

The

RANKIN

WITCH

HUNT



By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Z. Foster, the author of this pamphlet, is the National Chairman of the Communist Party and a veteran leader of the American labor movement. He led the great steel strike of 1919 which helped to pave the way to industrial unionization of the basic industries. He is the author of several books, including *Pages From a Worker's Life* and *From Bryan to Stalin*, as well as scores of pamphlets on political and labor problems. His most recent pamphlet is *The Strike Situation and Organized Labor's Wage and Job Strategy*. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the author's militant activity and leadership in the American trade union movement.

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209

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THE Red-baiting by the so-called House Committee on un-American Activities, the moving spirit of which is the notorious reactionary poll-taxer from Mississippi, Rep. John E. Rankin, signalizes a danger that should put every worker and progressive in the country on guard. For the objective of this committee is to create a national anti-Red hysteria, under cover of which the reactionary trusts and monopolies can work their sinister purposes unmolested. The working plan of the committee is to get the unthinking sections of our people all excited with fear over an imaginary revolution just about to take place and thereby, with popular attention diverted from real problems, to enable the reactionaries to go ahead more easily with their schemes of exploitation at home and of imperialist aggression abroad. It is a typical application of the Hitler Red-baiting technique. The House Committee on un-American Activities is as definitely a part of American reaction as the Hearst press and the National Association of Manufacturers, and is no less dangerous.

They Red-Baited Jefferson and Lincoln, Too

Throughout our history every time our country has faced grave economic and political problems, and especially when the forces of progress were actively on the march, the reactionaries have deliberately deluged the nation with Red-baiting, in the hope of disorganizing the people, of preventing them from advancing their own cause.

Thus, in the years immediately following the founding of our Republic, Thomas Jefferson and the other patriots who were fighting to incorporate the Revolution's gains into the

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new economic and political life then taking shape, were subjected to personal attacks, the violence of which it is now hard to conceive. They were denounced as agents of the French Revolution and enemies of everything that Americans held dear.

Abraham Lincoln, also, when leading our country through the historic task of abolishing Negro slavery, was especially the target of the Red-baiters of his day. They assailed him as an anarchist, a free-lover, an atheist, and used every other epithet that they could lay their tongues to. Their violent agitation against him undoubtedly contributed to creating conditions favorable to his eventual assassination. Perhaps never in our history was a man so bitterly denounced as Lincoln. It was the very greatness of the cause he fought for that provoked these malignant attacks from the reactionaries.

Coming down to our own times, we also have had innumerable examples of organized Red-baiting during recurring periods of national difficulty. In the troubled times following World War I, for example, such bigoted elements as U.S. Attorney-General A. Mitchell Palmer and the Lusk Committee of New York, filled the country with cries of bloody revolution, driving the Communist Party underground and arresting and deporting hundreds of foreign-born workers. The main aim of these Red-baiters was to terrorize the people and thus to defeat the many big defensive strikes of the period.

The great economic crisis beginning in October, 1929, also produced wide outbursts of Red-baiting. The chief leader of this disgraceful campaign was the Fish Committee of the House of Representatives. The purpose of this hated committee was, by shouting about the "Communist danger," to further cut the workers' rapidly falling wage standards, to break up the trade unions, and to smash all efforts at providing jobs and relief for the millions of starving unemployed.

Rankin Takes Over Where Dies Left Off

Also, throughout the New Deal period of the Roosevelt regime the reactionaries, greatly alarmed at the growth of the trade union movement, of the progressive legislation that was

being written on the Federal and State statute books, and of the general anti-fascist mass movement, carried on an intense campaign of Red-baiting. Their main instrument for this was the Dies Committee of the House of Representatives, which tried to halt the course of progress by political terrorism. This committee for years deluged the country with denunciations and persecutions of every progressive cause and movement as "Red."

