
Underground and Above: A Memoir of American Communism in the 1920s.

by Max Bedacht

A section from Max Bedacht's unpublished memoir *On the Path of Life* [1967].
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During all this period, the Party was forced to function without fanfare. It led a sort of semilegal existence. Formally it was not outlawed. But when you did Party work you were liable to be sent to prison for having violated some "anti-" law or other.

The capitalist propagandists talk so much about the dictatorship in the workers' state. As against it, they claim that capitalist rule grants freedom. But the only difference existing between a workers' dictatorship and a capitalist democracy is that in the former you are legally obligated to help the workers live while in the latter you are legally obligated to help the capitalists make profits. In return, the former guarantees you economic security, while the latter offers you unemployment and periodic misery. In the former you cannot act against the interests of the workers; in the latter you are jailed if you act against the interests of the profit-makers. As for myself, I much prefer the workers' "dictatorship" to any capitalist "democracy."

Anyway, many of us Party members recognized our responsibilities for fighting our way back again to full legality. At the same time we had to find protection against automatic persecution. We found the two in one. Making ourselves an integral part of the working masses, we would work with them and carry on our propaganda and agitation. At the same time the masses themselves were our best protection. We organized our party in the form of units of the working

class in shops and in workers' organizations. These cells represented excellent instruments for our work among the masses. This form and method of work also allowed to draw militant non-party workers into intimate cooperation.

Unfortunately, some party members began to like "underground" work. As they practiced it, it was very easy. One had practically nobody to work with or to work on. One's work was confined to attending some meetings and to listening to discussion between comrades. The protagonists of that form of party work even invented a theory which justified their proposals. They insisted that for revolutionary struggles there must be favorable conditions. That, of course, is true. However, one of the needed favorable factors is the existence of a revolutionary working class. And that commodity does not grow in secret dark rooms. It must be developed by propaganda, by agitation, and by continuous political efforts on the part of the Communists. Only when subjective conditions for the proletarian revolution, a revolutionary working class, are combined with the favorable objective factors, only then can the revolution be realized.

As against this argument, the Geese,[†] really ideological relatives of Nick Hourwich,[‡] insisted that any and all Communist activities really making for a revolution are unnecessarily unlawful under capitalism. Therefore, they must be carried out in secret.

[†]- The "Goose Caucus" was the nickname of the organized faction which believed in the primacy of underground organization and that the underground party should carefully direct its limited legal operations. This group had its roots in the old Communist Party of America. This faction's anti-underground opponents, the "Liquidators," often tended to be of Communist Labor Party stock.

[‡]- Nicholas Isaacovich Hourwich, the son of a Jewish lawyer who emigrated from Russia to America around 1890, was a member of the New York branch of the Russian Federation and briefly editor of that group's official organ, *Novyi Mir*. Hourwich was a founder of the Communist Party of America and was regarded by his political opponents — such as the former CLPer Bedacht — as an ideological extremist and inveterate factionalist.

As against that, we Liquidators insisted that we had to fight our way back to legality, while the Geese maintained that in order to preserve the revolutionary purity of our principles and our work we had to remain underground. This illegality for our Party was elevated into a principle.

Despite the weirdness of their ideas, the Geese found quite a following in the Party. This was a reflection of the high percentage of petty bourgeois elements in our ranks.†

Ruthenberg had meanwhile been released from Sing-Sing prison on an appeal. This appeal finally set aside the verdict against him. Upon his release, Ruthenberg and myself jointly formulated our position, that of the Liquidators, in formal theses, the Damon-Marshall‡ theses. The general ideas embodied in these theses I have pretty completely explained in the course of the picture of the Geese. Our theses were our fighting program for the election of delegates to a planned convention.

This convention was finally held outdoors, near Bridgman, Michigan. Our founding convention of the UCP has been held in the same place. It was a summer camp before its official opening. The cabins supplied lodgings for the delegates, while the wide outdoors offered unlimited meeting room. In bad weather the dining room could serve as convention hall.

