

Communist Candidate

Why a Big Vote for Amter in New York State Is Vital

RUTH McKENNEY

THIS is the story of a man and a symbol. They both have the same name—Israel Amter—and it is not easy to say where the man begins and the symbol leaves off, for Israel Amter is probably the only politician running in next week's crucial New York State elections who has slept, eaten, and dreamt with his party platform for thirty-seven years. Not that Mr. Amter is a dreamy idealist, operating exclusively in the clouds and addressing his campaign speeches to yet unborn generations. Mr. Amter, like many another good Communist, is a precise realist—only a realist with principles.

Indeed, Israel Amter is running on the Communist ticket for congressman-at-large "precisely because," as they say down at the *Daily Worker*, he understands the hard facts of building a democratic front to stop fascism in America. For it isn't enough to hate Hitler and drop around to the newsreels to boo Mussolini. It isn't even enough to kick in for collections for Spain and keep your fingers crossed about Father Coughlin. Fascism is no slouch; fascism works fast. Those namby-pamby liberals who thought the Reds were getting semi-hysterical about the possibilities of fascism here in America were silenced forever on that terrible day, a month or so ago, when we all sat by our radios and heard the destruction of a free people.

Now nobody can pick up his newspaper without a sick feeling in the pit of the stomach. Nobody now, not even the flossy hair-splitters of our polite liberal magazines, can doubt that fascism threatens us all, immediately, right now, here. And that's where

Israel Amter, the symbol, comes in. For the Communist Party's answer to the march of fascism at home and abroad is the cry—unity at all costs among all anti-fascists, at once! It's a simple idea, of course, and it's based on bitter experience. Divide and rule is an old slogan but Hitler has used it to his advantage for a long time now. Communists have learned the obvious—working people, the middle class, must learn to stand together to prevent reactionaries ruling.

Now it's one thing to raise what the Communists call a "slogan"—in this case, unity—and quite another to put it into operation. Communists have worked diligently to build the American Labor Party in New York State, for here was the most complete expression of working class, white-collar worker, and professional unity in the country. After the primaries the Communists called their State Committee into session and, after plenty of careful deliberation and consideration of the candidates on the American Labor Party ticket and their records, decided to withdraw

the Communist ticket from the state elections—all but one candidate.

All kinds of people immediately began to beef about this Communist decision. The Socialists, for instance, those old dreamers, raised quite a hullabaloo. It appeared (to them) that the Communists weren't revolutionary any more. Of course they haven't been able to dope out an answer yet to the quiet question of the Reds: "If an American Labor Party candidate is running against an unreconstructed Tammany Democrat or a black Republican, won't the working-class votes cast for a Socialist candidate split the anti-fascist front and throw the election to the tory?" This has proved quite a poser to Norman Thomas, but in his happy-go-lucky fashion he has just ignored this side of practical politics and gone his own sweet way, backing opponents to Marcantonio and other ALP candidates.

The reactionaries, Mr. Dies, and Tammany Hall and Bruce Barton and assorted other such gentry, including Father Coughlin and

such pretty fascists as Gerald K. Smith, didn't much like the Communist decision to back the ALP candidates, either. This was quite natural, for the tories understand only too well that working- and middle-class unity spells defeat for their interesting plans to ruin the New Deal, put the quietus on labor unions, and pave the way for a sterner and fiercer form of reaction. So they raised a stink. "Red! Red!" they screamed at the ALP.

And now we come to a pretty sad business. The leaders of the American Labor Party should know that the Red-scare is the



To guard against any possible error in voting. The N. Y. State Communist Party has circulated thousands of these instruction sheets.

prelude to fascism. They do know it, really. But in the jittery weeks before the election they made a mistake and the papers were full of the headlines, ALP REPUDIATES COMMUNIST SUPPORT. The New York *Sun* called the Communist Party "he who gets slapped" and there was great rejoicing among the Tories for they thought that the Communists would be jarred out of their support for the ALP candidates.

But the Reds surprised the New York *Sun*. Communists don't like to get repudiated any more than the next man or the next political party. But Marxists cannot let their tempers interfere with building the front against reaction. There was some teeth-grinding down on Twelfth Street, naturally, but the Communists hitched up their suspenders and went right back to working for the defeat of Bruce Barton and John O'Connor and such other pretties running in the New York State elections.

