

Mr. Dewey Stakes His Reputation

By Stanley Randolph

WHEN the meeting of the Trotsky Defense Committee was formally opened in New York on December 12 under the obviously impartial chairmanship of George Novack, member of the Trotskyist center in the United States, three main points were stressed: (1) that the committee existed only for the purpose of finding facts, and anyone who had come to hear anything else had better leave the hall at once; (2) that the commissioners themselves were impartial, and if anything, sinned in the direction of prejudice against Trotsky and Trotskyism; and (3) that the committee was motivated only by the search for truth and justice, and absolutely abjured any interest in political questions.

The first to speak was Suzanne LaFollette, secretary of the committee. It did not fall to Miss LaFollette's lot to reveal any of the facts unearthed by the committee's nine months of investigation. She confined herself to relating the exact number of documents, letters, telegrams, and verbal depositions in the possession of the committee. Hers was also to establish the impartiality of the witnesses testifying. Miss LaFollette hotly denied that only Trotskyites were called to testify. The European branch of the committee had interviewed five people: Sedov (Trotsky's son) Victor Serge, refugee from Soviet justice; and "three who knew Sedov in Germany." The eleven witnesses examined by the American group had an even clearer record: three of them were definitely not Trotskyites. Two of these three were merely "personal friends of Trotsky, having no political views." The third, indeed, had been a Trotskyite but had "definitely broken" with Trotsky.

The character of the witnesses being thus established, the chairman introduced Benjamin Stolberg to attest the commissioners' impartiality. Wendelin Thomas had been a member of the Communist Party, which he quit in 1923, and therefore he could not be a Trotskyite; Suzanne LaFollette was a relative of the governor and senator from Wisconsin, and therefore she could not be a Trotskyite; John Chamberlain was an editor of *Fortune*, and therefore he could not be a Trotskyite, etc., etc. And as for himself, Stolberg, everybody knew he was not Trotskyite; and if there were still room for doubt, he took the opportunity of stating then and there, that in his opinion "all dictatorships are of, by, and for the dictators" and any regime which begins, as did the Soviet regime in 1917, by dealing forcefully with its enemies in the camp of reaction would inevitably wind up by killing off its own sons later. Thus was proved beyond a shadow of doubt the impartiality of the commission.

By way of conclusion, and just to prove the committee's complete unconcern with political matters, Mr. Stolberg declared that the

Comintern is responsible for opening the road to fascism in Germany and China; that the Stalinists have killed off the best of the working-class leaders in Spain; and that they are trying to break up the United Automobile Workers in the United States.

Following an address in German by Wendelin Thomas, the floor was given to John Chamberlain, who contented himself with explaining that he had joined the committee out of "curiosity" and because some of his radical friends had begun to "look shamefaced" when the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial began.

By this time a worried look had come over many faces in the audience. Already four of the "commissioners" had spoken, and nary a "fact" bearing on the case of Leon Trotsky had put in an appearance. The committee must have anticipated some restiveness at this time, because they now introduced some comic relief in the person of the venerable Italian anarchist, Carlo Tresca.

Mr. Tresca exemplified his libertarian principles from the outset by refusing to walk over to the microphone, thus forcing Mr. Novack, the chairman, to move the instrument over to him. Having registered this initial victory over the forces of law and order, Mr. Tresca proceeded to relate that he had joined the committee hoping to find Trotsky guilty. Since he, Tresca, had been a life-long advocate of sabotage and, assassination, he had hoped to find in Trotsky a new, if belated, convert. But he was disappointed. In fact, he was certain of Trotsky's innocence even before joining the committee. And although his principles did not permit him to judge other men, he decided, after much thought, to make an exception in this case, because the cause of truth was involved. He also wanted to take this occasion to explain why he had not as yet gone to Italy to assassinate Mussolini. Which reminded him of one time down in Philadelphia, during the war, etc., etc.

The revelations of fact were now interrupted to allow the chairman to take up a collection, for the double purpose of publishing the eighty-thousand-word report of the commission and to finance Miss LaFollette, who had run into considerable personal debt as a result of her work as secretary of the commission. The chairman called for two thousand dollars for the first of these purposes alone, but the collection netted only six hundred dollars, half cash.

