
How I Became a Rebel

by William Ross Knudsen ¹

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Fresh out of High School, with a bourgeois psychology and fame as a roller-skater, well dressed and with a beautiful crimson necktie as a headlight, I put on my best efforts and strolled into San Diego, California.

There was a free speech fight on, but of it I knew nothing. Suddenly a policeman's hand shook my shoulder, and when, insulted, I resisted, I was slammed in the jaw; completely subdued, I was brought before the police sergeant, absolutely in the dark as to what was the cause.

"Here's another Red, Sergeant."

Completely bewildered, I looked about in a frightened manner. Those ahead of me were questioned regarding Socialism, Unionism, IWW, etc. I thought I was in a bughouse.

"Where are you from?" "Who are you?" "Are you an IWW?"



¹ **William Ross Knudsen** (b. Sept. 30, 1892), apparently born William Ross Knudsen Wogens, the son of ethnic German immigrant parents. Attended high school in San Jose, CA, got AB degree from University of California, 1914. Joined SLP in 1915. Delegate of the SF Iron Trades Council, 1913-1918, 1923-1925. President of San Jose Central Labor Council, 1918-1919. organizer for IAM, 1919-1921, leading a strike of Machinists in Akron Ohio in 1919 and a 7 month long strike of 10,000 in Cincinnati in 1920. Toured on behalf of Soviet Russia, 1921-1922. Challenger for President of IAM, 1922. Organizer for IAM in San Francisco, 1922. Delegate RILU and CI Congresses, 1922. Delivered address to graduating officers of Red Army on 5th Anniversary of Russian Revolution, Nov. 6, 1922. SLP candidate for Mayor of SF, 1923. SLP Presidential Elector (California), Nov. 1924. Delivered memorial oration for SLP Presidential candidate Frank T. Johns, who died in a drowning accident, 1928.

I tried to answer questions that I did not understand. “What are you wearing that red necktie for?” I finally convinced them that I was a poor “boob” and gained my freedom.

Once outside I began to puzzle my mind. Socialism? Unionism? Red neckties? and while still trying to connect them together, I suddenly came upon a radical hall. In I went and was soon buying all the pamphlets and literature in sight. As I turned to go with my arms full, a sudden commotion broke in upon my thoughts. A raid upon the hall was being made, and again I faced the sergeant.

This time I failed to explain, and into the tank I went. Here I found men talking, arguing, and singing. Next thing I knew, the fire hose was turned into the tank. I tried hard to [turn] away from the water; cracked into the back with the full force of the stream from the hose, I fell a moment later in some feet of water.

The brutal actions of the police, the confinement with these rebels, and my mental reactions to all this, caused me to have a great interest in learning what it was all about. I investigated. I read all the literature I could get. Reading and thinking produced the result — a Red.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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