

HOW BITTELMAN PLAINLY LIED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST CONVENTION

By BEN GITLOW.

IN the wilderness of New York a sage was found in all his naked innocence by the present majority of the C. E. C. Because he became a member of the infallible flock he was elevated by Comrade Cannon with the approval of Comrade Foster to the leading position in the party, thereby becoming the grand apostle of Communism in the country. So it came to pass that he left New York for Chicago. In Chicago where the stench of the stockyards nauseates he raised his sinewy arm felling with one fierce blow the giant Pepper to the ground. And behold, ye unsophisticated members of the Workers Party, the giant is no more. Comrade Bittelman, shy and bashful like a maiden that knows better, is now the political secretary of the Workers Party of America.

Wearing the mantle of the great and assuming the position of the political oracle among the Communists in America it has become the painful duty of Comrade Bittelman to supply the magic words, both spoken and written, that in their very utterance destroy all opposition, particularly that of the minority. We find this firebrand speaking before the convention of the Hungarian section for over two and a half hours on behalf of the majority. After having spoken thousands of words that would have scuttled a pirate ship, leave alone the minority, he was surprised to learn at the end of it all that the delegates were not overcome but soberly by a vote of 23 to 1 supported the minority.

Bittelman therefore in his anger deliberately forgets what actually took place at the convention. The convention was very orderly. It deliberated fully on all matters before it. Comrade Bittelman was given every opportunity to present his viewpoint. Comrade Bittelman in his article admits that the discussion on the majority and minority lasted over four hours. That alone is sufficient proof that every phase of the question was considered.

Comrade Bittelman comes to the following conclusion because the dele-

gates by a vote of 23 to 1 supported the minority. He is however afraid to make a definite charge so he frames it in the vague terms that it seems as if.

Says Bittelman, "It seems as if the farmer-labor party idea had become an obsession with the comrades who cannot imagine the further development of our movement without this slogan."

Please, Comrade Bittelman, don't tell us that it seemed so. What actually did the delegates say? Many delegates spoke and pointed out why it was necessary to continue the use of the farmer-labor party slogan. Why don't you present quotations from their arguments to prove what seemed to you was actually so? The truth of the matter is that Comrade Bittelman was either asleep while the discussion was on or that from the arguments presented the above conclusion can not logically be drawn. A mere assertion, Comrade Bittelman, is no proof.

Then Comrade Bittelman with his political sagacity quotes from the C. I. and comes to another conclusion. This time the political secretary of our party gets an impression. After all we are living in an impressionistic age.

Thus states Comrade Bittelman: "The impression forced upon me by the debate at the Hungarian convention was that at least some sections of our party are becoming contaminated with (petty bourgeois pacifist) illusions. That this is a menace to our party every one will admit."

Comrade Bittelman, concretely, what did the Hungarian section and its convention do to warrant such a serious charge? Why does not Comrade Bittelman, the political secretary of the party, bring definite motions before the C. E. C. to eradicate the dangerous petty bourgeois pacifist tendencies manifested at the Hungarian convention? To fail to do so in the face of such a serious menace to our party is to neglect one's Bolshevik duty to our party. For a C. E. C. member who is aware of such a dangerous tendency within our party and not to actively combat it is a crime. But Bittelman and the majority of the C. E. C. will not take action against the Hungarian section because the insinuations of Comrade Bittelman contain not one iota of truth. The damaging insinuating charges that Comrade Bittelman so carelessly indulges in should be severely condemned.

The Hungarian convention and the activities of the section conclusively prove the opposite of what Comrade Bittelman contends. The report of its executive committee and the resolution passed proves that the Hungarian section is Bolshevik, an active section of the party and a whole-hearted and loyal supporter of the Communist International.

Comrade Bittelman, will you contend that a fight against the Two-and-a-Half International ideology as proposed in the report of the federation secretary, is a symptom of petty bourgeois pacifist illusions? Or will you hold that to insist upon a Marxian-Leninist education of our party membership together with the reorganization of the party on the basis of shop nuclei, also part of the report, is a sign that the Hungarian section is petty bourgeois pacifist and therefore a menace to our party? Comrade Bittelman is using methods that are a real menace to the party in an attempt to discredit a whole section of party workers who are good Communists and who are acting as true Bolsheviks only because he happens not to agree with them on party tactic.