In the course of the convention and toward its end, one of the delegates, as I remember now it was Bill Dunne, reported having seen a Department of Justice hunter of Reds, known to him, roaming around the town. We took that as a warning against an impending raid. Therefore, we decided to close our debate; we took a vote on the major issue, and adjourned the convention immediately after. All delegates were urged to leave at once. Only two or three were assigned to gather and pack our materials, typewriters, etc., to assure their safe return.

Next morning the raid was pulled off. Yes, our freedom of speech and of assembly, so nicely and for-

mally guaranteed in the Constitution, meant precisely nothing to our Department of Justice. Yet, that organization is supposedly obligated to guard the constitutional application of justice in our land. These guardians of law and order arrested everyone they still found on the premises. In addition, they took away every piece of paper they could find. The indictment which followed included those arrested on the spot, together with a great number of other participants. Many of them were merely named John Doe. Even a nonexistent "Arnold Lozovsky" from Moscow decorated the list of the indicted criminals. Foster, who had come to the convention as a guest, was arrested a few days later in the streets of Chicago.

The vote on the main issue before the convention, the question of illegality in principle, was decided in favor of the Geese *by one solitary vote*. This majority was achieved by order of the Department of Justice, whose agent had voted with the Geese. He had been a delegate from Philadelphia and had achieved that honor by continuous and violent advocacy of illegality in principle. So there and then, for the first time in my life, I became personally acquainted with the most contemptible creature in human form, the *agent provocateur*. This breed are police agents who help instigate the committing of deeds which can be construed as crimes and which can serve as pretexts for a legal persecution of political opponents of the existing order. Of course, there may be a serious question as to what is more contemptible, the agent creature, or the institution which needs and produces them.

In late years this vermin has become very fashionable. Even a Catholic veterans' organization in Long Island has recently spoken out in favor of it. It protested against the Supreme Court of the United States because that body had demanded that the testimony of such creatures must be given in open court so that it can be subjected to cross examination by the defendants. These good Christians are belatedly giving a badge of honor to Judas Iscariot. They elevate his spe-

†- In actuality, the chief factor determining one's perspective on the Underground Party v. Legal Political Party issue seems not to have been social class, but rather one's Language Federation affiliation and immigration status. Non-citizens bore the brunt of the 1919-20 repressions, with the language groups of the former Russian empire suffering the particularly close scrutiny of government raiders. These groups were generally aghast at the idea of eliminating pseudonyms and stealth and thereby opening the entire communist organization to a full frontal attack from federal and state agents of law enforcement — which regarded mere membership in the Communist Party as participation in a criminal conspiracy to overthrow government by force and violence.

‡- "David Damon" was the underground pseudonym of C.E. Ruthenberg; "James A. Marshall" was that of Max Bedacht.

cies into the category of saviors of “our way of life.” If my memory serves me right, that is exactly the role Judas played for “the way of life” of the masters of 2,000 years ago.

Anyway, the Bridgman agent was a dirty rat. But when I use that term I feel in duty bound to apologize to the rats. True, they are disagreeable and disease carrying creatures. But they cannot help themselves. They do what they do as a necessary part of their struggle for existence. And who blames even a rat for wanting to live? The agent provocateurs have no such excuse. From Judas to Azev and to our own Morrow† they were creatures without honor and without conscience, and without any natural reasons for existence. They will falsely betray their friends, their fellow workers, their neighbors, and their own fathers and mothers, their sisters and brothers, all for a consideration. Our world of humans will be justly able to claim civilization only when creatures with the inhuman qualities of the Judases and the Azevs, the Morrows, and their ilk, are treated by all of the people as outcasts. No social system which needs such creatures to perpetuate itself can claim to represent civilization.

Morrow, by the way, also went by the name of Ashworth. I do not remember anymore which was its right name. And, anyway, a skunk by any other name, with apologies to the skunks. This Ashworth was not only a creature employed to stick his nose into the chamber pots of his friends and to report the particular odors, he was also employed to smuggle into the pots the desired substances which would create the smell needed to give formal justification for the intended unjustified and lawless actions of his employers. And out of such self-created stink our honorable rulers have pulled the distorted rabbit of our Congressional political inquisition committees.

We Liquidators insisted to submit our controversy to the Communist International for judgment. This could be done and was planned for the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International which was scheduled for the fall of 1922.‡

I was one of the delegates selected to attend that Congress. It became the reason for my third trip to

the Soviet Union.

