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**Letter to C.E. Ruthenberg,  
Executive Secretary, WPA, in Chicago  
from Norman H. Tallentire,  
WPA District 12 Organizer in Seattle,  
Sept. 19, 1924.**

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 324, ll. 128-131.

Box 125  
Seattle, Washington  
Friday, September 19, 1924

C.E. Ruthenberg  
1113 West Washington Blvd.  
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Comrade:

Reporting to you more fully and in detail about the condition of District #12 [Seattle] on my arrival here, and also upon my activities for the first month, I must say the organization was in much worse shape than I had dreamt it could be before coming here.

First, as to Local Portland: The dissension in respect to the suspension of Comrade Newman, and

particularly the fact that the National Committee revoked the first action of the Local in this matter, caused quite a bad reaction in the Local.† Now that Comrade Newman has finally been expelled, there seems to be a general disease in favor of expulsions, several Comrades wanting to proceed to expel others in addition to Newman. With this internal wrangling going on, the English Branch in Portland has dropped around 70, to somewhere between 40 and 50 members.

Arriving in Tacoma, I attempted to discover the Comrade whose name was given me as the Secretary of the English Branch there and after half a day's searching, discovered that this Comrade, S.F. King, had left Tacoma ten months ago; that in the interim the English Branch had entirely passed out of existence; that the Finnish Branch there had disappeared; that the South Slavic Branch in South Tacoma had dropped

†- Otto Newman was expelled from Local Portland, WPA in March 1924 because he "deliberately advocated forcible overthrow of the government after having been instructed by the City Central Committee not to do so." He is said to have read from various Communist publications at open meetings, highlighting passages which asserted the "violent methods which must be used to accomplish the revolution." He was regarded as a provocateur by the membership of his local, charges were preferred against him, and he was found guilty and ordered expelled. [f. 515, op. 1, d. 324, l. 22] Newman appealed his case to higher authority, and Executive Secretary Ruthenberg queried the officials of Local Portland as to the situation. Ruthenberg expressed surprise that a member would be expelled for reading passages from pamphlet literature published by the Comintern, noting "Our Party does not advocate use of force by the workers in the present situation. On the other hand, we believe that the class conflict which capitalism produces will in the future produce those conditions which will bring about a use of force by the contending classes." More documents were requested in the Newman case. [d. 324, l. 27]

On April 29, 1924, a letter to the Portland City Central Committee announced that the Central Executive Committee of the WPA had ruled in favor of Newman's appeal and ordered him reinstated. The letter announcing this decision was ordered to be read to the meetings of the City Central Committee and the English Branch of Local Portland. This communique read in part: "The Central Executive Committee is of the opinion that the attitude of the City Central Committee on the question of the part which force plays in the class struggle is incorrect. We cannot as a Communist Party hide our views on this question from the working masses. We must where the issue is raised frankly present our viewpoint.... No privileged class in past history has given up its privileged position without resorting to force to maintain its privileged position and its right to exploit the oppressed class." [d. 324, l. 53] It seems clear here that following Newman's reinstatement by the CEC at the end of April 1924, he was expelled once again.

down to three members; and that the South Slavic Branch in Tacoma proper was entirely without any connections with, or knowledge of, a District Office, the only connections they had being with the South Slavic Bureau [central Federation authority]. Letters from your office to this Branch were being sent to one J. Jugo, who was expelled from the Branch one year ago and is suspected of being a spy by the local comrades.

As I have notified you in other communications, the comrades in Portland, Seattle, Spokane, and Tacoma have all complained that it is absolutely useless to send changes of address to your office, because no matter how often they send a change of address to your office, mail still continues to come to the old address, and in many cases to people who have dropped out of the Party or have left the territory. In a few days I will be forwarding you and up-to-date, corrected list of all the connections in the District and I hope that when this report is sent in that the corrections will be made, not alone in the files of the Executive Department, but also in the files of the TUEL, *The Liberator*, *The Daily Worker*, and the Literature Department.

