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# Secret US Department of State Memorandum on Louis Fraina, March 5, 1920.

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March 5, 1920.

## *Secret Memorandum*

*Subject: Louis Fraina.*

As stated some time ago, the British authorities were fully informed regarding the purposes of Fraina's trip to Holland.† The following is given to amplify the relationship existing between Fraina and the British government.

About 2 months ago, the British authorities informed a member of the American Embassy at London that Louis Fraina was about to leave America to attend the meeting of Communists in Holland. The British authorities inquired whether the American authorities had anything against Fraina and whether his attempt to leave America would in any way be hindered by the government. Upon learning that there was no information in possession of the Embassy at London regarding this individual, the British authorities were undesirous that telegraphic inquiry should be made of the American government. The explanation was advanced that Fraina would be accompanied

by a British agent and it was intimated that the British authorities in America would inform the American authorities. The British went on to explain that after the meeting at Amsterdam, Fraina would probably endeavor to get through to Moscow. In this event, the British agent would be able to obtain reliable information as to what the Communists really thought of their chance of success and how far the moderating tendency was becoming apparent in the policy of the Soviet government.

It has now been learned that Fraina left America accompanied by one *Harry Nosovitsky*, of Russian nationality, who it appears had done certain work for the American authorities. It appears that this agent had been recommended very highly by *Finch*, who seems to be connected with the New York state authorities.‡ Nosovitsky had stolen, sometime before, the passport and papers of an Englishman named *Ralph Snyder* and for the purposes of the trip, presented these to Fraina. Nosovitsky obviated the necessity of obtaining a passport for himself by travelling as a ship's doctor. Accordingly, Fraina was landed safely in England, a false Immigration officer doing the necessary at Plymouth.§ The British were not anxious, however, that

†- Louis C. Fraina, first International Secretary of the Communist Party of America, was dispatched to Europe in December 1919 to attend a conference of the Western European Bureau of the Comintern at Amsterdam, which began Feb. 10, 1920. After the Amsterdam Conference, Fraina was to proceed to Moscow to represent the CPA's interests and to attend the 2nd World Congress of the Communist International, which began on July 19, 1920.

‡- Raymond W. Finch, formerly head of the Bureau of Investigation's radical division in New York City, quit the BoI in May 1919 and went to work for Archibald Stevenson and the Lusk Committee, where he soon found himself working in close concert with Robert Nathan of British Intelligence. During or after his stint with the Lusk Committee, it is believed that Finch went to work for British Intelligence himself. The theory advanced here that Finch was in a position to have recommended Nosovitsky to British Intelligence is logical.

§- A Nov. 20, 1920 synopsis of information on Fraina apparently prepared by the Military Intelligence Division of the War Dept. gives Dec. 21, 1919 as the date of Fraina's arrival in England under false passport. The document contains other date errors, however, and should not be regarded as unimpeachable.

Fraina remain in England any length of time, so Nosovitsky hinted that they had best move on to Holland.

The meetings of the Communist International have been fully covered in the reports of the British. It has probably been observed, however, that the Dutch police appear to have been very much on the job — thereby hangs a tale. It is believed that the Dutch police saw fit to arrest Nosovitsky for the purpose of deportation to Russia. This would have upset everything, so he was obliged to reveal to some extent his identity. The Inspector of Police to whom Nosovitsky communicated this was delighted and agreed to keep it secret on condition that he was allowed to obtain all the credit for himself. This all occurred according to plan, but in the mix-up, Fraina became separated from his chaperone. The latter returned to England and made his report under the impression that Fraina would arrive in a day or so. Unfortunately, Fraina changed his mind

and decided to go on to Berlin.† The British have accordingly passed the word along to the German Police authorities, the impression existing in England the Noske's idea of a good revolutionary is a dead revolutionary. Fraina seems to have convinced Nosovitsky that he was of Italian nationality. It will, therefore, be impossible for him to return to America unless we agree. The British suggest that Fraina might prove valuable to the American authorities in at least two ways: first, because his presence in America would encourage those who have broken off from Martens and widen the split in the revolutionary crowd; and second, because they believe Fraina is venal, and might be of service to the Department of Justice.‡

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†- This account generally confirms that given by Theodore Draper and seconded by Fraina's biographer, Paul Buhle. In Draper's words: "The Dutch police raid aroused Fraina's suspicions, and he decided to shake off Nosovitsky. They made arrangements to meet at a Dutch port to return to England and then to the United States. Instead, Fraina, with the help of his Dutch acquaintances, walked across the frontier into Germany and made his way to Berlin." [Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*. (New York: Viking, 1957), pg. 235.] This stands in direct contradiction to the story told in a Feb. 15, 1921 secret report of the Dept. of Justice on the topic of British Intelligence in America, which asserts that Fraina returned to England, where he was jailed and "subjected to a thorough examination by the British authorities." The Department of Justice account adds that "whether or not [Fraina] was actually placed upon a salary basis with [British Intelligence] is unknown but he shortly thereafter departed for Russia..." ["British Espionage in the United States: A Secret Memorandum Prepared by the United States Dept. of Justice, Feb. 15, 1921," available from [www.marxisthistory.org](http://www.marxisthistory.org), pg. 3.]

‡- A clue about the rumor of Fraina's purported venality may lie in the post facto account of the escapade written for the press by Nosovitsky, in which it is claimed the pair in 2 weeks' time managed to rack up a \$2800 tab, ultimately paid by the British government. [*New York American*, Nov. 8 & 15, 1925, cited in Draper, op. cit., pg. 233.] One could well expect the agent Nosovitsky to blame such a gargantuan expense voucher on his "venal" subject of interest.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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