

UNDER THE BANNER OF RUTHENBERG

C. E. RUTHENBERG---COMMUNIST - By Herbert Zam

Those of us to whom the word Communist simply means membership in the Party or belief in the principles of Communism must learn from Comrade Ruthenberg the true meaning of that word. For Comrade Ruthenberg symbolized in his person precisely those qualities which every intelligent Communist realizes are the most essential for one who would plunge himself to the working class movement. Many strive but few attain that stage where we have no existence separate and apart from the Communist movement, separate from the struggle of the working class. Like all great working class leaders, Comrade Ruthenberg had reached that stage. We cannot all become like Comrade Ruthenberg, but the least we can do is attempt to model our lives on his, to follow in his footsteps.

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Comrade Ruthenberg fitted perfectly the Leninist conception of a Communist leader. He was at the same time a theoretician, the man who gave the Party its policies, and a man of action, who personally led the Party and the working class in all its struggles. From the day that it was organized, Comrade Ruthenberg was the acknowledged leader of the Communist Party. This leadership was recognized not only by the Central Committee, not only by the leading cadre of the Party, but by the wide masses of the Party membership; by those who agreed with him as well as by those who disagreed. I remember very vividly, on the occasion of the discussion in the Party over the LaFollette alliance, the District Convention of the Party in New York. Comrade Ruthenberg presented the position of the Central Executive Committee. After his summing up, the position of the C. E. C. was adopted. But the thing I remember most vividly was the remark of one of the delegates, a former leftist who had voted against Ruthenberg's policy. "After Ruthenberg made his last speech," he said, "it was very difficult for me to vote against the C. E. C. and I had to think the matter over for a long time. Ruthenberg is a real leader." This is typical of the way many comrades felt toward Ruthenberg. His leadership permeated into all sections of our Party.

Comrade Ruthenberg was a man of unwavering principle. In the Socialist Party before the Communist movement was founded, he was always the first to defend the principles of revolutionary socialism, of Marxism and fight against all efforts to water them down, and many are the clashes he had with Berger, Hillquit and other right wing and liberal leaders on this issue. When he saw that the Socialist Party had reached a point where it was no longer possible to remain within it, he was the

first to issue a call for the organization of a new party. Within the Communist Party he fought energetically against all deviations from the correct Communist line—against the social-democratic tendencies of Lore and against the leftists who attempted to keep the party a small sect. He fought against the effort to prevent the Party from establishing contact with the masses by dropping the Labor Party movement and he fought against all tendencies to dissolve the Party within the Labor Party. He never permitted himself to be carried away by the momentary enthusiasm

against the war. He not only organized their struggles, but he participated in them personally, and many a worker still remembers some strike which was won because of Ruthenberg's inspiring presence in their midst. And so in the great demonstration in Cleveland, in May, 1917, Comrade Ruthenberg was the personal leader of the tens of thousands of workers who came to put an end to the imperialist war, and he did not flinch even in the face of a line of armed police and militia. Arrested and brought to trial because of his anti-war activities, Comrade

and his release from jail found him on the job trying with redoubled energy to make up for lost time.

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Comrade Ruthenberg was a professional revolutionist. His entire life was devoted to carrying on the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Outside of the movement, he had no personal existence. All his work, all his activities were connected with the movement. And to this work he devoted himself only as men like Marx, Lenin, Liebknecht and other leaders of the revolutionary working class have devoted themselves. No sacrifice was too big—and no task was too small—for Comrade Ruthenberg to make for the movement. Three times, he gave his liberty for long periods for the cause. His many imprisonments only served to steel him further in the struggle for a new society. His spirit, his devotion to the working class remained unbroken. And he was ready to make new sacrifices whenever the movement called upon him. His life might have been prolonged many years had he been willing to cease working for the movement for a time, and to take a much needed rest. Comrade Ruthenberg refused to rest while there was work to be done. He refused to sit idly by and watch while the working class was in need of his help. He never permitted himself a vacation. From all to the Party without interruption—that was his course. I remember when he left prison in 1922. It was in early spring. The Workers Party had just been formed, and was in a struggle to establish itself. On the day that he was freed, he came directly to the Party office, and at once took over the work of secretary, without an hour's waiting. This is typical of his work throughout his life.

