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# Roger Baldwin and the American Civil Liberties Union: Excerpt of a Report by a Former Special Agent of the Bureau of Investigation, US Dept. of Justice. [May 3, 1920]

by Edgar B. Speer

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Roger Nash Baldwin is a direct descendant of Miles Standish. Baldwin was born in Baldwin, Conn., about 33 or 35 years ago.† His father lives in the vicinity of this village and is said to be a highly respected farmer. Baldwin is a graduate of Harvard University, is more or less of a student, and has traveled extensively abroad. He spent some time in Germany, and speaks the language.

Prior to entry of the United States into the war, Baldwin was secretary of the Civic Club of St. Louis, Mo., and was highly regarded by many of the best people of that city. He was chief probation officer of the Juvenile Court of St. Louis and it is thought that his work in this line was one of his first actual steps toward social settlement work, which in his case, like with so many other educated settlement and social workers, led him into the radical movement. Settlement workers, through contact with the poor, commonly get a distorted view of life and see only that which may be wrong. A large percentage of these workers became strong pacifists during the war.

While in St. Louis, Baldwin was a bachelor and took into his home several young men and boys whom he met in connection with his Juvenile Court work. Several of these boys later caused considerable trouble and created widespread notoriety by their incorrigibility. One of them was William Oral James, conscientious objector, who received a sentence of 20 years

before a military court martial. It was James who caused much of the trouble at the Fort Leavenworth Penitentiary through hunger strikes, riots, etc. Baldwin was in communication with him constantly and today expresses a great fondness and admiration for the boy's stubbornness as a conscientious objector.

### Pacifist Leanings Shown.

In February and March of 1917, Baldwin in St. Louis had already shown strong pacifist tendencies. Certain prominent radicals in New York had observed these tendencies in Baldwin, and probably because he was highly regarded as an organizer and had prominent and influential friends he was turned to by them. He entered into communication with Max Eastman, editor of *The Liberator*;‡ Crystal Eastman, who is the wife of Charles Fuller of *The New Republic*; Fannie Witherspoon, a former member of the Vassar College faculty who played a very active role in pacifist, anti-war, and conscription movements; and Lella Fay Secor, secretary of the First Emergency Peace Conference and reputed by some to have been in the pay of the German Government for a time. All of these people were of ultra-militaristic [*sic.*] views. These were the people who at that time had organized the American Union Against Militarism, with headquarters in Washington, DC. The American Union Against Militarism, its pur-

†- Baldwin was born January 21, 1884 in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts.

‡- *The Liberator* was not established until March 1918. It was started in response to the suppression of the publication Eastman previously edited by postal authorities, *The Masses*.

poses, activities, and organizers must be kept in mind, because the same organization with the same type of sponsors exists today, under the name of the American Civil Liberties Union, with Harry Frederick Ward as its president and Roger N. Baldwin its directing genius.

During February and March of 1917 the group referred to above, through the American Union Against Militarism had started spreading anti-war propaganda. It was this group which induced Baldwin to leave his work in St. Louis and come to New York. He made the trip by way of Washington, DC, stopping in that city long enough to assist in staging an anti-war demonstration. The demonstration was fostered by the Union Against Militarism, with Baldwin taking care of the details. It was staged on the steps of the Capitol Building as a protest against the declaration of war, a few days before the war was actually declared.

After the Washington demonstration, Baldwin went to New York City where he took charge of the office of the Union Against Militarism. Some months later, war having been declared by the United States, the name of the organization was changed to the National Civil Liberties Bureau. Baldwin opened a New York office in connection with the Bureau, of an organization known as the New York Bureau of Legal Advice. It was announced that the National Civil Liberties Bureau was for the purpose of "maintenance in wartime of the rights of free speech, free press, and peaceful assemblage; liberty of conscience and freedom from unlawful search and seizure."

Miss Witherspoon presided over the Bureau of Legal Advice and it became generally known that the purpose of the organization was to furnish legal advice to persons interested in learning how to avoid conscription.

