
Communist Labor Heads Arrested!

Infamous Freeman Act Again Used to Crush Political and Industrial Activity Among Ohio Workers.

by Joseph W. Sharts

Unsigned article in the *Miami Valley Socialist* [Dayton, OH], v. 7, whole no. 398 (Oct. 24, 1919), pp. 1, 4. Attributed to editor Joseph W. Sharts.

A Cleveland, O., dispatch of October 16 [1919] bore the news that Alfred Wagenknecht, National Secretary of the new Communist Labor Party; L.E. Katterfeld, national organizer of the new party, formerly on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party; Elmer T. Allison, editor of *The Ohio Socialist*; Charles Baker, state organizer; and Walter Brunstrup, Secretary of the Cuyahoga County Committee, had been arrested.

The arrests were reported as made at the close of a meeting in Cleveland.

The charge against them was violation of the criminal syndicalism law.

That is all the information given out concerning this latest incident of the White Terror in Ohio.

But everyone personally acquainted with these radical leaders knows that if they spoke at any meeting they were careful to avoid making statements that would violate the Freeman Act.

They know the provisions of the infamous Freeman Act, which creates the offense of criminal syndicalism in Ohio. They know they are marked men — constantly spied upon by the secret police of the capitalist class, because of their Socialist activities. The majority of them have done time behind bars already, suffering a long and cruel confinement for incautious remarks during the war, which their capitalist enemies eagerly pounced upon as seditious. They have been trained by bitter experience into guarded utterance.

To Silence Criticism.

Thousands of men and women knowing the

present principles and past histories of these men will at once declare that their arrest at this time originates in no honest desire to enforce the law but in an unscrupulous determination by the exploiting class to silence the voice of criticism. Knowing the Espionage Act would expire with the war which furnished its pretext, the capitalists demanded a substitute for peacetime use which would protect them and their methods against exposure.

It was for that purpose the Freeman Act was passed in the last session of the Ohio Assembly, by the votes of both Republican and Democratic political prostitutes of capitalism, and approved by Governor James M. Cox.

Used Against Radicals and Strikers.

Already the Freeman Act has been eagerly applied. It was used for the arrest of C.E. Ruthenberg while quietly performing his duties as city organizer of the Socialist Party in Cleveland.

It was used against 9 coal miners in Harrison County a few weeks ago, who were the officials of a local union of the United Mine Workers, which had called a strike in protest against being cheated by the operators in the weighing of coal on the tippie. Those 9 coal miners now face trial under indictments charging them with criminal syndicalism.

And the latest application of the Freeman Act against the leaders of the Communist Labor Party indicates what a handy tool it is for handcuffing every activity of the workers, either industrial or political, which organized exploitation does not like.

Conservative Labor Doped.

The so-called “conservative” labor element in Ohio was doped into passive acquiescence in the passing of the Freeman Act by assurances that it was aimed only at “lawless” labor activities like those of the IWW. (The “conservative” labor element has long ago swallowed the capitalist propaganda of hate against the IWW.)

The “conservative” labor bodies, like the AF of L, were led to believe they were really quite popular with the employers and their lawmakers! Their usefulness and legality were not only recognized but highly appreciated! The Freeman Act was not aimed at them! Oh, no!

It is thus the “conservative” worker has been led by the nose in all ages. He has been induced to desert and betray the cause of his fellow-workers, which is also his own, by just such pretenses and flatteries from the ruling class.

It is by such means that White Terrorism gathers momentum, until at last it can boldly unmask and proclaim the undisguised dictatorship of the plutocracy.

The popularity of the AF of L with the employers lasted just as long as the employers believed it was influential in preventing strikes — at least in preventing large industrial strikes; the small localized strikes were not feared. But when the AF of L called the steel strike, its popularity passed like a June frost.

And now that the coal strike is called for November 1st [1919] by another industry affiliated with the “conservative” AF of L, the capitalist organs are making absolutely no distinctions in their denunciations of “reds,” “anarchists,” “bolshevists,” “terrorists,” etc.

The indictment of the United Mine Workers in Harrison County was an application of the Freeman Act against an AF of L union.

The day is fast approaching when the same shackles will be fastened upon any and every workingman who presumes to advocate organization among the workers.

His labor unionism may be as emasculated as that of the Dayton *Labor Review*; he may even boast like a good slave of his “loyalty” to the master’s political party; he may prattle about the identity of interest between capital and labor as his paternoster; he may talk of a “fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay” as the ultimate goal of his fondest dreams. But he will be reached at last.

For it has been the world’s history that when a dominant class, strengthening its hold upon its special privileges, begins to break down the old popular rights that interfere with its property rights, it cannot stop. Once committed to the path of despotism, it must go on as fatally as Macbeth, from murder to murder, till all the strangled liberties of the land lie under its feet.

The Way Out.

There is still a way open to the Ohio workers to save themselves from the closing jaws of this Freeman Act.

The constitution of the state provides that on petition of 10 percent of the electorate, an amendment must be submitted to the people at the next election.

An amendment petition, to make impossible in Ohio the enactment of such laws as the Freeman Act limiting discussion or punishing men for opinions expressed, might force the question to a popular vote.

With organized labor aroused to its peril and pushing such an amendment petition, it would not fail of signatures.

Are the workers of Ohio men enough to take such action for their future safety?

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