
Notes from the Road: September 23 — October 30, 1923.

by Harry M. Wicks

Documents in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 184, ll. 32-44; d. 185, ll. 14-16; 22-25; 55.

Erie, Pennsylvania.

Sunday, Sept. 23, 1923. 2:30 p.m.
Central Labor Union Hall

Monday, Sept. 24, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Central Labor Union Hall

Fee received: \$30.00

Total attendance: 52

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Mostly Party members at Sunday meeting and now very many at Monday night's meeting — about 20. Comrades rather discouraged at failure to attract English speaking elements, but working hard nevertheless. Suggest organizer's visit. (See accompanying letter.)

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Jamestown, NY, Sept. 25, 1923

C.E. Ruthenberg
1009 No. State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade Ruthenberg:—

Enclosed find report of Erie meetings. We are unfortunate in Erie in not having a single member that can speak good English and none of them are active in the trade union movement. However, there are a number of enthusiastic comrades who are anxious to do what they can toward attracting English speaking elements. There are a number of former members of the Socialist Party that are inactive and the Erie

comrades think that someone should spend a week or two doing organization work. I told them I would make such a recommendation to the National Office. Now I think that some comrade like Caleb Harrison or Max Lerner could do this sort of work and believe it would produce good results.

They have a headquarters in Erie that is a flat above a store on Parade Street, one of the business streets of the city. Three comrades live in rooms in the flat and use a front room for a headquarters and it is very good for a town that size. They also have some funds on hand they realized from picnics and other affairs last summer.

I have also been talking today to Comrade Little and Comrade George Reader, who is vice president of the Central Labor Council, and they assure me that next year they will organize a good local labor party here. The Buffalo activity has aroused interest in this section of the state and from a short stay in Buffalo this morning I learn that one of our members is almost certain to be elected to the City Council next election — that is, in November. The whole town is talking about the Elmwood Music Hall meeting and I anticipate one of the best meetings we have ever had there.

I sent in the article on the press strike to [*Worker* editor J. Louis] Engdahl and hope he gives it proper display, a thing he usually neglects to do with my articles for some reason that is unknown to me. Last week I sent in an editorial on the activity of the Salvation Army in relation to the drive for collecting relief funds for Japan and it was omitted. I wish you would investigate this. I do not want to take things up with the Political Committee, but will have to do so if it continues. It seems too personal and as you know the only thing I do demand or have ever demanded of the

movement is that I have an opportunity to work to the best advantage of the Party.

The pressmen's strike in New York will be handled by our committee in the printing trades and we may have a big jurisdictional fight on in Portland as we have got our International Executive Committee about to the point where they will issue a charter to the pressmen in New York, which will be a violation of the principles of the AF of L. In fact the Typo union may split away from the AF of L if it tolerates Berry. I do not suppose Foster will agree that this is good tactics, but I know it will win. We can afford to tell Gompers & Co. to go to hell, but he cannot harm us in any way, and if we do stop paying per capita [dues] into the AF of L it will only be of short duration and will kill Berry as a trade union leader, and pave the way for IMMEDIATE amalgamation of the two unions. The next drive will be against [Matthew] Woll. We are now contending that every union in the industry must come under the jurisdiction of the ITU [International Typographers' Union] and will fight it out on that line — to paraphrase Grant — if it takes all winter and longer. I would like the immediate opinion of the Political Committee on this tactic so that there will be no misunderstanding in the matter of my activity and that of the other officials of our amalgamation group. I have prepared publicity for our *Industrialist* along this line but will not release it until I hear from you, although it is now in the hands of our committee. Keep this strictly confidential as no one must know at this time that we are interested in this struggle for it would furnish Berry with a weapon against the whole movement in the printing industry. Also do not leave this letter in the office or any place that it can ever become public. Better put it in the form of motions or something and destroy it, as I will feel much easier if it is destroyed.

Next week I will have further material on the NY strike as I am keeping in close touch with the situation through daily reports from our committee in New York. We can do a great deal for the daily among the printing trades unions if these articles of mind are handled right so they know we are fighting with them and for them.

