
The American Red Star League: A Report by the Bureau of Investigation [circa May 1, 1921]†

by Warren W. Grimes

Copy in DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 935, file 202600-934-13.

National headquarters, 59 E Van Buren Street, Chicago. Secretary and active administrative officer, CHARLES L. DRAKE, formerly director for the Western District of the Soviet Russian Medical Relief Committee. Drake and MRS. MOSES STROUD were the originators of the American Red Star League, which was created after numerous protests by local communists against the misappropriation of funds collected by the Soviet Russia Medical Relief Society ([Boris Leonidovich] Roustam Bek, Dr. [A.M.] Rovin, and others.) The affairs of that Society were turned over to a committee of the United Communist Party of Detroit and Chicago (Jacob Feldmark, Leon Fedoruk, and A. Kramer of Chicago; and Kuchen, Forris, and Peshechonowoff [Peshekonov?] of Detroit.) The Western District of the Society [Russian Medical Relief Committee] was disbanded January 15, 1921.

The following are the officers of the American Red Star League:

DUNCAN McDONALD, President;
CHARLES L. DRAKE, Secretary;
SWAN JOHNSON, Treasurer;
IRWIN ST. JOHN TUCKER, Organizer;
DR. R.B. GREEN, Medical adviser;
LINCOLN STEFFENS, Lecturer.

McDonald, Tucker, and Steffens are very well known from past activities. McDonald at one time was president of the Illinois State Federation of Labor

and a radical lecturer, particularly on the subject of amnesty, having spoken over the country for the Socialist Party. However, he is not a socialist. His favorite line is to belittle the Federal Bureaus and call upon his hearers to cease asking for what they want, but to demand it. Vice President of the American Civil Liberties Union (Seib, 1/28/20). Active in the "Fellowship of Reconciliation" (Loula, 9/28/20). Speaker for the "Committee of 48," speaker for the Farmer-Labor Party (Spolansky, 9/11/20). Conferred with L.C.A.K. Martens (Conf. 11/10/20).

Tucker became well known as rector of St. Marks Church, New York. He lectured on the Socialist platform and in 1914 became editor of *The Christian Socialist* (Chicago). He is the author of numerous radical works, particularly "The Price We Pay" ([May 1917]); *The City of Dreams* (1909); *Poems of a Socialist Priest* (1915); *Hero Prophets of the Poor* (1916); and "Why You Should Fight" [June 1917]. He was made educational director of the Workers' Institute of Chicago. On February 2, 1918, with Berger, Germer, Engdahl, and Kruse, was indicted for violation of Espionage Act, found guilty on January 9, 1919, sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. New trial granted by United States Circuit Court of Appeals.

Steffens, former pacifist and Socialist lecturer, was an ardent friend of the pacifists and through his writings insisted on fighting against the war. Was engaged by the Chicago Peoples' Council and the Lib-

†- Date estimated based upon Department of Justice documents on the same microfilm reel, relating to the Bureau of Investigation asking postal inspectors to investigate the American Red Star League for possible mail fraud violations relating to their fundraising activities. This investigation seems to have been launched on or about June 8, 1921, and the report seems to have been extant then. The last date mentioned internally is March 23, 1921 — the report was thus written sometime between those two dates. This report by Special Assistant to the Attorney General Grimes was passed along to postal inspectors not later than June 27, 1921.

erty Defense Committee in support of the Bolsheviki. Close friend of ROBERT M. LOVETT of the Federated Press and JANE ADDAMS of Hull House.

Swan Johnson is a Chicago lawyer who has appeared for many of the Communists. He is a Socialist, a poor lecturer, and considered a “shyster” by members of the local bar. A “soap box” artist (Loula, 3/22/21). Known to have actively assisted many men in evading service, through his office in Chicago (APL [American Protective League], 12/14/17).

Charles L. Drake was known as a director for the Soviet Russia Medical Relief Society. He is the most active officer of the American Red Star League — who signs the propaganda and to whom payments are made. Was active against the draft and ejected from a meeting in Duluth on July 5, 1917, for speaking against our men going abroad. Used the “mammoth 6 reel Socialist movie, *The Wanderlust*” (Kearney, 9/8/18). Indicted by grand jury at Duluth (Kearney, 10/2/18).

The League has become very active in a drive for \$10 million “to save the women and children of Soviet Russia.” Printed propaganda of many forms and colors has been disseminated in many ways, asking for contributions. In this printed matter, an attack is made upon the Red Cross and upon the Hoover relief work, charging misuse of funds for political and anti-labor work. It claims the League is organized as “First Aid to the Working Class in every country” and that “our first and most pressing duty is to save the women and children of Soviet Russia.” “They are dying because of their *loyalty (sic.)* to a Cause.” “Withdraw your support from relief forces that despise and neglect you!” They also advertise that “hundreds of tons (of food) destroyed by the Red Cross” — referring to Tucker’s *Soviet Russia and the Red Cross*. “Join the Red Star — you have borne the ‘cross’ long enough!”

One of their leaflets contains the “Declaration of Principles” — attempting to show that relief orga-

nizations do not give the “working class” help — in other words, basing their appeal on the “class struggle.” It cites Ludlow, Homestead, Colorado coal strike, and others as instances where “official” relief organizations would not help the workers.

As to results obtained, the League evidently is making progress. It announced space had been obtained on the *SS Oscar II*, sailing from New York on March 27th [1921] and it was planned to make a large shipment of soap. (Long, 3/12/21). Fifteen thousand pounds of soap arrived at New York too late for the steamer *Hellig Olaf* on March 17th. The consignors are the American Red Star League and the bookers Gerhard and Hey, 24 State Street, New York City. It was contemplated to ship the soap on the *Oscar II* on March 31. (Anderson, 3/23/21).

Comment.

From the information at hand, I can find nothing tangible on which to base an assumption of *fraud* or, in fact, a violation of any law. Inevitably, of course, there will be irregularities — there always have been in organizations of this kind. The Soviet Russia Medical Relief Society experienced them — and this very scheme grew out of those irregularities. But the evidence shows that both organizations have at least made shipments. While the “Declaration of Principles” and the personnel of the directorate clearly indicate the likelihood of both questionable faith and propaganda opportunities which undoubtedly will be worked to the limit; and while the activities of the organization and its officers should and will be followed closely, there appears nothing on which the Department could take extraordinary action at present.

Warren W. Grimes.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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