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INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA

HEARINGS

BEFORE A

SPECIAL COMMITTEE
TO INVESTIGATE COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES
IN THE UNITED STATES

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEVENTY-FIRST CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

PURSUANT TO

H. Res. 220

PROVIDING FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNIST
PROPAGANDA IN THE UNITED STATES

PART 5—VOLUME No. 1

SEATTLE, WASH.
(OCTOBER 3, 1930)

PORTLAND, OREG.
OCTOBER 4, 1930



UNITED STATES
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 1930

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III

PROVIDING FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNIST
PROPAGANDA IN THE UNITED STATES

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1930

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE
COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED STATES,
Seattle, Wash.

The committee met at 10 o'clock a. m., Hon. Hamilton Fish, jr.
(chairman), presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. The first witness we will call is Mr. Forbes.

TESTIMONY OF LOUIS J. FORBES

(The witness was duly sworn by the chairman.)

The CHAIRMAN. State your full name.

Mr. FORBES. Louis J. Forbes.

The CHAIRMAN. Your occupation?

Mr. FORBES. Chief of police, city of Seattle.

The CHAIRMAN. How long have you been chief of police?

Mr. FORBES. I have been two years and starting the second term
last June—two and a half years.

Mr. BACHMANN. How long have you been on the police force,
Chief?

Mr. FORBES. Twenty-three years.

Mr. BACHMANN. Were you in the police business before that time?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir.

Mr. BACHMANN. What was your occupation prior to that time?

Mr. FORBES. Prior to the time I was a police officer?

Mr. BACHMANN. Yes.

Mr. FORBES. I had been a blacksmith.

The CHAIRMAN. Will you state to the committee what you know
about communistic activities in Seattle and vicinity, since you have
been chief of police?

Mr. FORBES. Since I have been the chief there has been an indica-
tion of communistic activity in this section of the country continu-
ously, since I have been in this office. We have had, at different times,
demonstrations of their belief and ideas. Practically every night in
the year they preach this belief down on our street corners in the
lower section of the city. We have had practically about the same
number, or the same persons that have been speaking and talking,
promoting this belief right along, and, I believe, in the last year there
probably have been a few more of these agitators added to the old list.
They have been successful in increasing the number, I believe, of the
followers of this idea of government—not to a great extent, but it is

a little noticeable. Their activity during the past year has been a little more progressive. They do not reach, I do not believe, into the important circles of our society or of our Government here; but, nevertheless, they are gradually working their way in, getting a little more notice and creating a little more—well, I would say creating a little more of a feeling, gradually getting a little more attention.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, it is your view that the last few years the activities have been increasing?

Mr. FORBES. Yes. It shows on the surface that it is gradually on the increase; not to a great extent, but it is gradual.

The CHAIRMAN. And they are holding more meetings now than they did three years ago?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir. I would say they have attempted to show their face a little more in the past year.

The CHAIRMAN. Have they had any parades here?

Mr. FORBES. They attempted a couple of parades. The city ordinance here requires that any parade held in the city shall have a police permit, must have an American flag in the front of the parade, and certain other regulations governing parades of this sort, and these people attempted to hold these parades and we would not permit it.

The CHAIRMAN. Did they attempt to hold them after you refused to grant them a permit?

Mr. FORBES. They never asked for one.

The CHAIRMAN. They never asked for a permit?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Did they attempt to hold the parade anyhow?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. And the police broke them up?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Have you any other facts you would like to present? When they attempted to hold this parade did they have the American flag?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir.

Mr. NELSON. How many communists do you estimate there are in Seattle?

Mr. FORBES. I would say there are, in Seattle and vicinity, in the neighborhood of 500.

Mr. BACHMANN. Five hundred?

Mr. FORBES. I would say there were; that is, those that are followers of the communistic teachings.

Mr. NELSON. You mean by that actual members of the Communist Party, or active sympathizers?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir; closely connected with them. Of course, I understand a lot of them that belong to this organization are not really active, although they are followers.

Mr. NELSON. You have no knowledge of how many there are in the State?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir.