I was glad to note the favorable action of the CEC on the report of the steering committee in Minnesota. Although we might have developed better floor

leadership, we did well with what we had. Neither [Clarence] Hathaway, Wangerin, or Johnson have any floor ability in a conference, they seem afraid to offend someone and will have to learn to carry on more effective floor activity. I think that if I could direct them in a few more struggles like the last one they would develop real floor leadership.

I am running for delegate to the next AF of L convention and will probably be elected from the Typo union. Some of the members want me to run for President of the ITU, claiming I can carry both New York and Chicago by a big majority and sufficient of the small unions to get in. I hesitate to do so because of the laws on our books which demand arbitration, etc. I would rather wait and fight to change the laws so I would not have to take action contrary to the principles I have fought for so long, in case I should be elected. Also in case I ran it would be a straight communist issue, as everyone knows where I stand, so it would be a terrific campaign of mud slinging. Already the henchmen of Hearst in Chicago, under the leadership of a fellow named Galloway, a member of No. 16, who is a lawyer, are starting a fight against me on the grounds that I represent the Red International of Labor Unions, etc. The present acting president, Howard, is a Hearst man and Lynch, who is also going to run, is a tool of the publishers' association under the leadership of Victor Lawson of the Chicago News. John W. Hays, the secretary, is already printing tales about the reds in the official organ preparatory to launching an open fight against our committee. All in all we are likely to have a bit of hell and that very soon. I only state this for your information, so you will know the developments in this industry.

Yours Fraternally,

H.M. Wicks

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Jamestown, New York.

Tuesday, Sept. 25, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Business College Hall, Cherry Street.

Fee received: Nothing

Total attendance: About 80

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Well handled and fair attendance for Jamestown. Keenly interested in talk and two young men signified their willingness to join the Party.

Comrade Little explained that he had notified the National Office that he could not guarantee fee, but that he would do what he could. After paying advertising and hall rent they had nothing left for fee. I told them to take it up further with the National Office.

Would suggest that Campbell and Brill from Buffalo be sent to Jamestown occasionally as there is a good situation there for the formation of a local labor party.

Scandinavian Branch is also coming in to WP, after remaining unaffiliated for some time.

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Buffalo, NY, Sept. 27, 1923

C.E. Ruthenberg
1009 No. State Street
Chicago

Dear Comrade Ruthenberg:—

Enclosed find report on Jamestown meeting. Note explanation regarding fee.

Party here is increasing membership, but unfortunately we still have to endure the incompetency and stupidity of Hansen, not having secured someone else to take his place. Our work in the Central Labor Council and in the local Labor Party is progressing nicely, but our own comrades are not devoting the time to it they should. Campbell, Raymond, and one or two others are doing everything.

The Jewish Branch is still crying over the expulsion of that rat who scabbed on the street cars last winter. They are trying to take him back in the Party saying “really he is a *good comrade* and that it was just the doings of Wicks that he was expelled.” Now I never saw the bastard or heard of him in all my life until I saw him last winter when charges were preferred against him. I emphatically protest against the implication that there is any personal malice on my part. I simply did

my plain duty as a member of the CEC and if we now take him back we will alienate good trade union elements that know his record very well. The Jewish comrades plead that the poor fellow (?) had a family and was forced to rat and add that Conroy, the business agent of the carmen’s union, is a tool of the corporation (they have no proof of this, though he is a plain fakir.) Now there are thousands here who have endured privations and still they retained their manhood and refused to scab. Bob Minor was here at the time this rat was expelled and agreed that it was the only possible course for us to take. Now the one question to be settled is whether we are going to please a bunch of half-baked kikes who want him in the Jewish branch and who are themselves scabs at heart, otherwise they would not defend his action, or whether we want to maintain the respect of the active trade unionists here. For my part it is no problem; our decision can only be against this branch, or more particularly those members of it who want him back.

