

of a confirmed revisionist. Fortifying himself with Marxism-Leninism—Bittelman would not budge without Marx and Lenin—he arrived at the glaring heresy that American capitalism “is displaying a number of distinct and important national peculiarities and characteristics. . . . As a result, capitalism in the United States was developing in width and strength at the same time, and *still continues to do so* (italics his).” *429

What is more, Bittelman now embraces the Welfare State: “. . . Only the struggle for the Welfare State will create the conditions and realize the objective possibility for the peaceful transition to Socialism,” he wrote. And in this struggle “the middle classes and sections of the non-monopoly bourgeoisie” are fit to be partners.

In 1928, Bittelman was the brain behind the Leftist caucus, whose chief weapon against the majority group was the accusation of believing in the vitality of the American economy—American exceptionalism—and “lagging behind the radicalization of the masses.” It took him precisely three decades and three-and-a-half years in prison to recognize the validity of this American exceptionalism.

For this heresy, Bittelman was dropped from the party payroll in the fall of 1958.*430

ISRAEL AMTER, A SAINTLY COMMUNIST

Of all the curious types that gravitated to Communism, Israel Amter was perhaps the most unusual. Amter was born in Denver, Colorado, March 1878, of Jewish-Hungarian parents. His father was a prosperous farmer, one of the pioneers of the West. As he told it in his autobiography, he never mingled with the children of the Eastern European immigrants, who lived on the other side of the tracks. Nor does he mention receiving any sort of Jewish education. His friends in school were mostly gentiles.*431 Israel showed musical promise, he studied piano, and was given a good musical education. But he became interested in the radical movement and joined the first SP branch, formed in 1901.

His parents sent him to Germany to prepare for a career as a concert pianist. He stayed there 11 years, dividing his time between his musical studies and activity in the Social Democratic Party. On returning to America, Amter rejoined the SP, became a Left-Winger in 1919 and a Communist in 1920.

Amter never touched the piano again, nor did he show any sign of missing it. He was never heard to speak of music nor of going to a concert, so completely was he swallowed up in Communist politics, for which he was wholly unsuited. The only evidence of his student days in Europe was his Bohemian dress and string tie.

As if to bury his "frivolous" musical youth, Amter became a dedicated ascetic Communist. One morning in the 20's, the author found him sweeping the floor at party headquarters in Cleveland; he was party secretary there. The story was that he was existing on fifteen cents a day. His task was to build up a revolutionary movement in that industrial city, but his office was without a telephone. He had so little practical sense that he could not raise the few dollars for a telephone—or perhaps he deemed it a bourgeois luxury.

Israel Amter was one of the speechmaking Communists, and every speech had to include a review of the entire world situation, full of ponderous platitudes. His party comrades listened to his boring talks only out of deference to his honesty and modesty. He was perhaps the only one in the party hierarchy without personal ambitions. He held many important executive positions, like that of secretary of the New York State party, but there always had to be a second man with him to manage the organization. All his life on the CEC of the party, he was never heard to utter a fresh thought, even within the framework of the doctrine. However, the little group of bureaucrats in his office did occasionally manipulate him for their own petty aims.

Amter's devotion to the cause was fabulous. Every change of line was accepted by him with deep reverence. During the Third Period, in the early 30's, Amter happened to be at Camp *Nitgedeiget* during the weekend of the Day of Atonement. The three musicians who came to give a concert innocently included Baruch's *Kol Nidre* in their repertory, thinking it appropriate for the occasion. The solemn chant was warmly applauded. But the secretary of the New York party was outraged. He denounced the playing of *Kol Nidre* on the night of *Yom Kippur* as evidence of a lingering bourgeois-nationalist-religious sentiment. As a countermove, Amter compelled the camp management to organize an anti-religious lecture for the next day. A few years later, in 1936, 1937 and 1938, during the Democratic Front era, running for various offices on the CP ticket, Amter, never identified as a Jew, was now proud to be one, and

kept appealing as such to the Jewish voters. . . . The man had not changed, the line had.

Like many saintly men, Amter could be cruel and revengeful to people holding different views. In 1942, with Russia and America in the war, he denounced Norman Thomas as a "Fifth Columnist and a Spearhead of Fascism," and demanded that the government take measures against him and other Fifth Columnists.*⁴³²

Amter died in 1954.

JACK STACHEL, THE ORGANIZATION MAN

The organizational key-man of the party in the late 20's and 30's was Jack Stachel. He has come out rather badly in some of the writings of former Communists who dealt with him in the factional struggle. But the full measure of the man could not be taken in the 20's.

Of all those who entered the Communist movement as foot soldiers, Stachel's way to leadership was the most rapid. He did not inch his way to power in the party; he grabbed it with both hands.

Stachel was born in Austrian Poland in 1900, of a poor family. He came to this country at the age of nine. After finishing public school, he supported himself by peddling in the daytime, while continuing his studies in evening high school, which he graduated.

Stachel joined the CP in 1924. The functionary who made out his application remembered a little episode: Immediately after signing the form, Stachel asked to be assigned as a speaker on one of the street corners. The functionary, amazed at his eagerness, replied, "Wait a little while, until you get acclimated in the party." But Stachel impatiently insisted on speaking the same evening.*⁴³³

Young, unknown, without any outward sign of being above the average, Stachel could not gain attention in the party. He begged to be attached to the Young Workers League. There his talent for organizational maneuvering and his shrewd judgment of men were quickly revealed. He joined the Ruthenberg faction, and helped to line up a majority of the YWL for the faction. A couple of years later, he wound up a representative of the YCL in that faction. From there his rise in the party was rapid. He soon emerged as the right-hand man of Jay Lovestone. The latter planned the factional