
Where Do We Stand?

by C.E. Ruthenberg

An article distributed by the Workers Party of America Press service, Oct. 24, 1922.
Copy in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 149, ll. 4-7.

Two members of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party have recently published articles in which there is, in one case, a veiled suggestion that as a result of the raid at Bridgman the Workers Party has met with some unexplained injury and in the other the open charge that the Michigan raid has aroused fear in the Party membership and is responsible for the fact that the Party has not been as successful as it otherwise might have been in placing its candidates on the ballot in the November election.

What has happened to us? Where do we stand? Is our Party stronger or weaker than before Bridgman? These questions require a definite answer in view of the articles in question and it is not difficult to give the answer when one has more than a long distance acquaintance with the Party organization and its work.

• • • • •

The first of these articles appears in the October *Liberator*, and the author is J.B. Salutsky. Significantly enough, the article is entitled "Labor Liquidates Revolution!"

If Comrade Salutsky is of the opinion that "revolution" has been liquidated in the United States by the events of the past six or seven months it is not at all surprising that he is also pessimistic about the progress of the Workers Party in recent months.

The fighting spirit shown by the rank and file of the labor movement in the miners' strike and the railway shopmen strikes, their attitude toward the bosses and toward the government, shows a nearer approach to a revolutionary spirit than has existed in the recent history of the working class of the United States. For the first time a large number of AF of L organizations have gone on record for the mobilization of the whole

organized labor movement — for a general strike — to help fight the battles of workers on strike, and we are told that labor has liquidated revolution!

The demand for a general strike, the widespread demand by international unions belonging to the AF of L, and outside of that body for the Labor Party indicates that labor in the United States rather than liquidating revolution is making the first weak, tentative steps on the road that will carry it on to revolution. Labor is gaining its first stray glimpses of the fact that the enemy is not only the boss, that the struggle cannot be carried on through strikes over wages and working conditions alone — talks seriously about a strike AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT and of a labor party to put labor in control of the government. No, labor has not "liquidated revolution" in the United States. If it has not yet realized the necessity of revolution it has at least begun to move in the direction that leads to revolution.

Comrade Salutsky ignores all this and bases his thesis of liquidation of revolution on the attitude and actions of the officialdom of the labor movement. His treatment of the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League in relation to the arrests made at Bridgman, Michigan is of the same character.

Who created the Workers Party, Comrade Salutsky? You? You have contributed something, but would it have been in existence through your efforts and those who hold your views if you stood alone? It is the "romanticist," in attacking whom you rush off to aid of the powers that be, that contributed most to the building of this organization in the open, to fight in the open.

And if there is a new development in the trade union movement of this country, if solid results are being attained, if there is at last hope that the organi-

zational form and policies of the trade union movement in this country will be changed, who formulated the policy and laid the foundation for this work? You, or those you delight in calling “romanticists”?

Those men and women, Comrade Salutsky, who initiated this work, who can claim credit for it which you cannot claim, can be better trusted to see that the work prospers in the future than you who try to ridicule and malign them at a time when they are meeting the hardest blows of the enemy — not only their enemy but the enemy of the whole working class.

• • • • •

The second article, we assume, by Comrade Lore, in the form of the “Wochen-Rundschau” in the October 15th issue of the *Volkszeitung* makes more specific statements and is therefore possible to meet the issue raised in a more definite form.

Comrade Lore in discussing the situation of the Workers Party in relation to the nomination of candidates for the November elections assigns the Michigan “Red” raid as the reason for the failure of the Party to get its candidates on the ticket in many places. Specifically, Comrade Lore charges that the Michigan raid intimidated the Party membership through fear of general arrests, and that the raids came at a time when the whole energy of the Party should have been put into preparation for the elections, and the diversion of Party energies into defense work made it impossible to do the election work.

Both these statements are incorrect. They are of the same superficial character as the judgement that revolution has been liquidated at a time when the first signs of a movement toward revolutionary action are appearing among the masses of the workers.

