

THE WHITE TERROR

Fifteen Years Penal Servitude for Ruthenberg.

By John Pepper.

A cable message from New York informs us that the High Court of Justice of Michigan has sentenced Comrade C. E. Ruthenberg, the leader of the Workers (Communist) Party of America, to 15 years penal servitude.

It was evident to all who know American conditions, that the electoral victory of Coolidge, the reactionary, "the strike breaker", created the preliminary political conditions for a general offensive of American capital against the working class.

The verdict of penal servitude against Ruthenberg, the communist in the United States who is best known and best hated by the capitalists, is merely the prelude to a general regime of penal servitude for the American working class.

History repeats itself. When in the Summer of 1922, no less than a million workers were on strike against capital, the capitalist government first persecuted the communists as the most active elements of the working class, and then turned with their troops and warrants against the masses. The prosecution of comrade Ruthenberg and 71 other American communists began in the Summer of 1922. The Communist Party of America, which at that time was still illegal, held an **illegal party congress** in Bridgeman, Michigan. The police discovered the congress through an informer. Some of the comrades were not able to escape, some of them were arrested immediately. The whole of the American Press at that time raged for weeks on end against the communists who "were conspiring in the woods against the American Constitution".

The public prosecutor brought against us, against all the 72 members of the party congress, a charge of "criminal syndicalism". Of course we had absolutely nothing to do with syndicalism, but the "Anti-Syndicalist Law" was the handiest weapon for the bourgeoisie to strike the whole leadership of the communist party at one blow.

Comrade Foster was the first accused. They were unable to sentence him. The jury could not arrive at the necessary unanimous verdict, as Foster, who naturally confessed to whole-hearted communism, could prove that he was not a member of the illegal communist party. The Court, while gnashing its teeth, was obliged to acquit him.

The Ruthenberg process was enacted under quite different circumstances. Ruthenberg was one of the founders and leaders of the illegal communist party. The bourgeoisie had long hated him. Even during the war he had been the leader of the left opposition within the Socialist Party. He led the fight against Hillquit. He was the leader of the split in the Socialist Party which, in 1919, led to the formation of the Communist Party. Ruthenberg carried on a truly heroic fight before the Court. Both Foster and Ruthenberg adopted a fundamentally clear, uncompromising communist attitude, but the wrath of the Court and of the whole pack was concentrated especially on Ruthenberg, as he not only defended the communist idea in general but also, as the recognised leader of the Communist Party, defended the right of existence and of freedom of movement of his party.

Ruthenberg's fight before the Court gained for the communist organisation in America the recognition of its legality. The bourgeoisie has revenged itself with 15 years penal servitude. The punishment is unexpectedly severe. The only accusation against Ruthenberg is that he took part in the illegal party congress and that he pronounced himself theoretically in favour of "the forcible overthrow of the American Government". The reason for such a monstrous verdict however is, that the "100% American patriots" hate Ruthenberg particularly because, in spite of his being a "pure bred American", he nevertheless fights for the "foreign-born, anti-American" idea of communism.