. They demand WORK and that is their right.

We wish to call your honor's attention to the fact that the Socialist Party is in no way responsible for the proposed parade and mass meeting and it is merely called upon by the unemployed to act and assist them in an advisory capacity, and this it is always ready and willing to do. Therefore, any arbitrary act on the part of the local administration in denying the unemployed of this city to peaceably assemble, parade, and meet to discuss and find ways and means to alleviate their condition and any attempt on the part of the administration to deprive these people of their right must meet with the protests of every decent, respectable, and liberty-loving citizen of this city. The determination

on the part of the unemployed to exercise their legal rights cannot be met with any arbitrary action on your part, and, therefore, the responsibility for any trouble arising out of this proposed parade and mass meeting must be shouldered by you and those in power in the city of Buffalo.

Trusting we have made clear to you the position of our organization in this matter, and hoping you will take a more liberal attitude toward those in need of counsel and recall any orders you may have given to suppress the proposed meeting, we beg to remain,

Sincerely yours,

Socialist Party, Local Buffalo,

by Irving M. Weiss,
James Battistoni,
D'Arcy Milliken.

Before adjourning the meeting, the Socialist Party elected committees to acquaint the Soldiers', Sailors', Workers' and Farmers' Council with the war-like preparations of the police and to advise against any attempt at parade or meeting on Monday.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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