
BoI Informant's Report on the Cleveland District Conference of the unified CPA, July 3-4, 1921.

by "Ryan"-“Hill”†

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A report dated July 8, 1921 by H.J. Lenon, Agent of the Bureau of Investigation, Pittsburgh.

Report Made At: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Date When Made: July 8, 1921.
Period for Which Made: July 7, 1921.
Report Made By: H.J. Lenon.

Title and Character of Case:

Communist Party of America (Unified), Conference at Cleveland, Ohio, July 3 and 4, 1921.

Facts Developed:

AT PITTSBURGH, PA.

The following reports were received from a strictly confidential source and are quoted verbatim:

Thursday, June 30, 1921.

I have just learned that Sub-District Organizer Hill [the author] issued 200 of the Tulsa Massacre leaflets to former organizer Schmitt [=???] tonight at his residence at 1839 Howard Street. Schmitt desires 5

more copies of the *Workers' Challenge* and 10 more copies of the book *Communism and Christianity* [by William Montgomery Brown].

Section Organizer Paul Hanas [=???], of #1 Section was given 2000 of the leaflets for distribution among the groups in that section. Marcus Erb [=???], of 1405 High Street, was given 150 leaflets to distribute personally. All persons who were given leaflets were instructed by Hill [the author] not to distribute the leaflet before 11:00 pm July 4th.‡ Hanas [=???] stated that he cannot successfully handle *The Toiler* in the future, and he desires that some member of the English group take over the handling of the paper. Hill [the author] promised to select some person that he could trust to handle the paper in the future.

The [Pittsburgh] Sub-District Organizer of the former CP (Ray) [Joseph Stilson] met Hill [the author] tonight and they discussed plans for leaving for the District Convention. Word has come through from Cleveland, instructing the delegates to the convention to the 9:15 am train on the PRR [?] Sunday morning [July 3, 1921], and get off at the Euclid Station, as the train arrives there at 12:55 pm.

This will be met by a Communist, who will escort them to the place where the meeting will be held.

†- The Bureau of Investigation had a very meticulous “confidential informant” at the top level of the UCP in Pittsburgh, who provided a steady stream of reports and confidential documents to the Bureau in 1921. The UCP’s Pittsburgh Sub-District Organizer, who used the pseudonym “Ryan” at the May 1921 Joint Unity Convention held near Woodstock, NY, was fairly clearly the source of the insider’s report detailing that gathering — and was by extension was the BoI’s “confidential informant.” As this is also a meticulous insider’s report given to the Pittsburgh office of the Bureau of Investigation, detailing content down to the decisions of 5 person UCP caucus and the traveling details of a party of 3, it is fairly clear that the UCP Pittsburgh SDO “Hill” in this report was the same individual. The identity of “Ryan-Hill” remains unknown at this writing.

‡- Only SDO “Hill” himself would know these precise details, as well as many other confidential details which follow. The date June 30, 1921 is significant — it being the last day before formal union of the two parties. The DO and SDO positions were divvied more or less equally between members of the two former organizations and CEC member Joseph Stilson (“Ray,” “Shevtzov”) of the old

Ray [Stilson] wrote a letter to each of the delegates whom he is in touch with instructing them to be at the depot Sunday, and if possible for them to meet either Hill [the author] or Ray [Stilson] Saturday night, near the park at Cedar and Forsland Streets.

Ray [Stilson] suggests that Smith ([Joseph] Verba) probably will not get his letter in time, so Hill [the author] had better notify the first alternate, who is William Kaposi [=???], 344 Fifth Ave., Rankin, to appear in his place.† Hill [the author] stated that he has sent Verba a letter today, instructing him to appear Saturday night for a package that he will have for him.

Ray [Stilson] then spoke of the merits of Kaposi [=???], saying that he will not sway from one point to another like Verba, and suggested that Hill [the author] have him on hand, so that if Verba is not there exactly at the time specified Kaposi [=???] can go in his place. Ray [Stilson] does not think very favorably of Verba.

Hill [the author] stated that he would see that Verba is on hand, and if he fails to appear, Hill [the author] would go to Rankin [=???] and get Kaposi [=???], so that no delegate will be missing at the last minute.

Ray [Stilson] states that most of the leaflets that he received from Cleveland have been distributed to the branches, and that on July 4th at 11:00 pm all members of the former CP will be on hand to make a good distribution of the leaflets.

Sunday and Monday,
July 3rd & 4th, 1921.

Sub-District Organizer Hill [the author] and Ray

[Joseph Stilson], together with delegates S. Charnituki [=???], of 75 Marshall Street, Benwood, W.Va., J. Velens [=???], of 2214 Forbes Street, Pittsburgh, and Joseph Verba of Conway, Pa., left Pittsburgh via PRR at 9:15 Sunday Morning [July 3, 1921] for Cleveland.

