
The Enemy Within

by Bertha Hale White

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The story which recently startled the average reader of the great daily papers of America, the story told by Albert Balanow, self-confessed spy and hired investigator of violence, was long since well known in the National Office of the Socialist Party. Whether it was true in all its revolting details had not been established. For the National Office to give it publicity was to invite certain ridicule and contumely from Communist circles, although some of the Socialist papers gave it considerable space a year ago.

Since the men now on trial in Michigan as a result of the government raid on the Communist Convention last August [Aug. 22, 1922] have accepted it, and base their hopes of acquittal upon proving that story to be true we may venture to speak of it and its connection with the events which shattered the organization of the Socialist Party 4 years ago. For more than 2 years we have known that our onetime Translator-Secretary of the Russian Federation, Alexander Stoklitsky, was a secret employee of a detective bureau and that his able cooperator in the work of destruction, Louis Fraina, was an undercover man for the Department of Justice. Fraina was located in the east but Stoklitsky was more advantageously placed, having been elected Translator-Secretary by the members of the newly admitted Russian Federation.

It is not, perhaps, out of place here to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to our translators in that happier time before war came to America. It is only fair to say that they never failed to respond in any emergency, great or small, at the National Office, whether it was for a hurried translation or the loan of their treasuries. Their spirit was that of fine cooperation, the very essence of comradeship. That was true of all in those earlier years, and it is true today of the

federations that have remained with the party organization.

When we entered the Great War there were 13 foreign language groups affiliated with the party. Each had its Translator with separate office and equipment at the national headquarters. The Translators were elected by the members of their respective federations, and the national officials accepted them without question, exercising little or no authority over them beyond requiring formal reports and occasionally acting in a judicial capacity in the inevitable controversies which arose in the ranks of the federation.

One of the first Socialist papers to publish an account of the Balanow confession printed another news item. It had no apparent connection and perhaps commanded little attention. It was a story of Socialist work in Detroit which unquestionably proved that Detroit was coming back into its old place in the movement. The connection was not apparent — but it was there. It was from Detroit that the first whisper of the storm reached the national headquarters of the party. It was a stronghold of newly admitted Russian members and it was through them that the Socialist Party of Michigan repudiated political action and declared for the just-around-the-corner revolution.

It is not intended to imply that this group of foreign members entered into a Balanow-conspiracy to destroy the Socialist Party. They were, however, living in a foreign country of whose language and beliefs and customs they had no knowledge, wholly dependent upon such few members as they had who could speak English, their sole medium of communication with the Socialist movement throughout the United States their Translator-Secretary, and their safety during the frenzied period of the war rested upon his good

faith and honesty. And the national officials of the party were as dependent upon the integrity of the Translator as were the members of the foreign groups themselves. The barrier of language could not be scaled without his assistance.

It was in October 1918 that the Russian Federation was granted a Translator Secretary with salary paid and office equipment furnished by the National Office. Then came Stoklitsky, of whose history and activities we knew nothing. As always, the selection of this officer was unquestioned. He bore the Russian label and to have dared question one who was in a way the representative of the first Socialist Republic would have seemed to us all an act of unspeakable treason. No — it did not occur to us to suspect Stoklitsky.

Looking back, I wonder that we did not. It was with his advent that we began to be excluded from the offices of the federations by a subtle spirit of antagonism. It was too illusive, too intangible to be taken hold of. Not all were affected. It had its definite center in the room of the Russian Federation. It was from that quarter that we first heard those now familiar terms, “yellow” and “traitor to the working class.” In the retrospect, his work was so coarse, its purpose so evident, it seems amazing that it was not instantly suspected. Among the horde of critics who assailed the national officials of the party after the split of 1919, there were those who blamed them for not discovering the significance of Stoklitsky’s work before it was too late to defeat his purpose.

But Stoklitsky had chosen his time well. Following the declaration of war with the German government, the Socialist Party had to fight for the defense of its indicted members and to maintain some method of reaching the outside world. It was imprisoned by the invisible barriers set up about it by the Department of Justice. While not officially barred from the mails, the National Office was reduced to the costly necessity of registering not only first class mail, but printed matter which had formerly been sent out unsealed. There was no open decision by the Post Office Department which could be met and contested. Our letters simply dropped out of sight and were never heard from after mailing.

Besieged from every side, harassed by enemies that knew neither decency nor legal restraint, from the day the agents of the government descended upon

the National Office and the score of workers marched out under their orders, the position of every member of that force was precarious. There was no security from surveillance, from espionage. Communication with distant friends and relatives was broken and any time those in the National Office were liable to receive a summons to report at the federal building to be questioned and harassed in an attempt to force some admission which could be distorted and made to give plausibility to the charges of treason in the approaching trial of our national officials.

As the months passed it became increasingly evident that someone was filling the despicable role of spy and informer at national headquarters — it was clearly shown in the questioning of government agents. Suspicion reared its ugly head. Sometimes we thought this member of the force was guilty — sometimes another. The assaults of the known enemy could be met with composure, but how to know and meet the enemy within was a problem that baffled and bewildered. Never, never until too late did we suspect Stoklitsky.

