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# The Pink Terror, Part 1: The Rape of the 17th Assembly District Branch.

by John Reed

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Unsigned article attributed to editor John Reed.

Last week we told about the unleashing of the Pink Terror against the Left Wing by the State Committee at Albany. This week we have to record the actual massacre in full swing.

One dark and gloomy night the Cossacks, Bashibazooks, and Oprichniki of the Right Wing swooped down on the 17th AD Branch, slaughtered the rank and file, and carried off the branch into captivity.

The 17th AD Branch is — or was — the largest branch of Local New York. It contains — or contained — about 400 members in good standing. It elected Claessens to the Assembly twice, and Calman to the Board of Alderman once. About two months ago the “poisonous propaganda” of the Left Wing began to work among these innocent and unsuspecting comrades. The dastardly and criminal idea occurred to them that there was something the matter with the Socialist Party — and especially with the Right Wingers who control the machine of Local New York.

Finally this feeling crystallized in an attempt to recall the delegates of the 17th AD Branch to the Central Committee. On this the Right Wingers persuaded the branch to postpone action until a special meeting. They then combed the town for Right Wing members, rounded them up, and herded them to the meeting. Many of these comrades had not attended a branch meeting within the memory of man, and there were some present who had forgotten where the hall was. The Right Wing rejected the recall of delegates *by a majority of 13 votes*.

At the following meeting of the branch, April 10th, 1919, another resolution was introduced by the Left Wingers — to recall all branch officials, to have extended discussion on the question of Left and Right

Wing principles, and then to elect new officers, the old ones to function until the new elections. *This resolution was carried 27 to 7.*

Now began an exhibition of Right Wingism unexampled in the history of Local New York.

The Right Wing delegates turned up at the Central Committee, and whenever they could assist the political bosses on any question, they voted as *regular delegates from the 17th AD*. At the same time, acting as no longer officials of the 17th AD, a group of these same individuals appeared before the Executive Committee of Local New York and asked that the branch be “reorganized.” Comrade [Julius] Codkind, a member of the Executive Committee, attempted to protest. He was beaten up and expelled from the meeting; after which, with cheers and handshaking, the Executive Committee ordered that the 17th AD Branch be “reorganized.”

On April 17th the members came to their regular branch meeting and discovered that a bright new padlock had been placed on the door of the hall. They broke the door open, however, and held the meeting, which declared that the branch did not recognize the right of the Executive Committee either to dissolve or to “reorganize” the branch without the consent of the majority of its members.

The Right Wingers bit their mustaches in rage and chagrin. “Foiled again!” In a secret chamber of the Rand School, fitted out with grindstones for sharpening snickersnees, the conspirators gathered one by one. The password was “Scheidemann!”

The next morning, April 18th, the members of the 17th AD Branch received as letter, which read as follows:

**Socialist Party, New York County**

April 18, 1919

Dear Comrade:—

The Executive Committee of Local New York at its last meeting decided to reorganize the 17th Assembly District Branch.

The committee was forced to take that step on account of the actions of a group of members in that branch who at every meeting created a fight, and by their continuous squabbling have reduced the branch, one of the largest, to insignificance.

Many of the members, disgusted with the actions and activities of these squabblers, stayed away from the meetings and the organization fell into the hands of a few. At the last meeting on April 10th, they recalled all the officers of the branch, leaving the branch without any functionaries to look after the affairs of the branch.

A letter signed by a large number of members of the branch was received, wherein these members complain about the actions and treatment accorded to the members by a small group.

The Executive Committee was forced by the course these comrades have taken to reorganize the branch and has appointed a committee to do so. As a member of the 17th AD you are requested to come to a meeting to be held Friday, April 18th at 8 pm in the Juliette Hall, 103 West 117th Street. Bring your party card. The committee will be at this meeting to reorganize the branch and put it on a solid and working basis.