A problem remained, however. Mr. Dies was blustering out in Michigan. Father Coughlin was screaming that Communists weren't legal. Red-baiting picked up after the Munich agreement, so refreshing to fascists at home as well as abroad. The Communist Party of New York State decided that, besides supporting the ALP ticket, it would demonstrate its full voting strength at the polls this fall.

So Israel Amter, the man and the symbol, began his campaign for congressman-at-large. Mr. Amter is no shadow-boxer. Unlike Norman Thomas, he isn't running to hear himself make speeches, nor is he putting up the most energetic and exciting fight in New York State Communist Party history just to keep the hammer-and-sickle franchise for the voting machine. Mr. Amter is running in dead earnest. The Communists consider that it is absolutely essential to the building of the democratic front in America that Israel Amter poll a huge vote in the New York State elections. The Reds want to demonstrate to reactionary enemy and friendly progressive alike that the Communist Party has strength and able leadership to offer to the anti-fascist front in America. Mr. Amter's vote, the Communists say, will be the best answer to the American reactionary and fascist; the best answer to the chop-licking fascists abroad. Every vote cast for Israel Amter will be an answer to Munich—a proud declaration: We have just begun to fight.

And Communists are no amateur politicians. Israel Amter hasn't been sitting home telling his small granddaughter, aged one, why she should vote for grandpa. Mr. Amter toured upstate New York, talking to thousands of farmers, appearing on local radio stations, giving interviews for front-page stories. Communists upstate distributed 100,000 copies of a little pamphlet discussing the problems of farmers and telling why they should vote for Israel Amter and then the ALP candidates.

Coming back to New York City, Mr. Amter has made the most notable campaign in the history of the city. The five speeches a day he has made to New York City voters were just the beginning. He addressed the biggest election rally held by any party in Queens. He has talked himself practically hoarse in a dozen radio appearances. His campaign workers have distributed six million pieces of literature, addressed in direct, simple terms to white-collar workers, union men, Italian and Jewish workers, housewives. Two airplanes will fly over New York City the day before election, with Mr. Amter's name floating behind them. The Communist Party has radio time on election day and Mr. Amter will get in a last word as people go to the polls.

I've just sketched in the more important items in Mr. Amter's campaign. The Communist candidate, as you can see, has put up one of the liveliest, most exciting fights for votes in New York State election history. And yet, curiously, the best argument for candidate Israel Amter is the life story of Israel Amter the man.

It's a little hard to tell the story of Israel Amter the man, not the symbol, because the bare facts sound so solemn. And Mr. Amter really isn't solemn at all. He's given his life to the working-class movement, he's been in prison, he's been poor, and yet he's had a rich and rewarding life and wouldn't swap it for any man's fame or comfort.

Mr. Amter doesn't look much like a politician. He has a gaunt face, but his eyes are very lively, and he has a neat wit. He makes his secretary laugh, which is no mean feat, and the people who work with him day after day worship him and spend their spare time trying to pamper him and keep him from working too hard—a quite impossible attempt, incidentally. When he isn't running for office, he has a staggeringly difficult executive job. He's head of the New York State Communist Party, and although of course the State Committee makes collective decisions, Mr. Amter has to see that they're carried through.

That means that he's at his bare desk in his very plain office at 9 o'clock every morn-

