

International Events and Western Workers

An Appreciation of a Devoted Working Class Leader

J. LOUIS ENGDHAL

(Died November 21, 1932)

By **SAM DARCY**

We had just finished visiting the graves of John Reed, C. E. Ruthenberg, Bill Haywood and Comrade McManus of the British Communist Party, all of whom were buried along the Kremlin Wall. We rested in the shadow of the Lenin Mausoleum. It was Fall 1928. Moscow in the Fall had a sombre, even gloomy appearance. The atmosphere was "old world." The tremendous Socialist Construction going on had not yet changed the outward appearance of Red Square.

We were discussing Lenin's greatness. I don't remember any exact words but the thoughts are yet clear in my memory:

Lenin's ability to contribute so heavily to the revolutionary movement did not lie in his profound theoretical understanding alone. He had equipped himself as a skilled writer, a shrewd organizer, a clear and convincing speaker, and a systematic worker. Maybe we can't all develop all these qualities and to the degree he attained but we can conscientiously develop some of them and put them at the service of the Party. History produces few such giants as was Comrade Lenin. Even in the last century, which moved so rapidly and was so eventful, there was a lapse of sixty years between the emergence of Marx and that of his greatest pupil. And, since the vast majority of individuals cannot reach their stature, we can each of us develop in ourselves and contribute some of the qualities they had and thereby collectively give the working class the leadership it deserves.

That summarizes Engdhal's philosophy of leadership. And he earnestly tried to live up to it.

Leader of Center in S. P.

We remember him first at the time of the Left Wing Split from the Socialist Party. None of us were then very strong in Leninist understanding. Louis was even less so. But he was deeply sincere. The reaction to the traitorous course of the Hilquit-Berger leadership for the support of the Imperialist war and against the Russian Revolution was not always understood in all its implications.

After the Christmas Convention in 1921, where we organized the **WORKERS' PARTY**, Engdhal was one of the happiest comrades we knew. He confided that he had been full of doubts during the time that his group kept its center opposition, that the splits in the underground Communist Parties helped to keep him from taking the decisive steps towards us but now that unity had been consummated he felt launched on the revolutionary road.

Hard Worker

Since 1921 we were in fairly constant contact. All his activity was marked by a simple devotion to his tasks the intensity of which is not very common, even in our movement. He kept the longest hours. He was almost never late. On the Daily Worker editorial staff we know, of weeks at a stretch when because of the small inadequate staff he worked fully 18 to 20 hours a day. Comrades fifteen years younger than he sagged at the pace and relaxed but Engdhal would be in at nine every morning and at two the next morning he was yet working reading the news to prepare his next day's editorials.

In Moscow, where it is possible to take things easier because of the 7 hour day, etc., Louis worked constantly. If his "must" duties ended, he took to writing articles for papers in every part of the world. He never refused a request to fill a speaking date, write an article, or help steer a demonstration unless he was actually engaged in Party work elsewhere.

During election campaigns he made more agitational speeches than several other candidates combined. Yet through all our close association with him in the editing of the Daily Worker, in the International Labor Defense, in our co-working in the Comintern in Moscow, during election campaigns, etc., we never heard him once complain of having too much to do. Such qualities are as rare as they are precious. Those happily few but still too many of our comrades, who keep "union" hours, dodge extra assignments and constantly complain should look at a stalwart working class leader, Comrade J. Louis Engdhal, and take example.

Leader of Jobless

In demonstrations he was a lion. We particularly recall the de-

monstration at N. Y. City Hall on October 16, of either 1929 or 1930. Engdhal was leader of the steering committee inside the Board of Estimate chambers, we were assigned leadership of the steering committee outside. After his speech before the Tammany robbers in which in the very few minutes he was allowed he vigorously denounced them, he was seized by the police and rushed out. The City Hall building was cleared for a distance of several hundred yards in any direction.

On the edge of the police lines were many thousands of people waiting. When he came out, despite the threats of score of uniformed and plainclothes thugs who seized him, he mustered all his strength, stood his ground, and began a speech urging the workers to break the police lines and come hear his report on what went inside. We succeeded in breaking the lines. However, several hundred police from out the basement, and from the back of the building, on horseback, motorcycle and afoot assailed the defenseless gathering. They drove us down Broadway. Our committee was scattered by the rush. As the mass approached the Woolworth building we decided to make a stand. We raised him in front of the building wall and he again began his speech.

At least ten thousand workers surrounded us and it took the police more than twenty minutes to break through. During all this time they swung their clubs at him from on top of their horses but it was ineffectual because they could not get close enough. But Engdhal's speech, arousing the mass to ever mounting enthusiasm did not stop. Finally the police broke through. In a flash Engdhal was atop a parked automobile continuing his speech. Before he could again rally enough workers to protect him however, it seemed as if all the 18,000 police in New York swooped down and arrested him. Even then several dozen cops had to hold him in a corner of the building to keep him from breaking through and finishing his speech.

Those who were with him at the Pittsburg convention of the I. L. D. remember his aggressive leadership in the fight against a Jim Crow hotel.

Oscar Ameringer—A Contrast

These were characteristic. Some time later in San Francisco, by chance we met Oscar Ameringer, a cynical, obviously "licked," "socialist" party editor who had worked with Engdhal, I believe on the Milwaukee Leader. Ameringer expressed wonder that Louis should have shown such fighting qualities. He related how timid Engdhal was on the Leader and how quiet and retiring he was in the Socialist Party generally. "Oh!" said Ameringer, "we all go through these stages. Enthusiasms, that's what they are. Engdhal will learn. When he gets like me he won't be so 'idealistic.' He will be more 'materialistic.' Out for all he can get," and he snickered complacently at this "joke." It was disgusting, and typical of the old degenerated "socialists."

Ameringer and his type will never understand the fine deep sincerity and self-sacrificing of such a man as was Comrade Engdhal. They look upon the movement as legitimate prey for increasing their business as lawyers, insurance men or print shop owners, which is Ameringer's racket.

J. Louis went back to Moscow about four years after our talk at the base of the Lenin Mausoleum. But things were different. Red Square was paved. So was all Moscow. New factories, new buildings, electrification, a vast industry in the country where darkness once ruled, even the Mausoleum had its wood replaced with marble. He had finished his tour of Europe with Mrs. Wright. He saw the onward march of the revolution in Germany, Poland and elsewhere bringing nearer the new world, and a newer and happier day. So when he died he knew his work was not lost. That he did not labor in vain.

And now Comrade Engdhal is dead! We have lost one whom we greatly loved. We will miss his energy and devotion in carrying forward our work. The working-class will not forget him. The history of militant labor in the United States cannot be written without due tribute to the devoted activities of this worthy leader of our movement.