
Notes from the Road:

September 13 — October 17, 1923.

by Max Bedacht

Untitled letters from the road addressed to the CEC of the Workers Party. Original documents in Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 185, ll. 1-13; 20-21; 26-31; 38-40; 44-49; 51-54.

Los Angeles, Sept. 13, 1923.

CEC of WP
C.E. Ruthenberg, Sec'y.

Dear Comrades:

Since my last report I was busily engaged with conferences or with traveling.

In Omaha we thrashed out matters quite thoroughly before my departure. I urged upon the comrades to make an issue with the rank and file of the trades unionists of the ultimatum delivered by the business agents to Lacheay [???]. I also urged them to take up the fight against the order of the board of directors of the Labor Temple not to permit the WP any more the use of any hall. We have good chances to win out. What is lacking is organization. Our best man there is Coates. He is a well trained trades unionist. But he is no organizer. He is a "lone wolf type." We discussed questions of organization and worked out a plan, which, if put into execution, will not only insure success of the *Daily Worker* campaign, but also membership campaign and will result in a better TUEL.

In this connection I might say that for purposes of these campaigns the local comrades, or the campaign committees, *must be supplied with the local mailing lists of all our party publications*. The Omaha comrades, through neglect or mismanagement, are not even in possession of the Cannon (???) subscription list of *The Worker*.† No matter how small these mailing lists of all our publications may be, they form the basis of a

mailing list for the local comrades. And the building up of an extensive, classified mailing list of the locals for and through our divers campaigns I am urging everywhere. Please have the organization committee *authorize the sending of the local mailing lists of all party publications*.

Denver is suffering from a lack of a live Labor movement. They have no reliable local light. Comrade Dietrich is willing enough, and loyal enough — but he is a bad musician, as we say in German.

The comrades have created an open Forum. But they have only one local speaker and he is a PP [Proletarian Party] man, one Falconer.‡ This man is to lecture, as a rule, at the forum. I told the comrades that this arrangement is unsatisfactory. Either all subjects are dealt with in the abstract — then the workers will derive neither educational, nor practical benefit from the forum, or they deal with the questions in a practical matter, then it *will* and *must* lead to conflicts. We will not and cannot stand for policies and leadership of the PP while the PP man will resist, and oppose, WP policies and leadership.

But the situation is just an example of how comrades without local leadership are trying to *do* things. We had an intimate talk about all our problems among the membership and I have reasons to believe that my conference with them was a success, though the public meeting was poorly attended.

Yesterday I cam to LA. Had fairly good meeting here. Tonight we will have membership meeting. So I

†- James P. Cannon was a former editor of *The Toiler*, predecessor to *The Worker*. The reference here is unclear.

‡- The Proletarian Party of America — formerly the Socialist Party of Michigan — was an organization regarded as having a predilection towards academic hairsplitting.

will wait with report about LA until after that conference. I might say that I have used up almost my entire private reserves of *l'argent*. By not being able to buy a through ticket the trip comes considerably higher. A through ticket with sleeper from Chicago to LA would have cost \$107.52. Buying part of the way tickets it cost \$122.19 — that is, nearly \$15 more. Had I been able to buy a round trip ticket the balance in our favor would have been still better. It would have cost us not more than one-half of what it will cost us now — and that means a lot when the RR fare of a trip will probably reach more than \$300. In other words — for the sake of saving money we must in the future try hard to have sufficient money for Far Western trips.

Enclosed please find financial statement for first week. I take it for granted that you send \$35.00 to Mrs. as agreed. Therefore I account for only \$15 of my wages to you. Do not know whether I will be able to pull through financially without help. That will depend on character of trip after San Francisco. In case of necessity will try to borrow money, and get donations.

The literature you supplied me with turns out to be a rather useless burden. The comrades have literature and try to get rid of theirs. In LA I had to permit them to do that because I did not get my money in Denver until it was train time. So I could not buy my ticket before, checked my suitcase late, and did not get it on time in LA.

Well, that is enough.

Yours for the WP,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Portland, Ore., Sept. 24, 1923.

CEC of WP
C.E. Ruthenberg, Sec'y.
1009 N State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed please find financial report for last week. You will note a little improvement. I hope for more improvement this week.