### **Assists Conscientious Objectors.**

Circular letters were sent out by Baldwin, through the two above named organizations, stating:

This Bureau exists to serve, free of charge whatsoever, those whose constitutional rights are violated under pressure of war.

Many of these letters were sent to military prisoners.

Soldiers in the service were circularized with a copy of a petition to Congress which characterized postal censorship and military discipline as "mob violence" and "violence of American liberties."

The National Civil Liberties Bureau, together with the Bureau of Legal Advice, was supported substantially by the Socialist Party in New York. One of the committee members of the Bureau of Legal Advice was Joseph Hillquit, brother of Morris Hillquit, International Secretary of the Socialist Party of America.

### **Some of Its Sponsors.**

The National Civil Liberties Bureau was made up of such people as Rev. Norman Thomas, editor of *The World Tomorrow*, Helen Phelps Stokes, John Nevin Sayre, Walter Nelles, and Crystal Eastman. Its circulation of conscientious objector propaganda continued widespread the latter part of 1917 and through 1918 until the signing of the armistice. It circulated propaganda favorable to the IWW and assisted in raising a substantial sum for their defense at the time of the Chicago trial.

Baldwin is an admirer of the IWW. He is deeply interested in philosophical anarchy and frankly admits that he is a philosophical anarchist. He is a member of the IWW and Waiters' Union No. 70 of Chicago. His IWW was issued to him in Chicago by William D. Haywood during the fall of 1919, and he joined the Waiters' Union about the same time. Baldwin is not favorably inclined toward the Socialist Party because he says its program is too innocuous. He is careful to avoid violence in his speech and writings, but he is in total accord with the IWW theories.

Baldwin was largely instrumental in the formation of the Workers' Defense Union, of which Elizabeth Gurley Flynn is the head with her common law husband, Carl Tresca, both of IWW fame. Tresca has been prominent as an Italian Anarchist for several years.

In the fall of 1918, the New York offices of the National Civil Liberties Bureau, together with the offices of the Bureau of Legal Advice, were raided by agents of the Department of Justice. At that time, it was discovered that Leo Chumley, IWW and confidential man for William D. Haywood, occupied desk space in the Civil Liberties Bureau offices.

### Baldwin Serves Term.

A short time after this raid, Baldwin willfully violated the Conscription Act. He was tried and convicted in New York City and sentence to serve 1 year in the Newark County Jail. His term expired about the time the steel strike had gotten under way.

Upon his release, Baldwin married Madeline Doty, a writer who is 10 or 15 years his senior. She is a member of a prominent Massachusetts family. Mrs. Baldwin was in Russia at the time of the revolution and from there went into Germany, where she was in communication with [Karl] Liebknecht, whom she financially assisted. Mrs. Baldwin is in sympathy with her husband's political views and is said to be his most willing helper.

After his marriage, Baldwin donned the clothes of a workman and started for Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and the Central West. Much of his trip was made aboard freight trains. He arrived in Pittsburgh while the steel strike was still on, established contact with W.Z. Foster, strike leader, and offered to act as a confidential informant for the strike committee. In this capacity he succeeded in getting employment at the Homestead mill of the Carnegie Steel Company and made a confidential report to Foster on conditions within the mill. One hundred thousand copies of this report were printed in the Steel Strike Bulletin and circulated widely throughout the Pittsburgh District.

Baldwin traveled throughout the district, dressed as a workman, for Foster, visiting the Ohio Valley in the Wheeling district and Youngstown, Ohio. He worked for a time as a railroad track laborer and lived in a section-hand car near Youngstown, Ohio. Later Baldwin visited Gary, Indiana, and Chicago. After becoming a member of the IWW and Waiters' Union No. 70 in Chicago, he spent some time waiting tables. He is in possession of his IWW membership book and Waiters' Union card, both of which he is very proud. His real name appears on both cards.