Now we have the Rankin Red-baiting Committee, also of the House of Representatives. The purpose of this committee is the same as that of its notorious predecessors associated with the hated names of Dies, Coudert, Fish, Lusk, etc. It is to defeat democracy and to promote reaction. The Rankin committee, with its lurid cries of revolution, is particularly aiming to defeat the present demands of the workers for wage increases, to disrupt the movement for unemployment relief and full employment, to cultivate anti-Semitism, anti-Negroism and hatred for the foreign-born, to drive a wedge between the labor movement and the veterans, to prepare the ground for a reactionary victory in the 1946 Congressional elections, to cultivate anti-Russian and anti-British sentiment, and to promote generally the dangerous attempt of American imperialists to undermine the United Nations and to dominate the world.

Rankin Committee Uses Hitler's Method

The Rankin Committee, like the Fish, Dies, and other Red-baiting committees that went before it, uses the Hitler method. That is, it centers its attack upon the Communist Party, makes a scape-goat of it, smears it as the national villain, and blames all our economic and political troubles upon it. And then, with the help of the gutter press, when it has developed a national anti-Red phobia, the Rankin Committee will proceed to attack progressives of all kinds. Still fresh in the public mind are the outrageous attacks made by the Dies Committee upon every public-spirited individual and movement in the country. Often these persecutions become actually ridiculous in the absurdity of their objectives, a case in point being Dies' notorious denunciation of the child actress Shirley Temple.

The Rankin Committee has shown that it is cut from the the same Hitler cloth as the old Dies Committee. It is not only assailing the Communist Party, but it has also had the insolence to demand the confidential lists of employees of certain key government departments, in order to conduct witch hunts among them. It has also called for the scripts of several progressive broadcasters and has announced that it is going to check over the writings of various progressive columnists. It has announced its intention to "purge" Hollywood of those it calls "Reds," and it attempted to intimidate the voters in New York City by subpoenaing to its inquisitions the Negro Communist candidate for Councilman, Ben Davis, Jr. The Rankin Committee is a veritable cesspool of anti-Semitism, Jim Crowism, anti-trade unionism and all the other subversive doctrines that lead to fascism.

War-Mongering Attacks Against the U.S.S.R.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the Rankin Committee is its war-mongering attacks upon the U.S.S.R. All through its hearings there runs a note of hostility to our great ally of the recent war. This plays directly into the hands of all those reactionary elements who want to sever relations between these two great countries and to provoke war if possible; and this is precisely the effect desired by Rankin. At a moment when the most vital interests of our country and the whole world demands the cultivation of friendly relations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., the Rankin Committee, which is an official body of Congress, is deliberately sowing the seeds of dissension between the two countries. This is an outrage of the highest magnitude and should not be tolerated by the American people.

Such committees as those of Fish, Dies, and Rankin have always taken the position that they are out to fight "subversive forces." But this is merely a pretext. What they always do is to concentrate their fire against the progressive forces and let the real subversive elements, the fascist-minded reactionaries, go unmolested. If, for example, the Rankin Committee were really interested in combatting un-American activities, it would



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summon before it such people as Hearst, McCormick, Patterson, Gerald L. K. Smith and similar fascists; or it would bring in the Governors of the several Southern States and put them on the spot regarding their infamous Jim Crow system; or it would quiz the National Association of Manufacturers leaders about their anti-union drive. But, of course, the ultra-reactionary Rankin is not a bit interested in combatting such people. Quite the contrary; these elements all look upon the Rankin Committee, and correctly so, as their friend and ally. If a fascist is ever haled, by chance, before such a committee it is merely "to keep the record straight"; to make it look as though the fascists are also being investigated, as well as the progressives. No harm ever comes to any fascist so "investigated."

In their day and time ever since the Salem witch hunts of early colonial history, committees of the Rankin type have always been very dangerous to American democracy. They have done incomparable harm to our progress. But now, more than ever, they are a real menace. Elements like Rankin have learned much from Hitler about the technique of Red-baiting and from the Japanese reactionaries about the system of "dangerous thought control." The Rankin Committee is an incipient Gestapo and an organizer of native American fascism. It is giving a stimulus to every rotten, fascist tendency in our country.