Your instruction relative to the Conventions in Stockton [CA] received. But I could not attend. Had meetings on Wednesday and Thursday. Comrade [James] Dolsen attended. We talked matters over thoroughly and I am sure that Comrade Dolsen had a clear understanding of what was wanted. As I wrote you in a previous report, the LA bunch has messed up things a little. For instance in Oakland there were several unions that had elected delegates to the LA LP [Labor Party] conference. But owing to the late withdrawal of that call and the negligence of our people in setting into motion our machinery for the Stockton Affair prevented these same unions from sending delegates to [Liharsenberg's (???)] Conference. The same condition prevailed in other towns and unions.

In my party membership meetings I stress the point very much that our machinery must react at once and with precision to every action of the higher units. It is my firm conviction that much of our present energy must be directed toward a perfection of our machinery. The talks that I give about our campaigns and our organizational measures to carry them out are more important than the public lectures. The comrades out here are so far away from the political center of gravity that they are nearly starved for just such intimate talks. After all, we are not yet a part of action, nor are we yet a disciplined party. But we are on the road. Everybody tries to do something, and a good combination of opportunities for real work, like our big campaigns, combined with a little instruction as to how these campaigns are to be carried on, will create wonders with our party.

The Trades UEL is pretty well shot to pieces in SF. Some petty jealousies, some local peculiarities, and some lack of understanding same on the part of our people brought this condition about. I tried to do what I could. But W.Z. [Foster] ought to come through here. I was very much disappointed to hear that his trip was cancelled. From all indications it is certain that he would have had meetings that hardly anyone else can get — and with his authority he could have reorganized the local leagues — and they certainly need it.

In San Francisco I spoke at the picnic of the lo-

cal. You know that picnics are not the best occasions for things like membership campaigns, etc. We made quite a good collection. But by previous arrangement that went to *Labor Unity*. Monday [Sept. 17] we had a membership meeting. I am sure that that meeting was a source of inspiration to most of those present. The campaign for the *Daily Worker* will have to be pushed very hard there because they drain their local resources to keep *Labor Unity* going. This paper is now improving and will soon stand on its feet. I did not spare the comrades and pressed the point of the daily without pity.

I had written to the German Branch about my coming. But they did not get the communication. Only on Friday [Sept. 14] did they receive notice of my coming on Saturday. But a meeting was arranged, nevertheless, for Wednesday [Sept. 19]. The meeting was a rousing success. I collected \$113.33. The German comrades paid the local \$50.00 for the lecture, and advanced the other 50 to make up my pro rata for SF. For the G. Branch that meeting was like water to the thirsty. A membership meeting in the Bay district (Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda) on Thursday [Sept. 20] was a good success, too. The greatest portion of members there are Finns. They do not cooperate, as a rule. But we struck their meeting night in their own Hall. So the membership campaign and the *Daily Worker* campaign were launched.

The practice of having membership meetings, aside from public meetings, whenever someone of the Headquarters happens around should be eliminated and all such road agents should have certain organizational policies to expound and to inaugurate. That is, they should all work along the same line.

Well, that is all for today.

Yours for our party,

Your comrade,

Max Bedacht.

(personal) I am longing to see my family — I hope that the end of October sees also the end of my longing. —B.

• • • • •

Astoria, Ore., Sept. 26, 1923.

CEC of WP
C.E. Ruthenberg, Ex. Sec'y.
1009 N State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade:

My meetings in Portland, and also in Astoria, proved again that in arranging any kind of an affair our comrades depend to much on chance. No system in the arrangement of meetings. The comrades in Portland rented a Hall for \$25, got 70 people, and collected \$18. Result: large deficit and a not too enthusiastic feeling. But in the very poorly attended membership meeting I sailed into their lack of system and the unanimous opinion of the comrades was that my visit did pay. They promised with all kinds of oaths to reform.

Comrade Newman is a hustler himself, but he is no organizer. He does everything himself and has no ability to recruit and mobilize the party membership for anything. I am confident of some improvement in the future.

With a comrade from the committee for recognition of SR [Soviet Russia] we had conferences and talks about the campaign at the AF of L Convention.

By the way: Newman has not the best of names here, owing to some unsavory occurrence when he was a member of the old SP. He was then expelled from the SP at the instigation of the local Labor element. That mitigates against him, too.

Astoria is a very [small (?)] spot. It is a stronghold of *the Finnish Federation*. They have a big hall, a dairy, a publishing establishment, etc. in this burg. They are good businessmen; *but no communists*. The Finns would be a recruiting ground *for active party workers*, more than a *nucleus of a local party organization*. But they will not and can not be such a nucleus. So there are practically no chances to build up a local of the party if we have to depend *on them*.

