

Bridges' Frameup Falls Down

NM's exclusive story about the informer and ex-convict whose perjury is the hope of West Coast union busters.

WITH the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ordered to proceed with deportation hearings, the case against Harry Bridges, West Coast CIO director, may hinge on the testimony of one man, an ex-convict and police informer.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Strecker case held that membership in the Communist Party at the time an alien enters this country, or at the time deportation proceedings are instituted against him, is cause for deportation.

To date only one man claims to have definite proof of Communist Party membership in the case of Australian-born Bridges. That man is Arthur Kent, alias Scott, alias Margolies.

Kent claims to have Bridges' membership card in the Communist Party, made out in the name of "Harry Dorgan."

Bridges has offered to eat the card, together with a bowlful of goldfish, or to leave the country voluntarily if such evidence can be produced. Best guarantee that such evidence, real or manufactured, doesn't exist is the fact that it hasn't been produced to date.

WHO IS MR. KENT?

Who is this Arthur Kent, alias Scott, alias Margolies, upon whose testimony the West Coast shipowners and open shoppers are counting so heavily? What are the forces behind him? Briefly, his record might be summed up as follows:

1. In 1927 convicted of burglary, served three years of a seven and one-half year sentence in San Quentin.
2. Employed as stool pigeon for police departments of San Francisco and Portland, following his release from prison in 1931.
3. Worked for Col. Henry Sanborn, notorious strikebreaker, starting April 1936, in developing deportation case against Bridges. Work involved wiring Bridges' hotel room in Portland, during convention of Maritime Federation of the Pacific in summer of 1937.
4. Arrested in December of 1937 for series of thirteen burglaries in the wealthy Beverly Hills district of Los Angeles. Implicated local labor leaders as his accomplices in fantastic "Red robber ring," whose alleged purpose was to convert stolen furs and jewels into money for the Communist Party. Labor leaders later absolved of all guilt.
5. Sentenced to from one to fifteen years in Folsom prison, but secretly allowed to work out his sentence in the Los Angeles County jail.
6. Pardoned by Republican ex-Governor Merriam (after serving only nine months) in one of that official's last public acts before being forcibly retired by California voters. In freeing Kent, Merriam lauded his work in

"exposing and interpreting radical and subversive activities in the United States."

FINK'S ANATOMY

That, in brief, is Arthur Kent's record of crime, double-dealing, treachery, and betrayal. But it warrants much more detailed study. What makes a stool pigeon "tick"? Let's take him apart and see.

Following his release from San Quentin in 1931, after three years "in stir," it is safe to assume that Kent was in the employ of the police network on the West Coast. Prisons breed stool pigeons.

Undoubtedly, Tom Mooney was a familiar figure to Kent in San Quentin. At any rate, immediately following his release, Kent, cashing in on an acquaintance with the famous labor prisoner, plunged into active work with the Mooney Defense Committee, the better to wreck it from within. He also joined the Communist Party in 1934 to "stool" on that organization. He of course completely concealed his criminal record, for otherwise he would never have been admitted into the Communist Party.

COLONEL SANBORN'S STOOGES

It was not until April 1936 that Kent made contact with Col. Henry Sanborn, Army Intelligence officer, prime mover behind the San Francisco Industrial Association, member of the American Legion's Committee on Subversive Activities, publisher of the Red-baiting *American Citizen*—the man who is credited with breaking the bloody Salinas lettuce strike.

Sanborn it was who operated in Salinas as the mysterious "Mr. Winters," self-appointed coordinator of all law-enforcement agencies engaged in breaking the strike.

"Under his [Sanborn's] dictatorship," Paul C. Smith, editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, wrote at the time, "minor children . . . have been deputized and armed; high school students have been pressed into service for the manufacture of clubs; nauseating and dysentery gases have been shot along crowded streets by high-powered bomb projectors . . ."

When questioned, Sanborn readily admitted that Kent had been in his employ since Easter Day, 1936, "to ascertain and develop the relationship of one Harry Bridges and others to the Russian Comintern."

But let Kent tell it in his own words. The following is quoted from a so-called "confession" signed by Kent on Dec. 22, 1937:

So I arranged to try to get a job with the National Broadcasting Co. through a friend. He contacted Colonel Sanborn, and Colonel Sanborn tried to get me a job through Don Gilman, vice-president of NBC, for \$100 a week. . . .

At that time Colonel Sanborn and others, particularly a member of the Police Department of

Portland, discussed with me matters in reference to the membership of Harry Bridges in the Communist Party.

Kent's first assignment as a "radio technician" was to wire Bridges' room in the Multnomah Hotel in Portland, where the CIO leader was attending the convention of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, in June 1937. By posing as a telephone repair man, Kent did manage to plant a dictaphone in Bridges' room; but the latter discovered it.

It was not until a month later that Kent was exposed, and then by accident. A group of people were gathered in his studio apartment in his absence when—but let Kent tell you in his own words:

The telephone rang and someone said that Colonel Sanborn wanted to talk to Mr. Hill. I then arrived and the message was given me with many suspicious comments. Everybody left the studio and went somewhere else.

Upon investigation, Kent was immediately expelled from the Communist Party and dropped by the other organizations in which he had been active.

ITCHY FINGERS

Still all might have gone well with Kent; he might have left town and worked himself into the labor movement in some other section of the country as an informer, had it not been for the unfortunate fact that he had itchy fingers. He was next heard of when police picked him up and charged him with a series of burglaries in the wealthy Beverly Hills section of Los Angeles, burglaries that netted him over \$30,000 in loot, according to police. Kent was really in a jam. A one-time loser, he knew that a second conviction would go hard. His only hope was to plead guilty and to throw himself on the mercy of the court by involving innocent persons high in the labor movement.