In its hearings the Rankin Committee makes no effort to ascertain the true program of the Communist Party and other progressive organizations whose leaders are brought before it. Thus, at the hearings which the writer attended he introduced the program of the Communist Party, but not one member of the committee even bothered to pick it up, much less to read it. What they wanted was to peddle over and over again their moth-eaten, Hitlerite charges of violence against the Party. The Committee members make a practice of browbeating the witnesses and of trying to force them into making compromising answers to distorted trick questions cooked up in advance. They also insolently demand of the witnesses what their personal views are on religion, ethics and philosophy. This in-

fringement upon intellectual freedom is all in the tradition of Japanese "thought control," and it has nothing in common with American free traditions. No Congressional committee even remotely intimidates capitalist witnesses as the Rankin Committee does Communist and other progressive witnesses brought before it. The whole Rankin procedure stinks of the Gestapo.

Some Anti-Communist Lies Exploded

The Communist Party, holding the Marxian conviction that ultimately the outworn capitalist system will have to be supplanted by Socialism at the same time makes every effort, like the Marxists of all countries, to establish the most favorable economic and social conditions and to achieve the maximum possible democracy under capitalism. It fights for every progressive measure, and it is relentless in its struggle to realize world peace on the only basis on which it can be built—firm unity of the Big Three to carry out the principles of the great conferences of Moscow, Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam, and San Francisco.

The Party presents the question of Socialism in the United States in an educational sense, realizing that Socialism will not become possible until the great masses of the American people by increasing bad experiences under capitalism finally become convinced of Socialism's absolute necessity. The Red-baiters such as Rankin, however, completely distort this program of the Communist Party. They ignore or besmirch the Party's fight for reforms under capitalism and try to make it appear that the Party is organizing a violent revolution. They grow hysterical about the question of Socialism, as though the Communist Party were advocating it not as a matter of education, but of immediate political action. By this device they hope to terrorize the masses politically and to distract their attention from immediate, day-to-day economic and political questions of great concern to them.

The charges against the Communist Party, which are the chief stock-in-trade of the Rankin Committee, as well as of the Dies, Fish, Lusk and other such committees of the past, are

deliberate lies concocted on the Goebbels model. As for the charge of un-Americanism, let me quote from a statement which I made as a witness to the Rankin Committee on October 17:

Communists Fight to Strengthen Democracy

"I wish to protest indignantly against the assumption of this committee that Communists are un-American. Contrary to this, we Communists yield to nobody in the patriotic defense of American national interests.

"During the war, with America's fate at stake, we had over 12,000 of our members in the armed services; and on the home front we loyally supported labor's no-strike pledge and spared no efforts to achieve maximum war production.

"For a generation the Communist have been unsparing in their efforts to strengthen the trade unions, the very foundation of American democracy.

"We have always worked tirelessly to raise the living standards of the working masses, upon which the economic future of the United States depends.

"Every piece of progressive legislation incorporating the real American spirit of democracy has always had the ardent support of the Communists.

"In the best American tradition we have uncompromisingly fought every form of racial and religious discrimination. Communists are inveterate foes of anti-Semitism and Jim Crowism.

"We are especially proud of our long fight for full economic, political and social equality for the Negro people, without which there cannot be true democracy in the United States.

"The Communists are the most resolute of all fighters against fascism, which is the enemy of everything truly American.

"It was in the deepest American national interest that we Communists worked long and diligently for close and friendly-cooperative relations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., without which cooperation we would have lost the war and can not win the peace.

"It is also in the most basic American interest that we Communists are now warning the American people against the

dangerous attempts of reactionaries here to force the United States onto a path of imperialist world domination.

“And history will show that in proposing a system of Socialism to take the place of decadent capitalism, the breeder of economic chaos, fascism and war, we are thereby advancing the most fundamental of all American national interests.

“We Communists are proud of our record of Americanism, the Americanism of the people, not of the trusts; the Americanism of democracy, peace and progress.”