My meeting was a fright. A Hall with a seating

capacity of 800 at least — and 28 people there, at least half of whom did not understand me. The fishing season for local canneries influenced the attendance. But mainly the fact that outside of Finnish circles the Finns do nothing and can do very little.

Will have membership meeting today. Your directions for Tacoma received today.

Your comrade,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Tacoma, Wash., Sept. 30, 1923.

CEC of WP

Chas. E. Ruthenberg, Ex. Sec'y.

1009 N State Street

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

Received mail you forwarded to Bowman. Also your letter. I am glad of the new assignment given me — if it is endorsed with the quality of permanency. Now to my present work.

Financial statement for week will show again some improvement. Hope to keep it up. With some changes in itinerary for Montana as indicated in letter of [Bill] Dunne to me, I do not know what financial arrangement you made with him. What am I to get there? Do I collect from center in Butte for all other places, like in San Francisco? In not, how and what am I to collect?

In Aberdeen [WA] I found conditions quite similar to those in Astoria. All Finns. In Astoria, fishermen — in Aberdeen, lumbermen. And in Aberdeen they are infected with the disease of IWWism. We had some samples of the species in our meetings.

I repeat what I said about the Finns in my last report. With good local leadership the Finnish groups may be drawn into the regular party work. But as the center of such work they are incapable.

I tried to make some connections for an English

group. In Aberdeen there is a shoemaker, Thomas. He was quite active and prominent in the old SP. Intelligent and well read. I looked him up. His sentiment is with us — but he is afraid. He was hit quite hard at the time of the persecutions. Now he told me frankly that he has not enough spirit of self-sacrifice in him to face those dangers again — at least alone. We could get him if we succeed in getting a whole group. But where can we get the group? The District Organizer will have to pay some attention to these places. Without the building up of some English groups as elements of leadership, our Finnish groups will degenerate into social clubs and relief organizations for Karelia, and recruiting units of Finnish communes for Soviet Russia.

Arrived in Tacoma yesterday. Had meeting of a good hundred last night. We have small and weak, but pretty enthusiastic English groups here. But there is some sterile group here that calls itself “Marxian Club.” (O Marx, what sins are committed in thy name!) This group is an example of the danger of unscientific and unreal Marxian education. This group grew out of a class conducted by Jim Fisher. The members have swallowed so much of Marx that they feel nothing but contempt for the poor member who does not prostrate himself at the mention of the holy name. This travesty on a Marxian club does not want to soil its hands in unholy contact with the infidel. From their lofty position of a high minaret of intellectual indigestion, caused by swallowing the holy scriptures instead of reading and understanding them, they can only haughtily criticize the work of others. Any suggestion that they should do something they consider an insult. They have never heard the greatest command that Marx ever gave the workers: “You must not only interpret the world differently, but you must rebuild it differently.”

Well, what is the use of getting excited? I told the comrades that they must do everything in their power to break up this group. They have, until now, handled them with kid gloves, hoping to win them. But I told our friends to go at them with fighting gloves. The leaders of the group are hopelessly impotent, and nothing can entice their intellectual creative organs to eject any fecundating thought or action. All we can do is to show them their impotency to the poor virgins of

both sexes that are carried away by these eunuchs' phrases and wait for the great climax — until they, too, are sterile.

In former reports I forgot to mention two things. One about the situation in California relative to the sale of stock for the *Daily Worker*. You know that the RAIC (?) got into conflict with California blue sky laws in selling shares. So we agreed that the comrades should get donations and subscriptions without selling shares until that point is cleared up. Hope they wrote you about [that] and you fixed things up.

Another thing is the districts. They do not work. Los Angeles is 500 miles from San Francisco. LA is the typical scab town in the US. The District Committee is in SF. It could just as well be in Berlin. Maybe we will yet have to create districts without paid organizers, but with directing committees that will take active leadership. In a verbal report I will point out the great possibilities of our comrades in towns like Los Angeles.

Dunne writes me that I should debate with Emil Herman [Pacific Northwest organizer for the SP]. Will do it if I receive no orders to the contrary. But do not want to discuss Socialism vs. Communism, but SP vs. WP.

That will be enough for today.
Hope to see you soon. I remain

Your comrade,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Butte, Mont., October 7, 1923.