Again — I wonder that we did not. Enough happened to warn us of what was impending if we had not been so preoccupied with government persecution. We knew that our “reddest of the red” comrades were hoping to “capture” the National Executive Committee in the approaching election. But we did not think they would take up the favorite old party pastime of stuffing the ballot boxes. Not even when we knew that 30,000 printed ballots had disappeared from the shipping room. The first suspicion was aroused through a mistake of the printer — it is always safe to blame the printer — but even then we did not suspect the truth. The election was by districts and after the printing was done it was found that some of the names were on the wrong ballots. It necessitated reprinting. But the notice of shipment had been mailed before the mistake was discovered, and it was supposed in the office of the Russian Federation that the state quotas of ballots had been shipped. Before ever a ballot was in the hands of the State Secretaries for distribution to the English and foreign language branches, mimeographed blanks began coming in from Russian branches saying they had received their ballots but needed more — a hundred more in most instances. It was the first betrayal of the plot, but even then we put it down to over-zeal to win the election

for favored candidates and not to any intent to defraud. The national officials were not looking for plots and every indication that such existed was received with incredulity until State Secretaries began reporting returns from Russian branches showing that 2 or 3 ballots — or even more — had been voted for every member.

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Just 4 years before [Balanow's] confession, Michigan took the first step toward the brink of the abyss. Everything the Socialist Party stood for was repudiated and [the Michigan] charter subsequently revoked. And just 4 years before, our party officials were sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment at Leavenworth. The night those sentences were imposed for alleged violation of the Espionage Law [Feb. 20, 1919], we gathered in the National Office. The first steps in the long fight for amnesty were to be taken. A meeting of our Executive Committee had been held shortly before and plans for enlisting all forces for an amnesty campaign had been adopted. True, it met with opposition from the first. The subject was discussed long and bitterly. During the sessions, various Translators were given the floor and nearly without exception they branded amnesty as a repudiation of our revolutionary position. To ask for amnesty was betrayal. The jails and prisons of the country held hundreds of our people; the struggle to save Eugene V. Debs, our national officials just sentenced, and many others at liberty on appeal was certain to fail, but they must be considered "casualties of war," and their liberation must not be secured through any appeal to the capitalist class. "Mass action" was the thing! "The Revolution is here — we'll take them out!" Despite this opposition, a motion was finally adopted to send out a call for a [amnesty] conference. [Ludwig] Katterfeld, then a member of the Executive Committee, was with the opposition at first, but finally reconsidered his vote. [Alfred] Wagenknecht, also a member, was invited to take charge of the preliminary organization, and this he agreed to do. The call for an amnesty conference went out to a long list of organizations and individuals known to have opposed the war persecution.

Into that conference came the same discordant elements. It was one of the most tragic nights of the

war period. We had until 10 o'clock to file bonds for appeal and a quarter million dollars must be scheduled by that hour or our 5 officials — [Victor] Berger, [Adolph] Germer, [Irwin] Tucker, [Louis] Engdahl, and [William] Kruse — would begin the journey to Leavenworth. I took the minutes of the Amnesty Conference, which was not an exacting task as there was little action and much controversy, and at the same time at the telephone helped to canvass our membership for property holders who would go to the federal building and help make up that quarter million. The amount was scheduled in time, but the Amnesty Campaign began under the most unfavorable conditions. Some of our befuddled comrades followed the Stoklitsky lead. About all the Socialists could do if they were not to be "yellow" was to adopt a resolution and go home. No one who did not subscribe to the class struggle could have anything to do with freeing the political.

Before ever the machinery of the Amnesty Campaign could be set up it was effectively scrapped. Shortly after the first conference, Wagenknecht resigned as secretary and others withdrew. It was found impossible for the national Socialist Party to conduct the campaign because of this opposition within our own ranks, and the forces working for amnesty set up a separate organization, the Freedom Foundation, with the party as one of the supporting groups. Not until the famous "Emergency Convention" in the fall of 1919 [Chicago: Aug. 30-Sept. 5] and the definite alignment of the left in the Communist parties, was the National Office free to begin the amnesty work that eventually freed many of the political prisoners. It is a sad commentary upon the sincerity of the Communists to recall that they drew no such fine distinctions when the red raids swept them into the net of A. Mitchell Palmer.

Not until a part of the Balanow confession reached the National Office, more than 2 years before it was revealed in the depositions of the Michigan trial now in progress, was Stoklitsky's real character suspected. We had learned of the pestilent crew of spies and thugs which infested the labor movement at the end of the war. There were occasional exposures such as that of Joseph Krieg in St. Louis, leader in the Left circles of the Socialist Party, member of the Machinists' Union, delegate to the Central Trades and Labor Union, and — employee of the Industrial Service

Corporation, a concern solely engaged in the business of furnishing spies to factory owners. He was unmasked by the member so his union and was one of the first of a long list of spies that has become generally known throughout the country, worthy members of the exalted order of Balanows and Brannigans and Ashursts and Stoklitskys.

The knowledge of Stoklitsky's treachery came with peculiar bitterness. While his rude and boorish manner made it impossible to associate with him without irritation, he had enjoyed the unqualified confidence of the National Office and no suspicion of him had stayed his hand while he scattered the seeds of dissension and hatred. All the tyranny and persecution of the war could not shatter the Socialist Party. Stoklitsky, agent provocateur, had more efficient methods.

In less than a year after he come into the National Office he had accomplished the task assigned him by the enemies of the Socialist Party. In the midst of fratricidal strife the Communist and Communist Labor Parties were organized and the Socialist Party cleft to its foundations. Stoklitsky, glorious leader of the "Left," was the final authority in all the newest modes and fashions of the "revolution" and for a little while no one could aspire to recognition or distinction in those circles who failed of his approval. Then came the red raids. Stoklitsky, arrested and indicted with countless others, slipped casually through the police net and disappeared. His mission was fulfilled for the Socialist Party was disrupted and the "red menace" had thoroughly hoaxed the American public.

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