
The Crisis in the *Laisve*: From a Declaration of the Lithuanian Opposition Communists

Serialized in *The Revolutionary Age* [New York], vol. 2, no. 24 (May 16, 1931), pg. 3
and vol. 2, no. 25 (May 23, 1931), pg. 3.

*We publish below the most important paragraphs of a declaration recently issued by the opposition group in the Lithuanian revolutionary workers movement in New York. As appears from the facts given in this declaration, this group very probably has the support of the bulk of the readers and followers of the Lithuanian Communist Party paper **Laisve** [Freedom]. The declaration shows to what extremes the wrecking course of the present Party bureaucrats is proceeding, not only in the Party but in the sympathetic workers organizations.*

—The Editor.

Last summer [1930] the leaders of the Communist Party decided to drive out practically all of the Lithuanian workers from the Party. Some were expelled and others, terrorized by threats and condemnations, left themselves.

Such “drives” took place in New York and Chicago. Finally, Herbert Benjamin, then District Organizer from New York, brought charges to the Central Executive Committee of the Party against all Lithuanian Communists, denouncing them as “social-patriots” and demanding that there be a general investigation of all their institutions and more Party “cleansing.”

Throughout the whole country only about 150 Lithuanian workers are now left in the Party.

How It Started.

Either because of Benjamin’s charges or because of the Party leadership’s general line, it was announced that all of *Laisve’s* income was to be controlled by the Party “experts.” At the same time the Central

Committee sent a committee consisting of [Charles] Dirba, [A.H.] Harfield, etc., who demanded that they be allowed to “examine” all of *Laisve’s* records, assets, the editorial staff, and all the technical workers. Harfield announced that 51% of *Laisve’s* shares must be written over to the Central Committee. * * * But this decision did not go through, apparently because the Party discovered that it is not the shares that controlled the paper as such, because the shareholders themselves, regardless of the number of shares they hold, had only one vote. Afterwards all of the editors were questioned and the same was to be done to the technical workers. The question arose why all of this is being done. * * * *Harfield explained that the Party Central Committee had decided to exterminate all foreign language workers’ “hangouts” and to publish all papers from the Center.*

To the question what they intended to do with all the foreign language workers’ home buildings as, for instance, the *Laisve*, it was answered that the necessary machines would be transferred to the Center, the unnecessary ones sold, and the buildings (other nationalities also have such workers’ homes) would be transformed where convenient into workers’ centers where not sold. * * * When all the papers will be published at the center, then all the foreign workers’ donations will go to the *Daily Worker*.

The Money Question.

Unable to control *Laisve* by taking over 51% of the shares and not seeing any way of moving it to Union Square, an attempt was made to bankrupt it in order to “prove” thereby, as then announced, that a paper “rejecting Party control remains without energy, virility, and it means death or development into a counter-revolutionary paper” ([Anthony] Bimba’s Directors’ statement in *Laisve* No. 41, February 18, 1931).

Why did it appear to us that they wanted to bankrupt the paper? First of all, because they had begun to demand an unlimited sums of money. * * * Taken in all, the money demanded was three times a sum of three units — \$500; \$1000; next \$3000; then a bond of \$3000, which would have been over \$10,000. Anyone can see that if Bimba had controlled *Laisve*, that day *Laisve* would not have had a center and could not have been published. * * *

Trying to Force Two Papers on *Laisve*.

Last summer [1930] and instruction came from the Party leaders that *Laisve* “at its own expense publish a Spanish Party weekly.” Such a thing would have cost *Laisve* \$5000 a year. The pressure from the Party was great, but the conditions during the last summer were so bad that somehow they were talked out of it. Not even a month passed before another “categorical instruction” came to the effect that room be made for two new linotypes to print the Italian Party paper free of charge.

If we had agreed to publish these two weeklies at *Laisve* we would have had to draw a new mortgage on *Laisve* for \$10,000 and in another six months there would not have been any *Laisve*, nor those two weeklies. Would we in this manner have served the cause of Communism? If we were to have no daily through which to constantly urge the workers to support the Party and its institutions, how would such a situation reflect itself amongst our organizations and its members? As a matter of fact, we would have created a field for a Lithuanian Fascist daily and general demoralization among the workers. An attempt was also made to hang on to us the printing of the *Freiheit*, but the new instruction was raised in such a despicable manner that it was met with an unconditional refusal. That ended it then and there.

The present leadership of the Party, while making continual appeals for funds, bankrupted one institution after the other, from newspapers to the Party center on Union Square. Greater and greater demands were made upon the Party membership.

All Party papers should, of course, be published from the Party center and the Party should control not only the publication but also the technical affairs of all Party papers. But *Laisve* is not a Party paper, but a paper of a Party-sympathetic cooperative. Under such circumstances it is sufficient that the Party have ideological control of *Laisve*. But when conspiracies are concocted without the shareholders’ knowledge and the attempt is made to transfer it to the Party or else to bankrupt it, then are we, knowing all this, guilty because we expose this conspiracy? It appears to us that we would really have been guilty before those workers, shareholders, and readers who built the *Laisve* if we had helped the Bimba clique to hide its work.

More — we would have been guilty of betraying the best interests of the working class because it is plain to us that there is a field for a

Lithuanian communist daily today and there will be for at least 10 years.

Were We Against the Party?

We called the caucus for one purpose — to discuss how to prevent the Bimba elements from destroying *Laisve*. We do not stand for — and no one in our caucus stood for — taking *Laisve* from the ideological control of the Party. Even in the Directors' list we put 7 Party members and 5 non-Party members working in close contact with the Party.