CEC WP
C. E. Ruthenberg, Ex. Sec'y.
1009 N State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

My financial statement will show you that I did

not succeed in making scheduled collections at my last two stopping places. As to my next one, Miles City [MT], I do not know yet what will happen to me. Fortunately I insisted successfully in Tacoma and Seattle on payment, although I had to overcome strong resistance. But in Spokane and in Butte all my insistence was in vain. If the two twin cities, St. Paul-Minneapolis and Duluth [MN]-Superior [WI], do not come across I will have to send an SOS call.

Now to my regular report:

Seattle is in a deplorable condition. Three members were present at the membership meeting. And two applicants, who have their application in for three months. But they had no local quorum yet to admit them, although they are reliable comrades of long standing, for some time disconnected because of work in out of the way camps.

As I will be at headquarters in two weeks I will save full report till then. There is excellent opportunity for Trades UEL work. But nothing is done. The membership campaign great prospect — but nothing done — and I fear nothing doing in near future. No farmers' [league] campaign in spite of opportunities, except what outsiders do, like Kennedy.

Spokane is dead. Had 35 in public meeting with some applications — and seven in membership meeting. The leading spirit is a hopeless romantic. Another is a general agent for Eastern Insurance Company. One half of him is revolutionist and the other half insurance agent. And the insurance agent's half is the more energetic part, that succeeds in making his revolutionary half subservient to the insurance business. The TUEL representative is a helpless creature. I think I succeeded in giving them at least some idea of our work. But local conditions are exceptionally unfavorable.

Butte is good. Had tolerable meeting. Got some new members. Sold quite [a bit of] literature — little of mine, but local lit.

Will have membership meeting this afternoon. Prospects for local FLP in state very bright. Local Labor leaders contend that W.F. Dunne will be next US Senator from Montana. Take that *cum granum salum*; but they believe it locally.

Soon will be able to make verbal report.

Your comrade,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Miles City, Mont., Oct. 8, 1923.

Dear Comrades:

Neglected to enclose financial report in yesterday's letter. You will find it this time.

Here in Miles City I am to speak under the auspices of the Trades and Labor Council.

Debates with [Emil] Herman I wrote you about did not materialize because Bill Dunne disposed of Herman in two debates sufficiently well to kill any desire on the part of Herman to repeat the performance.

In comradeship,

Yours,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Minneapolis, Minn., October 12, 1923.

CEC of WP

Chas. E. Ruthenberg, Ex. Sec'y.

1009 N State Street

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade:

My itinerary for Montana was not kept. I had only two stops in that state. In Butte two meetings, and one meeting in Miles City. With the debates arranged between Dunne and Herman, Missoula was

covered that way. After Dunne had left Butte some other comrade was supposed to have arranged the dates for further debates with Herman at Miles City, Roundup, and Klein. But that was neglected. The meeting in Miles City was arranged for me by the Trades and Labor Council. Herman was there and wanted the debate — not because he was very anxious to debate, but that was the only way for him to get a crowd. So his local friend approached the Labor Council to permit the debate in place of my meeting. But the LC decided that it had invited me and would only let me speak. However after my speech we could have the meeting all to ourselves. So finally Herman pleaded for a chance to speak for the release of political prisoners after my speech. That was granted.

The meeting was very enthusiastic for independent political action and especially for a Labor Party for Montana. These people are by no means revolutionists. Quite the contrary. The chairman left the day after the meeting for SF as delegate to the American Legion. They are reactionary, but nonsophisticated reactionaries, reactionaries from ignorance. And they listen to reason. And Dunne has a tremendous influence with them.

There is a chance to build up a local. Have written to comrade McCarthy in Butte about it.

In Butte my membership meeting was not too well attended. Our position is very strong ideologically in Montana. That is due to Dunne's personal influence and leadership. But I am afraid that that apparently strong position produces a disastrous laxity in organization work. The ideological influence is not transformed into real strength organizationally, and a real campaign of the *organized* forces of the enemy would be disastrous for us. There is no TUEL organized anywhere in Montana. Some influential comrade took issue with my statement about the membership campaign, claiming that indiscriminate acceptance of applicants would lead to a Mass Party — but would kill all revolutionary qualities. I had to show the comrades that any worker who would join our party under fire at present is worthy of acceptance. And whatever bad material we might get can be weeded out in action, after a trial of their revolutionary qualities. In fact, I believe and I told the comrades that only in exceptionally bad cases will it be necessary to rid the party of any unwelcome member. If the party succeeds

in lining up all its members for action then the “bad” ones will leave by their own accord, convinced that we are not the bunch he was looking for.