Comrade Bittelman then takes up my presentation of the minority at the convention. Says Bittelman in his article:

"Comrade Gitlow resented very much the charge of opportunism directed by the central executive committee against the minority for its policy of emasculating the Workers Party and building a substitute for it. In reply to this charge Comrade Gitlow advised the Hungarian convention to examine the personnel of the majority and minority of the central executive committee. To assist the convention in this examination Comrade Gitlow volunteered a bit of information. He said the minority is composed of comrades of long standing in the labor movement, people who have suffered for the movement, have served prison terms for their ideas and have thereby proven their fitness for leadership in the American Communist Party. I do not recall whether Comrade Gitlow volunteered any information on the record of members of the majority. But the conclusion that is to be drawn from his statement was that members of the majority of the central executive committee do not possess virtues attributed by him to the minority, at least in the same measure and therefore the contentions of the central executive committee must not be taken seriously."

Needless to say that the above is a complete distortion of what I did say. I protest most vehemently against such deliberate falsification to dis-

credit an opponent in a party discussion. Comrade Bittelman should stick to facts. Comrade Bittelman knows what I said.

What I said was in answer to the charge that the majority calls the minority liquidators. In reference to this I asked the delegates to examine the personnel of the minority and their service in the Communist movement to determine whether or not the minority is made up of comrades who want to liquidate the Communist Party. I pointed out that the minority was composed of members who had been active in the left wing of the socialist party and in the organization of the Communist Party of the country. I stated further that these comrades had fought for the party, defended it in all kinds of situations, and had gone to jail for it. These are facts. Bittelman and the whole majority cannot deny them. As a further example let us take Comrade Ruthenberg. Comrade Ruthenberg is of the minority. The majority brands him as a liquidator. Yet, after having spent three years in prison for the Communist Party he is again, as a result of the Bridgeman trials, facing a ten year sentence for his loyalty to the party. Nevertheless, Bittelman and his supporters, many of whom are recent adjuncts to the party, have the audacity to brand him and others of the minority like him as liquidators. On the question of opportunism I will answer Comrade Bittelman a little further on.

Comrade Bittelman also distorts another statement I made. He states in his article that I said the following: "That the Russian Communist Party initiated a movement for the organization of Soviets. Why did the Russian party do it? Why did the Russian party build non-Communist, non-partisan political bodies such as Soviets? Because the Russian party knew that by means of these Soviets it will be able to mobilize large masses of workers and poor farmers, organize them around itself for revolutionary struggles against capitalism. The American party has the same duties to perform in the United States. It must therefore create non-partisan political bodies in order to achieve the above end. Consequently the Workers Party of America must carry on a campaign for a farmer-labor party."

The above is a complete falsification of what I said. When the political secretary of a Communist Party resorts to such deliberate methods of misrepresentation in the furtherance of factionalism, the party is bound to suffer severely. Now what did I say on the question of Soviets? I said that the Russian Communist Party participated in the Soviets even though the Soviets were not Communist bodies and even though they were not integral parts of the Bolshevik Party. That did not stop the Russian Bolshevik party from raising the slogan of all power to the Soviets thereby through the revolutionary struggle that ensued making the Soviets the instruments of state power and the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat. I used this argument to counteract the sectarian poison that is being injected into our party by the majority that maintains that only through its own organization can the party wage a Communist political struggle, and that it is opportunism for the party to wage political struggles thru the instrumentality of other organizations. The farmer-labor party I therefore contended could be made an instrument of our political struggle even though it is not a Communist body. The British Communist Party demonstrated that it is possible to do so when it ran Communists on the labor party ticket in England.