Mr. NELSON. What communist organizations or revolutionary organizations here have you come in contact with—any particular ones?

Mr. FORBES. Well, the Trade Union Unity League, they call it, I believe.

Mr. NELSON. Yes.

Mr. FORBES. Then there is one other here.

Mr. NELSON. Friends of the Soviet Union?

Mr. FORBES. Yes; friends of the Soviet Union. They are the two principal ones here.

Mr. NELSON. Do you know any of these agitators personally?

Mr. FORBES. No; not personally. I have met them; I have seen them, but not to come into personal contact with them. My agents have handled that more than I have.

Mr. NELSON. Well, their activities, so far as you have met with them, are these: They hold outdoor meetings?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

Mr. NELSON. Nearly every night?

Mr. FORBES. Also, they have their halls here—meeting places.

Mr. NELSON. How often do they hold those meetings?

Mr. FORBES. In their halls?

Mr. NELSON. Well, their meetings?

Mr. FORBES. Well, they hold a street meeting practically every night.

Mr. NELSON. How many people gather around at those meetings?

Mr. FORBES. Well, probably 300, 200, 150—it will vary according to the weather conditions and the day. On a Saturday, holiday, or something like that, they will probably have four or five hundred, or maybe five or six hundred.

Mr. NELSON. Have they shown any soviet films here in this town?

Mr. FORBES. They attempted to show one up here at the theater, but it did not get through. I guess they did not get enough.

Mr. NELSON. Do you know the name of the film?

Mr. FORBES. No; I can not recall it. I remember the theater, the time, and the place.

Mr. NELSON. Was it The Seeds of Freedom?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir.

Mr. NELSON. The Land of the Soviet?

Mr. FORBES. I do not believe it was. It was supposed to be held up here at the theater on Eighth Avenue.

Mr. NELSON. And you know of but one attempt to display a propaganda film?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

Mr. NELSON. Do they do any work in the schools here in Seattle—the Young Pioneers, or the Young Communists?

Mr. FORBES. Not to any noticeable degree. There is a certain amount of work and they attempted to put up a school of their own down here on First Avenue to teach communism. That school got started for a while; then it went out of business.

Mr. NELSON. Then, so far as you know, there is no school in which they are teaching children this communistic idea?

Mr. FORBES. Not in the vicinity of Seattle; no, sir; not to my knowledge.

Mr. NELSON. No out-of-door summer school?

Mr. FORBES. No, sir; not to my knowledge.

Mr. NELSON. There have been no strikes in which communists have led or attempted to lead?

Mr. FORBES. No; not of any consequence. I would say there have not; no.

Mr. NELSON. Well, their activities here are largely confined to these public meetings at which the agitators harangue the crowd on soviet principles?

Mr. FORBES. Yes; and with the purpose of getting new followers.

Mr. NELSON. Well, in what trades are they more particularly represented?

Mr. FORBES. Well, they come out of this—Seattle is a great center for the logging industry.

Mr. NELSON. For lumber?

Mr. FORBES. Lumber and logging, and a good many of their followers come from that, and many of them are just the common, ordinary laboring men.

Mr. NELSON. What percentage of these men who are actively interested in communism would you say were of American stock?

Mr. FORBES. I would say 50 per cent.

Mr. NELSON. And 50 per cent of foreign stock?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

Mr. NELSON. Is there any one nationality that predominates?

Mr. FORBES. Well, it runs to Finnish, and the Russians and the Slavs.

Mr. NELSON. Largely Finnish and Russian?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

Mr. NELSON. Any Japanese or Chinese?

Mr. FORBES. No; we have not come in contact with any of those.

Mr. BACHMANN. Are there many colored people connected with the movement?

Mr. FORBES. No; we have had one or two agitators here, but from the standpoint of the colored people following that, it is hardly noticeable. You practically do not see any of them.

Mr. BACHMANN. Have the police had much trouble with them?

Mr. FORBES. No; just the usual, ordinary trouble that comes about in attempting to hold these parades and their activity down around the street corners, blocking traffic, and everything like that, but nothing of any consequence.

