
Three Socialists Free Again

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C.E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker were released from the Stark County workhouse at Canton, Ohio, last Monday [December 2, 1918], after serving 10 months there because of anti-war and anti-conscription speeches made on the Public Square in May of last year [1917].

Cleveland Socialists and their friends will welcome the three men at a great mass meeting to be held at Acme Hall, 2416 E 9th Street, on Sunday, December 15, at 2:30 in the afternoon, at which Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht will speak, and possibly Baker.

The specific charge on which the three men were convicted was "aiding and abetting" a certain Alphonse Schue not to register. Schue was arrested for failure to register, and when examined stated that he had been induced not to obey the law through speeches he heard Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker make in opposition to the war and conscription on the [Cleveland] Public Square. The three men were indicted by the federal grand jury as a result and tried before Judge Westenhaver, found guilty, and sentenced to serve a year in the Canton Workhouse.

When asked whether he had anything to say before the sentence was passed, C.E. Ruthenberg, speaking for the three prisoners, stated before Judge Westenhaver: "I am not conscious of having committed any crime. The thing I tried to do was to inspire higher ideals and better lives. If that is a crime in the eyes of the government, then I am proud to have committed that crime."

The sentence was passed on July 25 [1917], but the case was carried to the Supreme Court, the sentence being affirmed by that body last January.

At the workhouse the prisoners experienced all the evils of the existing prison system. Among other things Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht went without food for three days, and during this period had their hands cuffed together and padlocked to a ring over their heads for 10 hours each day. This punishment was the result of a refusal to work in the workhouse laundry, a position they took because they felt that they were being subjected to unfair treatment.

Upon leaving the workhouse they were met by a delegation of Canton and Cleveland Socialists. After a breakfast at the home of a Canton comrade, where Eugene V. Debs made a speech of greeting, they left for Cleveland. At Akron, Ohio, Comrade Baker was arrested by the federal authorities on instructions from Cleveland. Baker was called for service in the army a year ago last summer, but being under bond to appear in the federal court from day to day, he surrendered himself to the federal authorities in Cleveland in order to put the decision as to his status up to these authorities. He was held in the Cuyahoga County jail for 4 months pending the appeal to the Supreme Court, and had served over 14 months at the time of his release.

The Akron authorities who arrested him stated that he would be sent to Camp Sherman and inducted into the army. Since soldiers now in the cantonment are being mustered out, Baker's friends hope to see him released from the army in a short time.

Wagenknecht and Ruthenberg joined in the statement: "We will take up our work where we left off last January. Our 10 months in prison has merely made us more certain that our cause is just and confirmed in us the determination to continue our part of the struggle until it triumphs."

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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