Continuing about Local Tacoma: Of course I did not discover all the foregoing information in one day; because of Comrade King having left the city there was of course no meeting arranged and it took me two weeks to discover the South Slavic Branch. However, when I did find this Branch, I found that they had been endeavoring to organize a meeting for Comrade Foster, their only information in respect to his coming having been gotten out of the notices in *The Daily Worker*. I had a meeting with the members of this particular Branch on Sunday, September 7th, and after the meeting, along with Comrade McIlveigh (who will probably stop in to see you on his way from the Machinists Convention at Detroit), Secretary of the local TUEL, proceeded to rent a hall for the Foster meeting. Much of the detail arrangements in respect to same I have had to take care of personally, because these language-speaking comrades, although very willing and anxious to do everything they can, cannot handle same.

I have been doing everything possible to lay the basis for the formation of an English Branch in Tacoma. In this connection, it will be necessary for us to do something to kill off the antagonism of a certain group, organized in the Marxian Club of Tacoma. This orga-

nization is one of the groups gotten together by James H. Fisher when he was lecturing on Marxian Economics in this District about four years ago. The attitude of this group is very well set forth in a communication from Comrade McIlveigh to the TUEL, of which I am enclosing a copy. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the members of this organization are very dissatisfied at the present time with the tactics and policies of our Party, it is the general consensus of opinion around here that it will be useless to try and organize an English Branch in Tacoma against the antagonism of this group, insofar as the active members of the Marxian Club are the leading left wing elements and are strongly entrenched in the local labor movement. Some mistakes in our attitude to this group have been made in the past, as, for instance, when Comrade Cannon was present in the city he advised strongly against any antagonistic tactics toward them and, as a consequence, some of the members of the Marxian Club became members of the Local of the Workers Party, which was in existence at that time.

Later on, Comrade Bedacht visited Tacoma and at a Party meeting is reported to have stated that the policy of the Workers Party was to fight all such groups as the Marxian Club, with the consequence that those members of the Workers Party who were also members of the Club immediately dropped out of the Party and all the active workers having left, the Local ceased to exist.

I have done everything possible to make friendly contacts with the leaders of this group, particularly with W.T. Morris, who is the outstanding figure of this group, and who was for three years Secretary of the Tacoma Central Labor Union. As a result, I was able to address a meeting of the Club last Sunday night [Sept. 14] and there arrangements were made, whereby Comrade Foster will address a special meeting of the organization next Thursday night, September 25th, the day after the mass meeting in Tacoma. The idea of these meetings with the Marxian Club are to answer some of the many objections that are put forward against the Workers Party. Already, as a result of making contact with these people, every member present at Sunday night's meeting took quantities of advertising matter away with them, and each also took 25 tickets for the Foster meeting.

In addition to trying to organize an English

Branch through the Club, I am also making strenuous attempts to make contact with other elements in Tacoma, notably through Mr. King, the brother of the Ex-Secretary of the English Branch; through Sam Sadler, who, as you know, served a term on McNeill's Island for opposition to the draft, and through Comrade Ruuttila, an English-speaking Finn. Also, on Wednesday night [Sept. 17] I addressed the Central Labor Union at Tacoma, advertising Comrade Foster's meeting, and there also made contact with possible recruits.

Altogether it seems possible that we will be able sometime before Christmas to organize an English Branch in Tacoma; but all the comrades are agreed that we should go slow and do everything possible to kill off the antagonism of this Marxian Club group. The South Slavic comrades are very enthusiastic and with a Branch of 40 members will do everything to assist in this reorganization.

