

**No. 9**

# **STEVE KATOVIS**

## **LIFE AND DEATH OF A WORKER**

by

**A. B. Magil**

and **Joseph North**

**10c**

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## STEVE KATOVIS

### *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A WORKER*

By A. B. MAGIL *and* JOSEPH NORTH

HE was born in 1890. The month and day are unknown. Whether summer or winter doesn't matter much.

Four had come before him. Now there was another mouth to feed. But the pious peasant, Nick Katovis, and his wife, Ajero, living on their meager farm in Karytha in the province of Thessaly, Greece, did not grumble. They thanked the God they so devoutly believed in for sending them such a fine, lusty youngster. He would grow up to be a joy and comfort to their old age. They called him Stephen—a crown.

The world of 1890. It was only nine years since Thessaly had been freed from Turkish domination. Less than seventy years before Greece itself had overthrown Turkish feudalism which for nearly four centuries had oppressed and plundered the country.

Now, supposedly a free country, it was actually the scene of struggles and intrigues between Britain, France and Russia, each supporting its own political cliques, while Turkey, chastened but untamed, nursed its hurts and waited eagerly for an opportunity to pounce once again on the rich plum that had been torn from its grasp.

Capitalism in the leading European countries was plunging from the period of free competition into the period of monopoly, of ruthless imperialist struggles and wars, of proletarian revolutions.

Less than two decades had passed since the workingmen of Paris arose in their wrath and desperation, overthrew the bourgeoisie and established for the first time in history the

Commune, a workers' government—to be drowned in blood only two months later. Friedrich Engels was in the evening of his life. Seven years before, his great friend and collaborator, Karl Marx, poor and broken in body, but with his marvelous mind—the greatest of the nineteenth century—undespoiled, had died in London. In a small town in the province of Kazan, Russia, where he had been exiled for revolutionary activity among the university students, a twenty-year-old youth, Vladimir Ilyitch Ulyanov, whom millions of the toiling masses of the world would later come to know and love as Lenin, was poring over the works of Marx and dedicating himself to the task of organizing the Russian workers for the overthrow of tsarism and capitalism. In America, on the great plains of Nevada, a huge, one-eyed young man named William D. Haywood was herding cows, with the memory of the four brave men of Chicago—the Haymarket martyrs whom the capitalist class had murdered only three years before—alive in his mind.

### *A Peasant Boy*

Life on the Nick Katovis' farm was primitive and harsh, filled with endless toil. The plain of Thessaly was the most fertile part of Greece, yielding oranges, lemons, olives and grapes, wheat and other cereals. But the wooden plow that had been introduced in the time of the Greek poet Hesiod was still in use, and the peasants had no knowledge of the use of fertilizers or of rotation of crops. All this rich semi-tropical yield meant backbreaking work from sun-up to sun-down throughout the year.

And what had the peasant of it all? If he was one of the thousands of tenant farmers or even if he had a small farm of his own, he was oppressed by the big landowners, fleeced by the city merchant, the tax-collector and the usurer, and had little left for his pains. A bad year and poor crops meant semi-starvation for the peasants of Thessaly.

The family of Nick Katovis was large and his farm was small. At the time Steve was born the two oldest boys, John

and James, were already helping in the fields. Soon the two girls, Athou and Aphento, would be old enough to do their share. After Steve came a girl, Despo, and the two boys, Paul and Charles, making eight in all. There never seemed to be enough of anything to go round. The children's clothes were tattered and often they went hungry.

Sometimes in the winter Mother Ajero would silently take a piece of bread, divide it equally among the children—and that was the whole meal.

Despite privations the boy Steve grew strong and sturdy. He was a serious-minded boy and his thoughts were filled with God, the church and the life hereafter. When he crossed himself before sitting down to eat, he knew that God would bless the meal; and he was angry at his brothers and sisters who sometimes neglected to make the holy sign. Often in the summer he would wander about among the fields, talking to himself or chanting the hymns of the Greek Orthodox Church. To the East, not far off, lay the Ægean Sea, and all around were mountains and hills. It would be pleasant to go down to the sea and go sailing in a boat. But no, that would be wicked. He, Steve, was dedicated to the church and to a life of piety.

"When he grows up he will study to be a priest," Ajero Katovis said. And she rejoiced in her son—Stephen, her crown.

### *A Child Goes to Work*

Steve was nine years old when Charles, the last of the children, was born. Eleven months later Nick Katovis took sick and died. Mother Ajero was left with eight children, the youngest an infant. But she was not a woman to sit and wring her hands and wait for ruin to come. The older children looked after the farm while she went to work for the neighboring peasants.

