
Military Intelligence Division Undercover Surveillance Report of the Communist Labor Party [events of Dec. 30, 1919 to Jan. 2, 1920]

Document in DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 931, file 313846.

January 12, 1920

By: *W. W. Hicks*,
Lieut. Colonel, CAC.

Mr. Frank J. Burke,
Assistant Director and Chief,
Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice

• • • • •

Attention— *Mr. Hoover*.

(Copy)

My dear Mr. Burke:

There is enclosed a copy of a report received from a very reliable source, concerning the activities of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party, and is of particular interest because it states that one Dolgin, under instructions from Martens, was planning to start a national uprising of the negroes.

This report also states that Dudley Field Malone, who had talked to Martens in Washington, recently, informed Ruthenberg that raids on radical organizations and meetings would be made from January 5th to January 10th, 1920, and that no meetings should be held during that time.

It is desired that this information be used discretely, in order not to uncover this agent, as his usefulness would be ended by so doing, and his life put in danger.

Very truly yours,

M. Churchill,
Brigadier General, General Staff,
Director of Military Intelligence.
Assistant Chief of Staff.

On arriving in New York City Tuesday, December 31st [1919],† I immediately visited the Communist Labor Party headquarters at 208 E 12th St., top floor, where I found Katterfeld, Gitlow, Ruthenberg, Ferguson, Larkin, Dolgin, and Mrs. Richardson holding a meeting — Wagenknecht, who had been expected in NY Monday had not arrived as yet and no word had been received from him. At the request of those present Katterfeld wired Wagenknecht to the Cleveland headquarters that I was in New York and for him to return at once. Letters and telegrams had been received from Executive Board [Committee] members, Max Bedacht and several others, that they were either in jail or out on bail and not permitted to leave the federal district. Gitlow then proposed to postpone the meeting until Wagenknecht will be heard from.

I took most of the leaders to lunch and learned from Ruthenberg that a tip had been sent out by Ludwig Martens from Washington, DC, that raids on radical organizations will be made between Jan. 5th and Jan. 10, 1920, and that no meetings should be held during that time. Ruthenberg claimed to have received the information from Attorney Dudley Malone, who had talked to Martens in Washington, DC.

Larkin then stated that he is going to work out a plan for “underground” propaganda similar to the one

†- This day & date is squirrely — December 31, 1920 was a Wednesday. Presumably the day is correct rather than the date.

used by Sinn Feiners in Ireland, but leaders of AF of L unions who are not known as radicals will have to be enlisted for such a plan. Ferguson then stated that he could furnish 30 or 40 of such AF of L leaders who will gladly lend their names and official positions to such a movement.

After lunch I remained with Ruthenberg, Katterfeld, and Gitlow and learned from them that the Communist Party is practically busted as far as any active organization is concerned, because most of the leaders are either in jail, in hiding, or afraid to continue the propaganda, and some of the State Secretaries have failed to send in any reports for the last 5 weeks and most of the organization's funds are now being used for legal defense.

On Wednesday morning [Dec. 31, 1920] a telegram was received from Wagenknecht stating that he will be in NY Thursday [Jan. 1] and had been taxed \$250.00 to buy a printing plant. I refused to come across with any money and consequently was treated fairly cool all morning. Larkin announced meeting of the Provisional Executive Board for Thursday [Jan. 1], 10 am to discuss future plans, but did not invite me. After lunch I succeeded in buying Katterfeld for a \$50.00 to the CLP and \$25.00 to the Larkin and Gitlow Defense League. I was then invited to attend the meeting.

About 4:30 a young Russian Jew called on Katterfeld with a note from Martens urging Katterfeld to clear all important letters and papers out of the office as a raid may take place any hour. Katterfeld secured a suitcase and filled it with mailing and membership lists. He took them to his home but he did not seem to be anxious to tell anyone where he was living at.

Wagenknecht arrived from Cleveland Thursday morning [Jan. 1, 1920] and also reported about having received a tip from Mrs. [Marguerite] Prevey from Akron about an expected raid — Mrs. Prevey received the advance information from Rose Pastor Stokes from NY by letter.