In the meantime the Michigan authorities had started to put its intended victims from the Bridgman Convention on trial. Foster, who had been a guest of the Convention, was tried first. The jury disagreed and Comrade Foster was freed. Ruthenberg, the next to be put on trial, was convicted. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment. In New York he had served in prison as a victim of a criminal anarchy law. Now in Michigan, and for the same activities, he was elected as a victim of a criminal syndicalist law.

The indictments created extraordinary financial burdens for the county. These burdens, in turn, required extraordinary taxes. The farmers of the county did not cherish that at all. This burden considerably reduced the enthusiasm of the local authorities for the trials. At that time the conspiracy charge had then not as yet been invented. That is why each defendant was entitled to an individual trial. Then those damn Reds played a dirty trick on the persecutors. The Party rounded up all those named in the indictment but not apprehended. It had them surrender to the Bridgman authorities. Now the prospect was an endless number of costly trials of people, who, after all, had but done what the Constitution said they were allowed to do, meeting and speaking. Anyway, eventually the prosecution went into court to have the indictments *nolle prossed*, invalidated.

Incidentally, in this connection I learned of another peculiarity of the rights of the American citizens. The Constitution of Michigan state, as do all state constitutions, guarantees every accused a speedy trial. All of us defendants, therefore, close to two years after the indictments against us had been returned, appeared in court in Bridgman and demanded that since the prosecution had violated the constitutional guarantee of a speedy trial, which we certainly had not been given, the indictment should be thrown out. The court denied the motion. It insisted that it was up to us, the intended victims, to demand the speedy trial. Since, until then, we had not pressed such a demand, the constitutional guarantee did not apply to us. It seems that the constitution is not binding on the

†- Evno Azev was an agent of the Tsarist secret police (Okhrana) who infiltrated the Central Committee of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party. Francis A. Morrow (pseudonyms “Day” and “Ashworth”) was the Department of Justice agent which infiltrated the August 1922 Bridgman Convention as a delegate, tipping off its location and making possible a government raid.

‡- The 4th Congress of the Communist International was held from Nov. 7 through Dec. 3, 1922.

authorities. They can legally do as they please. Only when people try to prevent them from doing what they pleased, then these people may use the Constitution as their base of action. Of course, that would still not guarantee them their constitutional right. The court could still decide that the violators of the Constitution were in the right, just as it did in our case. The moral of this story is that the people's rights are not worth the paper they are written on. They acquire a meaning only when the people, hour by hour, day by day, and year by year, fight for their rights, and themselves enforce them. As Goethe said: "*Nur der verdient die Freiheit und das Leben, der taeglich sie robern muss*" — "Only he earns liberty and life who daily must and does conquer them."

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The date of the 4th Congress of the Comintern had been set for November 1922. As an elected delegate to that gathering, I again set out for the Soviet Land. I arrived in time for the opening session, which was held in Petrograd in the Tauride Palace. We met in the former meeting hall of the Tsarist Duma.

The Geese were well represented on the delegation of our party. We Liquidators had only two official representatives — James P. Cannon and myself. In Moscow, at the Congress itself, the Geese also received some left handed support from a representative of a splinter group. It called itself the United Toilers. This was the name of a larger group from which they had

split when the latter, together with the Workers' Council Group, united with the UCP in the formation of a broader Workers Party.†

This Workers Party had been conceived as a broad political party of the left, going beyond the Communists. The Communist Party itself was to be an integral part of that organization. The fact that all of the members and of the groups in the Workers Party were revolutionary socialists soon became evident. With the demise of the Geese, therefore, the whole Workers Party eventually replaced the UCP and became the CPUSA.‡

Upon arrival in Moscow, Cannon and I busted ourselves with a systematic campaign for interviewing and buttonholing delegates from all countries. We tried to acquaint everyone with the issues involved in the American tussle, and we solicited their support. In the course of these efforts we also had a formal interview with Trotsky. Max Eastman, then in Moscow as a guest of the Soviets, accompanied us to that interview.

