

The Black Legion - and my 1939 firing

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The Black Legion, violent, racist and the creature of the automobile manufacturers, was for a short period of time probably the most violent and most anti-union ^{and racist} radical group in Michigan. It was created in the wake of the intensified union organization campaigns, particularly by the Congress of Industrial Organization and the sit-down strikes of that era, when the workers just sat down in the plants, not working and not letting them operate.

Peripherally, I was part of the earlier investigations leading into ~~the~~ ^{it} by the Senate Civil Liberties Committee (actually, a subcommittee of the education and labor committee) when in the course of investigating the "Corporations Auxiliary Company," fancy name for a labor-spy outfit, I learned that Chrysler was a client. Not long after they realized that I had learned this (the books were coded) I was offered a good job on behalf of Chrysler, that, living it up as I then did on \$30 a week, I turned down without even thinking about it.

Three years or so later, when I was the committee's editor ^{but} on the payroll of the Farm Security Committee as the administrative assistant to the director (C. Benham "Beanie" Baldwin), the committee by then having held its auto and National Association of Manufacturers hearings, the committee decided to place many records it had not used in the hearings in its record to be published. That was and remains a common practice. A considerable proportion of the Warren Commission's published exhibits were not used in the hearings. They were just given exhibit numbers and published. In those days at the Senate this practice was called "dumping" because the exhibits were just dumped into the record.

The manner in which my committee did this was to dispense even with the holding of a pro forma hearing. The lawyers just drew up a duplicate of how the court reporter headed each hearing and had one of the Senators say that he was placing in the record the exhibits then described. I may have been told to do that and if so I did it.

I was given the documents, prepared them for publication, sent or took them to the Government Printing Office and so had galley proofs. I had an approved list of those to whom I sent galley proofs, one I remember being Isadore Feinstein, later known as Izzy Stone, then at the New York Post, and I had a set for reporters who came to my office to look at them.

In the case of this "dump," the only one I handled, I was instructed to call it to the attention of Henry Zon, the Washington correspondent of Federated Press, a labor news service, and also a friend.

Whether it had earlier been called to his attention or not I do not recall but I presume it was and that was the reason it was suggested to him that he go over those records.

Some related to the National Industrial Conference Board of the NAM. I think it is now known as The Conference Board but I'm not certain.

After going over those records Zon wrote and Federated Press distributed an accurate

account of the minutes of the Board at which a General Motors representative, Harry Anderson, I think but I'm not certain a vice president, told his colleagues who were having labor troubles from organizational drives, "You need what we have, a Black Legion."

The quote is approximate but in essence what he really did say.

When the story appeared there was, given the prestige of the NICB and its members and the character of The Black Legion, a strong reaction from the NICB and those who supported it and its policies.

Senator Robert M. LaFollete, Jr., was the chairman. He was anything but his father's son. With his brother Philip, then Wisconsin Governor, they tried to turn The Progressive Party into an Ameriform fascist party. Their sister, Suzanne, had moved to New York and was a Trotskyite. *(End of Progressive Party and beginning of affinity for Senator Mc Carthy.)*

Although the volumes were then at the printing office and being published and were published without change and although the story was completely accurate LaFollette, who later killed himself, fired me with the false allegation that I had leaked (the public record, I add) to the Daily Worker, then the Communist Party newspaper.

I could have gone to my Farm Security job but after this experience I decided not to.

I had for years worked hours that most people would consider impossible. On a number of occasions, when LaFollette had decided that he wanted a report out on a certain day, I worked five days and night without leaving the office except to go to the GPO. I had the reputation of turning out the best of the Senate Hearings and Reports. At FSA my salary was \$3,200 a year. I took no vacations, worked most nights into the wee hours, and being repaid that way was a bit much.

I am certain that the real reason LaFollette fired me is that with a friend, Gardner Jackson, of Labor's "Non-Partisan League, I helped lobby through an extension of the committee's life so that it could investigate the deplorable conditions of migrant workers in California. Remember Steinbach's "Grapes of Wrath?" That LaFollette had decided that he had gotten all the political benefit he could from his committee and wanted not to antagonize the major campaign contributors more. He did not want the investigation continued and Jackson and I had frustrated that.

Labor's "Non-Partisan League was the political arm of John L. Lewis' United Mine Workers. Jackson was its legislative representative.

While I did not figure openly in the lobbying, it was no secret that Jackson was a chronic drunk if not an alcoholic and that the resolution coming up during the summer, with his wife and children away, he was drinking even more. I did most of the thinking and Jackson did all of the personal contact, the lobbying.

What really made it possible for the resolution to be passed was a trick that was his. FDR was also against continuing the committee, although his wife was very much interested in the conditions of farm labor and of poor farmers and their families.

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EDR did not want to further alienate the corporations that with those who owned and controlled them were major political contributors. So he had let it be known informally that the committee should just expire when its legislated life ended.

Paul Y. Anderson, the the Washington correspondent of Pulitzer's St. Louis Post-Dispatch, is the reporter who broke the Teapot Dome Scandal of the Harding administration.

FDR had started press conferences for presidents by speaking to the press in his office. There was no TV then and radio news was in its infancy.

So, Jackson got Anderson to ask FDR if he supported continuation of the committee do that it could investigate the conditions of migratory farm labor.

For FDR, with his need for labor support, not to have said he did would have been like condemning motherhood. I also suspect that he anticipated new problems with his wife it publicly he opposed that, of such great interest to her.

So, he endorsed the committee's continuation, it was continued, and it did conduct that investigation -without me.

The Black Legion was well and publicly known as violent and murderous. For the top industrial corporations to be told by what was then probably the biggest, that it was behind if it did not control the Black Legion and to recommend to others that they have their own was of course, scandalous.

Henry Ford then also supported such vigilante outfits, through his "security" man, Harry Bennett. They were common in that era.