Comrade Bittelman follows up with a statement that when a representative of the minority finds it necessary to resort to such arguments as those related above it would prove that his cause is in a very bad way. But dear Comrade Bittelman you are a member of the C. E. C. of a Communist party. Don't manufacture arguments yourself and then credit them to some member of the minority. They will call your bluff every time. And don't wind up your argument by saying that five or six delegates abstained from voting. You know that all the delegates voted and it five or eight did not vote how comes it that you could not convince them to vote for the majority? In order therefore to infer that your imaginary five or eight (you are not sure) were for the majority you end up by saying that it really required some courage for the one lone delegate who voted for the majority to raise his voice against the minority. That it took no courage to speak for the majority Comrade Bittelman well knows. No blackjacks or guns were used. Even Comrade Bittelman was permitted over two and a half hours to speak on the majority. The lone delegate got the same courtesy that all the other delegates received. If he didn't let him present charges to the C. E. C. and the C. E. C. will act accordingly.

Comrade Bittelman introduced a trick resolution at the Hungarian convention. In his resolution he failed to include an out and out indorsement by the delegates of the majority thesis. This resolution was so framed that supporters of the minority position if they were not on the watch could easily be fooled into voting for his resolution in the belief that it was not an indorsement of the

majority. The first paragraph of the resolution is proof sufficient to the above contention. It is as follows:

"The convention of the Hungarian section accepts the report of the central executive committee submitted to it by Comrade Bittelman and pledges its full support to the program of Bolshevizing the party as outlined in the program of the central executive committee particularly the section which calls for an ideological struggle against all opportunistic tendencies in the party."

He wanted the Hungarian convention to pledge itself for an ideological campaign against opportunism and opportunistic tendencies in the party. Opportunism Bittelman defined as participation by the party in the farmer-labor party movement and the opportunistic tendencies are the tendencies of the minority. When the Hungarian comrades suggested that Comrade Bittelman, if he did not want the Hungarian convention to go on record for the majority, that he change that clause to include acceptance of C. E. C. report and a fight against the Two-and-a-Half International tendency, Bittelman refused. Bittelman, who refuses to include in his resolution a plank against Two-and-a-Half International tendencies in our party brands the Hungarian convention as petty bourgeois pacifist and opportunistic because they insist that the C. I. decision in this respect he carried out. The antics of Comrade Bittelman are really ludicrous. The tragedy of it, however, is due to the fact that they are seriously considered by our membership which holds in high esteem whatever the political secretary of the party has to say or do.

Comrade Bittelman objects because the Hungarian convention wants to see the decision of the R. I. L. U. put into effect. The Hungarian comrades as well as all other comrades would really like to know what the industrial department has actually done to put the decision of the Proflern into effect. They know that unless it is that our industrial work will continue to suffer severely. Don't become indignant Comrade Bittelman but show us what the majority has really done with this most important decision affecting at the present time one of our most important tasks. Comrade Bittelman after distorting everything that Comrade Amter said at the convention objects because Comrade Amter brought in Comrade Pepper's name in his speech to the convention.

Comrade Bittelman, without the wink of an eyelash, on the matter of injecting Comrade Pepper's name has this to say:

"The point that I wish to raise here is on what ground will Comrade Amter and the minority justify the raising of this issue in the party? By what arguments will they prove that such speeches as Comrade Amter's are contributing to the welfare of the Workers Party? Factionalism as a rule is most rampant in pre-convention periods but it would seem that there must be a limit to it somewhere."

It little behooves Comrade Bittelman to preach against factionalism in our party. He has been an arch factionalist in the Jewish federation of which he was secretary and at all times in the party. The manner in which the present majority of the party succeeded in removing Comrade Pepper from valuable service to our party was a crime against the party. It was actuated by the ugliest factional motives. Comrade Bittelman was a party to that crime. No single man has rendered the American party as much valuable service as did Comrade Pepper. The majority of the C. E. C. having closed an alliance in a bound caucus with Comrade Lore branded by the C. I. as a Two-and-a-Half Internationalist, unable to withstand the Communist criticism of Comrade Pepper decided to get rid of him. The mistake the majority made is that they did not as they had hoped to, get rid of the Bolshevik elements in the party when they got rid of Pepper. And now after the majority has been and still is guilty of a thousand factional sins, after they have contaminated with their unholy alliance the party with the ideology of the left social democrats, they come out and try to raise the cry of factionalism against the minority. We hurl the charge back into Bittelman's teeth and into the teeth of the whole majority. Why does the majority still support Lore and with his support seek to crush the minority in spite of the fact that the Communist International, March, 1924, has ordered that unity be established between the majority and minority?

