
The Chicago “Picnic”: Bureau of Investigation Report on the Mass Meeting Held at National Grove, Riverside, IL (near Chicago), May 16, 1920

by August H. Loula

Excerpt from Special Agent A.H. Loula's report for the week ending May 22, 1920.
Document in DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 922, file 154434.

Report made by: A.H. Loula.

Place where made: Chicago, Ill.

Date when made: May 21, 1920.

Period for which made: May 22, 1920.

*Title of case and offenses charged or
nature of matter under investigation:*

Summary of Radical Activities in Chicago
and Vicinity for Week Ending May 22nd, 1920.

*Statement of operations, evidence collected, names and
addresses of persons interviewed, places visited, etc.:*

AT CHICAGO:

On Sunday, May 16th, 1920, about 500 members of the Communist Party of Chicago held a meeting at National Grove, Riverside, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago).

The call for the meeting was in the form of dodgers announcing a picnic but upon arrival at the picnic grove at 2 o'clock a meeting was started which continued until 5:30 pm.

There were two speakers, one a member of the Executive Committee whose name was not announced [Bittelman?], representing the [Majority] and another, who was announced as the Secretary of the Jewish [Minority], denounced the shameful conduct of the Executive Committee since the January raids and called upon the audience to demand an investigation and make the result of the investigation public.

A representative of the Executive Committee [Bittelman?] defended the action of the Executive Committee, stating in substance that under the circumstances the members of this committee could not act otherwise because the life of the party was at stake and in order to save it they were obliged to place themselves in hiding, to which the representative of the Minority accused some of the members of stealing the party funds, particular reference was made to [Alex] Stoklitsky's action.

A resolution was adopted endorsing the stand of the [Minority].

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†- Loula throughout seems to confound the dissident Ruthenberg-Ferguson-Belsky “Minority” faction of the CEC (who were numerically dominant in Chicago) with the dominant “Majority” faction of the CEC, which included Nick Hourwich, John Ballam, and Alex Bittelman (numerically insignificant in Chicago). The standard factional appellations are inserted in brackets for the sake of clarity. Likely speakers at this mass meeting were Alex Bittelman for the Majority and Leonid Belsky for the Minority.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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