Communists Are Enemies of Imperialism

The Americanism of Communists has nothing in common with the jingoism that the reactionaries parade under the name of Americanism as a cover-up for their reactionary policies at home and their imperialism abroad. Communists realize that the true interests of the American people can be advanced only on the basis of an internationalism that is based upon friendly collaboration with the democratic nations of the world. We are the inveterate enemies of imperialism in all its forms.

As to that other stock charge of the Rankin Committee, that the Communist advocacy of Socialism is illegal and an advocacy of violence, the United States Supreme Court has given a conclusive answer to this in its celebrated decision in dealing with the attempt made by reactionaries to deprive the Communist leader, William Schneiderman, of his citizenship because of Party membership. The attorney for Schneiderman was Wendell L. Willkie, and the Court's decision, written by Mr. Justice Murphy, was handed down on June 21, 1943.

Sustaining Schneiderman's right to citizenship, and confirming the people's right to take over the industries from their private owners whenever and however they see fit to do so, which is the heart of the ultimate Socialist program of the Communist Party, Justice Murphy said in his decision:

“Our preferences and aversions have no bearing here. Our concern is with the extent of the allowable area of thought under the statute. We decide only that it is possible to advocate such changes and still be attached to the Constitution within

the meaning of the Government's minimum test."

This is a clear statement of the right to advocate the government's assuming the ownership of the industries in the interest of the whole people. Justice Murphy further pointed out that:

"Throughout our history many sincere people whose attachment to the general constitutional scheme cannot be doubted, have, for various and even divergent reasons, urged differing degrees of governmental ownership and control of natural resources, basic means of production, and banks of the media of exchange, *either with or without compensation.* (emphasis mine, W.Z.F.) And something once regarded as a species of private property was abolished without compensating the owners when the institution of slavery was forbidden."

Supreme Court Rejects Red-baiters' "Violence" Charge

Regarding the manner in which Communists foresee the change from capitalism to Socialism, (and here is where the Red-baiters always falsely charge the Communist Party with advocating violence), Justice Murphy, after surveying the basic writings of Lenin and Stalin on the subject, as well as reading every Red-baiting argument that the prosecution could dig up (and it had them all), had the following to say in his formulation of the decision of the majority of the Supreme Court judges:

"A tenable conclusion from the foregoing is that the Party in 1927 desired to achieve its purpose by peaceful and democratic means, and as a theoretical matter justified the use of force and violence only as a method of preventing an attempt to forcible counter-overthrow once the Party had obtained control in a peaceful manner, or as a last resort to enforce the majority will if at some indefinite future time, because of peculiar circumstances, constitutional channels were no longer open."

These words by Supreme Court Justice Murphy represent a fair and objective statement of the Communist Party's position, now as well as in 1927, as to the manner in which it proposes the change from capitalism to Socialism. More than that, it is a precise description of the way in which the Ameri-

can people fought through the Civil War of 1861-65. What happened at that time was this: The American people by democratic means elected Lincoln and set out upon the revolutionary path of abolishing slavery. The Southern slaveholders, however, rebelled and took up arms against the Government, Whereupon, the democratic government, as any sane government would do in the circumstances, put down their rebellion by force, and the revolutionary abolition of slavery was accomplished.

The Rankin Committee, of course, knows about the Supreme Court decision in the Schneiderman case; it also knows perfectly well that Communists do not advocate violence. But it goes right on with its lying charges against the Communist Party, of un-Americanism and violence, in order to create an anti-Red hysteria and thereby confuse and defeat the progressive forces in general. The whole procedure of the Committee is in flagrant violation of the Supreme Court's decision in the Schneiderman Case, as well as of the whole American democratic tradition.

The Progressives and the Rankin Committee

Although the reactionary Rankin Committee is aiming first of all to cripple the Communist Party, the vanguard of the working class, its principal objectives are, in the Hitler tradition, to weaken the trade unions and to disrupt the progressive movement generally. Too often, however, labor and the progressive forces are not fully alert to the nefarious plans of the Fishes, Dies' and Rankins, with their phony un-American Committees. They seem often to think that it is a case merely of the Rankins versus the Communists and that they have no concern in the matter. Some reactionary A. F. of L. leaders even feel called upon to join up with the Red-baiters. John P. Frey, for example, was the first witness before the infamous Dies Committee when it begin its ill-fated course, and for several years thereafter A. F. of L. conventions endorsed that committee with fulsome praise.