In the membership meeting in Butte we succeeded in getting some additional new ones to the ones gotten the day before. Herman’s local connection also applied for membership, saying that the SP was too yellow for him.

The meeting in Minneapolis was attended by about 100 people. A number of prospects were picked up. The organization here is suffering from a cancer — [Alex] Georgian.†

This is the fifth time I came up here either as a speaker or as a representative of the CEC. And there was not a time when I was not beleaguered by local comrades to talk to me about that past. But now the conditions have really become intolerable. The Executive Committee will have to choose between Georgian and a District Organization.

There was a meeting of the CCC [City Central Committee] yesterday. I could not stay during the whole meeting because of my St. Paul engagement. After I had left, pandemonium broke loose. The question was the admission of an applicant, Hegelin. His admission was opposed by G. [Georgian] because he suspects him of being a spy — though the man was a Socialist of old standing and members of our party know him practically from childhood. I would say that the accusation of G. [Georgian] was worthy of consideration; but it turned out that he accused the whole English Branch, about 40, being composed only of spies. The best he can say of anyone is that he or she is not a communist. He accused Jay L. [Lovestone] of having testified Win. [Harry Winitzky] into the Pen to save his hide. He accuses M. [Martin] Abern of being a thief. He tells comrades in his fight against the DO that the DO is a crook and although nobody believes it yet, within a year they will be convinced. He leaves the impression that either [Norman] Tallentire is a spy, or that he willingly and knowingly tolerates spies in the Office. Georgian also accuses the CEC of having framed up on [Allen] Broms.

Now I say that Georgian is either a provocateur

or a lunatic. In both instances a major operation is the only cure. After my return I will make a <illeg.> exhaustive verbal report on the matter.

Enclosed please find financial report. Meager as it is, but it is not my fault.

With comradely greetings

Yours,

Max Bedacht.

• • • • •

Minneapolis, Minn., October 17, 1923.

CEC of WP
Chas. E. Ruthenberg, Ex. Sec’y.
1009 N State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrades:

Had two very successful membership meetings, in St. Paul one, and in Minneapolis the other. They were well attended and all comrades agreed that the meetings contributed immensely to the consolidation of our forces and to a better understanding of aims and methods of our party. Universal approval was voiced on the method in having speakers from headquarters attend not only public meetings as speakers, but also to such intimate party gatherings. An announcement on my side that the CEC will follow that practice more frequently in the future was received with general applause. New impetus was given to membership campaign as well as the *Daily Worker* campaign.

An attempt was made by the village past to bring a discordant note into the gathering in Minneapolis. But the meeting was in much too good a spirit, and much too well handled to give him a chance to succeed.

Has some talks about *the LP [Labor Party]* move-

†- Georgian was a delegate to the 5th Convention of the Russian Federation in August 1919, a founding member of the Communist Party of America in September 1919, and was subsequently named an alternate member of the CPA’s first Executive Council.

ment with [Clarence] Hathaway. He complained that the party has become completely inactive on the question. It worked for the success of the conference. Now that the conference is over, our comrades think our aim is achieved. I set to work and set up the committee again; we worked out plans for a conference of the Workers Non-Partisan League in Hennepin County (Minneapolis) to oust the [Thomas] Van Lear forces and set the machine for the January convention. I hope things will be moving soon in that direction. Attempts will also be made to oust Van Lear from the [control (?) of the *Daily Star* in Minneapolis. Outcome is as yet uncertain.

A German meeting on Wednesday resulted in the formation of a meager German Branch with 5 charter members. But there are good prospects for a speedy growth to 15 or 20.

My first meeting in Superior [WI] was attended by about 80 people. The comrades here did not heed your instructions of having one public and one membership meeting. They arranged two public meetings. I arranged for the members to come at least an hour before the public meeting starts. But from experience I know that that does not work. Will make an attempt to get our Finnish comrades working in their support of the *general* party work.

The second meeting in Superior was a little better attended than the first one. Many application cards were handed out on request of people present. But could not ascertain how many actually signed up.

My next — and last report from this trip I will submit to you personally as I hope to see you next Saturday.

Your comrade,

Max Bedacht.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.