But the burden was too great. Steve was ten years old; time for him to go to work. Dreams of the priesthood were stifled; his fitful schooling that amounted, all told, to no more than a year, was broken off, never again to be resumed. But there

was no place for him on the farms. The sea was not far off.

And so at the age of ten the peasant boy, Steve Katovis, got a job on a sailboat that cruised along the coast, and became a breadwinner in earnest. Steve worked hard, doing all kinds of jobs for a few coins a week. The master of the boat was harsh and sometimes beat him. Steve did not cry; he grew silent, more obstinate; he hated the master, though he thought it was sinful to hate.

At sixteen Steve went to work on a steamer, and then began years of wandering all over Europe. He worked with seamen of all countries and learned to make himself understood in several lingoës. Spanish was the tongue that pleased him most. The sound of its syllables was somehow beautiful in his ears. Some day, he promised himself, he would study the language and master it.

Steve worked as an able-bodied seaman, as a cook and fireman. It was hard work, the pay was poor and the officers were domineering and abusive. But it was better and freer than working on the farm. In Greece he was wanted for military duty. But let them catch him if they could.

Gradually the shackles of religion were broken. Steve tossed away superstition and turned to reality, the hard, unrelenting life of a worker.

The men all liked the dark young Greek with the stocky body and powerful shoulders and arms. There was in him a mixture of gentleness and strength. And there was sober wisdom too.

But Steve was tiring of this aimless life. He wanted to make something of himself, to do something concrete and practical. What? He didn't know.

He would go to America. America was the land of opportunity. Many of his countrymen had gone there and they had not come back.

### *The New World*

On a day in 1913 Steve Katovis landed in New York. He had seen many cities, but this one was different. The buildings

rose cliff-like to the sky. Overhead and in the earth roared monsters like snakes with great staring eyes. Everywhere was confusion and people in a hurry. Always in a hurry, running to catch something. What?

The only familiar sights were the ships. But he liked it all; it was alive. The small timid life of the peasant farm with its narrow horizons, the grooves of its ancient customs, its unchanging ritual of birth and death lay far behind. Around him swarmed the eager life of the city—the new world.

But he had to make a living. He got a job on a boat and went south to Savannah and then to New Orleans. He saw for the first time the black men of the South abused and persecuted, jeered at, kicked from pillar to post, the white man the master. And he remembered in anger and pain a ten-year-old homesick boy on a sailboat on the Ægean Sea. . . .

A friend told him that if he enlisted in the navy, he could get a good job on a coast guard vessel. He signed up for two years. Once when the boat was docked at Savannah, he went ashore for a few minutes to get a cup of coffee. When he came back he was thrown into the brig for fifteen days on bread and water. All day he sat in the brig stubborn and silent, thinking. He was beginning to understand. There were two kinds of people on board ship: officers and men. The men did all the dirty work, they got slop to eat and a few dollars at the end of the month for their pains. The officers were the rulers and the heroes. They took delight in bullying the men and making them stand like sticks before them. It gave them a sense of power. He hated them. He hated their power. He knew how hollow they were inside. Why, the most insignificant man on ship was worth a ton of these bullies.

Yes, there were two kinds of people. And he belonged to the second kind, the riffraff, scum-o'-the-earth, so much cattle, to be run through the guts for daring to have human feelings, thoughts, hungers, aches. The officers . . . and who were behind *them*? Who? . . .

After working in the coast guard eighteen months Steve found his chance and ran away.

## *A Worker Discovers His Class*

The war came. Greece was a pawn on the imperialist chess-board. The catch phrases of the war-mongers meant little to Steve. He wouldn't fight. It was the poor people that paid for it. They paid for it with blood and with suffering and with shattered lives. If you were lucky enough to come out with only a leg or an arm shot off, then you were a hero and could starve in honor. All the wretches that were killed, all the wretches that were maimed and broken, all the wretches that came back alive and whole with the horrible nightmare of the war stalking through their minds—for what, for what? Steve hated the war.

In 1915 he went west to San Francisco and worked on various boats on the coast. His English was constantly improving. Doggedly he had begun to study the language shortly after his arrival in this country and before long he was able to speak and write fluently. He was a tireless reader. Besides Greek and English, he read Italian and Spanish, especially Spanish. Labor papers in these languages came his way—I. W. W. papers, anarchist papers, socialist papers. Steve was learning. Slaving on boats and reading in his spare time, Steve was learning a universal language, the language of the working-class struggle.

In 1918 Steve helped his younger brother, Paul, come to this country and for several years they worked together on coast ships.

