

for or against the proposal, bringing into debate the Scottsboro decision and social equality," The Birmingham Age-Herald reported on June 4.

The decision recently loomed large in an entirely different sphere. The Provident Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia foreclosed on a large apartment house in Birmingham and leased the building to Negroes. When the families began to move in they were prevented from doing so by city police. The insurance company sought and obtained an injunction in the federal district court restraining such interference. Robinson was outraged and issued a vitriolic blast against "Yankee corporations" that dare to "disrupt the prevailing friendship existing between the whites and Negroes in the South." He went on to predict bloodshed and warned the courts that "the South does not look upon the Supreme Court's decision in the Scottsboro case . . . as a matter of law."

In the apartment house case Robinson outlined the manner in which the South proposes to circumvent the decision when he said:

Tradition is one of the noblest and endearing of laws. Tradition and custom have always been the supreme law of Dixie.

Relations between the white and Negro races have been a fixed social law, based entirely upon traditions and not legal powers.

The North has dealt with the Negro problem after its own established fashion. The South has met the situation as it saw fit.

As I have said before, we in the South do not consider the constitutionality of the various Negro problems.

There is a lesson in these brutally frank statements for those who have tried to coerce the International Labor Defense into fighting the Scottsboro case on strictly legal grounds. It must be very plain by this time that the Southern rulers have no intention of abiding by any court decision that does not accord with their "traditional" treatment of Negroes. If the legal victories are to have any significance at all the fight must be broadened rather than restricted.

Hearings on the application for bail by Willie Robertson and Olen Montgomery, two of the boys, have been set for the very near future. The Alabama law provides that bail may be set where there is a presumption of innocence. It was of these two boys that Judge Horton said the "evidence was unbeliev-

able." Immediately following the bail hearing, the two youngest boys, Roy Wright and Eugene Williams, will appear for trial in the juvenile court. The International Labor Defense has carefully prepared the legal groundwork in these cases. It remains for friends and

sympathizers to mass enough public opinion to break through that "tradition and custom that have always been the supreme law of Dixie." Protest enough will force the Alabama jurists to square traditional rights with constitutional guarantees.

## An Exclusive Labor Party

**P**OLITICAL adventurers are hard at work trying to divert mass sentiment for the formation of a Labor Party to their private ends. Led by Professor Paul Douglas and Alfred Bingham a group, proud of its so-called native American radicalism, has just completed deliberations at Chicago. A platform was outlined and plans made to call a convention in the fall.

Among those active at the gathering were Congressman Thomas Amlie of the Wisconsin Progressives, Howard Y. Williams of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party and a number of others, some of whom were honestly seeking a way out while others were evidently fishing in troubled waters for personal reasons. Among the latter was Senator Gerald P. Nye who did a nice job of patting Roosevelt on the back with his right hand and extending the left hand of fellowship to the dissenters. Another group is meeting in Omaha this week with the prospect that Huey Long's candidacy may be formally launched there.

The platform adopted at Chicago is a mass of vague pleasantries evidently conjured up with the hope that it will attract all of the dissatisfied. One plank calls for "production for use," a phrase that proved a good vote-getter for Upton Sinclair last fall. The demand for "the payment of high wages to all of those at work" is strangely reminiscent of Mark Hanna's full dinner pail. Not a word about Negroes was included. Other planks are equally as hard to define. This lofty vagueness is easy to understand in view of the bitter attacks on Communists led by Lillian Herstein of the Teachers Federation and Adolph Germer, war time secretary of the Socialist Party. They were ably seconded by other politicians, one of whom declared that every Communist in the organization would "cost ten thousand votes." Evidently the new (?) party is looking for votes above all else.

The effort to convert the Chicago gathering into a meaningless political pow-wow did not go unchallenged. A Kansas farmer told the delegates that if he were a worker he would be a Communist and the conference refused formally to bar Communists. Finally Congressman Vito Marcantonio and the Knickerbocker Democratic club of New York withdrew from the conference. The Knickerbocker spokesman pointed out the futility of trying to dodge the Red label and minced no words in saying that a "genuine third party must be a labor party, drawing its support from the ranks of organized labor, organizations of the unemployed, people on relief, the farmers, the veterans and the Negroes."

The battle to keep the Communists out of a Labor Party is more than a quixotic fear of the word itself. It displays a determination to tear a third party from its working-class base and make of it just another vehicle for personal ambitions. Such movements bulwarked behind radical phrases, are the stuff out of which fascism comes. Insincere and confused third party advocates do not want Communists in their party because they know the Communist Party is the prime mover in the drive for a real Labor movement. It will be that force to balk their schemes and keep the organization to its task of fighting for workers' and farmers' interests.

Every indication shows that the workers are not blind to these facts. Both in Detroit and Connecticut organized workers have taken the lead and laid the basis for real political action. A Labor Party will be in the field by 1936. Workers and farmers and their friends must redouble their vigilance to see to it that the party is a genuine one built on the widest united-front basis and serving "organized labor, organizations of the unemployed, people on relief, the farmers, the veterans and the Negroes."



William Gropper

# What Happened to Us in Cuba

CLIFFORD ODETS

“HAVANA welcomes you—blithe, debonair . . . and big-hearted! Havana is never selfish about her myriad diversions . . . she offers them all to you, bids you welcome as one of her own.”

For these gracious remarks concerning our Commission of Investigation to Cuba, we had the word of the tourist pamphlet handed us as we sat in the understaffed dining room of the S.S. Oriente, queen of the Ward Line fleet.

However, our delegation had its own ideas about how Havana might welcome an honest investigation commission. We said to ourselves that if the Cuban authorities permitted us to enter Cuba unmolested, then indeed there must be something rotten in our hearts. We were waiting to see.

