
Ruthenberg Permitted to State Teachings of Communist Party [April 26, 1923]

by Jay Lovestone

Mimeographed release of the Workers Party of America Press Service, April 26, 1923.
Copy in Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 211, ll. 86-87.

April 26, 1923.

St. Joseph, Mich.- After a two hour legal battle at this afternoon's hearing in the trial of C.E. Ruthenberg [he] was permitted to go on with the statement of the teachings and philosophy of the Communist Party of America at the time of the Bridgman Convention [Aug. 17-22, 1922], although Prosecutor Smith raised an objection every third or fourth sentence to break up the exposition to the jury.

Judge White's ruling that Ruthenberg might "briefly" state the principles of the Communist party at the time of the Bridgman Convention was a decided victory for the defense. It was won in a manner that put the laugh on the prosecution.

In the Foster trial Ruthenberg had qualified as an expert on Communism. At the opening of court this afternoon Prosecutor Smith began a speech which lasted 45 minutes that such expert testimony was not permissible. Opening volume after volume of his three foot long row of law books, he quoted ponderous opinion in support of his viewpoint.

When he had finished Attorney Frank P. Walsh arose and suavely remarked, "Mr. Smith seems to have been arguing from the wrong premises. We are not offering the testimony of Mr. Ruthenberg as an expert, we are offering it to show his intent and purpose and to prove by a member of the Central Executive Committee what the Party really advocated."

After a further struggle lasting another hour Judge White ruled that Ruthenberg might proceed, but cautioned him to state the teaching of the Communist Party as briefly as possible.

Ruthenberg outlined the class struggle as it has manifested itself in the past and in present day society. He gave the basic ideas of the materialist conception of history and the facts of exploitation of the workers

and farmers under the capitalist system and the development of imperialism leading to war and threat of the destruction of civilization.

Discussing the question of violence Ruthenberg said:

“It is the teaching of Communism that in every past economic era the conflict of classes has resulted in a struggle of force. The capitalist class won its power in a struggle in which force and violence was used from the feudal lords of the past. The Communists state as their belief that the struggle between the capitalists on one side and workers and farmers on the other will finally develop into a struggle of force. The capitalists will [no more] give up their right to exploit the workers and farmers without resorting to force to protect their privileged position than did the Southern slave holders surrender to the Republican Party without a civil war. The Communist Party does not advocate and teach the use of force. It states the historical truth that armed struggles develop out of the conflict of classes in the evolution of social forces.”

Taking up the immediate proposals of the Communist Party as the next steps to be taken by the workers and farmers, Ruthenberg said:

“At the time of the Bridgman Convention the Communist Party taught that the next steps the workers and farmers of this country must take to strengthen themselves in the everyday struggles against the capitalists was the amalgamation of the craft unions into industrial unions and the formation of a labor party to fight the political battles of the workers and farmers.”

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · December 2011 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.