Mr. BACHMANN. No police assaulted in any way?

Mr. FORBES. No; not a bit.

Mr. BACHMANN. Have you had occasion to prosecute any of them for violating the city ordinance?

Mr. FORBES. Well, we prosecuted them. At the time they held these two parades we arrested the people responsible for those parades, the agitators, the leaders, and tried them in police court.

Mr. NELSON. Under what charge?

Mr. FORBES. Unlawful assembly.

Mr. BACHMANN. You have a city ordinance here to reach that?

Mr. FORBES. Yes. They were tried, convicted, sentenced, and fined, and they appealed to the superior court. I believe their case is still in the higher court.

Mr. BACHMANN. What kind of an ordinance do you have?

Mr. FORBES. Well, it is an ordinance that runs along the lines of unlawful assembly, where any number of people congregating in any particular place and refusing to obey the orders of the police to move, disband, or anything of that kind.

Mr. BACHMANN. You find that ordinance is broad enough?

Mr. FORBES. Well, it has been effective in our lower courts. I do not know what the higher courts are going to do about it; but we find this ordinance will reach this trouble in our lower courts, and from the police standpoint.

Mr. BACHMANN. Do they have any State law in the State of Washington?

Mr. FORBES. There is a State law in the State of Washington called the syndicalism law. The prosecuting attorney probably will be on the stand and can explain that more definitely than I can.

Mr. BACHMANN. You say the movement is on the increase here rather than on the decrease?

Mr. FORBES. It is not extensive, but it is gradual; you can notice there is a gradual increase, but not a rapid increase.

Mr. BACHMANN. Do those connected with the movement generally resist the police, or do they show any disrespect for the police?

Mr. FORBES. Well, they do not have much respect for the police; no.

Mr. ESLICK. Chief, other than the avowed communists, have they not an element of sympathizers in your city?

Mr. FORBES. Well, there are a certain number of people; but, as I say, that element is within their own strata of society.

Mr. ESLICK. But still there are sympathizers? The 500 you referred to are avowed and open communists?

Mr. FORBES. As I said before, I would not say they were all, as we might say, signed up to them, or have taken out a pledge, or anything of that character; but they follow them or are with them.

Mr. ESLICK. Now, other than this 500, in their teachings and adherence, are there not many more that lean toward or are in sympathy with them?

Mr. FORBES. That is what I mean. That is where you get your increase. They are being influenced by them and gradually one of them takes it up.

Mr. ESLICK. Now, communism feeds on misfortune and bad times, does it not?

Mr. FORBES. Yes.

Mr. ESLICK. In this section of the Northwest, have you had a depression where there has been a large number of idle people?

Mr. FORBES. Well, we have had a certain amount of it; there is no great amount, that is, nothing here that is extraordinary or unusual. At this time of the year we generally have a certain amount, always, but it has not been to a very marked degree.

Mr. ESLICK. I will ask you whether or not, among the idle ones, of the laboring classes, the efforts of the communists has been to sow the seeds of discontent?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir; they are more active at that time and they will put their speakers out more often during the time the men are here in the city that are out of employment.

Mr. ESLICK. In these public speeches or harangues on the street, do they advocate the overthrow of the Government and society by force?

Mr. FORBES. They have on very numerous occasions.

Mr. ESLICK. You speak of these parades or processions where they did not have the American flag—did they have any flag or any symbol?

Mr. FORBES. No; they carry banners.

Mr. ESLICK. With writings or mottoes on them?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, various phrases written on those banners.

Mr. ESLICK. At their meetings on the street, did you ever see the red flag there?

Mr. FORBES. I have not, to my knowledge, ever seen it.

Mr. ESLICK. Do you know, in their halls, whether they use the red flag rather than the American flag?

Mr. FORBES. No, I could not say. I have not been in their halls, myself; I have detailed men in there who probably can give you that information.

Mr. ESLICK. But you do know, in their open meetings, they advocate the overthrow of government and society by force?

Mr. FORBES. I have read stenographic reports; we have sent stenographers down there in the crowd to take down these speeches there and I have read these after they have been taken down, where the speakers practically advocated taking possession of the city hall, the police department, and anything of a lawful nature.