Hanson did not call a membership meeting as he should have done, but held a CEC meeting instead. I talked to them last night and tonight I have a public meeting in the Jewish Labor Lyceum, far from the heart of the city. That is another blunder and occurred because Campbell is out of town for the Moulders’ Union. Some of the comrades here said that considering the fact that I was going to speak Friday night at the Labor Party meeting we should not have held a Party meeting publicly. They are greatly concerned about the LP all of a sudden. As a matter of fact they too should have secured a large downtown hall and we could have held a good WP meeting. I always get large crowds here when meetings are properly arranged and advertised, and it is foolish to imagine that our meeting would interfere with the larger meeting tomorrow night. Raymond and the trade union element were sore as the devil about it and bawled Hanson properly for not arranging a downtown meeting for me tonight.

In general the work here is in great shape, and as soon as the district is properly organized it will be one of the best in the country, but we dare not play with scabs and their sympathizers. I think this Jewish branch should be told emphatically that they *must* drop the harangue over this man Drozen — he is a scab and that is all there is to it. I am positive we must choose

between Campbell, Raymond, and the real Communists and this piece of cheese who never was and never will be a Communist. Campbell and Raymond are not going to jeopardize their positions in the labor movement by apologizing for scabbery, especially in this last car strike, which was the outstanding local struggle of the past decade in the Buffalo labor movement.

Yours fraternally,

H.M. Wicks

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Jamestown, NY, Sept. 28, 1923

C.E. Ruthenberg
1009 No. State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade Ruthenberg:—

Received the telegram from [Abraham] Jakira this morning and replied that the strike was off, because the men had accepted the Berry agreement. This information was sent me from NYC. The formal acceptance is arranged for today, so the situation has changed in the week so that our policy cannot be continued further. I think that we will have to go over the situation in the printing industry thoroughly so that we can act decisively in the next crisis. This whole matter must be carefully considered and I am sure that neither Bill [Foster] nor anyone outside of a very small group in the industry understands the potentialities of the present situation. I do not think anything can be accomplished by Bill [Foster] coming to NYC at this time, as most of our active members would be unable to attend, and our own position is not yet definitely clarified in relation to our present executive council of the ITU [International Typographers' Union].

Also some of our militants are very jealous of their position in the movement and would resent even friendly cooperation as interference with the group. It is only individuals like myself that accept the TUEL discipline and we can influence the other militants so

long as they do not know the details of our connections. We have been striving for over a year to definitely connect our movement with the TUEL, but thus far we are not part of the TUEL and we have gone so far on some occasions that we have had trouble holding some valuable workers in line because they have claimed that others outside the printing industry have tried to influence our action. While this is not a very satisfactory condition, it is the best we have at present. You know our amalgamationists are far from Communism.

While the capitulation to Berry is distressing, still it relieves the situation considerably as I am sure that nothing else would have stopped the jurisdictional fight that was looming and which would have embroidered the ITU in a struggle with the Gompers machine. We must realize, however, that this struggle is only postponed and is bound to arise again the first time another crisis develops. Therefore we must formulate our own Party policy in relation to this. I am glad that the sting is stopped now, for it will give us time to consider our tactics in the future in relation to this development. There is a long history back of this, a history wherein the ITU has on many occasions defied the AF of L. This bad feeling dates from the time Max Hayes gave Gompers such a stiff fight for the presidency of the AF of L. Max Hayes is strongly in favor of an open fight against Berry and Gompers, thinking we can smash the Old Man [Gompers]. You, of course, know how [the Socialist] Hayes would react to even the most friendly suggestion from our forces outside the printing industry. He is really the most influential man among the amalgamationists and we may run him for president of the ITU next May. To give you an idea of his position at this time, he told me the other day that had he been in Chicago in July he would have supported Fitzpatrick & Co. against us.

Now as to the local situation in the Party here. We had a small meeting last night at the Jewish Labor Lyceum and succeeded in getting a number of new members. One of them was formerly very active in the SP. I have forgotten his name at this moment.

As to the Drozen affair, I told some of the Jewish comrades that the only condition under which he ought to be readmitted is for him to undergo a six months probation period, during which time he must

prove by his work that he is ready to accept party discipline. They seemed satisfied with that and it may also enable the trade union bunch to tolerate him back. It is really a ridiculous thing, as the man has no ability anyway.

I also understand that the secretary of the Labor Party, one William Johnson, has been writing to you. He is not to be taken seriously and is a sort of amateur politician who belongs to the Tug Firemen's union. I presume you realized his general character from his letters.

