

How Ruthenberg, Founder Of the I.L.D., Acted in Court

First C. P. Secretary
"Most Arrested Man
in America"

Editor's note: Last week brought the eighth anniversary of the death on March 2, 1927, of C. E. Ruthenberg, first secretary of the Communist Party of the United States. The following article is an estimate of Comrade Ruthenberg's role as a leader and founder of the International Labor Defense, a frequent victim of the capitalist courts, and an outstanding example of how a political prisoner conducts himself in order to further the workers' movement.

By ANNA DAMON

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DURING the long years of his activity in the labor movement, C. E. Ruthenberg was often spoken of as "the most arrested man in America."

Organizer, agitator, writer, speaker and outstanding leader, Ruthenberg was bound to come into conflict, time and again, with the police and the courts. Ready at all times to strike a blow for the advancement of the workers' cause, Ruthenberg found the employers ready to strike a blow in revenge.

Very clearly did Ruthenberg realize the function of the courts in the struggle of the workers and the employers. To the New York Court which sentenced him in 1920 to a term of five to ten years in Sing Sing Prison, for having been the outstanding leader of the Left Wing Conference of the Socialist Party, Ruthenberg declared:

"I realized from the beginning of this trial, as I have in any other trial that I have taken part in as defendant, that this court, and all the instruments of this court, are merely a part of that organization of force which we call the capitalist state. I accept this as a case of class justice, a case of the use of the organized force of the state in order to suppress the desires of those who today are suffering under the oppression of the present system."

Fought Against War

When, with the declaration of war in 1917, a tidal wave of cowardice swept the majority of the leaders of the Socialist Party into cringing acceptance of the slaughter, Ruthenberg stood out as a tower of strength in the struggle against the war. In



C. E. RUTHENBERG

mass meetings, in the columns of such newspapers as were open to him, with tongue and with pen, Ruthenberg fought against the draft, against the repressive war measures, against the whole imperialist holocaust. And before the tribunal of the capitalist court, he did not swerve from his working-class principles by the breadth of a hair. In July, 1917, he spoke as follows to the Cleveland Federal Court where he was a prisoner on trial:

"This is not a war for freedom. It is not a war for the liberties of mankind. It is a war to secure the investments and profits of the ruling class of this country. I am speaking to you as Karl Liebknecht spoke to the German nation, as he spoke in the Parliament of that country, when he denounced the war as a war of the ruling class and stated his unalterable opposition to that war."

Faced Bosses' Courts
in Spirit of Debs
and Haymarket

During the larger part of Ruthenberg's life, the International Labor Defense had not yet been born. It was brought into being only two years before his death, and he had much to do with its organization, and with the forming of its policy of mass pressure and mass defense. But in all his conflicts with the law and the courts, Ruthenberg anticipated the policy of the I. L. D. of using even the capitalists' weapons of repression to further the cause of the workers, of utilizing the court as a tribunal to spread understanding.

In each of his many trials, Ruthenberg spoke over the heads of the judge and the court officials, beyond the courtroom walls, to the unseen jury of the exploited and the oppressed. In clear and simple language, he laid bare the workings of the capitalist system. He showed the role of the capitalist government and all its agencies.

Spoke for the Oppressed

Fearlessly he raised his voice in court, in the very stronghold of his persecutors—and through that voice were uttered the aims, the aspirations, the dreams and hopes of America's oppressed. Thus Ruthenberg continued the tradition of that long line of American martyrs brought before the courts of their oppressors—John Brown, Nat Turner, the Haymarket victims, Eugene V. Debs, and countless others.

"I have merely this to say for myself," Ruthenberg said at one of his many trials. "I have in the past held certain ideals for a reorganization of society on a new basis. I have in the past held certain ideals and gone to prison for them when they were connected with the late war. I have stood by those principles in which I firmly believe and I still stand for those principles irrespective of the result of this particular trial. I expect in the future as in the past to uphold and fight for those principles until the time comes for those principles to triumph and a new society is built in place of the present social organization.

"I will accept the sentence in that same spirit of defiance, realizing that I go to prison because of support of a great principle that will triumph in spite of all the courts, in spite of all the organizations of the capitalist class."