
Police Spies and Agents Provocateurs.

by William M. Feigenbaum †

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The recent statement of Santeri Nuorteva with reference to Louis C. Fraina was sensational, but hardly unexpected.

Louis C. Fraina joined the Socialist Party in 1913, coming from the Socialist Labor Party. For several years, to my certain knowledge, he was intensely active — but always on internal matters discussing party tactics and policies. I do not believe that he ever wrote an article or made a speech that was designed to convert a non-Socialist to the Socialist position. All his work was to convince the party members that the party position was incorrect, or that it should have taken some other stand.

When the violent discussion over party principles broke out immediately upon the cessation of hostilities (when many people felt that it was again safe to speak freely), we find Louis C. Fraina leading a vehement and violent denunciation of the Socialist Party, editing a paper and pointing out that the party would “have to be captured” for revolutionary Socialism.

In this entire controversy, Fraina constantly employed the age-old method of assuming that anyone who differed with him was insanely crooked or crazy. For a long time Fraina worked hand in hand with another comrade, whom the former frequently praised. At one point in the controversy, this comrade signed a statement entitled “A Basis for Discussion,” in which

the formation of a separate organization within the Socialist Party was denounced, but a number of the points supported by the then Left Wing were put forward as a basis for serious discussion among party members. Immediately we find Fraina denouncing his former friend as a “cheap American imitation of Hugo Haase.”‡

The dominant note in all of Fraina’s work was intolerance, bigotry, and heresy hunting. In an unguarded moment Fraina once said to me, “I am surprised that Morris Hillquit is taking the correct stand in *****.” I have forgotten now just what Hillquit did that earned Fraina’s unmerited praise, but I remember that Fraina soon discovered a very good reason for venomously and vehemently attacking him. That was Louis Fraina. That is the kind of man that the Russian revolutionary movement was accustomed to beware of. When one protested his revolutionary devotion a little too vehemently, the Russian comrades were in the habit of looking up his antecedents.

And just about a year ago, a number of active Socialist Party workers began to suspect that Fraina, who had served 30 days in prison, and who was eligible for at least 40 years more, had entered the Azef class.§

There was the case of Herman E. Bernhardt, Left Wing Socialist of Buffalo, who became recording sec-

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‡- The letter “A Basis for Discussion” ran in the *New York Call* on March 23, 1919. It was signed by 13 members of the Socialist Party: David P. Berenberg, F.G. Biedenkapp, Evans Clark, Walter M. Cook, Benjamin Glassberg, Jacob Lawn, Flora M. Line, Louis P. Lochner, Ludwig Lore, Scott Nearing, Moses Oppenheimer, Albert Pauly, and Henry Sipos. Reference is probably to Moses Oppenheimer, who was a contributor with Fraina to the Left Wing theoretical journal *The New Review* (1913-1915).

§- Reference is to Evno Azef (1869-1918), a key Socialist Revolutionary Party leader exposed as an Okhrana agent in 1908.

retary of the Buffalo local of the Communist Party, who was a guest at the dinner table of Miss Julia D. Pratt, and who then informed upon her to the Department of Justice, as a result of which she was dismissed from her position and indicted for “criminal anarchy”; at the same time, as a side line, he was furnishing mailing lists to the Lusk Committee.

There was also the case of George Cameron, who was a delegate to the Communist Labor Party Convention in Chicago [Aug. 31-Sept. 5, 1919], and who turned up as a government agent in a recent trial in Jersey City.

There are also the secret instructions sent out to George E. Kelleher of the Bureau of Investigation of Boston on Dec. 29, 1919, instructing that functionary on how to prepare for the “Red raids” of Jan. 2. One of the instructions is as follows: “If possible, you should arrange with your undercover informants to have meetings of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party held on the night set. I have been informed by some of the bureau officers that such arrangements will be made. This, of course, would facilitate the making of arrests.”

We are just beginning to uncover the work that was done by agents provocateurs and police spies in the labor and the Socialist movement within the past 2 or 3 years. But the information that we have thus far secured convinces us of the correctness of the position of the Socialist Party in the recent controversy.

These fundamental principles can be laid down: That the overwhelming majority of the members of the Socialist Party are on the level; that whatever they do, they do in absolute good faith for the welfare of the Socialist movement; that when you find someone to discuss with you honestly, the average and normal Socialist will honestly argue, inasmuch as the progress of the Socialist movement is made by the exchange of opinions. But when you find a person violently charging that others do not understand Socialism; that they are betrayers of the Socialist movement; that the party should be captured, etc., the chances are that you will find someone who is not interested in the progress of the Socialist movement, but who is interested rather in creating dissensions within the party.

Many things are still obscure, but when we find documents coming from the alleged Amsterdam sub-bureau of the Third International in which it is stated that all Socialist public officials must stand pledged to violate their oath of office; when we find documents alleged to be signed by the Executive Committee of the Third International stating clearly that Socialism must depend for its success upon the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship; that the proletarian dictatorship does not mean majority rule, and that it does not necessarily employ violent and bloody methods — then when it is remembered that the Amsterdam sub-bureau of the Third International was established as a result of a conference in which Louis Fraina was the dominant figure, and that it has since been repudiated by the Executive Committee of Moscow itself — the Socialist movement has every justification for feeling deeply suspicious of such action, such resolutions, and such bureaus.

The split of last year accomplished a great deal. Its principle result was the sowing of a spirit of distrust among tens of thousands of comrades. Another one of its results was the dispersing of hundreds of party sub-divisions by the splitting of its members into quarreling camps, and the consequent loss of hundreds of party headquarters all over the country.

The fact that the recent convention of our party revealed numerous differences of opinion in principles and tactics, all of which were honestly and decently discussed within the party organization by comrades, all of whom mutually trusted each other, shows the deep cunning of those who launched the movement of a year ago, and gives us a hint of the motives of those who launched that movement.

This is as good a time as any for our former party members to come back into the Socialist movement. There is no place for Socialist activity in America today outside of the Socialist Party. And this is as good a time as any for the Socialists of America to tell themselves that the Socialist Party is a pretty good organization of pretty good people, practically all of whom are honest and earnestly and devotedly working for the better day. — *National Office Press Service.*

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