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# A Letter to the *Appeal* from Joseph Zack

by Joseph Zack

Published in the *Socialist Appeal* [New York], v. 3, no. 80 (October 20, 1939), pg. 3.

Dear Sir:

In an edition of your publication (Trotskyite) of October 6, 1939, you are quit free in the epithets you use of condemning Ben Gitlow and myself for appearing before the Dies Committee.<sup>†</sup> You raise the issue there of the possible suppression of the Communist Party resulting from the activities of the Dies Committee, condemning those who appear before the Dies Committee as siding with that suppression.

May I ask you whether you yourself would refuse to appear there if subpoenaed and run the risk of going to jail for contempt? May I also ask you whether you, when appearing, would lie in favor of the Communist Party, and if you did lie, what good would that do to you, in face of the fact that the Dies Committee could prove out of your own printed articles the names of all the various unions and other organizations that the Communist Party controls. Would you undertake to deny that the Stalin GPU (Russian Secret Service), in fact, controls the activities of the Communist Party here, when, in fact, the Dies Committee could quote your own printed words to that effect?

You will probably say that you would make

speeches against the Dies Committee at the same time as you affirm the facts, in which case, let me assure you that the speeches you would make would appear nowhere except in your own little paper, whereas, the facts you would affirm would be flashed across all the newspapers of the country, in a manner that you would not like, but over which you, the same as myself, would have absolutely no control. When I was first interviewed by the counsel of the Dies Committee two months ago, I said to him that if subpoenaed I could of course not refuse to appear and when appearing I would not lie in favor of the Communist Party. Would you do otherwise?

It is not my fault if the mere statement of known facts about the party discredits them in the extreme. As to what the Dies Committee does or intends to do with my testimony, or how the newspapers report any testimony, this of course is beyond my control.

In reference to the issue of the possible suppression of the Communist Party, I am of course in favor of fighting to the limit any movement that, if it would come to power, would suppress everyone else. I don't have to tell you that the Communist Party utilizes the available democracy in this country for no other purpose than

<sup>†</sup>- An editorial in the *Socialist Appeal* of October 6, 1939, probably by editor Max Shachtman, called Ben Gitlow and Joseph Zack "turncoats without principles or scruples" for cooperating with the Dies Committee, a forerunner of the House Un-American Activities Committee. This assessment was softened in an October 20 editorial written in response to this letter, which stated that while the avowed "radicals" who testified before the Dies Committee were "with perhaps one or two exceptions, ex-radicals, avowed turncoats," it was "undoubtedly wrong" to have bracketed Zack with the "patriotic renegade" Gitlow.

to suppress it completely and entirely for their own benefit, the same as the [German American] Bund would do if they had a chance, the same as they have done in those countries where they have acquired power. I would prefer, however, that they be “suppressed” by public ostracism rather than by any administrative measures, for it is obvious that the public and the workers in particular will come to the same conclusion as the resolution adopted by the American Labor Party, namely that they are “anti-democratic, anti-humanitarian, anti-labor, and the servants of Stalin’s dictatorship, brutal betrayers of the labor movement.”

You know as well as I do that even the most reactionary Democrat in this country is far more democratic than Stalin’s mercenaries, *who parade their alleged radicalism as a trap to the workers*. The democracy in this country with all its faults and essentially capitalist character does not depend on Mr. Dies or any other individuals. It is inherent in the system but the system of one party domination of government ownership by the bureaucracy of all economic and political institutions has been revealed as the instrumentality to expropriate not

only the capitalists, but to expropriate also the workers of all their rights. The workers cannot be expropriated of property which they do not own, but when they are expropriated of their rights, then a country becomes a huge concentration camp, regimented by a bureaucracy, organized by a totalitarian party. Under such a setup, one or more individuals can engineer a despotism over all. This kind of slavery for which you too stand, explains better than anything your stand on this question and the nonsense of your polemic.

I, and others, however, who see in Socialism a system which gives more rights to the masses over all things, economic and political, shall and will remain intransigent opponents of the kind of slavery totalitarian parties and their splinter offsprings stand for. Therefore, far be it from me henceforth to sympathize with any of them, even if they get paid back in their own coin.

Very truly yours,

*Joseph Zack.*<sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup>- **Joseph Zack Kornfeder** (a.k.a. “Joseph Zack,” “A.C. Griffith,” “J.P. Collins”) was born March 20, 1897 in Trencsen, Slovakia. Zack (he used his mother’s maiden name) was an ethnic Austrian from Catholic family and first came to US in 1916, where he worked as a garment worker. Zack was a member of the Communist movement from 1919, although not as a top-ranked leader in that year. In 1920 he was elected as a member of Central Executive Committee of the United Communist Party. He was a fraternal delegate to May 1921 Woodstock Convention due to his status on the CEC of the UCP. Early in 1922, he was elected as a member CEC of unified CPA. He voluntarily resigned on April 17, 1922 to help make way for Earl Browder, Robert Minor, and Alfred Wagenknecht, who were coopted to the CEC at that time. He was a delegate to the ill-fated Bridgman Convention of August 1922.

Zack served as Secretary of National Committee of the Needle Trades Section (TUEL), organized November 22, 1922. Zack was an adherent of the Foster faction in 1920s party fight. He married a Russian woman in 1926, with whom he had one son. Zack was in Moscow at disposal of the Communist International from 1928 to 1930. He attended Lenin Institute and was Foster faction’s man in Moscow and also sat on the Anglo-American Secretariat of ECCI. Zack left his family in Moscow to serve as a Comintern Rep to South America from 1930 until Fall 1931. At that time he was jailed in Venezuela, returned to the United States and released at behest of US State Dept.

Zack was the Eastern District Secretary of the Trade Union Unity League in the fall 1931 and actually shared quarters with Earl Browder for 4 months. Deportation proceedings dating back to the time of the Bridgman convention were finally dropped in 1934. Zack quit CPUSA in fall of 1934, ostensibly over the party’s Right turn. He joined Workers Party of the United States and was a member for short time thereafter. Zack sought State Department help in getting wife and child out of USSR in 1936, but was unsuccessful. He was threatened with deportation to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1938. His wife was apparently arrested in the Ezhovshchina as the relative of an “enemy of the people” and shipped to the Gulag, an ordeal which she survived. Zack thereafter moved to a position of venomous anti-communism and was friendly witness before the Dies Committee on September 30, 1939. A hardline conservative after WWII, Zack returned to use of the name “Kornfeder” in later years, under which he authored several pamphlets. He died on May Day, 1963.

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