

---

# The Pink Terror, Part 4: Bloody Thursday in the 8th Assembly District Branch.

by John Reed

Published in the *New York Communist*, v. 1, no. 5 (May 15, 1919), pg. 8.  
Unsigned article attributed to editor John Reed.

On Thursday evening [May 8, 1919], just as dusk was descending on the East Side and lights began to appear in the store windows, a number of Right Wing members of the 8th AD, grasping white papers firmly in their right hands, were seen slinking in the shadows of the houses toward East 4th Street. When a fellow member of the branch approached they were observed to huddle closer to the wall and hurry past with averted faces. They were on their way to the "re-organization" meeting in Casino Hall, 85 East 4th Street, at the command of the Executive Committee, and the last lingering shreds of conscience still troubled them. But black night, under whose pall men do deeds that blanch their faces in the clear light of dawn, dropped down, and smothering the faint cries of conscience, the Right Wingers hurried on.

Early the same morning a carefully picked group of Right Wingers had received the following letter:

Dear Comrade:—

A meeting of the members of the 8th Assembly District, Socialist Party, will be held Thursday, May 8th, at 8:30 pm, at the Casino Hall, 85 East 4th Street.

This meeting is called by the Executive Committee of Local New York for the purpose of reorganizing a branch of the Socialist Party in the 8th Assembly District.

For the past months, it was impossible for the members of the branch to conduct meetings, and to transact the legitimate business of the party because of a group of self-styled "Left Wingers," who place allegiance to factionalism above that of the party and who have organized a party within the party, meeting behind closed doors and deciding beforehand what is to be done at the meetings of the branch; send delegates to a Central Committee of a faction where these delegates receive instructions what they are to do and how they are to act at the meetings of the Central Committee, with every member bound to vote in the branch as the leaders dictate; and every delegate in the Central Committee must act as the steering committee directs.

The party organization must be free from any dicta-

torship, no matter in what form it manifests itself.

This meeting on Thursday, May 8th, is to place an organization in the district free from dictators and from outside influence.

There is no intention of curbing the ideas of the comrades. Discussion of party matters are always desirable, but there is no room for another organization within the organization, and only such comrades who are not members of the "Left Wing Section" or who have ceased to be affiliated and left the "Left Wing" will be admitted to membership.

Bring your party card with you, as no one will be admitted without a card. Only members of the 8th AD will be admitted.

All comrades having the welfare of the party at heart, and who are not members of the "Left Wing" should attend, and help build up a loyal party branch in the 8th AD.

Yours for a United and Solidified Organization,

Executive Committee,  
Local New York, Socialist Party.

Simultaneously the organizer of the branch, Comrade Dauber, received the following *ukase*:

Mr. Sam Dauber  
Organizer, 8th Assembly District

Dear Comrade:—

This is to inform you that the Executive Committee decided that in view of the fact your branch is affiliated and an integral part of the so-called "Left Wing Section," an organization within the party organization, organized for the purpose to destroy the party organization, and contrary to the decisions of Local New York, your branch is therefore suspended from the organization, and is no longer an integral part of Local New York.

A meeting of the members of the 8th AD will be called by the subcommittee of the Executive Committee as soon as practicable for the purpose of reorganizing the branch.

For the Executive Committee of Local New York,

Julius Gerber,  
Executive Secretary.

Several Left Wingers, being informed of the plot, went down to Casino Hall to investigate the matter. Once inside the building they were subjected to a close scrutiny by the retainers of the Executive Committee, led by Grossman, and those known to be Left Wingers were refused admittance to the meeting. Those who survived this first examination were ushered into the hall where they were immediately seized by the second line of defense, led by Abe Beckerman, alias Abie the Agent, of the 6th AD, and subjected one by one to a protracted investigation as to their political, religious, and artistic beliefs.

“Are you a member of the Left Wing?” one comrade was asked.

“Do you believe in an organization within the organization?”

“Do you submit to this reorganization?”

When he refused to answer these questions he was informed that he couldn't be a member of the party unless he answered. He replied that he had been a member of the Socialist Party for 4 years, that no charges had ever been brought against him, and that he had no reason to believe that he was under compulsion to answer any questions. A discussion then took place between the members of the investigating committee, some wanting to expel him from the meeting and others arguing that he be allowed to remain. Finally they decided to allow him to stay.

After some 30 or 40 people had gathered in the hall, Potter, a member of the 21st AD, took the chair and announcing that the meeting was open, called upon Beckerman to state its purpose. Beckerman announced that the Executive Committee wanted the names and addresses of those who stood for the “reorganization” scheme. He further explained that these names would be investigated and another meeting called for those who were found to be satisfactory — or another words, sufficiently devoid of intelligence to obey without question all the commands of the party bureaucracy.

He continued to the effect that as he was not sure that all those present were Right Wingers, no business could be transacted. At this point somebody called attention to the fact that the chairman had not been elected. Immediately Anita C. Block augmented Abie's remarks by saying that those who gave their names in would be investigated, and if found to be

OK would be invited to another meeting.

Comrade Schneider, who is not a member of the Left Wing, made an objection to this procedure, and moved that the meeting start reorganization right away and for that purpose that a chairman be immediately elected and the meeting proceed to business. Beckerman told the chairman that this motion was out of order and the semi-comrade from the 21st AD ruled accordingly. Schneider appealed from the decision of the chair but Beckerman again instructed that no appeals were in order and the chair so ruled. Schneider protested this decision and several comrades demanded that the protest be recorded, but Beckerman, with that cold logic that so often has saved the board of Aldermen from deviating from the paths of duty, pointed out that as there were no records nothing could be recorded.

It was then decided by the Executive Committee's mercenaries that only questions were in order. Asked whether any member of the Socialist Party, not a member of the Left Wing, would be permitted to join the new branch no matter what his or her beliefs, Beckerman answered in the affirmative. Whereupon he was asked how his answer squared with Anita C. Block's statement, but this he refused to answer on the ground that he did not want to enter into a personal discussion.

He then declared the meeting adjourned. It is authoritatively stated that the net results of the meeting were about 12 names and addresses. Waldman claims 71, but his knowledge of the facts doubtless equals his knowledge of socialism.

While this serio-comic meeting was going on, the majority of the members of the branch were attending the regular branch meeting in the headquarters, which was still intact owing to the fact that a guard had been formed to protect the furniture from Assemblymen and Aldermen with a penchant for pilfering. Under a special order of business, Gerber's letter to the organizer was taken up first.

A motion was made to disregard the action of the Executive Committee and proceed to carry on the ordinary business of the branch as heretofore, and to make an immediate appeal to the State Committee to rescind the action of the Executive Committee. After some discussion, during which the members who had been attending the “reorganization” fiasco came in, the

motion was carried unanimously. Two reporters from *The Socialist*, the organ of the Pink Terror, [David] Berenberg and [Abraham] Tuvim, were present during the meeting, and were observed taking copious notes which will doubtless appear in the next issue, if the publication is able to survive the publication of Waldman's speech.

Thus ended Bloody Thursday. The plot for the political butchery of the 8th AD fizzled out, and according to the latest advices the Executive Committee was gathered in Gerber's office weeping bitterly over the 12 pitiful names which represented what was to have been a new and obedient branch. Our statistician computes that taking into account the deposit paid on the furniture van, which was held in readiness, the price of Casino Hall, and the hire of mercenaries, besides the tip to the cop on the beat, each name cost the comrades of Local New York over \$10, to say nothing of the cost of the cellar where the plot was hatched.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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