The Red raids of 1919-20 swept like a hurricane over the country. Arrests, deportations, tortures. The newly formed Communist organizations driven underground. Steve escaped Attorney General Palmer's dragnet: he was not yet known as a Red. But he saw clearly the meaning of it all—the rôle of the capitalist state, the fraud of the "democratic liberties," the mobilization of the entire propaganda machinery of the bosses to goad on the pack. The hunt was on and every militant worker was legitimate prey.

In 1921 the coast marine firemen struck. It was Steve's first strike and he showed that he knew how to fight. When the strike was over, he decided to look for more stable work. He left San Francisco and went to Los Angeles. Here he joined the Communist Party, which at that time was underground, and he became active at once.

### *Steve the Red*

In 1921 Steve bought a ramshackle taxi with some money he had saved and drove it during the next three years, taking occasional trips to the sea. In 1924 the Chauffeurs' Union in Los Angeles broke up when the secretary absconded with the funds.

"What else can you expect of the A. F. of L.?" Steve shrugged his shoulders. He talked to some of the men, urging them to form a real union. Many of them were like Steve—class-conscious, hard, toughened to toil, had been around a bit, and were aware that in union there is strength. But they were skeptical after the loss of their funds.

Steve continued to urge a new union. "To hell with a paid A. F. of L. secretary! I'll be secretary myself, without wages too."

The other men laughed. They warned Steve it was no easy job—that it took up a lot of a man's time. That did not halt him. There was one word for which he was willing to sacrifice plenty of time—and that was the word "organize." It was the word he was to repeat most frequently in his life—and it was the last word on his lips when he died.

In a few weeks Steve had rebuilt the local. He was secretary and organizer. But he scrupulously refused to accept any pay. "I'm not an A. F. of L. faker," he used to say in scorn.

The other chauffeurs dubbed him Steve the Red. His broad shoulders were prominent in the Central Trades and Labor Council of Los Angeles. He fought for a strong left-wing policy until the A. F. of L. bureaucracy expelled him.

Steve had sailed the sea too long to stay in one place. "I'm off for New York," he told his comrades in Los Angeles. The

Communist Party granted him a transfer and he got a job on a ship. He came to New York in 1927. New York was more to Steve's taste. Here he found his old friend, George Mastropelas. They got jobs at the United Workers' Coöperative House in the Bronx. George was a fireman and Steve worked as a handyman. They joined the Amalgamated Building Service Workers' Union which later became the Building Maintenance Workers' Union, affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League.

"Workers must organize" was the phrase that rang through Steve's mind like the liturgies of his early youth far off in Greece. He organized a Spartacus Club among his Greek friends. As recording secretary, he was most active in building the Maintenance Workers' Union. He reorganized a branch of the International Labor Defense in the Bronx Coöperative and it became one of the most active in the city. He joined the Workers' International Relief—and helped build the branch in his part of the city.

When the *Freiheit*, Yiddish Communist daily, needed funds, Steve Katovis, born in Thessaly, Greece, took out a "sustaining fund" card and paid a quarter each week to maintain the paper.

But his work in the Communist Party was his chief concern. "The Party" to him was a beacon light in the dark of a capitalist world. It was something to live for, to think of day and night, to work for every moment of his spare time. He was financial secretary of Section 5 of the Party and his comrades knew and valued Steve as a devoted rank-and-filer who could always be depended on. He was in the forefront of every demonstration, was always among the first to volunteer for picket duty. He talked Communism to workers he met on the street, in the restaurant, on the job.

He went among the Greek workers, argued and fought with them, explaining, pleading that they turn their attention from the revolutionary movement in their motherland and concentrate it more on the land in which they now found themselves. "The workers in Greece will take care of themselves," he argued. "You're in America now and we need you here."

His constant activity in this direction and his articles on the movement in this country in the Greek Communist weekly, *Empross*, finally won over a majority of his friends.

Steve talked and dreamed of the Soviet Union. "When we get the Soviet Republic of the World..." he used to say to his friend Mastropelas.

Every fifteen days he went to Jersey City to visit his brother Charles, who worked in a Coffee Pot there. Steve's eyes glowed as he talked about the Communist Party over the greasy table to the workers chewing on their sandwiches, keenly interested, heeding each word.

The desire to go to the Soviet Union became very strong. "What we need there," Steve would say to his friend Mastropelas, "is good Communist mechanics. Lots of those intellectual engineers are White Guard bastards. They sabotage the work more than they help. They need men like you and me there."

Mastropelas agreed. They convinced four other friends. The half dozen comrades made their plans. They would become expert technicians and go to the U.S.S.R. and help build Socialism.