In those far away days, Eastman played the role of a Socialist. He obviously did believe then in "Moscow Gold." He then hoped for as much or more financial gains from pro-Soviet writings as he later harvested from rabid anti-Soviet outpourings. As you know, he later reneged on his original stand and joined the enemies of the working class.

To this day I have retained my old habit of trying to find out the why and wherefore of things. Therefore, just to improve my understanding, I have repeatedly tried realistically to classify the renegades. But all

†- Bedacht's recollection here is confused and confusing. The United Toilers Party (UTP) was the half-hearted "Legal Political Party" affiliated with the Central Caucus faction — the group of former old-CPA members headed by John Ballam, Charles Dirba, and George Ashkenudzie which split from the unified CPA in late November 1921 over the CPA's planned establishment of a legal Workers Party of America (WPA). The Workers' Council was a short-lived organization that emerged from the Socialist Party in America after the SPA's June 1921 convention, held in Detroit. It advocated a united "legal party" of revolutionary socialism and included in its ranks such future Communist Party stalwarts as J. Louis Engdahl, Alexander Trachtenberg, and William Kruse. The Workers' Council signed the convention call to establish the Workers Party and was dissolved into the WPA at its formation at the end of December 1921. The UTP was dissolved into the WPA shortly after the August 1922 Bridgman Convention, which reunified the Communist Party of America. Bedacht speaks here of A.S. Edwards (pseudonym "Sullivan") a former Boston District Organizer of the unified CPA and leader of a splinter faction of the UTP which refused reunification with the party in 1922. This small organization headed by Edwards maintained an independent underground existence throughout the 1920s.

‡- Bedacht is not precise here. The name "United Communist Party" (UCP) was terminated at a unity convention held in Woodstock, NY in May 1921, which joined the UCP with the old Communist Party of America to form a new unified organization — also called the Communist Party of America. This unified CPA, an organization which operated in secrecy, established the Workers Party of America as its open ("legal") affiliate in December 1921. Eventually this latter group supplanted the underground party. In April of 1923, the underground CPA was formally merged with the Workers Party of America in an open organization, from which time the organization was known as the Workers (Communist) Party of America. Sometime in 1929 this name was changed for a final time to "Communist Party USA."

my efforts failed to classify them in any *human* category.

To make a reliable analysis of anything one must find some realistic premise to start out from. But in the mere consideration of the human being the renegade defies any search. Sure, he looks like any other human being. But a closer examination shows that he has only the form of one, but he is not human at all. He lacks character. He is without any conscience. He is incapable of any convictions. Oh, yes, he does have a conviction. But that conviction is not human. His conviction is that wherever there is more than one side to a story or to an issue, the better paying side is invariably the good one. Thus, while the renegade defies classification as a human, a consideration of his political origin can throw a revealing light upon the creature.

In the class struggle there are two sides. Fundamentally, the side one takes in that struggle is determined by the social category of the people one belongs to. It is determined by one's very living interests. In all cases the side one takes is determined by a human reaction to the social phenomenon of the class struggle. But in the renegade the complete disintegration of all purely human, and especially social human feelings, which is generated by capitalist class financial avariciousness, has progressed to the point of no return. Dominated by the capitalist profit motive and having nothing else to profit from, the renegade sells himself. He sells himself to the side which offers the least risk and promises the highest returns. As you see, there is no human consideration involved in their doings.

So much for the renegades.

Cannon and I found no difficulties in convincing the comrades of the Comintern that our approach to the problems of the American party was a realistic as well as a principled one. Therefore, we could and we did look forward with confidence to the final decisions.

As already mentioned, the opening session of the Congress took place in Petrograd. All participants in the Congress then went by special train to Moscow to proceed with the regular sessions of the Congress in the Kremlin palace.

Lenin, earlier the victim of a murderous attack by a would-be assassin, could not attend regularly. But

he did come to report on five years of progress of workers' rule.