The Provisional Executive Board met at 10 am in an empty room on the 2nd floor at 208 E 12th St. behind locked doors. All sat on the floor and were instructed by Larkin that should a raid take place those present should insist that they are members of AF of L labor unions, who came to inspect the 2nd floor with the purpose of ridding it for meeting purposes. Wag-

enknecht presided and reported that conditions in the CLP were very bad and that money was needed badly to carry on the propaganda. Gitlow asked why Martens had not sent the usual remittance. Larkin answered that Martens was having his own troubles right now but that the usual remittance will be forthcoming about Jan. 18th, 20th, when a messenger is expected to arrive from Stockholm, Sweden with a draft on a New York bank bought in Stockholm by a Mr. Sturn, who is the Bolshevik agent in Sweden.

Dolgin then reported that his propaganda amongst the Negroes was taking ground everywhere and that he was carrying out Martens' instructions to the letter. Mrs. Richardson then stated that she held a meeting with radical Negroes in Walker's Book Shop on W 127th St. near St. Nicholas Ave. last night, and that reports from all over the country which were read indicated that something will soon be doing. She also reported that Scott Nearing had been active amongst the Negroes lately and that secret Negro "Clubs" are being formed everywhere.

Wagenknecht then instructed all present to omit Martens and Nuorteva's names when corresponding with radicals, but in cases where it is absolutely necessary to mention, Martens' should be mentioned as "Louis" and Nuorteva's as "Santos."

Wagenknecht also reported that Mrs. Prevey is doing some very effective work lately and that he will tour her through Ohio and West Virginia. Portsmouth, Ohio will be her first stop, about January 8th or 9th, and Charleston, W.Va., Jan. 11, 1920.

Secretary [Elmer] Allison in Cleveland is also improving in propaganda and is now concentrating his efforts on organizing "The Liberators' Club" to free Debs, but in reality it is a trick to secure names and addresses of prospective members.

Larkin then reported that the Irish in Chicago were arranging a lecture for him and that large funds have been promised him. Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor and Frank Walsh of Kansas City are working to secure the funds.

Larkin also reported that he was working on a secret organizing place but that he was not ready to make a report on the place, but will do so at the next meeting.

Wagenknecht then instructed Katterfeld to send special delivery letters to all State Secretaries to dis-

continue holding meetings until Jan. 11, 1920. The first meeting will be held in Newark, NJ, on Jan. 11 at the union hall on Springfield Ave.

Larkin was instructed to speak in Chicago on Jan. 18th at the North Side ----- (word of six letters, indecipherable) Hall.

Dolgin was instructed to discontinue the name of Union of Russian Workers and Federation of Russian Workers for any of the Russian organizations and substitute names of Social Clubs for them.

Gitlow reported that Nuorteva had succeeded in reaching Justice Brandeis in Washington, DC, and that Brandeis had made some promises, but that the nature of the promises has not been given out yet.

Wagenknecht then instructed Mrs. Richardson to go to Washington, DC and report to Nuorteva on the progress on the propoganda amongst the Negroes and tell Nuorteva that funds are needed very badly right now.

Wagenknecht then wanted to know from Katterfeld if any reports had been received from the Soldiers' and Sailors' League of Washington, DC. Katterfeld answered that Nuorteva himself was looking after the organization and that no reports had been received.

Wagenknecht then announced an Executive Board meeting for the 2nd week in February, at which time all future organizational plans will be decided upon.

I remained with Larkin, Gitlow, Wagenknecht, and Mrs. Richardson until Friday morning [Jan. 2, 1920] and learned from them that Martens has been spending a lot of money lately to bring about a nationwide uprising of Negroes in America, and the Kanakis in the Hawaiian Islands, and the natives of all colonies under US protectorate. Martens is using Negro politicians and preachers to foment trouble amongst the Negroes.

I left New York City Friday morning [Jan. 2, 1920] and on arriving at Chicago Saturday morning [Jan. 3] visited the Clarion Book Shop; 5 minutes after I entered I was arrested by two detectives and with Mrs. Proctor was taken to a building next to the County Jail, but after being questioned for several hours, Mrs. Proctor and myself were released. I then secured a room at the Great Northern Hotel and then visited the Proletarian shop on 1237 W Madison St. I had hardly entered there when I was again arrested and taken to the same building, but before leaving the Proletarian Shop I left instructions to get me an attorney who will get me out. I had absolutely nothing on me to show any connection with radicalism. I was grilled and questioned again for nearly 5 hours. I had given a fictitious name and claimed that I had been booking for my brother who is a radical. Attorney Sussman appeared and I was released.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.