
Larkin Conducts Own Case.

First published in *Voice of Labor* [New York].

Reprinted in *The Toiler* [Cleveland], whole no. 118 (May 7, 1920), pg. 2.

Jim Larkin of the working class is on trial in new York City for being partly responsible for the Left Wing Program, which has to do with the new class principles enunciated by the Third International. Jim Larkin is Irish and has an “A#1” labor record in Ireland. But that is not what we are going to talk about.†

Jim Larkin is on trial in New York City and he is going it alone. He decided he could make a better class fight than any lawyer could make for him — and he is right. He is holding down the stage in Judge Weeks’ court in such commendable style that we wish the whole world of workers could sit in and listen and see.

First let’s say that if you’d ask the average native what employment people follow in New York City he’d tell you that there are ever so many machinists, carpenters, needle workers, railroad men, ordinary working folk. How comes it then that the jury panel in the courts show none of these workers in it? You’ll only need one guess to guess why.

Here are the kind of folk that are being called to try Larkin: general insurance agent, carpenter superintendent, underwriter of surety, stock trader, chief cashier, cotton goods broker, treasurer for

importers, etc. And now get this — one prospective juror confessed that he managed a cooperative store and one approved of the 1776 Revolution and out both of them went by presumption by the prosecution.

The first thing Larkin did in acting in his own defense was to challenge the judge, claiming that the judge was prejudiced and had proven it in commending the conviction of Gitlow and Winitsky, two communists previously sentenced by the same judge. The court decided, as could have been expected, that it was fit to sit in the case. The Court and Larkin, all through the selection of the jury, staged the class struggle in pep-pery language. The Court, to facilitate presentation of the case, advised Larkin to take a lawyer. To this Larkin answered: “I don’t see that the form of presenting the truth matters much.”

Larkin insisted that the jury panel was not of his class and asked its dismissal. The judge refused. When a prospective juror seemed rattled about constitutional methods which might be pursued to overthrow the government and admitted that he was not familiar with the constitution, Larkin said to him: “That is the reason why you have been specially selected.” He asked this same

†- James Joseph “Big Jim” Larkin (1879-1947) was the former General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union — the largest union in Ireland — and the leader of a massive transportation strike beginning in the summer of 1913. An attack on a strike rally by police in July resulted in 2 deaths and hundreds of injuries and is still recalled in Irish lore as “Bloody Sunday.” After many months of pitched struggle, the transport workers’ strike failed and the vilified Larkin left Ireland, arriving in the United States in 1914. Larkin was a member of the Socialist Party of America from that date and was active in the Left Wing Section in 1919, serving on the Left Wing National Council and periodically contributing articles to *The Revolutionary Age*. These activities drew the ire of authorities and Larkin was arrested in a coordinated raid conducted during the night of Nov. 8/9, 1919. He went to trial on April 5, 1920 in a proceeding which lasted until the 27th of that month, when he was convicted of having violated the New York state Criminal Anarchy Law. On May 4, 1920, Larkin received a sentence of from 5 to 10 years in prison. He served time at Sing Sing and Dannemora State Penitentiaries before being pardoned by New York Governor Al Smith and deported to Ireland in April 1923.

juror that if a foreigner “like Christ came to this country, do you think he could become an American citizen?” This horrified the court!

At a point when Judge Weeks and a prospective juror who thought that the reason the cost of living was high was because workers did not work long enough hours, engaged in a conversation about economics, Larkin broke in by remarking, “Pardon me for saying so, but I think that both do not know what they are talking about.”

“What class do you belong to?” is Larkin’s hot shot. Most of those asked don’t belong to any class and say they do not believe in classes. So much like the religious fanatic who said he did not belong to any world or believe in things worldly.

A new trick was played upon those who are attending the Larkin trial, and the courtroom is crowded. At an especially well-attended session the names and addresses of all who attended were taken. An attempt at intimidation, that’s all.

We have had the “no defense” trial and the class trial with lawyers instructed to make a class fight. But the best of them all, after all, is the kind that Larkin is conducting, for he meets his class enemies face on and words are not softened by passage through a representative of the legal profession. There will be more of these trials from now on.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.