Mr. NELSON. Has anybody a copy of those stenographic reports or speeches?

Mr. FORBES. I have had it done on different occasions and those reports are available to this committee.

The CHAIRMAN. Does Mr. Jennings have them?

Mr. FORBES. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Are there any other questions? If not, thank you very much.

TESTIMONY OF EWING D. COLVIN

(The witness was duly sworn by the chairman.)

The CHAIRMAN. Please state your full name.

Mr. COLVIN. Ewing D. Colvin.

The CHAIRMAN. And what is your official position?

Mr. COLVIN. Prosecuting attorney for King County.

The CHAIRMAN. How long have you held that position?

Mr. COLVIN. Nearly six years.

The CHAIRMAN. Will you tell the committee what you know about the activities and propaganda in the city of Seattle?

Mr. COLVIN. What I know is from reports that have been made to me by investigators we have had, in conjunction with certain members of the police department, or departments of the police force, as to their street meetings and as to their meetings in the halls. In these street meetings, as stated by the chief, according to the reports I have, which will be available, the same as those of Mr. Jennings—they will be available to this committee—the speakers have continuously and frequently advocated the overthrow of the Government by force; they have agitated and suggested the attacking of the police officers; they have frequently called attention to what happened to the old Czar's régime in Russia and have said the same thing would occur here; they have urged their members to get recruits to their forces in the Army and in the Navy, and to get former service men who were familiar with the use of machine guns, and have predicted that it is only a question of time when there would be a revolution in this country and the soviet system of

proletariat, or dictatorship, would be established here. That is almost a nightly occurrence on our streets, according to the reports I have had made to me, and they have various meeting halls in the city, and have established a communistic school for the instruction of their agitators or workers—not for the instruction of any children I have ever heard of, but for instruction of the workers.

The CHAIRMAN. Where is that school established?

Mr. COLVIN. That is in the lower end of the city. The exact address I do not have, except as it will be in the reports.

The CHAIRMAN. Have you taken any legal action against them?

Mr. COLVIN. I have not. I have had cases where I could, and the office could start prosecutions against certain of these agitators on very short notice and on evidence where we could get them under the State syndicalism act. I have not done it for the reason that I did not know how it would affect the work of this committee, for one thing, and another reason is it has been my desire, if I started such prosecutions, not to get just the few soap-box agitators, but to try to get some one else whom I feel, as the evidence indicates, is behind their agitation. I could not reach them.

The CHAIRMAN. How do you get your evidence; is that from the stenographic notes, or do you go to the meetings yourself?

Mr. COLVIN. I have never attended a meeting myself. Just how that evidence is secured, I would rather not disclose at this meeting.

The CHAIRMAN. You know it is a correct report; you are satisfied the reports that come to you are correct reports of those meetings and the speeches made at those meetings?

Mr. COLVIN. I am satisfied of that fact, because I have checked them with different parties and find that the reports that come to me coincide.

The CHAIRMAN. And it is your view the reports show activities of a revolutionary character?

Mr. COLVIN. They advocate the overthrow of our Government, the change of our economic and governmental system by force.

Mr. NELSON. As I understand, he is going to give us further evidence in executive session?

Mr. COLVIN. The evidence I would have are these reports, which I have already gone over, reports which Mr. Jennings will have for you, and I have verified, not all of them, but a large number of them by having other parties and Mr. Jennings to attend the meetings. In other words, I have had persons working directly out of my office with Mr. Jennings?

Mr. NELSON. How many communists do you estimate there would be in Seattle?

Mr. COLVIN. I am afraid my best estimate would be a guess.

Mr. NELSON. What would be your best estimate?

Mr. COLVIN. It is hard to draw the line of demarcation between out-and-out communists and communistic sympathizers. I think they would run higher than what the chief said in his testimony, but I have probably taken into consideration sympathizers, which are much more numerous.

Mr. NELSON. How many communists who are active sympathizers are there, in your opinion?

Mr. COLVIN. They would run up into several hundred.