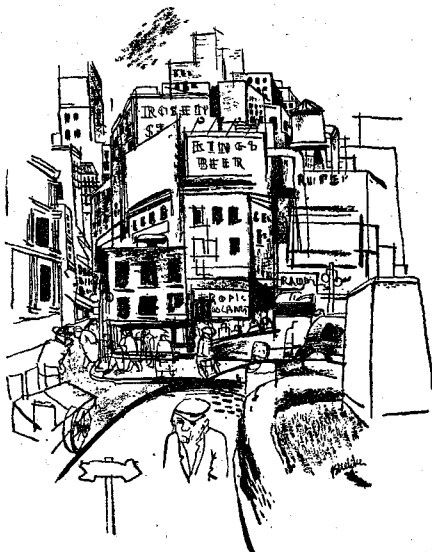
ing. His wife brings him in his lunch, neatly tied up in brown paper, at about 1 o'clock, and sometimes he takes ten minutes off from his work to eat. Most of the time he munches his sandwiches while he listens to sailors or farmers or party organizers tell him their troubles and demand an answer—immediate, of course. Everything is immediate and crucial in the Communist Party. He leaves his office at about 7 o'clock, and starts home with a staggering bale of books and pamphlets under his arm. For Mr. Amter, like all Communists, believes that the only way to organize the working class for Socialism is to study, and study, and then again study. At fifty-seven, Mr. Amter is a diligent scholar. He is famed around the halls of the New York State office of the Communist Party for his remarkable memory and keen Marxist knowledge. The byword among his staff is: "Ask Amter; he knows." Mr. Amter has been known to tell one person the exact size of the electorate of South Bend, Ind., follow that up a minute later by pointing out that there are five steel factories in Canton, O., not four, and round off the five-minute period by discussing the gold-point for the Japanese yen, pre-war and post-war. Mr. Amter is famous as an organizer too. Puffing on his underslung pipe, his eyes snapping, he appears at meetings to listen to the debate and then rise to put his finger on the exact soft point. "Consider this suggestion," he will say persuasively.

This is Israel Amter, circa 1938. A Marxist, a scholar, a great campaign speaker, executive, organizer, devoted Communist. Where did he come from? How did he learn to settle union problems? Who told him how to organize unemployed workers?

Mr. Amter's life-story is downright fabulous. He started in the revolutionary movement not as a coal miner or a sailor or a politician. He joined the Socialist Party in 1901 when he was a young and enormously talented musician, and he spent the first fourteen years of his life in the working-class movement studying music in Germany and writing symphonies. He was a poet, too, as well as a composer, and he was thirty before he turned to mass work and forsook his music.

Israel Amter's father was an alfalfa farmer in Colorado. The crash of '96 sent the Amters back to Denver, landless farmers, and Israel grew up in pretty bleak poverty in the Western city. He played a mean brand of sandlot baseball in those days and his heroes were alternately one of the mustached baseball players of the nineties, and Beethoven or Bach. For Amter showed great musical talent even as a small boy and his whole family urged him on to realize his ambition to become a great composer.

But life was exciting in Denver of the late nineties. The Western Federation of Miners led a great strike just outside the city. Young Amter was fired by their courage and determination. He met a pretty young girl on the miners' picket lines—a girl from Denver who wanted to be a great artist, just as he



John Heliker

planned to be a great composer. Her name was Sadie Van Veen. Sadie Van Veen and Israel Amter were married shortly after the great strike, and on their way to Leipzig, Germany, where he was to study music and she was to study art. But before they left, Amter's Dutch father-in-law convinced him that Socialism was the only solution to the problems of modern society. Israel Amter carried a Socialist Party card in his pocket the day he sailed for Germany.

It is hard to write symphonies when under your window march demonstrators for peace, workers on strike, women demanding bread. Israel Amter had a great future in the world of music before him when the war broke out and he came back home to carry on the fight for peace.

At first he worked in the revolutionary movement in his "spare" time. But then his talents as a speaker and organizer brought him greater and greater responsibilities. One day, during the war, he closed his piano for good, carried the boxes and boxes of pen-and-ink manuscripts to his trunk, and turned to the revolutionary movement. Since then he has worked sixteen hours a day, day in and day out, with now and then a brief vacation, a short illness, to punctuate the years. He was one of the founders of the Communist Party and one of its earliest organizers. He lived in Cleveland for five years, helped organize some of the earliest unions in Ohio mass industries. When the depression struck America, Amter plunged into unemployment work. His talent as an organizer made him a leader of those great demonstrations for relief in the early years of the depression, and men who live under the fairly decent relief standards of today owe a debt to Israel Amter and those other leaders of the early mass movement for jobs and food.

Among the many hunger marches Israel Amter led was the tragic one in New York, 1930, when the police descended on the demonstrators, clubbed and beat the marchers, and arrested the leaders. Amter went to jail with William Z. Foster, Robert Minor, and Harry Raymond.

The revolutionary career of Mr. Amter is studded with the stories of many hard jobs well done, many campaigns hard-fought. The jail sentence only interrupted his work among the unemployed. For another two years he was the national organizer of the Unemployed Councils—finally he was elected state organizer in the largest state organization of the Communist Party, and today holds the post of New York State chairman.

