

1938 Communist meeting had county in an uproar

A notice that the Indiana Communist Party was planning a meeting in the Monroe County Courthouse set off a flurry of activity among local veterans' groups. It was the first week in November of 1938.

Reported the *Bloomington Evening World* of Nov. 1, 1938, "Monroe County's patriotic organizations in a meeting in the courthouse last night took steps to prevent a scheduled meeting of the Communists from being held in the courthouse Thursday night as advertised."

The newspaper listed the names of the organizations involved in the protest meeting: American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Spanish War Veterans, Disabled American Veterans and their auxiliaries and the ladies of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic — Civil War veterans).

It is not clear who, if anyone, authorized the Communists to meet in the courthouse, since Orrin Jones, a county commissioner, told the protesting veterans that the commissioners had not given their permission. Judge Donald A. Rogers also denied giving approval



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

for the use of the courthouse by the Communists.

The group of veterans organized themselves, appointing Col. T.J. Loudon as chairman and Deputy Prosecutor Earl Huntington as secretary. It was the consensus of the group that county and city officials were to be on notice that there was serious opposition to meeting permits for the Communists.

The reason the Communist Party had planned a meeting in Bloomington in the first place was to allow Miles Blansett and Wenzel Stocker (candidates for U.S. senator and Indiana secretary of state, respectively) an opportunity to be heard in Bloomington. The officials of that party gained a headline or two on Nov. 3 by asking Indiana Gov. M. Clifford

Townsend for state police protection during the party's visit to Bloomington.

The request came from Claude Stadfeld, state campaign manager, and Philip Bart, state secretary of the party, both from Indianapolis. The *Evening World* reported that "City officials were not excited today" about the Communists' plea for protection.

Meanwhile, Huntington wanted to make sure Monroe Countians understood that the veterans did not object to the Communists having a private meeting in Bloomington. Bart retorted that he "wouldn't want Bloomington turned into another Jersey City or 1936 Terre Haute." The *Evening World* explained that the Communists had had problems with holding meetings in both cities.

At a meeting in Lafayette, Bart told the audience that Gov. Townsend had promised to call out the state militia, if necessary, to provide "full legal protection" for a pre-election meeting in Bloomington. A day or two later the Monroe County veterans had put together what they informally called "an anti-Red

organization."

Col. Loudon announced their names: American Legion, William R. Hoadley, and its auxiliary, Mrs. Henry Pruett; Disabled American Veterans, S.L. "Smoke" Miner; Veterans of Foreign Wars, Don Reitenour, and its auxiliary, Mrs. Emma Henderson; United Spanish War Veterans, Ray Eller, and its auxiliary, Mrs. B. Stimson; and the G.A.R., James Thompson.

Local Communists held a closed meeting at the home of Jason Shields on West Fifth Street. The veterans' organization also had a closed meeting that prompted an incident reported in the *Evening World*.

"Robert A. Cook, local newspaperman, was forcibly taken from the meeting room and kicked out the door after he had walked in to ask about the meeting. He jokingly held his right hand high and called out 'Hello comrades.'"

"The ejection followed in short order."

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