As to the first point, the intimidation of the Party membership through the “Red” raid, it simply does not exist. The writer has been in most of the large cities in which there are strong Party organizations since the Michigan raid. Nowhere was there any indication that the morale or fighting spirit of our Party membership had been lowered by the arrest of the men at Bridgman. Rather the reverse, the Michigan raid had stirred the Party out of a state of lethargy. Large and enthusiastic meetings were being held. The Party membership was roused for action and in a fighting spirit.

Examining the question from a broader viewpoint, the viewpoint of our progress in establishing contact with the organized workers in the trade unions, the Michigan raid has resulted in an advance, in a direct benefit for the Party. In most of the large industrial cities our Party was, before the raid, still completely isolated from the organized workers in the trade union movement. Through the organization of the Labor Defense Council our Party members have been brought into close contact with the progressive elements in the trade unions and are standing shoulder to shoulder with them in a common struggle. We have achieved through the defense of the victims of the Michigan raid what we have been unable to achieve through our previous eight months’ work.

When before in the history of our movement have central labor bodies and state federations of labor concerned themselves with the defense of Communists? They have concerned themselves with the victims of the Michigan raids. They are taking part in their defense. Our party is no longer isolated. Such a step forward for our Party is almost worth the personal suffering and sacrifice that the prosecution in Michigan may mean for the men arrested. The outcome of the Michigan raid, in its larger aspect, is not as Comrade Lore argues, something detrimental for our Party but a distinct advance.

If the Michigan raid is not responsible for the failure to become a factor in the election campaign this year, as Comrade Lore argues, what then are the factors which explain this failure? These factors are two in number, one of an organizational character and the other a failure on the part of the leadership in the Party.

The first of these factors is the character of the membership of our organization. It is perhaps a minor factor, but it had its influence in making the Party impotent so far as the elections are concerned. Citizenship is one of the fundamental requirements for functioning politically in the election campaigns. Even citizenship itself is not enough for a member of foreign extraction, although he may become a citizen is still under a handicap in the circulation of petitions and the securing of the necessary signatures to place candidates upon the ballot.

Our Party membership as it exists at present is probably 75% incompetent to carry on the work necessary to make nominations and place candidates on

the ballot. It is incompetent to perform this work because so many members are not citizens, because those who are citizens have the handicap of language to overcome, and because it is a membership as yet largely untrained in work in connection with election campaigns. These are the organization facts which explain lack of success in getting on the ballot, not intimidation of our membership and absorption of its energies on account of the Michigan raid.

All that has been said above, however, sinks into insignificance in comparison with the failure of the political leadership of the Party during the past nine months. An organization grows only in the process of struggles. A party can become a political factor only by participation in the political life of the country. That participation does not consist of waiting until the period of an election campaign arrives and then endeavoring to place candidates upon the ballot. It consists of taking up every political question which arises, formulating the party position and actively propagating the party views.

The trouble with our Party during the last nine months has been that it has largely kept itself aloof from the actualities of the political life of the country. What was our policy on the question of unemployment and how strongly did we advocate it? What did we have to say about the open shop campaign? What little we did came too late to mean a great deal in rela-

tion to the question. What was our position on the soldiers' bonus? What did we have to say to the working masses on the question of the new tariff? These and a dozen other questions were the realities of the political life of this country. It is only by proceeding from the beginning of these actual issues of the political life of the country that we can win political leadership, that we can become a political party.

If we wish to search out the reason why we are approaching the November elections with candidates on the ticket in only a few states we must find the primary reason in our failure to give the Party political leadership. For the failure of the Party to function politically Comrades Lore and Salutsky as well as every other member of the Central Executive Committee is responsible. If we had "mixed in" aggressively, if we had taken stands on every political question, if we had made our voices heard on every question, the momentum of such political actions would have carried us into the election campaign in such a way that we would have overcome all the other difficulties in our way. Through this, and this alone can we, or will we become a political party. If we wish to remedy the condition which has made us impotent this year we must face this failure of our leadership and not endeavor to hid it through such political nearsightedness as shown by Comrades Lore and Salutsky in their articles.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.