The plot went something like this: Kent robbed homes in order to get money for the Communist Party. Describing himself as a sort of "Red Robin Hood," Kent said he "expropriated" from the wealthy in order to give to the poor, thus "equalizing" social conditions. And, of course, the police went for it, because Kent's arrest coincided with an open-shop drive which had but recently been launched, and they saw in it a chance to tar the CIO with Communism.

Kent implicated as his accomplices in the "Red robberies" Tom Johnson, then business manager of the CIO newspaper in Los Angeles, and Dave Saunders, a member of the Sailors Union of the Pacific in the North. Johnson, who had worked with Kent on the Mooney case in 1931, but who had not laid eyes on him in four years, was arrested but eventually given a clean billing; and although Saunders offered to surrender, the district attorney did not even bother to issue a warrant for him.

Subsidiary to the main plot was one known as "the case of the water-soaked stiffs," also

Tomorrow's Seed

Proud banners of death,
I see you waving there against the sky,
Struck deep in Spanish earth
Where your dark bodies lie
Inert and helpless—
So they think
Who do not know
That from your death
New life will grow.
For there are those who cannot see
The mighty roots of liberty
Push upward in the dark
To burst in flame—
A million stars—
And one your name:
Man who fell in Spanish earth:
Human seed
For freedom's birth.

LANGSTON HUGHES.

hatched by Kent. This plot involved the framing of Harry Bridges, Henry Schmidt, and other waterfront labor leaders on phony charges of murder. The plan was to fish bloated corpses from the bottom of San Francisco Bay, identify them as persons missing from the waterfront, and pin the resultant "murders" on Bridges, et al.

A good study of a psychopathic liar was obtained by those who watched Kent in court. They will remember the elaborate detail with which Kent embellished his story connecting Tom Johnson and Dave Saunders with the robberies of which he alone was guilty. They will remember his white-faced nervousness when he testified, how he chewed his fingernails, covered the lower part of his face with a handkerchief when news photographers tried to get pictures.

REDUCING THE PENALTY

Yet, despite all the lies and the police willingness to convict them, Johnson and Saunders were absolved of all guilt. Charges were dropped against them, because there was absolutely no evidence to corroborate Kent's testimony. Kent himself was sentenced to serve from one to fifteen years in Folsom, the home of two-time losers, at his probation hearing on March 9, 1938. Commending him on his "patriotism" in exposing "subversive" activities in the maritime unions, Judge Clarence L. Kincaid ordered Kent's sentences on two counts of burglary to run concurrently, thus reducing the penalty, from two to thirty years, to one to fifteen.

The police department never meant to arrest Kent a second time as a burglar, you can wager on that. He was too valuable to the police departments for which he worked. In fact, it is understood that the chief of police of Portland called Los Angeles and raised hell when he learned that Kent had been picked up by two blundering cops in Beverly Hills.

But, once arrested and the charges entered on the police blotter, the prosecution had to

go through with it. It could, however, and it did, dismiss six counts of burglary against him, Kent pleading guilty to the remaining four. And the judge, as reported above, kissed him off with a light sentence, after complimenting him on his "patriotism." The judge was undoubtedly influenced by the letters he received begging him to show leniency toward Kent. These letters came from Colonel Sanborn; A. H. "Pedro Pete" Peterson and W. R. A. Patterson, ringleaders of the now defunct "Dirty Dozen" longshore renegades; and Stanley M. "Larry" Doyle, former district attorney of Portland.

KENT'S FRIENDS

One and all begged that Kent not be sent to Folsom or San Quentin for fear that he might be "roughed up," but that he serve his sentence in the county jail, where he could be "visited" occasionally. These letters are so important that it is worthwhile to quote from a few addressed to the county probation officer (the italics in each of the quotations are mine):

If you, in your official capacity, can in any manner assist in keeping Arthur Kent from being sent to Folsom or San Quentin, *it would be greatly appreciated* by the American Federation of Labor . . . (A. H. Peterson.)

. . . The testimony that he [Kent] can and will give to the United States Senate Committees and the federal court before whom Bridges will be brought will be invaluable and true, *and therefore must not be open to attack upon its credibility . . .*" (Col. Henry Sanborn.)

Kent has never lied to me in the three years I have known him . . . Kent is the motivating factor and the principal reason why the Harry Bridges case has progressed as far as it has, and he deserves commendation for this, if for nothing else. (Stanley M. Doyle.)

As an American and an AFL union man, I believe that Arthur Kent is too valuable a source of information to send to the pen . . . He will be of invaluable aid to us if he can be held *where that information and he will be available* for the cause of Americanism and to work against the subversive activities of the Communist Party. (W. R. A. Patterson.)

And this strange assortment of union wreckers prevailed. Although sentenced to Folsom, *Kent never set foot inside its door!* Instead, he served out his sentence secretly hidden away in the Los Angeles County jail, where he was easily "available" to authorities interested in using his testimony to deport Harry Bridges. He remained there nine months until ex-Governor Merriam pardoned him, because of his outstanding work in "exposing and interpreting radical and subversive activity in the United States," the Republican official said, using almost the identical words of the judge who sentenced Kent. That was part of the "deal" too, Merriam's pardon. That was Kent's reward for serving his masters so faithfully.

TOM CULLEN.