Steve enrolled in a night school that taught electrical engineering; Mastropelas studied plumbing. They would go to the Soviet Union and see with their own eyes what was going on over there—where workers were building a new world, a new life, under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Steve continued his study of languages, especially Spanish. He bought a Spanish-English primer and pored over the book during off hours at the Coöperative House.

### *The Picket Line*

Shortly after the New Year, 1930, Food Clerks' Local of the Food Workers' Industrial Union raised the demand for shorter hours and higher wages. They were bitterly opposed by the storekeepers, especially at Miller's Market, 161st Street and Union Avenue, The Bronx, where an injunction against

picketing had been taken out by the lawyer, Charles Solomon, a leader of the Socialist Party.

The Trade Union Unity League called for a demonstration of solidarity with the striking market clerks on January 16. The workers residing in The Bronx Coöperative, where Steve worked and lived, decided to turn out, hold a meeting, picket and help their comrades win the strike.

It was turning dark that evening, just after work, when about thirty men and women came out of the Coöperative, joking and laughing, headed for Miller's Market. Steve was in the forefront, carrying a couple of placards. They were going out to picket, to demonstrate, to dare the clubs of the cops in order to help some workers whom they had never seen and would perhaps never meet again win their demands. That is working-class solidarity—the feeling that the lot of his fellow is the concern of each. And so this small group of workers drew up across the street from Miller's Market. One of them got up on a stand they had brought along and began to speak. Patrolman Harry Kiritz, Tammany cop, strode on the scene. He watched for a moment, gathering his wits. Then he shouldered his way through the crowd of workers. "Hey there," he said, addressing the speaker, "got a permit?"

Tammany police are fervent in their demand for permits for activities from all but bootleggers, gangsters, exploiters, boss politicians and labor fakers.

"We don't need a permit to hold a meeting," the speaker said. "We notify the police department we are going to have a meeting and then we hold it."

Patrolman Kiritz hesitated. The speaker went on and Kiritz strode across the street into the store to consult the owner who had been watching from the doorway. A few moments later the cop returned. He shouldered his way through the crowd, scowling, and reached for the speaker. His club was in his right hand.

But a pair of powerful proletarian shoulders loomed in front of him. Kiritz collided with Steve Katovis. "God damn you," he said and swung his club. Steve ducked and the cop

began to swing wildly about with his club. In a moment he was on the ground, the club yanked from his hands.

Detective Donald Carey came on the scene just as his colleague arose, bewildered, hatless, gun in hand.

Shopkeeper Miller rushed out of the store, aproned, screaming.

"Shoot! Shoot them!" he cried to Kiritz.

"Give it to them!" Carey yelled, pulling his own revolver.

Kiritz needed no encouragement. His finger clicked a hail of lead into the midst of the workers. One of them cried out, and as he ran, began to limp, leaving a bloody trail.

Another fell without a groan, his body sprawling over the placard he carried, his abundant blood dyeing it red. It was Steve Katovis.

Steve's head lay against the curbstone. A woman comrade, who had walked with him to the demonstration, refused to flee from the rain of bullets and she fell to the pavement beside him, lifting his head. There he lay for twenty minutes, his blood streaming over the pavement, while the shopkeeper looked through the window in which pyramids of cabbages, potatoes, tomatoes, meats and chickens were on display.

The cop and the dick pulled Steve's friend from his side. She tried to take off her coat and wrap it round Steve's bleeding form. They shoved her roughly away and dragged Steve to the corner drug store. They locked themselves inside, refusing admittance to any one.

A patrol pulled up and the police threw Steve inside. "The bastard," one of them said. He kicked Steve. This time Steve could not fight back. He lay quiet—close to death.

The newspapers carried a few short paragraphs that night and the next morning. They told of a policeman "who fired several shots in the air. One of the shots struck Katovis, slightly wounding him. . . ."

Steve's last eight days were a torture that only a worker can endure. He lay in the narrow cot in the large, dark ward



FRED ELLIS IN *Daily Worker*.

of the Lincoln Hospital. All about him men were moaning—dying—while doctors stalked callously by. This is a “municipal” hospital. They bring only impoverished workers and criminals here.

Steve was a “criminal.” The charge of “felonious assault” was written in the magistrate’s book against his name. A bulky Tammany cop sat at Steve’s cot day and night. The worker’s spine was shattered. The bullet had passed through his intestines and had torn them in eight places. But the cop sat there day and night to see that Steve did not escape. . . .