Both in Petrograd and in Moscow I could witness the rapid progress which the Russian workers' state had made in the construction of their new world. The broken down railways with their decapitated rolling stock were now in excellent order. The trains with the heated passenger cars were rolling on schedule. The innumerable beggars seen on the streets a year and a half earlier, another heirloom of Tsarism, had practically disappeared. From an annoying rule they had now been reduced to a rare exception. Most of the burlap wound feet and legs of the peasants had made room for well booted ones. Obviously, the proletarian revolution had already rid itself of some of the most ugly inheritances which bankrupt capitalism had left behind. That meant that the Socialist construction was rapidly progressing.

One could not read about this progress in the capitalist press. It was not news fit to print. It was fundamentally different some ten or twelve years later. Then the fascist rule in Italy had achieved Italian trains running on time. This "accomplishment" was widely advertised and praised in the news columns of the capitalist press. The mass torture and mass murder of workers by the fascists were not allowed to dampen the applause. But news of the steady economic forward march of the Soviets in the building of Socialism was carefully smothered by a systematic silence on the part of the public press. But then, the sputnik ripped apart the curtain of lying silence and offered the world a view of the glorious accomplishments of Socialism.

The American question was referred by the Comintern to a commission for study. The chairman of the commission was a German party leader. The commission had fourteen members. Delegates from Germany, Russia, Italy, and from five other nations were among them. The Commission heard both sides and studied the voluminous materials submitted by them. The need of studying these materials made it impossible for the commission to finish its work during the sessions of the Congress. It submitted its findings only in March, 1923, to an enlarged session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

The Fourth Congress made a change in the setup of the Executive Committee. Previously that body had been composed of the comrades assigned to that work

by their respective parties. Now it was decided to elect its members by the Congress. The Executive Committee was to have a full session every four months. And of its twenty-five elected members, at least fifteen had to work in Moscow during their incumbency.

From our American Party, Katterfeld was elected a member, and Ruthenberg a candidate to the Executive Committee.

In the debates from the floor the Bostonian delegate from the United Toilers made a bitter personal attack against me. He attempted to aid the Geese by trying to discredit the Liquidators. He even shouted into the Congress Hall that Bedacht was an ideological accessory to the shooting of Lenin by Dora Kaplan. These violent charges were so grave that the American Commission found it necessary to investigate them. As a result of that investigation, the Commission eventually made a declaration to the plenary session that the charges against Bedacht were totally unfounded. The commission proposed that the Congress officially reprimand the accuser. The motion passed unanimously.†

The findings of the Commission of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern for examining the American question sounded the death knell of the Geese. Their followers melted away. As a particular species of Communist, they have never been heard from since.

As a matter of fact, the Geese had started to disappear as a group even before the judgment of the Comintern had been pronounced. Some petty politi-

cian of the National Committee of the Party had tried to utilize that fact. He achieved the acceptance of a resolution which condemned the Party representatives in Moscow for continuing the fight for a favorable decision when at home the issue had already died. We delegates in far away Moscow knew nothing of all this. We had been sent there to conduct the fight. We learned about the natural demise of the Geese only after our return.

At any rate, our fight, even if it had been true that developments at home had obviated its need, gave the Party and its members a good lesson in Marxism. Of course that lesson needed to be driven home. A thorough and well guided discussion of the Comintern decision could have effected such needed education. But such a discussion was forestalled by the resolution of the National Committee. The facts involved in this maneuver, and its purpose, fed my natural antipathy against petty political tricks. Such maneuvers solve nothing and teach nothing. They are merely weapons of petty bourgeois politicians. They do not belong into the arsenal of a working class leader. Such maneuvers can serve only for improving the position of individual politicians; they cannot contribute to a fortification of the position of the working class. They only leave ugly scars and cause pain and dissatisfaction.

Our work and activities in the United States now gradually flowed back into regular and more or less routine channels.

About that time the National Committee of our

†- While it is possible that Bedacht's recollection here is correct — only an abridged report of the 4th Congress of the Comintern was published, not a complete stenogram — it is likely that Bedacht here misremembers the specifics of A.S. Edwards' denunciation of him on the floor of the 4th Congress some 45 years previously. According to the published report, Edwards said:

"Just now, you heard another representative of the American Party, Comrade Marshall [Bedacht] of the Right Wing. He is the representative of the Mensheviks. He is not honest. He wears a mask over his face. He comes here before you, revealing a little of his real face, saying that we must elect Meyer London, the social patriot of Congress, if not, then the Communist movement will vanish from America.