On their arrival at the Euclid Station in Cleveland they were met by Russell [=???] of the former CP, who informed them that the District Convention would be held at Acme Hall, 2415 E 9th Street.‡ After visiting a restaurant, they proceeded to Acme Hall, where they assembled in the private club room. After a wait of 1 hour, they proceeded to the 3rd floor in the business offices of the Machinists' Union, where the convention was held.

Before going into session the delegates were assured by [Elmer] Allison and Milner [=???] that there was no danger of a raid, because they had 3 persons acting as lookouts, and they would be warned in time to make their escape, but in the event of there being a raid, all delegates were to follow Milner [=???], as he knew the building, and could lead them to safety.

Milner [=???] also stated that during the convention no one was to take any notes, except those he wished to speak about, and at the end of the session all notes were to be turned over to him, and not taken from the building.

The convention was called to order by Milner [=???] with 8 delegates present from the former CP and 9 from the former UCP. Two fraternal delegates were present, they were Anders [=???], the [Cleveland] District Organizer, and the Sub-district Organizer of Cleveland, who is Walter "Logan" [Brustor], who acted as Captain of the guards at the National Unity Convention.§

Among the delegates from the former UCP were Allison, the editor of *The Toiler*, from Cleveland; Mil-

CPA was placed in the position of Pittsburgh SDO. "Hill" seems to have been moved to the post of SDO for Youngstown, Ohio (Cleveland SD#3), where he apparently adopted the new pseudonym "C. Williams." This was a demotion for him, as the Pittsburgh SDO was a paid position and the Youngstown SDO post was not. "Ryan-Hill-Williams" continued to supply reports to the Pittsburgh office of the Bureau of Investigation from his new position.

†- The tale gets a bit convoluted here. Joseph Verba was apparently himself a former company spy, who may or may not have been so employed inside the CPA. New SDO Joseph Stilson suspected Verba as a being a spy from the get-go and clearly wanted the latter kept out of the loop. Verba apparently knew nothing of "Ryan-Hill-Williams" being a secret BoI informer, although the rumors swirling around Verba were apparently no secret to "Ryan-Hill-Williams"

‡- Note that the participants did not know the location of the convention before arriving in Cleveland, making it impossible for "Ryan-Hill-Williams" and/or Verba to tip off authorities to make a sensational raid.

§- Clear indication that UCP Pittsburgh SDO "Hill" attended the May 1921 convention and was the same person as UCP Pittsburgh SDO "Ryan."

ner [=???], the former Educational Director, also from Cleveland; Fred Wallace [=???], the Sub-District Organizer from Canton, Ohio; Frank Novak [=???] from Akron; Hill [the author] from Pittsburgh; Verba from Conway, Pa., Stokes [=???] from Steubenville, Ohio; Lake [=???] from Hubbard; and Ager [=???] from Cleveland, Ohio. The former CP had the following present: Ray [Stilson] the Sub-District Organizer from Pittsburgh; and the following delegates: Vlena [=???], Pittsburgh; S. Charnituki, Benwood, W.Va.; Russell [=???] of Cleveland; Strong [=???], Cleveland; Ninti [=???], Erie; Sharp [=???], Bellaire, Ohio; and Roy [=???] of Sandusky, Ohio.

Milner [=???] was elected chairman and Allison recording secretary. A credential committee of 3 was elected, and reported favorably.

As the only business of the convention was to elect 5 members from Cleveland to sit on the District Committee, it was necessary to call a short recess to form an agenda to prolong the meeting, and make the convention seem businesslike.

The first order of business formed on the agenda was the report of the District Organizer ["Anders" =???], which was very incomplete, and showed \$1641 received and the same amount expended during the last 2 months. The former Liquidation Report of the UCP was read, which showed that the former UCP District Organizer ["Schiller" =???] has turned over \$159 to Anders, and also gave the report of property on hand, which included several small printing presses, some chairs, etc.

Milner [=???], as the former education director, read the same report that he read to the Special Meeting of the Sub-District Organizers. It showed the importance of the work of the Educational Director in the party, and especially of this district, and recommended that an Educational Director be maintained in the new party. It then told of how the Director could prepare lessons for the entire district, and then tour the District, instructing the Educational Directors from each group in the new lessons, so the entire district could be studying the same [lessons] at the same time.

This was discussed by the delegates present for a considerable length of time, and the report was finally accepted, with no action whatever taken upon it.

Allison reported the activities of the Mid-Western Defense Committee in general during the last 6 months, but gave only a general report, admitting that in these reports he gives an incorrect amount of the money receive, and also on hand, because he fears if the membership of the Party learns they have considerable money on hand, they will not work for more.

He also stated that the CEC of the former parties and the new CEC as well, will always ask for money, stating it is without finances, when it has plenty of money on hand, believing if the membership thinks the Party is without money, they will work harder to build the Party up.

He stated that the Mid-Western Defense Committee has \$841 on hand at the present time. He then explained the defense of the cases in Pittsburgh, and also throughout the district.