Baldwin left the Chicago district for St. Louis on a freight train and upon his arrival there attempted to speak but the irate citizens who had learned of his anti-war activities prevented him. He was in the Middle Western coal fields during the coal strike and was in Indianapolis at the time the coal strike was called.

### Arranges Radical Convention.

During this time the man was using his organizing ability in laying the plans for a radical convention. In November the convention was called in Chicago under the auspices of the Peoples Freedom Union. It was attended by more than 300 delegates, representing all radical labor and most all radical organizations of importance in the United States. It continued in session 5 days and Baldwin was the leader throughout. William D. Haywood was one of the speakers.

The man has shown great interest in the Negro situation. He was very active in St. Louis at the time of the East St. Louis riots which resulted in the death of so many Negroes. His aunt Elizabeth Walton of New York is one of the leaders in that city among the white people who encourage the social development of the Negro. While in the Newark County Jail, Negro agitators frequently called on Baldwin. He has been friendly with A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors of the Negro *Messenger*, which has urged its Negro readers to join the IWW.

Today Baldwin is wholly engaged in operating the American Civil Liberties Union. This organization is simply the National Civil Liberties Bureau under a new name and adapted to after the war conditions. The headquarters are located at 41 Union Square, New York City. As stated before Harry Frederick Ward is the president.

Crystal Eastman continues her interest in the organization, as do most of the other persons referred to earlier. Crystal Eastman was in England about 6 months ago during a crisis in the industrial affairs of the empire. She was also in Hungary during the reign of Bela Kun, the Communist dictator, where she addressed the Hungarian Bolshevik Congress.

The present activities of the Union are the so-called preservation of free speech, free press, and peaceful assemblage. It has become very active recently in New Jersey, where the police of the various cities are opposing the strike activities of the Amalgamated Textile Workers, a syndicalist organization founded along industrial union lines, chiefly by former IWW members. It was this organization which caused so much trouble in Lawrence, Mass. Under the leadership of Rev. Muste, Cedric Long, H.W.L. Dana, and others. At that time there was much rioting. The Amalgam-

ated Clothing Workers are associated through joint board with the Amalgamated Textile Workers, of which Sidney Hillman is head with such assistants as Joseph Schlossberg and others, who have carried on an almost reign of terror in the clothing industry. The Amalgamated Textile Workers are now engaged in fomenting a general strike in all the textile industry. Their meetings have been broken up and the American Civil Liberties Union has been holding meetings in some of the New Jersey cities protesting against the interference by the police with the strike agitators.

Incidentally it was under the auspices of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers that a large meeting was held in Madison Square Garden, New York, during the steel strike and addressed by W.Z. Foster. At the meeting \$167,000 was donated to Foster to use in the steel strike.

### **Dangerous Man.**

Baldwin is entirely interested in radical industrial matters. Because of his education, training, and executive ability, he approaches his work in an entirely different manner than does the average red worker. In plausible, well chosen language, he can justify almost any situation. However, he goes about his work in a sneaking, secretive, conspirative way. He is the frankest and one of the few sincere men in the Movement. He works quietly, in a dignified way, and actually accom-

plishes things in a big businesslike way. His greatest handicap is his prior environment, which he is trying to live down. He has had some difficulty in establishing himself as really one of the proletariat. He is not suspected for having any ulterior motives but is regarded as a chap who is trying to imagine the hardships of the working man. He is able to interest wealthy people in his affairs and is intimately acquainted with such people as John Milholland, the builder of the mail tube system of New York, the Stokes, and others of that kind. He went to jail in order to place himself in the confidence of the men with whom he desires to associate because in no other way could he so quickly focus attention upon himself. He must be regarded only in the light of a dangerous man.

The weakness of the radical movement up to this time has been their lack of competent leadership. The radicals are human and have human weaknesses and selfishness. This keeps them frequently from getting together but at the same time they are opportunists of the highest order. Any movement offering more than fair prospects of success would cause them to quickly drop their minor differences. In such an event, Baldwin is easily head and shoulders over any other radical in New York City in ability to handle a large situation in a large way.

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*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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