Mr. Novak now brought into play the first piece of his heavy artillery, John Finerty, counsel for the committee.

Mr. Finerty admitted that his mind was all made up about Trotsky's innocence before he conducted the "inquiry" in Mexico, let alone inspected the rest of the "evidence" gathered by the committee since. Mr. Finerty's

contribution to the enlightenment of the audience was to read with a great show of learning some passages from a book on Soviet civil and criminal procedure, and then to show that the procedure adopted by the court martial which tried the treason cases was different in some respects from that laid down for ordinary civil and criminal cases.

Everyone who really came with the object of hearing the report of a "fact-finding commission" had by this time (almost eleven o'clock) been entirely disabused. But the audience stayed wearily on, for the last act of the travesty, the last performer, John Dewey. The chairman made an effort to revive the waning spirits of the crowd with an elaborate sentimental introduction. Dewey was the Voltaire, the Zola of the present day. An attempt to get the audience to rise in honor of Professor Dewey failed.

Dewey did a reprise on the records of the individual members of the commission and their impartiality.

It was indeed a moment of tragedy for those who had some respect for Dewey's work in fields in which he is competent to hear him say: "I stake my reputation on the truth of the findings of this commission." Fortunately for Professor Dewey, men's reputations are not altogether theirs to gamble away.

Since time did not permit reviewing *all* the evidence gathered by the commission, Dewey would give only some examples. Here they are, taken from the official proceedings of the Moscow trials themselves. It seems that two of the witnesses disagreed by several months as to the date of the formation of the Zinoviev center. And it seems that "divergent" and "contradictory" reasons were given for the formation of the second center. One witness said that it was merely a reserve, pure and simple, in case the first center were exposed. Another witness said that it was also a reserve in another sense; in the sense that the Trotskyites did not trust the Zinoviev group and wanted a separate center of their own.

"I want to emphasize," said Dewey, "that this is crucial. The whole case centers around the formation and purpose of the two centers. With these centers, the whole case against Trotsky and the other accused collapses."

Yes, that is the sum total of the "findings" of the commission. Nine months of "work," thousands of dollars spent, flying trips to Mexico, France, and other countries, lawyers retained, books published and more to come, radio broadcasts, mass meetings, conferences, Miss LaFollette deep in debt—and for what? To "reveal" what any schoolboy could have found by buying the official proceedings for one dollar, plus a discovery that Soviet procedure in treason cases differs from Soviet procedure in regular statutory cases.

"Silent Night,
Holy Night,
All is Calm,
All is Bright"



A. Birnbaum

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The Conflict in Japan

THE *Panay* incident has done much to crystallize sentiment in the United States against the indiscriminate frightfulness of the Japanese military in China. American firmness has certainly given China the added courage and confidence that comes with feeling that you are not alone. But the most far-reaching effects of the episode may yet be felt in Tokyo itself. The submerged conflict between the "extremists" and the "moderates" is coming to the surface on an issue that has long disturbed Japan: discipline within the army and subordination of the army to the civil government.

The most complete account of Japan's internal struggle over the *Panay* incident has thus far been given by Hallett Abend of the *New York Times*. According to Abend, the Japanese force which fired upon the *Panay* was commanded by Col. Kingoro Hashimoto, one of the leading spirits in the Tokyo military coup of February 26, 1936, when several cabinet members were murdered by a clique of "young officers." This Hashimoto is protected by extremely powerful friends in the high command; his arrest and punishment might very well create a breach in Japan's military front.

The insistence of President Roosevelt and the State Department that the Japanese give adequate guarantees against a repetition of the *Panay* incident has forced the Japanese militarists into a corner. That the Japanese military attaché in Shanghai found it necessary first to deny the machine-gunning of the *Panay* and then to retract that denial is not likely to increase the prestige of the Japanese army command either in Japan or in China. There is plenty of subdued opposition to the military extremists among influential Japanese industrialists, especially those engaged in light industry and commerce, and among the intellectuals. This conflict among the militarists will help their silent struggle.