I happen to represent the Left element in the Party, 4,000 of whom were expelled and 1,000 themselves left the party last January [in the Central Caucus faction split of 1921-22]. We were expelled by the faction of Marshall that ruled the party up to September this year....

Marshall did not care to say that he and the Right Wingers in the Party insist that the illegal party must be liquidated. It conducted a campaign in order to liquidate the underground Communist Party, and have just the legal organization to remain with a program within the lines of bourgeois legality, just as the old Russian liquidators of 1906 and after did. They were for the same big mass party. They promised a big mass party in America with 100,000 members, and now it has come down to only 14,000 members according to their own figures, a Centrist-Menshevik party that is a small sect.

Well, I cannot say all I have to say because there is not time, but, so long as the Communist International will not say that the Right Wing Mensheviks must be expelled from the Party, you will not see a healthy Communist movement in America." [*Fourth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Petrograd and Moscow, Nov. 7 - Dec. 3, 1922.* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1923), pp. 83-84.]

Party decided to transfer its headquarters from New York to Chicago. This was a commendable move. New York was not well fitted to be the center of our Party. In that city we had a very weak proletarian sector. Under such conditions the already existing heavy weight in the Party of petty bourgeois intellectualism became top heavy. The absence of any heavy industry in the New York area, with a predominance of workers who only a generation ago escaped the ideological prison of home industry, found no counterbalance in proletarians of heavy industry. The important counterbalance of honest-to-goodness proletarian instinct and experience was missing.

This is not an argument against intellectuals. They are very welcome to serve the cause of a proletarian revolutionary party. But the Party, fundamentally, must be proletarian in purpose and composition. In a predominantly petty bourgeois party the pressure of working class necessities is weak. Tendencies toward abstract theoretical speculations and rhetorical phrases are not counteracted by the daily requirements of the militant struggles of the workers. The road to petty bourgeois politics is blocked by the health instinct of a core of hard working proletarians. Most important of all, the workers within the party are the only contact of the party with the workers for their mobilization for the campaign of the class struggle, and for effective agitation and propaganda among the workers. The less workers the party has in its ranks, the weaker it is.

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The experiences which were conveyed by the factional fight and its end heightened for me the value and necessity for an international organization of the revolutionary proletarian movements of all countries. The possibilities for accidental derailments of some group or Party always exist. The unity and guardianship of the united parties over their mutual services to the common cause supplies the most reliable safety

device against such derailments.

What had touched off the senseless struggle in our Party?

For the Presidential election in 1924 non-capitalist and anti-capitalist groups in the country were urging unity in the coming elections. A national convention of these forces was called by the Farmer Labor Party. This Party had been formed on a national basis a year earlier. The convention was to meet in St. Paul, Minnesota, and was to nominate Presidential candidates. Then it was to organize and to unify national campaign actions for these candidates.

The delegates of our Party went to St. Paul in the hope that a full unity of political action by an American Left could be achieved. In most of this work the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor, its president, Fitzpatrick, and its secretary, Nockels, cooperated. These latter had been old co-workers of Foster in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. In St. Paul these men were bitterly opposing the nomination of any candidates.†

In the leadership councils of our Party, Foster made himself the spokesman of these Chicago labor leaders. He complained bitterly that the insistence by the Party on the nomination of national candidates put him into the position of betraying his Chicago friends. There may have been reasonable arguments for not proceeding with nominations. Today I am inclined to find such arguments myself. But, certainly, Foster's argument was not one of them.

This was a little explosion within our Party which, through seeming chain reaction, set off a bitter and destructive factional fight. As this struggle progressed it became more and more a war between two distinct and opposing political armies, each endeavoring to destroy the other. Both stubbornly refused to see that such a destruction would automatically carry with it a destruction of the Party itself.