Comrade Bittelman closes his article with a resume of the activities of the Hungarian section. He complains that the membership of the Hungarian section is very small, and tries to imply that it is due to the fact that the Hungarian section neglects to work among the numerous Hungarian workers who are employed in the basic industries. In this respect Comrade Bittelman ignores completely the report of the executive of the Hungarian section to the convention. In that report it was pointed out that the Hungarian section had made special efforts to reach the Hungarian workers employed in the basic industries. But Comrade Bittelman should not blame the Hungarian section of the party for the

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into warring groups, and the stumbling block to progress presented by the reactionary officialdom in the various craft divisions; weakness which would be modified or eliminated by amalgamation. More could have been accomplished, had more of the minority leaders and their federation followers been looking for action then.

Our next major problem was that of defending Communists arrested in an illegal convention with all the yellow pack of the kept press in full cry. That we could organize a successful united front on this issue, raising money and getting the Michigan Federation of Labor to condemn the law, the arrests and the prosecution, investigate the matter and bring in a report of much value to the defense in raising money and molding public sentiment, is an indication that a fairly healthy sentiment prevailed as a result of our party's activities. This united front was a success. We strengthened our position.

Now comes the farmer-labor phase of the united front, which we are told by the minority is to be the "seven league boots" of Communism. While the federation supporters of the minority were conducting their singing societies, dramatic clubs, and real estate ventures, not yet realizing that the farmer-labor party slogan was a similar prelude to Communism, the Detroit supporters of the majority thesis carried on a militant campaign for a farmer-labor party. The report of the July convention to the Detroit Federation of Labor cost us our first serious defeat. We accepted defeat with a determination to come back stronger to the next trial of strength, believing that the fault lay with us instead of the slogan.

When the June 17 issue came up, the Detroit Federation of Labor tactically refused to consider it. We called our own conference. Those unions we controlled and a few others sent delegates. The action was condemned by the Detroit Federation of Labor, with telling effect upon some of our affiliates and some of our party members. The convention was held, with what results we are all familiar. It was never possible to get the delegates together again, except our own party members. The decision of the party to run our own candidates pulled us out of a hole that had become untenable, locally as it had become nationally. At the end of this "united front" action, and particularly on this farmer-labor issue, the party stood stripped of all its former supporters. At the end of the action, we stood in a weakened position. The result was a united front of our opponents.

We need not seriously regret this isolation. It has clearly shown us the nature of our struggle. It has shown us how scant are the forces now favoring a class party. Our experience has been sufficient to dispel the illusion that class elements are to be conjured into being by sounding the magic phrase, "class farmer-labor party."

Gitlow Replies to Bittelman on Hungarian Convention Report

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neglect of the central executive committee. The central executive committee did not submit any plan to the Hungarian convention for work among the workers engaged in the basic industries. It was the duty of the central executive committee realizing that many Hungarian workers are engaged in the basic industries, to submit such a plan for work among them. After all the central executive committee is the leading and directing body in our party. It must initiate and direct important work of this kind for our language sections. When it doesn't do so it has no business to blame a particular section of the party for not making progress in that direction.

The whole article written by Bittelman on the Hungarian section convention is an example of how an article should not be written. To have to answer such an article is bad enough. Such articles make it impossible to conduct the discussion on serious lines. If Comrade Bittelman will continue to write such articles the whole discussion will degenerate into an expose of the methods used to distort and confuse the real and important issues involved.

When a discussion was decided upon I thought that there were fundamental issues involved that had to be seriously discussed. And there are. real fundamental issues involved. In order to discuss in a manner that would be beneficial to the membership and to the party a consideration of facts and their application to tactics is necessary. To divert the discussion into a misrepresentation of facts, mudslinging, unfounded charges, as the charges made by Comrade Bittelman against the Hungarian convention, and the issuance of empty, inapplicable fake slogans, is to greatly hurt the discussion, to confuse the membership and to injure the party.