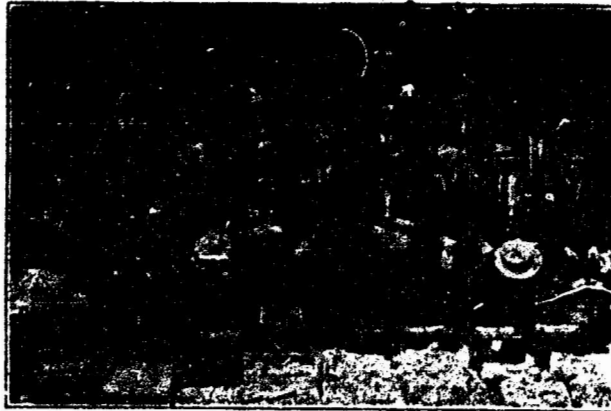
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Even in his death, Comrade Ruthenberg showed his loyalty to the working class and to the movement which he had done more to build than any single individual. His last words, his last thoughts were of the working class and the Communist movement. "Tell the comrades to close their ranks, to build the Party, leadership of our Party and the Communist, will win. Let's fight on."

We can best serve our movement, the movement of Ruthenberg, by doing that which Ruthenberg would have desired us to do. Each one give his best to the Party, to the Communist movement. We can best honor the memory of Ruthenberg by building as a living monument to him the movement of which he was one of the principal founders—the Workers (Communist) Party and the Young Workers (Communist) League of America.

Long live the spirit of Ruthenberg within our movement.

Long live Communism!

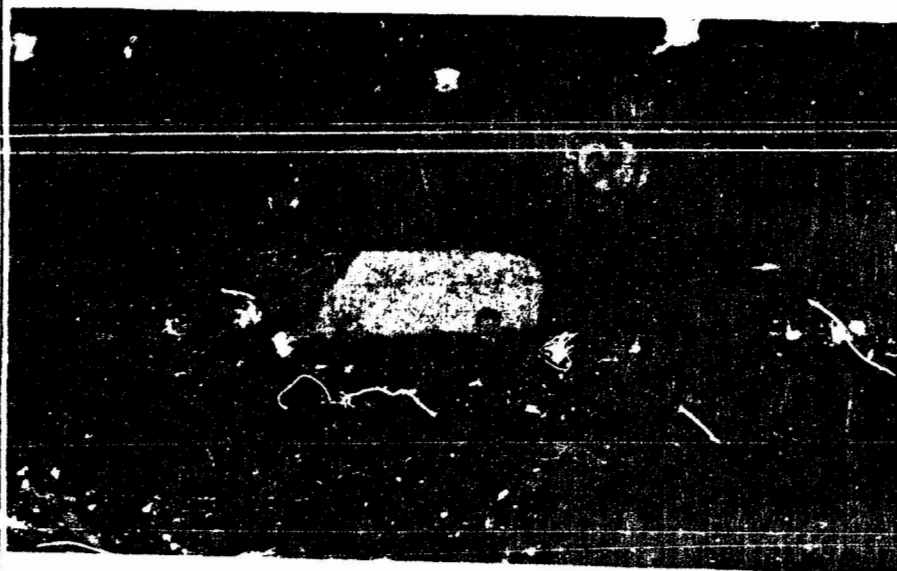


A group of Michigan defendants.

of the masses, nor did he become pessimistic at a time of low ebb of the workers' movement. His faith in the principles of Marx and Lenin was so great that he never wavered from his path.

But Comrade Ruthenberg was a man of the masses as well. Comrades who knew him in Cleveland in the days before the war, and during the war tell us that he was the idol of the masses. To them, Ruthenberg

Ruthenberg, in sharp contrast to other Socialists, notably Victor Berger, refused to make his main defense that he had violated no law. On the contrary, he used the trial as a tribunal from which he unmasked the nature of the war. He pointed out that the war was an imperialist war, fought in the interests of the master class. That the workers must fight against such a war to the bitter end, must oppose it with all their power, on the point of overthrowing the capi-



Some wreaths sent expressing sorrow at Ruthenberg's death.

was the symbol and the synthesis of all the struggles of the workers—from a small strike for higher wages, to the biggest political demonstra-

talist class. His imprisonment did not put an end to his activities—from his prison cell, he continued to direct the activity of the revolutionary work-