In its very early stages, the division of the Party did not reach down to the last recesses of the membership. None of the earlier issues and points of division

†- In 1924 there was a widespread and growing push of the candidacy of progressive Republican Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin as standard-bearer in an independent campaign for the Presidency. LaFollette chose not to seek or accept the endorsement of the St. Paul Farmer-Labor Party convention, which was organized and dominated by the communist movement — which LaFollette loathed. In this instance, “bitterly opposing the nomination of any candidates” at the Farmer-Labor Party convention probably meant the avoidance of splitting the progressive third party movement and weakening the LaFollette candidacy by putting forward yet another set of candidates, rather than any objection to the tactic of a “third party” as a matter of principle.

in the struggle within the National Committee particularly aroused the interests of the ranks. The activities merely took the form of a constant maneuvering between the two groups for a firm majority in the national leadership. However, the petty politicians and wirepullers in both groups, mainly Lovestone in our group and Browder in the Foster group, soon began to strengthen their maneuvers in the leadership through the actions of groups in the membership, organized by them.† Permanent rank and file connections were established and maintained by these leaders. This wrangling and bickering was extended from the national to the district committees and, finally, to all of the party units.

In the National Committee itself the division leveled off approximately in the middle. When Ruthenberg was called up for trial in Michigan, the Foster group, for a while, gained a majority of one.

During this period the National Committee elected a delegation to an enlarged session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. The temporary Foster majority elected only one from our side. And that one was myself. However, before my departure Ruthenberg's trial ended and on an appeal to a higher court he was released on bail. Since he was an elected member of the International Executive Committee, he needed no assignment from his party to acquire the right to attend. So we both, Ruthenberg and I, started out for Moscow.

At that time no side had any particular desire to bring the conflict before the Comintern. Therefore our American fight was not aired in the sessions of the Executive Committee.

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In the spring of 1927 we lost Charles E. Ruthenberg. On a Saturday, while we were lunching together in a drugstore on Madison Street, he complained about lumbago pains. In the night from Saturday to Sunday he had to be rushed to a hospital for an emergency appendix operation. A few days later, while I was at his bedside, he passed away. We had talked about

Party problems until he passed into a coma at the approach of death. Peritonitis had put an end to the life of this good friend and comrade. It had suddenly ended a vigorous and valuable life.

Ruthenberg's death was much more than the loss of one valuable comrade. He was succeeded as General Secretary by Jay Lovestone. But while Ruthenberg was a true and loyal son of the working class, Lovestone turned out to be an unprincipled semiskilled intellectual, whose thoughts obviously had never been centered on the needs and desires of the working class. Instead, they were centered solely on the welfare of Lovestone. This characteristic eventually led him onto the road of better paying renegadism.

Lovestone had been the organizer of the faction I was part of. Now as General Secretary of the Party he continued to play his chosen profession as factional field marshal.

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From then on, and unfortunately to this very day, no fundamental appraisal has ever been made by the Party leadership of the rapidly and constantly changing economic and political world situation; and of the role of our ruling class in that change. The fast developing and expanding new type of American imperialism, for example, the very basis of our government's foreign policy today, has never been fundamentally analyzed by our party. Instead of creating for the Party a realistic and solid starting point for its policy making, these policies and tactics were based on momentary phenomena. After the factional fight was finally abandoned, the old practices of policy making were continued. The participation of the membership in the fundamental policy making by intense and deep digging pre-convention discussions and by educational discussions of the current policies by the Party members became outlawed. The relation of the leadership to the members changed into one of domineering bosses to obedient underlings. And the fundamental aim of the Party, the Socialist Revolution, was lost sight of. Its treatment was confined to a very

†- The reader is alerted to a possible after-the-fact politicization of this assessment. Historians have regarded John Pepper as the leader of the Ruthenberg group in the 1920s factional war, while Alexander Bittelman is believed to have been Foster's chief factional lieutenant in the period. Bedacht's reduction of the factional struggle to Lovestone v. Browder — both black-hatted villains in the 1967 Communist Party mileau, as opposed to the heroic figures of Ruthenberg and Foster — should be considered cautiously.

rare and embarrassed pronunciation of the mere words.

With spot chosen political policies, general propaganda for the continued education of the membership lost all value and was discontinued. The relation of momentary moves to the ultimate aim received no more attention. A fundamental understanding of these relations on the part of the Party members was no longer considered necessary.