Fraternally yours,

H.M. Wicks.

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New Haven, Connecticut.

Tuesday, Oct. 2, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Trades Council Hall

Wednesday, Oct. 3, 1923.
Trades Council Hall

Fee received: \$30.00

Total attendance: 60

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Very few understood English very well. Meeting rather dull, it being impossible to arouse them. Collection about twelve dollars. Jewish branch only one doing anything at all. Ukrainians hopeless leftists and constantly finding fault. Latest kick on salary raises of last summer of workers in National Office. Suggest that damn fools be not notified of similar changes in future. I told them that even now we were scabbing on skilled workers in trades.

Hartford, Connecticut.

Saturday, Oct. 6, 1923. 8:30 p.m.
Labor Education Alliance, Windsor Ave.

Sunday, Oct. 7, 1923.
Eagle Hall, 23 Central Row

Fee received: \$15.00

Total attendance: 25

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Very poorly attended. Our own members did not attend. Many of them could not understand English. I asked them how many could read English and only four held up their hands. This is a horrible town. Full of white collar slaves in big insurance concerns. This element predominates, therefore revolutionary propoganda is very difficult. The place is unimportant industrially, and not much effort should be devoted to it, considering the fact that there are other places of importance demanding attention.

Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Monday, Oct. 8, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Workmen's Circle Lyceum

Tuesday, Oct. 9, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Hungarian Branch WP, 211 Spruce St.

Fee received: \$16.50

Total attendance: 35

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: "Mass meeting" not well advertised because little work is being done among unions. Local secretary is lazy and all comrades complain but say they can secure no one else. Membership meeting very poorly attended and little comprehension of work shown by those who did attend. The DO was present at this meeting, as usual.

Secretary declared they had no money and that \$16.50 was the best they could do [terms were \$30]. This district was very poor and all meetings were poor and membership seems to be critical of National Office and CEC. I do not know that the DO told the branches not to bother about paying the full amount to me or not, but it seems very queer that this district should be unable to pay for its meetings. At Stamford and Hartford I got the money before the DO knew about it and he seemed disappointed that I did succeed in getting it.

Revere, Massachusetts.

Friday, Oct. 12, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Labor Lyceum, Shirly & Walnut Aves.

Fee received: \$15.00

Total attendance: 80

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: This meeting was really exceptional for such a place as Revere. A Jewish branch here handled the meeting and sold tickets, bringing our 80 people. A number of shares of *Daily Worker* were sold and many questions asked by active unionists. The comrades were apologizing for their small achievement in the meeting, but I know that they did much better than most of the larger locals. They thought it advisable not to take a collection as most of the audience were there for the first time, but they paid the full amount of the fee without complaint. The local comrades are enthusiastic about the work of the CEC, in spite of the fact that most of them were members of the former opposition [Central Caucus faction]. The best meeting of the week.

Lynn, Massachusetts.

Wednesday, Oct. 10, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Lasters Hall, 34 Andrews St.

Thursday, Oct. 11, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Russian Club, 611 Summer St., West Linn.

Fee received: \$25.00

Total attendance: 60

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: The mass meeting was not very well attended because some of the shoe workers locals were meeting to discuss wages, therefore they would not attend our meeting. Several active unionists manifested considerable interest and asked a number of questions, declaring that they were in sympathy with us but that they were not members because of "policy." I discussed the matter with them and they seemed more favorably inclined. Think they will come in soon. Comrade Simons was invited to speak for a trade union forum there and I think he can get results in time.

Membership meeting held in out of the way

Russian club and poor attendance, but those present were interested in the work and enthusiastic. Think future membership meetings will be better. Secretary declared he could not pay full amount but I managed to get \$25.

Providence, Rhode Island.

Sunday, Oct. 14, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
American Cooperative Association Hall

Monday, Oct. 15, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Workmen's Cooperative Association Hall

Fee received: \$30.00

Total attendance: 100

Applications for membership: 4

Remarks about meeting: Mass meeting was very well attended and four applications were signed. Young Workers League doing laudable work.

Membership meeting small because members thought we were to make a *Daily Worker* drive, according to [Joseph] Coldwell, but those who attended declared future meetings would be attended as they would not have missed hearing report had they known what was to be told them.

Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Tuesday, Oct. 16, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Eintracht Hall, 630 — 1st Avenue

Fee received: \$15.00

Total attendance: 18

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: This meeting very poorly arranged, because the DO instructed the comrades to break into new territory so they rented a hall in an out of the way place and got the number wrong on the advertising. It was 630 and the comrades advertised it as 680 First Avenue. No one ever comes to that hall anyway and it is unknown. There seems to be no efficient organizational direction in this whole district, owing to inexperienced organizer. It is also difficult to reach other than Jewish elements because the organizer does not understand any other workers — and but little of the problems of the Jewish workers. Rec-

commend an efficient organizer for this district who will build up the Party instead of holding office. The DO works to the best of his ability. Probably harder than many others, but he has no ability to do anything effectively. †

Passaic, New Jersey.

Wednesday, Oct. 17, 1923. 7:30 p.m.
Cantor's Auditorium, 259 Monroe St.

Fee received: \$15.00

Total attendance: 200

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Very good attendance and much enthusiasm shown. Comrades were disappointed because they could not hold their membership meeting, [Benjamin] Lifshitz having switched the membership meeting to a "mass meeting" in Patterson. A number of new members are in the organization and the older members feel that I should have held the membership meeting to clarify them on Party problems so they would understand the reasons for the work they are called upon to do. I think their complaint is fully justified.

Reading, Pennsylvania.

Friday, Oct. 19, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
Red Men's Hall, Walbut St. below 9th

Saturday, Oct. 20, 1923.

Fee received: None

Total attendance: 14

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Just how I happened to have two dates in this hole is beyond me. There is nothing here, not even one branch. There are only a few comrades and two of them do all there is to be done. They have no contact with the workers, do not know how to arrange meetings or anything else. They could not pay anything because they were in the hole for the hall to the tune of \$15 and have no money. They said the

National Office told them I was coming this way anyway, and might as well stop off here. If so it is mighty poor judgment. It might not have occurred that I have been working every night with not one evening to myself and that occasionally speakers like to recuperate a trifle. At any rate such meetings are folly, and you will observe by financial statement that we are farther in the hole on account of it.

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Reading, Pa., Oct. 20, 1923

Dear Comrade Ruthenberg:—

Enclosed find financial statement. You will note that we [are] worse in the hole on account of this town, which is worse than no good. Some means must be devised to liquidate this deficit as I am right up against it with no funds to do anything with.

No use to hold membership meeting tonight for the very good reason that there is no membership. I talked to all of them personally — total number 5, with 3 of them inactive and likely to remain so from the looks of them.

Hope Baltimore is better. If not I will have to walk to New York.

Fraternally yours,

H.M. Wicks.

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Friday, Oct. 27, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
International Socialist Lyceum

Saturday, Oct. 28, 1923. 8:00 p.m.
International Socialist Lyceum

Fee received: \$30.00

Total attendance: 250

Applications for membership: None

†- Elizabeth, New Jersey, just south of Newark, was part of WPA District 2, based in New York City. The DO in the second half of 1923 is believed to have been Israel Amter, against whom these comments were probably directed.

Remarks about meeting: Very good considering fact that hall was in isolated section of city — Allegheny. No trouble from official clique in control of local government.

Membership [meeting] also well attended and members solidly support CEC policies in relation to FFLP. Much interest shown.

Charleroi, Pennsylvania.

Monday, Oct. 29, 1923. 8:00 p.m.

Italian Hall, 8th Street between Lincoln & Summit

Tuesday, Oct. 30, 1923. 8:00 p.m.

Italian Hall, 8th Street between Lincoln & Summit

Fee received: \$30.00

Total attendance: 150

Applications for membership: None

Remarks about meeting: Very good meeting for Charleroi. The membership meeting was not very well attended, probably because it was a very bad night and also because the membership is scattered over a wide area, there being many small towns and settlements included in this City Central jurisdiction. Members displayed great interest in Party policies, especially our application of the United Front policy in relation to the FFLP and also in the trade unions. Membership is composed of good working class elements, and many English speaking workers are becoming interested in our work here.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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