
Missing a Year! Where Is Julia Poyntz?

by Herbert Solow

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The existence in this country of a conspiracy to deprive critics of the Communist Party of elementary political liberty is thought by increasing numbers of observers to underlie the mysterious disappearance of Julia Stuart Poyntz, nationally-known Communist official. During the year elapsed since Miss Poyntz vanished in New York, facts have accumulated which have caused informed observers and some friends of Miss Poyntz to explain her fate as the result of a political fight with Communist leaders.

According to Detective William King, assigned to the case by the Missing Persons Bureau, the police department has made routine inquiries but is little closer to solving the Poyntz case than when the woman's disappearance from her room in the American Women's Association Clubhouse, at 353 West 57th St., was revealed by New York newspapers six months ago. The known facts, including the casualness of some persons who would normally be thought anxious to find Miss Poyntz, indicate that the affair is remarkable among unsolved mysteries of the metropolis.

Julia Stuart Poyntz was born in Omaha, Nebraska. She studied at Barnard and at the London School of Economics, taught at Columbia University and, becoming interested in problems of immigrant life, served as an investigator for the Federal Immigration Commissioner. In 1914-15 she was research director of the Socialist Rand School in New York, in 1915-19 educational director of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, in 1924 director of the Communist Workers' School in New York.

In the latter year she ran for Congress, in 1928 for the state Attorney Generalship, in 1931 for the Assembly, always on the Communist ticket. In 1929 she was an official of the Communist Interna-

tional Labor Defense, and a member of the committee which welcomed the Moscow-New York fliers. She was repeatedly arrested in New York and elsewhere in connection with demonstrations, one of which acquired national notice when at City Hall Miss Poyntz called Mayor F.H. LaGuardia "a bulldozer."

Recruited Aids for Communist International.

After 1934 Miss Poyntz was recruiting aids for secret work for the Communist International. In 1936 she traveled to and from Moscow, where she was seen in the company of George Mink, American Communist once imprisoned in Denmark as a Soviet spy. During this period she was known as Mrs. Glaser, her husband having been a German who died in 1933.

Miss Poyntz's friends have told reporters that her disappearance followed a loss of sympathy with the Communist Party and a consequent "fall into disfavor." Carlo Tresca, editor of the anti-Fascist weekly *Il Martello*, has declared that in May 1937 Miss Poyntz told him she "could no longer approve of things under the Stalin regime in Russia, that she was withdrawing from party activity."

According to Mr. Tresca, Miss Poyntz's "critical attitude was well known to the Communists here, and this made her a marked person." It is a Communist role, written into the party constitution at the recent party convention that "no party member shall have personal or political relationship" with anybody the party labels an enemy. Mr. Tresca has long been characterized by the party as an opponent on a par with "Trotskyites," and Miss Poyntz's conversation with him would be regarded as treason to the party.

It was mid-December 1937 when the public learned that six months earlier Miss Poyntz's attorney, Elias Lieberman, had discovered that she had left her room early in June and had not returned. It is just a year since Mr. Lieberman found in the room Miss Poyntz's unfinished manuscripts, passport, and all her belongings except the clothes she wore. He said she had promised to call on him in a few days but had failed to; she likewise neglected appointments with friends, a doctor, a hairdresser.

Intended to Spend Summer in City.

She failed to pick up a prescription filed with a druggist, and, although short of funds, neglected to sign documents essential to pending litigation to get a share in her husband's estate. Shortly before vanishing Miss Poyntz had told friends she would spend the summer in the city.

Mr. Lieberman and Miss Poyntz's friends believed her in good health and spirits and ridiculed the possibility of suicide. They were convinced "she had intended to return a few hours after she last left the room." "I can't believe," said the attorney, "she is staying away of her own will." Her friends, too, were quoted as saying they were convinced Miss Poyntz's disappearance was involuntary.

Early this year there circulated in non-Communist circles rumors that the Communist Party could explain Miss Poyntz's fate. Then on February 8 [1938], Mr. Tresca announced his conviction that Mrs. Poyntz was "lured or kidnapped to Soviet Russia" by Communists, because "she knew too much" and they feared that, having become discontented, she might reveal their secrets.