Israel Amter, a composer who gave up his life work to fight the battles of the working class, a leader who has marched many times into police terror, campaigns today for the votes of New York's workers and middle-class people in the coming election.

"I'm not ashamed to ask for your votes," he said the other night at an election rally. "I'm proud to ask for them. For every vote cast for Israel Amter is a vote against fascism and reaction."

The Jews in Austria

"When Knives Are Smeared . . ."

ANATOL RAPOPORT

I CAME into Austria practically by accident. Originally I intended to turn to the right on the Swiss side of the Rhine and head for Chur and the southeastern Alps, but the sight from above just beyond the Wildhaus Pass took my breath away. Where I stood it was drizzling and chilly. Two thousand feet below spread a sunlit plain surrounded by mountains which seemed to have been simply placed there like stage scenery. Their summits were immersed in the clouds from which I was emerging. I jammed the brakes and jumped off the bike. I could see the silver Rhine ribbon below and a bridge with a wooden roof. I thought the Third Reich was just across, but it was impossible to picture the silver ribbon as a yawning chasm between democracy and fascism. The unity of the scene was perfect in its splendor; the incongruity of this beauty with all that was going on beyond the river was too glaring. Soon curiosity and a desire "to see for myself" defeated other considerations, and I coasted down to the river.

The bridge was deserted. I cycled over the rickety boards, uncertain of what was going to happen next. Two banners on the other side made me realize that I was not yet in Austria but in Liechtenstein, one of those operetta principalities, which somehow keep their independence while empires crumble. I asked one of the peasants in the cabbage fields where the Austrian border was. His sullen pointing to the east was my first contact with the drama of the situation. Swastikas painted on the road at regular intervals marked the way, reminding me of the inscription, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." Here and there were traces of feeble attempts to erase them. A half-hour later a canary-green border patrol was heilhitlering me and asking how much money I had. I told him, and proved it. Then I kept going east.

My first companion, a middle-aged worker, pointed out two camps pitched almost side by side in the valley.

"That's how they breed them," he remarked. "One of those camps is the Girl Scouts', and the other may be Hitler Youth or just a road-workers' camp or the barracks. What do they do with the babies? Well, I don't know, we didn't have any of those Reich-babies yet. . . . It's just five months, you know. But I heard in the Reich the girl never sees the kid. They take it away and raise it somewhere."

He tells me he had been working on the roads in Saxony and is now cycling home,

because he has not the fare, and the Reich Germans just laughed at him when he begged for a lift in a truck.

"We'll knock that Austrian *Gemuetlichkeit* out of you," they said. They fed him uncooked meat so stale that "it danced around the plate" and disgusting fish and black coffee without sugar. In the meantime his wife was getting a mark a day (buying power approximately 25 cents), with five mouths to feed.

The frankness of some of the opinions voiced by workers and poor peasants on the way astonished me. Discontent, semi-cynical Austrian jibes, disgust, and especially fear, a universal fear of war, often expressed in the then significant question "What do they say in Paris?" were so open that I wondered whether the Nazi dog whips had been in action too short a time or too long a time to make any difference.

I come into an inn for the night. The old jingles on the door invoking peace and blessings on the stranger have given way to other greetings such as:

Comest as a German thou to me?
Thy greeting shall "Heil Hitler" be.

As I open the door, the steamy odor of cabbage and roast pork (Austria was still eating well in July 1938—I got a taste of the real potato diet only when I got to Germany proper) excites in me the anticipation of food and rest. But at the same time I hear a barking heilhitler from one of the younger SA men playing cards at a round table, and the extreme weariness almost gives way to a desire to leave. I had thought I could bring myself to heilhitler, but I could not. Still, in spite of the absence of a swastika on my bike or on any part of me, my "race" (whatever that may mean) remains undetected because of the very picture those innocent peasants get of the Jew from the press.

The innkeeper still rises to receive me in accordance with ancient traditions of hospitality, but there is nothing in his attitude to suggest that he considers me a guest. To him I am most likely a bike-wandering worker, and the absence of the swastika creates a very questionable impression.

"A mark and a half, pay up now," is all he says.

During the evenings I spent in the sitting-rooms of these village inns, reading the papers. I had the opportunity to observe these worthies, innkeepers, shopkeepers, kulaks whose accumulating land-holdings are protected against any division by Nazi inheritance laws, reducing the poorer peasantry to landless