
Letter from Henry Kuhn in New York to Boris Reinstein in Moscow, December 9, 1919.

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New York, NY,
December 9, 1919

Dear Comrade Reinstein:—

Once before have I made an effort to get in touch with your end of the line, but as no response has come — though a good deal of time has since passed — it must be assumed that it did not reach you. I am making this present attempt because we have, sometimes, an opportunity to send this with comrades who go to Europe and who may, from the country of their destination, find a way to transmit this to you.

Naturally, we have often wondered why we did not hear from you in any way whatever. It was thought by many that in some way, placed as you are, you might have been able to get word through to us and indicate a way in which we might be able to reach you with some degree of regularity, if only to get to you such publications of ours as you might desire to have. At any rate, if you are able to get in touch freely with comrades in Stockholm I would suggest that you transmit to them such messages as you would wish to send us, asking them to forward the same to us; and, at the same time, we could then use the same channel to transmit to you what we would wish to sent, letters, copies of the weekly, and such books and pamphlets as we, from time to time, get off the press.

These matters disposed of, I shall use the balance of my space to give you a rapid sketch of what is going on here, though I know not to what extent you may already be posted despite theoretical isolation. After the armistice had been signed, we adopted a plan to carry our propaganda into the miners' organization, beginning with coal and with Illinois. It was done in

the nature of a smashing attack against their fakers coupled, of course, with the advocacy of Industrial Unionism. Conditions helped us much. The aftereffects of the war were such as to make the miners utterly discontented and sore on the fakers. Moreover, they could scarcely get a living due in part to scarcity of work, many working only two days a week, and the ever rising cost of living. Under pressure of the rank and file, a nationwide strike of the soft coal fields started on Nov. 1st [1919]. The government interfered at once, using war legislation to obtain an injunction which culminated in a mandatory order to the national leaders of the miners to call off the strike and order the men back to work. The fakers surrendered and did what they were ordered to do. The miners, on the other hand, didn't care a rap about the injunction and stayed out and they are out yet at this writing with all the forces against in a quandary as to what to do next and with coal getting so short that real hardship is experienced. This state of affairs will help our work and is doing so.

Perhaps you are aware that the SP split wide open at a Special Convention that opened in Chicago on August 30th [1919]. The result was three parties: the old SP, a Communist Labor Party, and a Communist Party minus any qualifying adjective. The two latter formations came about largely because of rival leadership; there is little else to divide them. Their present attitude is one of leaning Bummery-ward — a more or less open advocacy of physical force. We are passing since the war (and during the war) through a period of reaction such as never experienced. The scarcely-veiled physical force attitude of the SP offshoots was water on the mill of the reactionists and relentless persecution resulted. We have not escaped that either

though rigid adherence to our time-tried position has made it more difficult for the reaction to ride roughshod over our organization. Our weekly lost its second class matter [mailing permit], issues were held up now and then for months, one was held up for good, our men were arrested here and there and sometimes slated for deportation, our St. Louis headquarters were subjected to a raid but again released, and so on and so forth. There is a noticeable growth of membership though this has so far been most marked among the Language Federations.

For the last two months a steel strike has been on. It started with over 300,000 men and still hangs on. The capitalist [press] scarcely prints any more news about it but the strike is on and is causing shortage of steel products. There is much ferment and <illegible> throughout the labor world, added to by the reactionary measures used, fed by the ever increasing cost of living, and predicated, in a general sense, upon the great and general disillusionment that followed the high tension of the war. Sometimes one is almost tempted to think that the days of the pure and simple craft unions are numbered. There is a noticeable tendency on the part of the capitalists themselves, as well as on the part of their governmental instruments, to discard them. The reason advanced is that they can't hold their own men in line and that the latter too often go on strike regardless of leaders and of sacred agreements. We have had large strikes of longshoremens and of printers which to break the national fakers of their organizations had their hands full; the local fakers scarcely ever tried to break them. We have had city-wide strikes in Seattle and in Winnipeg, Canada, which, though not revolutionary in final aim, represented nevertheless significant flare-ups of the class spirit that animated them. Before a Senate Investigating Committee of recent date a witness stated that of 70 recent strikes involving AF of L unions, only 8 had been authorized, i.e. were regulation affairs. This state of affairs robs "collective bargaining" of much of its charm in the eyes of the capitalist. He is apt to conclude that there is nothing "in it" — for him.

Fortunately, the whole reactionary crew, govern-

ment, capitalist, and all that implies, are acting just in the way I would want them to act under the prevailing conditions. They never miss the slightest chance to add fuel to the fire, and they really accomplish something in the way of awakening the dormant class spirit of the American working class.

In regard to Russia it may be said that the readers of the socialist, the radical, and the bourgeois liberal press are fairly well informed as to the true state of affairs. But the barrage of lies that the capitalist has maintained and is still maintaining no doubt kept the truth from large layers of the population. It is difficult to appraise this with any degree of exactitude, especially for one whose personal contact is limited to such as hold practically the same views. Still I was, last summer, in Illinois amongst the miners and I found that they understood. I moved amongst them for six weeks, going from Peoria south as far as Franklin county, far to the south of St. Louis, and then went north again and my experience was always the same. These men understood and were in full sympathy with the Russian development. I went there to look over the field and coordinate our work of propaganda which we had started, first by issuing a special pamphlet to the miners, and, second, by the NEC in annual session in May last deciding to concentrate agitation in the coal fields.

Just now it appears that Soviet Russia is in good shape, at least in a military sense, with Kolchak beaten, Yudenich wiped out, Denikin checkmated if not already in a worse predicament, the Archangel situation in better shape, and the Baltic statelets ready to come to terms. Industrially you have no doubt plenty of difficulties to overcome. I often wished I could be there to help in the latter field for I have certain information that might be of use.

I shall now close with best wishes to our Russian comrades, to their and our common Cause, as well as to yourself, with which I remain

Fraternally yours,

Henry Kuhn.

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