In a revolutionary proletarian party an understanding on the part of the membership of its immediate work and the relationship of that work to the ultimate aim, is the precondition for effective work among the rank and file in their unions, among the people in their neighborhoods, and in their daily life in general. While the members in the Party may be rank and filers, among the general citizenship they can and must act as leaders. There they must exercise initiative. They are unable to do that if they are merely trained as silent tools for carrying out orders from above.

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The Executive Committee of the Comintern appointed another American Commission. That Commission analyzed and aired our mess from all angles. Its final recommendation condemned both sides equally. It pointed to and proved the unprincipled character of the fight. It categorically demanded the immediate disbanding of the factions. A convention was to be organized on a strictly non-factional basis. The delegates to that convention were to be elected after a thorough going discussion by the membership of the Comintern decision. This convention was to elect the new leadership. The work of the leading members of the Party up to the convention was to supply the test for their fitness for further leadership.

There had never been any doubt in my mind about the decision of the Comintern being binding for me, or being just. I had gone to Moscow in good faith. If I did have no confidence in the Comintern, I would not have supported the submission of the con-

flict to its judgment. We had submitted it. Our good faith now demanded of us to accept its judgment.

I made a personal statement before the ECCI to the effect that now, after our court of last resort had spoken, the fight was over as far as I was concerned. I pledged my full share in the needed efforts to bring back peace and reestablish the normal functioning of the Party to fit it for its new leadership of the American working class.

Upon my return, the National Executive Committee elected me General Secretary to function in the preparations for the Convention. Upon their return, the leaders of the Foster caucus lent a willing hand to the needed work ahead of us. Browder did not come home with us. He returned only just before the Convention. Lovestone, Gitlow, and Wolfe made the decision of the Comintern their excuse to turn not only against the Party, but against the cause of the working class.† It obviously had never been their cause. It just cannot happen to a conscientious fighter for the emancipation of the working class to suddenly change sides and to land in the camp of the enemy of the proletariat. Therefore, I necessarily had to conclude that these people now merely openly professed to what they had always secretly believed in. They had always been unprincipled seekers of power, seeking where they could find it; yesterday at one side, today on the other.

After my return from Moscow I seriously undertook to review our fight and my position and role in it. I was forced to agree that the Comintern had made the only decision it could have made. That decision was fundamentally correct; it served the cause of the Party. The actions of Lovestone, et al., after the decision, not only strengthened my agreement but also suggested seriously that their factional plans and actions had purposely steered toward the destruction of the Party as an instrument for the American proletarian revolution.

How could I have worked and cooperated with these elements for so long? Did uncritical confidence in my co-workers and friends dull my senses? Did sentiments distort my judgment? Did the heat of contro-

†- Bedacht here anachronistically projects the later political trajectories of these individuals backwards. Jay Lovestone, Benjamin Gitlow, Bert Wolfe, Will Herberg, and others initially formed an oppositional Communist organization called the Communist Party (Majority Group) and published an official organ called *The Revolutionary Age*. While Gitlow left the movement ahead of the other three of these four primary leaders of the organization, no matter what one thinks of their decision or their later politics, it is factually inaccurate to say that any of these individuals turned "against the cause of the working class" at this time.

versy falsify the true picture of things in my eyes?

Whatever it was, it cannot lessen my responsibility. I simply had to learn that in all matters concerning the interests of the working class and their Party, a searching and unbiased analysis is required of all factors connected with the questions and issues under discussion. A Communist, and especially a leading Communist, cannot allow himself to be persuaded by friends, swayed by sentiments or blinded by the heat of any controversy. If and when he does succumb to such weaknesses, he cannot claim any valid excuses for his errors. That is the lesson the factional struggle has taught me. I learned that lesson so well that I am not likely to make the same mistake again.

With the preparations for the coming Convention, new life developed in the Party. While the pain caused by the damages done by the proceeding struggles could not be at once forgotten, nor their effects wiped out of the history and memory of our Party, everyone now tried hard and pitched in to repair and to rebuild.

The Convention held in 1930 completed the liquidation of organized factionalism. It elected Earl R. Browder as General Secretary. It formally wrote finis to a period which had done incalculable harm to the Party and which had taught me serious and momentous lessons.

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