One hour from Havana we were lining the ship's rail. We had already gotten medical advice in reference to malaria and typhoid, not to mention several varieties of dysentery. Plenty of disease in Cuba's interior. Bottles of pills in our luggage. The entire delegation of fifteen members more anxious than they cared to admit. Investigating a military dictatorship of high finance is no joke.

Night was coming on when we sighted the low warm hills of the island. If one might only be able to relax to enjoy this fertile scene, as, for example, the ordinary cruise passengers were doing, most of them loaded with rum and rich food. Finally, the port of Havana, vaguely familiar. Sure, looking like a Radio City stage set, unreal, incredible. The ship's band began to play, alternating between fancy rumbas and American jazz. The tourists began to cheer as the ship slipped past Morro Castle fort, a vile relic of the past, filled at present with many of the four thousand political prisoners of Cuba.

Havana from a ship looks like what you bring to it. If you're there to buy perfume cheaply, to drink at the infamous bars, to tickle a cutie under the chin—some of them in virtual bondage from the age of thirteen on—then you're set for a good time. But if you look at the place with clear honest eyes your nose will tell you what your eyes miss.

While the ship was being tied to the dock we stayed on the opposite side. One of our members followed the passengers to the other side but speedily returned with the information that the dock was swarming with police. Several of the men, he said, looked like reporters. I shifted news releases from inside pocket to out. The band kept up the hot rumba stuff.

The first man on board was the tour manager. For three dollars all the passengers were going to have the time of their lives.

A fat guy, he was, who knew how to make night club sound like a brothel. Our American brothers and sisters squirmed with anticipation. It was very hot, it was very noisy, the air palpitated with fever. Ropes rained through the air; the whistle blew. We were looking for the welcoming delegation which must, we knew, be waiting for us—unless! (Unless it was—fifty of them arrested, we learned later.)

A steward wormed through the crowd to my side. Would the entire delegation assemble in the smoking room. We would and did. So did a dozen newspaper men and photographers—suddenly, from nowhere, shoving cards in my hands because I was the chairman of the delegation—nice fellows, but beagles on the scent, news-crazy. I passed out releases a mile a minute. We had them in Spanish and English. Out of the corner of my eye I saw plainclothesmen pushing the camera men from the room. Scores of curious awed tourists were watching us from the outside decks.

I began to realize that the smoking room was now crowded with police. A fat fierce Cuban suddenly jerked one of our Negro delegates up from a chair and in one second would have hurled him across the room had not several others intervened. These boys understood a black skin with no questions asked! The newspaper men asked hundreds of questions. Armed men pressed us on all sides: the whole thing was ridiculous and dangerous. One man finally said, actually like a hissing snake, “You can not land here!” They took our names and addresses. Our landing cards were wrenched from our hands. Several men carrying sub-machine-guns, one in a straw hat, overalls and black shirt, paraded around us without stop. Telegram boys were allowed in the room. The executive committee of the delegation quickly wrote out a dozen cables, back to friends in the United States, to Mister Mendieta, to Mister Caffery, demanding immediate aid, demanding the right to land in Cuba. These were paid for at good juicy prices but never delivered.

The ship's officers would give us no aid. Later the captain explained, “By golly, I never seen nothing much like this before.” Permission to phone to American government officials in Cuba was denied. We learned afterward, too, that a Mister Connelly of the American Embassy came to meet the ship but kept away from our imprisoned party with real religious fervour. Even the Ward line representative in Havana hugged the outside of the door, making goo-goo eyes from that safe spot.

Several factions of police were quarreling

amongst themselves. Who was to have charge of us? They were all eager for the honor. Later we learned from a press association man that our lives had been in constant danger for the first hour of our detention. This is what happened, according to him.

“I saw you were in the hands of the National police,” he said, “the toughest bunch on the island. Through revolutionary groups their outfit has lost more lives than any of the others. When they hear the word ‘radical’ they go nuts, shoot first and ask afterwards. I immediately got in touch with Caffery and informed him of the facts. Told him you were a well-known playwright in the states, that hell would pop if they hurt you. Caffery immediately phoned the authorities. Told them to place you in the hands of the port police, a milder gang, used only to the rigors of the tourist trade.”

That, in fact, is what happened. The room slowly drained off most of the gunmen with the cute straw hats. In orderly fashion we were marched off the boat. Every five minutes they stopped to count us. The count was always seventeen (two tourist school teachers had been added to us by mistake).

Our luggage was waiting for police inspection. Much of it had already been opened. (Don't think it hadn't been tampered with while the ship was still at sea!) Innocent papers, notes and books were gleefully pounced upon as “Communist literature.” Four copies of the Foreign Policy Association's report, “Problems of The New Cuba,” were found with many elated cries. Actually officers congratulated one another on finding these reports which were made at Mister Mendieta's request and can be purchased in any Havana book store.

Significantly, scores of secret agents there were dressed as workers. One of them, a fat boy of moronic disposition, pulled out of his pocket a membership card of Joven Cuba, a revolutionary organization, kissed it with a flourish, gave us a Communist salute and laughed like an idiot. Agent provocateur.

Sexy appraisals of our girls went on all the time. The gun-loaded boys kept playing with their crotches in a suggestive manner. The girls with blonde hair entranced them. Surely blonde hair must be an old dream with them. Except for The Times man, the newspaper men stayed with us yet. Our delegate Shaffer was subjected to extra examination and frisking. The mechanical parts of his false leg were thought to be concealed weapons. Little detectives flitted around in the heat, kept counting us, kept poking fingers. One of them picked up my copy of *War and Peace*. “Very good book,” said he. One of