It is sometimes argued that firmness by this country against Japan will turn the Japanese guns against us. This view utterly overlooks

the deep conflicts within Japan and the critical state of Japan's finances in the war against China. International firmness against the aggressor is most likely to encourage the forces of peace and democracy within Japan and to put the military extremists on the defensive. The *Panay* incident points unmistakably in that direction.

Innocents Abroad

THE discovery that the "Robinsons" were touring Moscow on faked passports upset the apple cart in many a newspaper office last week. Running out of plausible slanders against the Soviet Union, the press revived the ancient gag about the innocent American kidnaped by the heathen Chinese. Senator Copeland called for the fleet to defend the national honor. Secretary Hull put himself out on an undiplomatic limb by quizzing the Soviet Embassy before consulting his own clerical staff. By the end of the week, every shade and stripe of the fascist rainbow was involved in the story: racketeer Marinelli of New York, Trotskyites Cannon and Shachtman, Nazi agent Healy. In the effort to cover up their own confusion, the newspapers trotted out every trapeze stunt in their sensational repertory. Meanwhile, in Moscow, the "Robinsons" are learning that it is more difficult to sabotage a socialist economy than it is to obtain false passports from a capitalist power for that purpose.

An Open Betrayal

WHO "killed" the wages and hours bill? In the *Congressional Record* the discredit goes to the coalition of 83 Republicans and 133 Democrats who voted to send it back to the House Labor Committee. Off the record the Liberty League, the National Association of Manufacturers, and all the tory forces that are bent on smashing the entire New Deal program were the ones who cast the votes. But all these forces of reaction together might not have succeeded in bringing about this reversal of the clearly expressed demand of the country if they had not found powerful allies in the top leadership of the American Federation of Labor. Green, Frey, and the other Tories of the executive council of the A. F. of L. swung in at just the right moment with invaluable aid and comfort to the enemy.

The A. of L. leadership has rarely played so dramatically treacherous a role as in its opposition to the wages and hours bill. Nothing illustrates so vividly to the rank and file of organized labor the reasons for the division in the labor movement. In opposing the bill,

Green said it wasn't good enough. Nobody has asserted that the bill was perfect, or indeed that it did not contain serious defects. But the need for a wages and hours bill is pressing, not only to relieve the misery of the underpaid and sweated workers to whom it would apply directly, but to cut unemployment by shortening hours. And as the *C. I. O. News* points out, "it was urgently important that at least the principle of federal regulation and some minimum regulation against sweatshop standards be enacted. Once this was done, amendments could be made later to improve inadequate legislation."

President Roosevelt has indicated that he has no intention of giving up the fight. A new bill will be pressed for in the regular session. Meanwhile labor will carefully file for future reference the list of those who blocked the bill, enemies open and secret, in Congress and out.

The Red Pants Menace

THINGS, we are extremely glad to report, have come to a pretty pass indeed. There is a rumor current throughout the advertising agency world that Macy's and Altman's are afraid of Santa Claus.

It seems that one of the publicity firms around town had a brilliant brainstorm last week and lured most of the Santa Clauses in New York over to a Brooklyn hotel for a big free feed, banquet, etc. The idea was to get the hostelry in question a little free newspaper space.

The several Mr. Clauses came in their white beards and red pants and were reported to have had no end of fun. But when Gimbel's veteran Santa (twenty years in the big time) called the roll, Altman's jolly old St. Nick and Macy's merry reindeer chauffeur were conspicuously absent.

And the story goes, dear readers, that when Macy's and Altman's were asked to ship their Santas over to Brooklyn, they gave a collective shudder and replied in this wise: "What, let our Santas meet Santas from other stores? Never! They'd probably organize a union."

Take off those whiskers, Santa Claus, and get rid of that bomb in your pack, we know you, Mr. John (old St. Nick) Lewis!

Second Artists' Congress

WHEN the first American Artists' Congress was held a little less than two years ago, it was easily accommodated in the comparatively small quarters of New York City's Town Hall. The second Congress, which met last week, required Carnegie Hall for its public session. This is