We hope that every good Socialist and comrade who has the interest of the party at heart will be at this meeting and assist the committee to get a good working branch in the 17th Assembly District.

Yours for the Cause,

Committee:

Emanuel Blumstein, Alexander Copstein,  
Charles Grossman, Herman Volk.

The “letter signed by a large number of members” referred to was in fact signed by *the 32 Right Wingers in the branch — all the Right Wingers who were members*. Now the branch contains *400 members in good standing*, and the quorum is *46*.

The Juliette Hall, where the “reorganization” was effected, is outside the 17th AD. On the appointed night about 150 members of the branch gathered and were marched one by one before the self-appointed “committee” to “register.” First they were asked to turn in their red cards. Then questions were put to them, such as the following:

“Do you believe in an organization within the organization?”

“Are you a member of the Left Wing?”

Of the 150 present *only 30 were considered pure enough to register in the new branch*, together with some Right Wingers *who were not present*, but who were registered by their friends on the “committee.” After the meeting the Left Wingers in a body — not one having registered — adjourned to their own headquarters, took a pledge not to recognize the right of any minority to impose their will on the majority, and declared themselves to be the only legal 17th AD Branch.

The next morning all who registered received the following letter:

**Socialist Party, New York County**

April 18, 1919

Dear Comrade:—

There will be a meeting of the members of the 17th AD who accept the party platform as a basis of the organization, and who are not members of any organization within the party organization, for the purpose of reorganizing the branch, and to put a working party branch in the district free from factionalism and cliques.

This meeting will be held on Sunday, April 20th, at 2:30 pm at the Juliette, 103 W 117th Street.

All comrades who are with the Socialist Party and have the interest of the party at heart should attend.

At this meeting officers and delegates will be elected and a permanent organization in the district established. If you have the welfare of the party at heart, come to this meeting.

Yours for a united and solidified Socialist Party,

Reorganization Committee  
of the Executive Committee, Local New York*Admission by Letter Only.*

On Sunday evening, the 20th, the fortunate few, clutching their admission letters firmly in their hands, went to the Juliette. Some of the Left Wingers went also. There an astonishing sight met their eyes. At the door were two policemen, and in the background, with several professional thugs, hovered the Committee, pointing out the Left Wingers to the cops and ordering them excluded.

Cried Blumstein to the police, “They’re a bunch of anarchists! They don’t believe in the Constitution! They ought to be deported!”

Even some of the faithful, who held letters of admission in their hands, were mistaken by the cops and gunmen, and told to “Beat it!” or they’d get

clubbed.

On April 21st, 96 members of the 17th AD addressed a signed letter to the Central Committee of Local New York, which read as follows:

We, the undersigned members of the 17th AD, Socialist Party, do hereby protest against the attempt of the Executive Committee of Local New York to dissolve our branch against the will of the majority of our members.

The sequel of the affair is to be found in the story of what happened at the meeting of the Central Committee on Tuesday evening, which was adjourned with the permission of a police captain.

All this indicates the desperation of the Right Wingers, knee-deep in the rising tide of the rank and file, which will eventually clear our party of thugs and strong-arm politicians and establish within the ranks of the movement the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Now comes the horrid finale, when the mailed fist of the Right Wing appears in all its ruthlessness.

On Wednesday, April 23rd, without authorization by the Executive Committee or anybody else, Alderman Calman and Assemblyman Claessens, in a moving van, swooped down on the 17th AD headquarters and began to remove the furniture.

Comrade Max Cohen, who happened to be passing, protested. Whereupon Calman stepped to the telephone and called up police headquarters.

"I'm Alderman Calman," he said, "Send a policeman here to preserve order!"

In a few minutes a cop came up and under his supervision the inoffensive desks and chairs of the 17th AD were loaded on the van and removed.

Where? Alderman Calman said to a storage warehouse. But observers report that the van was seen heading in the direction of the secondhand furniture quarter in the Alderman's Ward.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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