

Ruthenberg and the Labor Party

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.

THE death of Comrade C. E. Ruthenberg, who was cut down in the prime of life and in the fullness of his service to the workers, comes as a great shock to our party. It is a grave loss which we can ill afford to sustain. The American working class is notoriously weak in leadership. Hence the loss of a leader in the cause like Ruthenberg, intelligent, devoted, untiring, and a clear-seeing Marxist, leaves a gap in our ranks that weakens the whole front against the enemy.

He Was Trained Leninist.

Comrade Ruthenberg devoted the best years of his life to the education and organization of the masses of workers for their struggle against capitalism. He was a trained Leninist. Not alone did he understand the necessity of educating and uniting the workers for the final overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Communism, but also that this can be done effectively only by the revolutionists participating actively in the every-day struggles of the workers in order to give them practical leadership, organization and instruction in these battles.

Comrade Ruthenberg had an especially keen realization of the role of the labor party in the great task of ideologically and organizationally uniting the masses of workers against capitalism and laying the basis for the eventual mass Communist Party. The affiliation of the vast masses of workers to the capitalist parties stands as a tremendous barrier to the progress of the work-

ing class. It keeps open the very veins of the workers for an influx of poisonous and demoralizing propaganda from the capitalists. It strikes from the hands of the workers the weapon of the powerful political organization they should have.

The formation of a mass labor party will represent a great step forward by the working class. The labor party will emphasize class lines on the political field and will give an enormous stimulation will to the development of class consciousness and class organization.

The working class, thus cutting many of the treacherous class collaboration entanglements which now enmesh it and keep it helpless in the grip of capitalism will begin to tread faster than ever the road of class struggle which leads finally to a Communist mass party and the overthrow of capitalism.

This was one of the many great lessons which Comrade Ruthenberg never ceased in pressing upon our party. He was an untiring advocate of the labor party.

Sees Mistakes Liquidated.

The problem of finding the best way for the building of a labor party in the United States is a difficult one. Many factors conspire to make it complicated. And in working it out we have made many mistakes. At first we tended to ignore the importance of the labor party movement; later, awakening to it and suddenly, we tended to push the progressives faster than they would go in forming a party. Then, reaching hard for mass contacts, we almost drifted into an opportunist policy in

the LaFollette campaigns; and finally, we tended somewhat to minimize the applicability of the labor party slogan.

Sometimes these errors were made by the party as a whole, sometimes only by sections of it. But finally, by dint of rich experience and the guidance of the Comintern, we have liquidated these mistakes and have arrived at a correct united front labor party policy. Our party is awake to the importance of the issue and we understand how best to struggle for its realization under the given conditions.

In all these labor party developments, which rank among the most vital experiences in the life of our Workers (Communist) Party, Comrade Ruthenberg played a central role. His influence in solving the many complex problems confronting us was invaluable. And in the application of the labor party policy he was indefatigable. Never an occasion was allowed to pass but what he pressed upon the workers the vital necessity of organizing the labor party and he gave them practical guidance in this task through our party. Whoever speaks of the labor party in America must acknowledge the work of Comrade Ruthenberg.

Comrade Ruthenberg is gone. The great cause for which he labored so loyally must continue. The masses of workers must be educated and organized for their final emancipation. Let us, therefore, apply ourselves to the work with renewed determination, drawing fresh courage and inspiration from the rich life work of Comrade Ruthenberg.