In Seattle, the English Branch had dropped from 38 to 18 members on my arrival here. The entire local organization is very discouraged and despondent, particularly as they thought they had been neglected unreasonably by the National Organization. One great bone of contention is the fact that you have insisted on stopping out of the Federal Dues Refunds payment for \$400 worth of literature that was shipped her, I understand by Comrade [Elmer] Allison, without having been ordered by anyone, and which was never handled by the District Organization at all, but which was handled by M.J. Cassidy, Secretary of Seattle CCC [City Central Committee]. Also the comrades are putting up a hard battle at a disadvantage with the [John C.] Kennedy and [William] Bouck group [the Washington Farmer-Labor Party], as a result of our recent change of policy. As I told you at the time the decision was made, I believe a grave error was committed in the manner in which the withdrawal of Bouck and [Duncan] MacDonald and the nominating of Foster and Gitlow was effected. I have talked with both Bouck and Kennedy since being here, and they are very much dissatisfied at our action, and Kennedy himself is very bitter. Not only is this the case, but outstanding members of the Labor movement, like Hulet M. Wells, McGilvaray of the *Tacoma Labor News*, George Vandereer, and others are outspoken in their condemnation of the MANNER IN WHICH THIS AC-

TION WAS TAKEN.

As a consequence of these facts, I found the local organization in a very bad condition. The first thing necessary was to organize some kind of a District Executive Committee. The one elected at the last Convention being unable to function, because in the first place they were elected from different sections of the state; and further, three of the five elected have either left the state or dropped out of the Party. An Emergency Executive Committee has been elected in general party meeting by Local Seattle to function until the next Convention, consisting of seven members of the English Branch, two Finnish, one Caucasian [Georgian], one Russian, and one Estonian. Four open Party meetings have been held with the object of getting recruits in the Party in Seattle. As a result of these meetings, at every one of which I have spoken, 15 new members have joined the Party, five of whom are delegates to the Central Labor Union. In conjunction with these meetings, DEC meetings have been held and detailed arrangements have also been attended to for the showing of the Russian picture and for Comrade Foster's meetings.

In connection with the organization of Comrade Foster's meetings, I have visited several labor unions, as follows: Seattle Central Labor Union, Millmen, Machinists, Painters, Boiler Makers, and Jewish Workmen's Circle. In the union meetings I have been making personal connections with some valuable recruits for our Party, some of them hitherto unknown to the local comrades and as a result of visiting the Workmen's Circle we expect to organize a Jewish Branch in the near future.

The next task before me is to reorganize the City Central Committee in Seattle. The DEC have instructed me to meet Comrade Foster in Spokane, proceed with him to all his meetings in District #12, in order to make direct and personal contact with the comrades. Therefore, I am leaving for Spokane in the morning and will finish up this work in Portland a week from Sunday [Sept. 28], when Comrade Foster will leave for California, but I will remain over there for a week to do some local organization in Portland and in Astoria. One thing that has given me considerable trouble is the fact that there was not an up-to-date file of the District Branches and the one sent here by you was hopelessly out of date. By writing to about

ten different sources, I have at last been able to compile a very decent list which will enable me to get in contact with the Branches.

We held a [Washington] State Convention, as you are already aware, on September 9th [1924], and there I made contact with some English comrades from Mount Vernon and Arlington, in the North end of the state, and the DEC have agreed to the proposal that I should visit that section about the middle of October, after I have had my tonsils removed, visiting Everett, Bellingham, and Sedro-Woolley, in which towns there is a probability of organizing English Branches.

The local comrades believe that it might also be possible to organize English Branches in Aberdeen, Olympia, and Centralia, and of course as soon as possible I will look into the situation there.

From Spokane the comrades report that there are only five members left in the Branch; three of whom are out in the woods most of the time. I am to have a Party meeting there Saturday night, and an open meeting Sunday afternoon.

This is a brief survey of the situation as I find it here, after a month's investigation. I hope that you

will give a careful reading to the contents of this report and I feel sure that you will realize that when the comrades get into a despondent condition in which I found them in the District, it is a hard thing to lift them out and to enthuse them for the need for aggressive action.

However, you can rely on me to do everything I can to improve the condition obtaining here. And I would again urge that you forward me statements of Federation Dues Refunds to District #12 from the first of the year down to date, together with copies of Comrade Bowman's monthly stamp sales report from January to August. Also transcript of District #12 account with the National Office from January 1st down to date.

Hoping to hear from you in respect to these matters in the near future, I remain, with kindest regards,

Fraternally yours,

[Norman H. Tallentire]  
DO#12

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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