Such an attitude by labor men and other progressives, giving the Dies and the Rankins a free hand, is a deadly error. It leaves them wide open to attack from their worst enemies.

Although President Roosevelt condemned the Dies Committee several times, one of the biggest mistakes made by the progressive forces during his regime was in more or less tolerating that notorious committee, instead of fighting it resolutely. Consequently, for several years, until the workers in Texas finally took the matter in hand and drove Dies out of politics, the Roosevelt Administration was subjected to the most vicious sniping from Dies and, when it came to the 1944 Presidential elections, Mr. Roosevelt had to face one of the most dangerous campaigns of Red-baiting in our history from Governor Dewey. Mr. Dewey was enabled to make this outrageous attack largely because of the several years' long preliminary incitement of the Dies Committee. If labor and the progressives under the Truman regime make a similar mistake of tolerating the Rankin Committee, instead of fighting it vigorously, they will surely pay dearly for it in the vital elections of 1946. President Truman, who is abandoning Roosevelt's policies both at home and abroad has not condemned the Rankin Committee. This failure on his part constitutes a real danger to American democracy by lending aid and comfort to Rankin and other fascists.

Rankin, Dies and the like fully realize the importance of allaying the opposition of labor and the progressives to their Red-baiting organizations. That is why they always include one or more men with a progressive reputation as members of their witch hunting committees. Such progressives usually fool themselves into believing that they can use the un-American Committee constructively, but in reality they are only window dressing, a screen behind which the reactionaries can do their work the more effectively. The two or three progressives on the Rankin Committee, therefore, should refuse to allow themselves to be made use of by Rankin. They should resign immediately from the committee, denounce its sinister purposes, and demand its liquidation.

The Rankin Committee Must Be Abolished!

Although the democratic masses are by no means fully awake yet to the grave danger of Red-baiting, the Red-baiters are not having such easy sailing now as they used to have. The people

are not easily fooled as they once were by campaigns of "waving the bloody shirt," especially as they have seen the use made of these methods by the fascists all over the world. Hitler, the star of all Red-baiters, tried to conquer the world on the basis of a manufactured Red-scare, but his dream of an empire lies shattered by a world that refused to be deceived by him. In our own country, Governor Dewey took a leaf from Hitler's book with his fascist-like Red-baiting against President Roosevelt in 1944, but the American people sent him down to defeat at the polls. Martin Dies, too, lived for years by his vicious Red-baiting, but finally he was driven by the workers back into political obscurity. And Winston Churchill, who also tried his hand at Red-baiting and sought to scare the British people with hobgoblin stories of the "Red danger" if Labor were elected, was administered an overwhelming defeat by the workers and others of the common people in the recent British Parliamentary elections. In the New York mayoralty elections the candidate of the Dewey Republican-Liberal Party alliance, which made Red-baiting its central campaign strategy, went down to overwhelming defeat, while the New York electorate returned its two Communist members of the City Council to office with resounding victories. At the same time, two candidates of the American Labor Party, who were specially singled out as targets by the Red-baiters, were elected with flying colors.

All these defeats of the Red-baiters do not mean, however, that Red-baiting is no longer a danger. Far from it. This form of political terrorism remains a most sinister menace and it has to be fought with every means at hand. Organized labor must especially wake up to the danger presented by Rankin's Red-baiting and go all-out against it. Every local union, central labor body, state federation and international union of both the A. F. of L. and the CIO should condemn it. Every progressive organization in the country should do the same.

The Rankin Committee is a dangerous enemy of everything that labor is fighting for; it is the agent of all that is reactionary and fascist; it represents the most un-American forces in our country. *It must be abolished*, and it can be if organized labor and the progressive elements generally take the job of doing it seriously in hand.

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