Soon after Mr. Tresca repeated his charge to a Federal Grand Jury investigating the fraudulent passport ring which obtained the Donald L. Robinson passport for Adolph Arnold Rubens, New York Communist now in a Moscow prison. The theory was that Miss Poyntz's disappearance may have been due to her having knowledge of Communist connection with the Robinson-Rubens affair supplementing facts known to the Departments of State and Justice.



New York newspapers have echoed Mr. Tresca's charges. Miss Poyntz's friends have expressed fear that she might be in a Moscow prison, and her attorney declared that "Mr. Tresca's theory is not an impossibility," in view of the mysterious disappearance in Paris, Barcelona, and elsewhere of persons critical of the Soviet regime

To the Grand Jury Mr. Tresca spoke more precisely, naming "a prominent Communist, formerly resident in New York and subsequently connected with the secret police in Moscow, who was sent to this country for the purpose of delivering Miss Poyntz to Russia." He declared he had known Miss Poyntz and her alleged abductor some years earlier. He added that he could name witnesses who saw the two

together at about the time Miss Poyntz vanished, and witnesses on other related matters.

On February 8 the *Forward* alleged that the man in question was one Shachno Epstein, who in 1917, as a union official, met Miss Poyntz in New York, and who became a Bolshevik in Odessa in 1918. Around 1933, according to Mr. Tresca, Mr. Epstein returned to the United States for the Communist International under the name of Joseph Berson. He became the editor of the New York Communist *Freiheit*, returning to Moscow about two years later.

In May 1937 Mr. Epstein was in New York, but the Communist press, including the paper he formerly edited, did not mention his presence. Approached on the street by old acquaintances, he sought to deny his identity. Late in May he was seen with Miss Poyntz, whom he had helped bring to Communism years before and who, according to many informants, had been so intimate with him as to have full confidence in him.

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Early in June Miss Poyntz disappeared. Two months later Mr. Epstein sailed from New York on the *Queen Mary*, without his name appearing on the passenger list. The charges against him were printed in February. He had not brought a libel suit against any newspaper. He has, in fact, kept absolutely mum. His whereabouts are unknown, except to the Communist Party, which refuses to reveal them.

The party, moreover, claims no knowledge of Miss Poyntz's whereabouts. It has taken to steps to aid a search. *The Daily Worker*, leading party organ, has not mentioned her disappearance; even when denouncing Mr. Tresca it referred to its missing leader merely as "an American woman," anonymous and without political connection. Moreover, the party has tried to hide its connection with Miss Poyntz.

On December 18 [1937], H.C. Adamson, press relations director of the party, after conferring with the National Membership Department, said that "we have no record of the woman as a member of the Communist Party and no knowledge of her whereabouts for ten years."

Subsequently, C.A. Hathaway, member of the party's Political Bureau, admitted one-time association with Miss Poyntz, but said she "had severed her connections with the party in 1934." Still later it

was established by non-Communist sources that Miss Poyntz was in Moscow in 1936 in the company of Soviet secret agent George Mink.

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In estimating the evasions of the Communists, New York observers have pointed to frequent charges by responsible parties that Communists in Spain and elsewhere have kidnapped opponents, conveying them to Russia by Soviet freighter. Alexander Barmine, Soviet ex-envoy to Athens, has declared that he narrowly escaped such an attempt last year. And in June 1937, three weeks after Miss Poyntz was last seen, there sailed from New York the Soviet freighter *Chelyuskinets*, bound direct for Leningrad. Many informed non-Communist radicals and newspaper men believe that Miss Poyntz may have been aboard that boat, traveling to Russia against her will for eventual “liquidation.”

A few years ago, New York liberals have recalled, Robert Minor, Communist Central Committee member who, unlike Miss Poyntz, had not fallen from grace, disappeared for few hours in New Mexico. The reaction was an immediate hue-and-cry by various other bodies on the ground that to kidnap for political reasons is to abrogate civil rights. Some observers regard it as significant that today the Communists and others who might be presumed to be concerned in the search for Miss Poyntz, are passive or obstructive.

Mr. Lieberman, who kept Miss Poyntz’s disappearance from the police for six months, has rejected the suggestion that he file a complaint with the Federal Bureau of Investigation under the Lindbergh anti-kidnapping law, and the Bureau has taken no action, despite the fact that friends of Miss Poyntz have substantially admitted that her disappearance may have involved a violation of the Lindbergh law.

After a whole year there stands out against a clouded background of intrigue, one startling question:

Where is Julia Stuart Poyntz?

Edited by Tim Davenport

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