Considerable discussion was allowed on the proper way to conduct the defense work, the CP maintaining that the sub-districts should keep money on hand for immediate defense, and the UCP maintaining that by keeping the money in a District Defense Office, it could be shipped to the point where it is needed quicker, as each individual sub-district would not like to give up the money for defense for another place when raids are on, because they fear they might be raided themselves. This question took up 2 hours.

AS the Convention had been in session since 3 pm and it was 8 pm, it adjourned for 45 minutes for supper, which was served in the barroom of the private club, and supplied by the Party. No one was allowed to leave the building. Soft drinks, a case of beer, and some pop, were supplied by the Party while the convention was in session.

During supper time, Allison, Milner [=???], Hill [the author], Ager [=???], and Wallace [=???] formed a small private caucus, and agreed to propose 4 men from the UCP as members of the new District Committee. The men agreed upon were those who reside near Cleveland, and were Milner [=???], Allison, Ager [=???], and Sargent, who is Tom Lewis, father of Thurber Lewis. Others of the UCP were to decline if nominated. Hill [the author] was then selected to inform the other UCP delegates to abide by this decision of their caucus.†

†- This caucus within a caucus within the narrow circle elected to a 17 person secret convention seems indicative of the political culture of the underground Communist movement. By acting in this machinelike way, the 5 person inner circle within the 9 member

The convention reconvened at 8:45 pm and the only business that was transacted was a motion to make Seaver County a part of the Pittsburgh Sub-District, instead of belonging to Bellaire, Ohio, and then followed the elections.

Those elected to the District Committee were Milner [=???, ex-UCP], Allison [ex-UCP], Auger [=???, ex-UCP], † Sargent (Tom Lewis) [ex-UCP], and Russell [=???, ex-CPA]. †

The meeting adjourned at 10 pm.

A man who claims he is a Communist from Pittsburgh seeks to be admitted to the Party in Cleveland, and Anders, the District Organizer, wishes Hill [the author] to ascertain from what group he came. He gave the name of John Lazeta and wife. This is his correct name and he came from outside of Pittsburgh in Sub-District #1.

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Agent's note [by Lenon]: It will be noted that the delegates were cautioned about making notes. RAY [Stilson], of Pittsburgh, has suspected for some time that VERBA is not to be trusted and watched VERBA closely. During the conference he detected VERBA taking a paper from his pocket and making notes in a sly way. RAY [Stilson] complained to the chair [Milner =???], who called on VERBA and warned him against making notes and asked to see the notes he had made. VERBA said he had merely made a memorandum of something he wanted to talk upon but tried to evade the question and also could not find the paper upon which he had written. RAY [Stilson] insisted

on a search and had VERBA in a corner of the room where these two had a heated argument.

Agent has been attempting to obtain the proper name of RAY and from an outside source learned that his proper name is J. WALLAS, 2528 Carson Street, South Side, Pittsburgh. §

RAY [Stilson] is the new Communist Party organizer. He is a Russian [Lithuanian], age 30 years [30], height 5 ft., 8 in., weight 160 lbs., light blue eyes, light hair, and speaks very poor English.

Your attention is invited to the report of Allison on finance, which shows that these "Angels" who would overthrow this awful corrupt system we are now living under are not on the square with their own members.

The result of the caucus held while they dined would also show that these same virtuous reformers are past masters at the game of politics.

Each of the local leaders have reported success in the distribution of the dodger "THE TULSA MASSACRE," yet up to date we have not received a complaint or found anyone who has picked up the dodgers. We are of the opinion that the entire crew are suffering from a case of "cold feet" and instead of distributing the circulars carried them home and burned them. Usually after the distribution of literature we receive many telephone complaints; we also receive copies through the mail and often folks call at the office bringing the circulars with them. In this instance we have not had one single complaint.

Since writing the above one complaint has reached this office to the effect that dodgers were thrown off the 10th Street Bridge on the morning of July 5th. Δ Sample was mailed with complaint.

ex-UCP caucus maximized the former UCP's prospects for success in capturing a majority of the 5 member Cleveland District Executive Committee — but at the cost of loss of internal democracy.

†- The name is spelled "Ager" earlier in the document, "Auger" here. It is unclear whether the individual referred to was Helen Auger, correspondent with the Federated Press, who arrived in Moscow in July 1921 and soon became disaffected with Communism.

‡- Nine former UCP delegates voting in a bloc could elect anyone they wished in a convention with 8 former members of the old CPA, and the slate of 4 decided upon by the caucus within the caucus was elected. This was no meritocracy, but rather an exercise in governance by factional machine politics.

§- Wrong. Repeating a theme: internal reporting by secret operatives — effective; traditional sleuthwork by the BoI — ineffective.

Δ- This sums up the activities of the underground Communist movement: attending meetings and faction fighting with one another, fending off arrest and prosecution by professionally-interested cops and spies, and ineffectively scattering r-r-revolutionary leaflets.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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