In the *Laisve* No. 51 Bimba, stating that they will not print any more letters of the opposition, cries: "Imagine what *Laisve* would have been turned into if these elements had succeeded in capturing the conference."

But why doesn't he state which elements controlled *Laisve* up to now, if not those whom Bimba *now* calls "enemies of Communism"?

Bimba decided to seize *Laisve*, postpone the conference, suspend many shareholders, and thus get a majority in the conference. In order to achieve this, he instructed his chairman of the Board of Directors, Weiss, to call (On February 4 [1931]) a special meeting of the Board of Directors and here Bimba demanded that the Board suspend three directors. Then three directors supporting Bimba would have been "drafted," making a majority for them and they would have arranged the conference to suit themselves. but they failed, 7 votes against Bimba's proposal and 4 for.

Bimba demanded that the directors give him (he now says, "To the Party") the addresses of *Laisve's* readers. The directors decided not to give these to him as they knew that they would be used to send out all of Bimba's scandalous attacks. Next morning we found the addresses stolen and several thousand envelopes gone.

The Conference.

When the shareholders' conference opened, Weiss, as the chairman of the Board of Directors, began in every way possible to slander [E.] Butkus and his supporters. Uproars! Nearly two-thirds of the shareholders demanded that Butkus be given the opportunity to answer Weiss's slanders. The Bimba fanatics yelled as loud as they could. Because of their yelling the majority of the conference became so an-

gered that they did not let [Israel] Amter speak when he, instead of speaking of activities of the CP, began to repeat the slanders of Weiss. The uproar lasted the whole afternoon.

Then began the circus. The editors, instead of reporting on the paper, confessed their misdeeds and capitulated to Bimba and his clique.

The New “Directors.”

It must be clear to everyone that such a conference was not legal and authorized, was contrary to the constitution of the *Laisve* Cooperative; it trampled upon all decencies and mocked the shareholders who had built up *Laisve*. There are no directors now, just a fig-leaf, covered with which Bimba can now cook another mess.

The new “Board of Directors” consists of the worst elements, who in the past were either inactive or had dropped out of the movement. But so long as they are with Bimba now, they become 100% Communists overnight. (*We will publish more about this later. —Editor.*)

Since Bimba took control of the *Laisve*, his regime has driven the best workers out of the shop, and they have been replaced with anti-Communist elements.

Then the “election” of directors. A positive demand was made that the directors be nominated in the ordinary manner, and voted on by secret ballot as is always done in the *Laisve* stockholders’ conference. Buivydas disregarded such demands, read the “slate” proposed by the Bimbaites, and demanded that we vote “for Communism” for the slate or — against the Communist Party! Again an uproar! For the Bimba slate, the Bimba committee “counted” 136 votes (286 delegates officially registered at the conference). But still there was no majority. Against that Bimba slate, 64 votes — the others rose in protest and left the hall. And this is how the conference broke up. These are the methods used in a non-Party workers’ organization!

Just Before the Conference.

The Saturday before the conference there took place a caucus of the Party members. At that caucus those Party members who disagreed with the Central Buro were threatened that if they did not betray their convictions and openly denounce at the conference the caucus of February 1st, they would be denounced as enemies of the

working class and expelled. Bimba and Amter stated that if they failed to get control of the conference, then the Party would smash *Laisve*, denounce it as a counter-revolutionary paper, and the Buro would publish its own paper.

Thus pushed to the wall, certain weak comrades, especially the *Laisve* editors, agreed to surrender. But they surrendered not because they had changed their opinions or were convinced that the Bimba Buro's threat was "Communist work," but because they feared the threat. We, of course, did not know of the dishonorable role forced upon them, and even if we had known, we would not have believed that "revolutionaries" would sell their conscience for a few crumbs from the Bimba table. Many of these comrades agree with us today, no matter what they say openly.

What's the Solution?

Comrades, shareholders and readers! From the above-stated facts you can see that dictator Bimba's Central Buro and its followers really want to destroy *Laisve*.

What is it to them if with their continual attacks, slanders, and provocations they will drive out a large portion of the members of the Lithuanian Workers Literary Society and the Lithuanian Working Women's Alliance, Proletarian Art Society, Lithuanian Workers Alliance? What is it to them if the majority of *Laisve's* shareholders and readers become passive, leave our movement?

Are we going to permit them to do their detestable work? Every real revolutionary worker must immediately answer *No*, and again, *No!*

What Must We Now Do?

Let us all carry out the following measures, if we want to save our organizations and institutions, and the whole movement from general demoralization.

1. Send urgent demands, even to the Bimbaite directors, that Anthony Bimba, head of the present disintegrating clique, be immediately removed from the editorship of *Laisve*.

2. At the same time make a statement that we do not recognize the present directors as authorized and demand that a new *Laisve* co-operative shareholders' conference be held and new directors elected

— in the way that was always done up till this conference: open nominations and secret ballot.

3. Copies of all demands should be sent to the address given below so that we would know how many readers and shareholders have performed their duties.

Only the general protest of the shareholders and readers will force the Bimbaites to give up their destructive work. Only by breaking their destructive plans will *Laisve* regain the confidence of the masses and will be able to strengthen our movement in its entirety and to consolidate the forces of the revolutionary movement in this country.

With comradely greetings,

*Authorized Committee of the Majority
of the Laisve Conference,*

*B. Jokubonis,
J. Kuodis,
E. Butkus.*

P.S. Send all copies of your demands to this address: E. Kreivenas, 741 McConough St., Brooklyn, NY.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · March 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.