
Gitlow Found Guilty

[event of Feb. 5, 1920]

Published in *The Toiler* [Cleveland], whole no. 106 (Feb. 13, 1920), pp. 1, 4.

Summing up in his own behalf, Benjamin Gitlow, former Socialist Assemblyman on trial before Justice Bartow S. Weeks on a charge of criminal anarchy, last week asserted that the revolutionary principles of the Left Wing Socialist Party are the principles he believes in.

“I will fight for those principles,” Gitlow added. “My life is devoted to them. I ask no clemency. Regardless of your verdict I claim that these principles are correct.”

The defendant was permitted by Justice Weeks to make the summing up address, despite the fact that Gitlow did not take the witness stand during the trial, and therefore had not been subjected to any cross-examination.

“It is an unusual request,” said Justice Weeks, “but it is not to be denied at this time.”

The Justice cautioned Gitlow not to make any statements not based on evidence submitted at the trial. Gitlow disregarded the warning, however, with the result that he had several clashes with the Court, after the last of which the defendant ended his address.

“I’m a Revolutionist.”

“I admit that in the eyes of present day society I am a revolutionist...” Gitlow asserted.

Judge Weeks banged on the bench with his gavel.

“Mr. Gitlow, yu are not permitted to give your views and beliefs, said the Court.

“I’ll try to make my remarks impersonal,” said Gitlow. “Now in the United States all of our banks, factories, and mines are maintained for private advantage. Suppose John D. Rockefeller with all his bonds, stocks, and gold, went to the Sahara Desert. Do you think he could get for himself the comforts of life? He could look at his mountains of gold, but he could not buy himself a drink.”

Gitlow then launched into a statement regarding the world war, which he said was caused by capital and in which, he said, the masses were led to believe that they were fighting for principles and ideals.

Judge Weeks interrupted the speaker again.

“I don’t like to interrupt you,” said the Court, “but you are now speaking of something not contained in the manifesto.”

Gitlow insisted that the Left Wing principles are directly connected with the European war which, he added, “showed plainly the failure of capitalism.”

After several hours of deliberation, Gitlow was found guilty by the jury. An appeal was immediately taken by attorney [Clarence] Darrow.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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