

What Ruthenberg Means to the Workers Today

By JAY LOVESTONE

Exec. Sec. Workers (Communist) Party

TWO YEARS have passed since the death of Charles E. Ruthenberg, the founder and first secretary of the Communist Party in the United States. Ruthenberg was the outstanding leader of the left wing in the Socialist Party and of the Communist movement, symbolizing more than anyone else the developing stages of working class militancy. He showed a constant growth in his clearness and understanding of the revolutionary struggle. In spite of the hazy concepts and shortcomings which characterized the most militant and Marxian kernels in the various left wing groups before the founding of the Communist International, Ruthenberg quickly grasped the lessons of the changing development of his time and clearly interpreted the meaning of the imperialist world war and the Russian revolution to the working class.

Ruthenberg was intensely hated by the bourgeoisie. In his long activity as a leader of the revolutionary movement, Ruthenberg was many times in prison or face to face with the capitalist courts. In the last years of his life Ruthenberg was continuously under indictment and sentence. In his trials, at Cleveland, Canton, Ohio, Bridge-man, Mich., in New York, etc., Ruthenberg exposed the class nature of the courts of this country as directed against the working class.

The heritage of Ruthenberg is the Workers (Communist) Party of America, which, developing along the Leninist line expressed by Ruthenberg, is becoming the leader of ever greater masses of the workers

in their everyday struggles against American imperialism. Ruthenberg was a splendid organizer. He was the tactical and organizational leader of the Party, the man of ac-

tion who explained to the workers in simple language, often using the capitalist courts as a tribunal, the basic facts of the class struggle, the workings of the capitalist system of exploitation, the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the inevitability of armed insurrection of the working class before the victory of the workers in this struggle.

At this moment, when American imperialism is preparing for a new imperialist world war, is competing for the domination of the world markets with British imperialism and the other imperialist powers, and is making ready to take part in a united imperialist attack on the Soviet Union, the lessons of Ruthenberg's heroic fight against the last imperialist world war are of especial importance. The St. Louis anti-war resolution of the Socialist Party, which was adopted directly after America's entrance into the world war, had serious shortcomings from a Leninist point of view, but it marked the strong opposition of the rank and file within the Socialist Party of that day, to the imperialist war. Ruthenberg, more than anyone else, was responsible for the revolutionary aspects of the resolution. It was Ruthenberg who led and symbolized the revolt of the working class elements, the left wing, in the Socialist Party against the pro-Germanism of Berger and the social chauvinism of the Spargos, Wallings, and the rest of the right wing in the Socialist Party. It was for fighting imperialist war and for opposing the entrance of America into the war, that Ruthenberg, who from the beginning emphasized

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C. E. RUTHENBERG WAS ON THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE I. L. D.

RUTHENBERG

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its imperialist character, was imprisoned in Cleveland, May 19, 1917. He issued the slogan "Down with the Imperialist War."

When Ruthenberg made his speech after being sentenced in New York, in March 1920, he defied the court and exposed the fact that capitalist justice is an inevitable accompaniment of the system of exploitation and that the persecution of the workers is especially intense in times of preparation for imperialist war. During his trial at Bridgman, March 1923, Ruthenberg said: "Imperialist wars are the inevitable outcome of the capitalist system of production—not only a single war, but many wars, recurring from time to time.... In this process of imperialism and the destruction of productive power, there will be uprisings of workers who bear the brunt of the sufferings to endeavor to relieve themselves from the misery and sufferings



Photo Labor Defender.
ROBERT ZELMS, NEW ENGLAND I. L. D.
ORGANIZER

which the capitalist system brings upon them. These struggles will result in revolutionary struggles, in attempts by the workers to abolish the capitalist system and to establish the collective ownership of industry and production".

In his statement, after he was sentenced in the New York trial in March 1920, Ruthenberg fully exposed the class nature of the prosecution. He said: "I realized from the beginning of this trial, as I have at 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: and I expected no other

result from an organization of the capitalist class to protect the capitalist system than the result that has been returned by this court in this particular case."

Ruthenberg was a fighting revolutionist who fought against Opportunism and Reformism throughout his life as a leader of the revolutionary movement. Ruthenberg was an organizer and a man of action.

Ruthenberg's last words were, "Tell the comrades to close the ranks and to build the Party. The American workers, under the leadership of our Party and the Comintern, will win. Let's fight on". We must

fight on in the spirit of Ruthenberg against the attempts of the capitalist class to plunge America into a new imperialist world war. We must fight on against the attack of American and world imperialism against the Soviet Union. We must fight on in the spirit of Ruthenberg, to build the Workers (Communist) Party, the leader and the vanguard of the working class in all its battles. We must fight on in the spirit of Ruthenberg against the system of which class justice directed against the workers is a part and for the establishment of the workers' rule in this country.

THE CENTRALIA TRAGEDY

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placed in view of Everest's friends in the prison and at last buried in an unmarked grave.

Four union loggers were taken out of jail to do the work of burial under a heavy guard of soldiers. Some kind of a farcical inquest was held.

In the hall that day, besides Everest, were Bert Faulkner, Roy Becker, Britt Smith, Mike Sheehan, James McNerney and Morgan. The latter broke down under the torture all were put through. The terror continued for nine days. Loren Roberts, 19 years old, was driven insane.

A reign of terror existed throughout the Northwest. More than a thousand men and women were arrested in the State of Washington alone. Union halls were closed labor papers suppressed, and many men were given sentences of from one to fourteen years for having in their possession copies of papers that contained the truth about the Centralia tragedy...

Lewis County and the Lumber and Employers' Associations had provided special prosecutors for this trial. There was a heavy array of these mouthpieces of capitalism and they were backed up by all the authority of the State. The Governor had sent the militia to the town of Montesano where the trial was held, and the Congressman had sent word that the members of the American Legion who were employed as deputy sheriffs, could wear their uniforms in the court room with a red chevron to designate past service in the army. Against this force which the timber wolves had employed, George F. Vanderveer stood

alone. He was a lawyer with a heart, as dangerous as a workingman with brains.

With everything against them, witnesses intimidated, the court room packed with soldiers in uniform and every possible thing done, even to threaten the defense attorneys with death, and jurymen overawed, the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

The jury was out a total of 22 hours and 20 minutes. In their verdict, Eugene Barnett and John Lamb were found guilty of manslaughter, or murder in the third degree. The Judge refused to accept this verdict, and sent the jury back to change it, and the final verdict was "guilty of murder in the second degree—Eugene Barnett, John Lamb, Britt Smith, Bert Bland, Commodore Blank, Roy Becker and John McNerney. Acquitted: Mike Sheehan and Elmer Stewart Smith".

They judged Loren Roberts insane and irresponsible.

Bert Faulkner was released during the trial.

Judge John M. Wilson sentenced the seven convicted men to terms of from 25 to 40 years in the Walla Walla penitentiary. Though the jury had asked for leniency, the Judge gave the men the limit of the law. These men are still in prison and there is a movement on foot for their release.

Five of the regular jurymen have since sworn to affidavits saying that the verdict was unjust. One told of a preliminary ballot unanimously for acquittal.

(From Haywood's Autobiography, Int., Publishers).

*Yours for the success
of the International
Labor Defense
Wm D Haywood.*