When Steve’s friends came, they were refused admittance. “He is not a patient,” they were told, “he is a criminal.” A friend managed to see him through a ruse.

To her Steve repeated again and again as the cop stood listening: “Get that black dog out of here! Get that black dog out of here!” The bluecoat hovered about the bed, forcing the visitors out when two minutes were up.

One food worker entering with a bouquet to give to Steve was pushed from the ward, the flowers snatched from her hands by the policeman who inspected the red roses to see if there was a revolver hidden among them.

A doctor, a friend of Steve, forced his way in to examine him. He was astonished by the spirit and the vitality of the worker. “The man has wounds from which no human could ever recover,” he said.

Steve’s limbs twitched in bed with the fierce restlessness of his desire to live and get back to his Communist duties. “I won’t die. I won’t die. They can’t kill me,” he cried in his moments of delirium.

For eight days and nights Steve lay—shattered, dying. Only the powerful body of a peasant and the spirit of a revolutionary worker could withstand death’s demands that long. Twice blood was drained into his wasted body.

Friday night, January 24, Steve died. His last words to his friend who had stood at his side after the bullets of Tammany’s man had pierced his body, were:

"I'm dying, comrade. Tell the others outside to keep up the fight—organize the workers."

So Steve Katovis died.

And the bluecoat who had hovered about his cot for eight days rose from his chair, went out into the hall and called up police headquarters.

*"Workers, Avenge the Murder of Steve Katovis!"*

A black streamer hung across the front of the Workers' Center, on Union Square, headquarters of the Communist Party of New York. Letters two feet high called out to the hundreds of thousands of New York working men and women, "Workers, Avenge the Murder of Steve Katovis."

They had removed Steve's body from the charnel house of Lincoln Hospital—removed him from the gaze of the Tammany policeman who had sat day and night for eight days at the foot of Steve's bed of death.

Saturday, January 25, a clear, cold day. The Communist Party, through its press, had called for a demonstration before the City Hall. The capitalist papers had run columns telling of the proposed demonstration on behalf of an "obscure market clerk."

Saturday afternoon, 12:15. City Hall, old and sinister, stood guarded by 200 policemen, mounted horsemen and an equal number of plainclothes men whose back pockets were stuffed with blackjacks. Small groups of men and women walked across the cement paths. Some halted near that monument to bourgeois social ideals, the statue of Civic Virtue stamping self-righteously on the figure of a woman. The workers halted here, looked back toward the City Hall steps and strolled back.

The police watched out of the corners of their eyes. At 12:20 when several hundred men, women and children had gathered in the park, a thin-faced, bespectacled man, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of New York, ran up the stairs, reached the fifth step, turned around in the startled

gaze of 200 cops, mounted horsemen, plainclothes men, and said in a clear loud voice to the 500 workers gathered about the City Hall:

“Fellow-workers and comrades, we meet here to—”

There was a shower of blue arms, fists, a flurry of men and women and a swift assembling of the knots of workers scattered over the park. A startling array of placards was raised aloft from beneath workers' coats and a flood of blue-uniformed Tammany men surged upon the workers.

The speaker was hurled down the stairway by a squad of plainclothes detectives, gangsters and policemen. His place was immediately taken by another worker. He also was kicked down the stairs after saying one word—and a third took his place.

The police began to push, to swear, to reach for their rear pockets. In a few minutes they had pushed the disorganized groups of workers, whom they almost outnumbered, to the sidewalks. The workers halted—resisted—bare-armed began to push back. The police squads grew. The crowds grew. There were mêlées on the pavement. The mounted police began to ride their steel-hoofed horses onto the pavement.

“Arise, Ye Prisoners of Starvation”—sung in the shadow of Wall Street.

“You bastards—you bitches—” the reply of the Tammany police. Plainclothes men struck with their blackjacks. Police punched and swung with their small, six-inch clubs. Men, women and children were struck.

Steve Katovis was dead—“an obscure market clerk.” . . .

The fury of the police increased. The workers swirled away across Chambers Street before a flurry of blue-coated Tammany men and horses. The crowd reassembled, churned about and turned back toward City Hall.

For an hour this continued. Any man who came on City Hall Square was attacked. A fat merchant, who had halted his auto at the pavement to see what was happening, had the misfortune to take off his hat. The quick reasoning of a police-

man told him a Red is a man who goes bareheaded. Presto! the business man was a Red.

A mounted cop rode his steed down on the merchant who fled in terror, screaming, across Broadway and into a store. The horseman was joined by a second. They rode their horses down the stairway, into the entrance of the store. They captured the business man and pummelled him mercilessly with fist and blackjack.

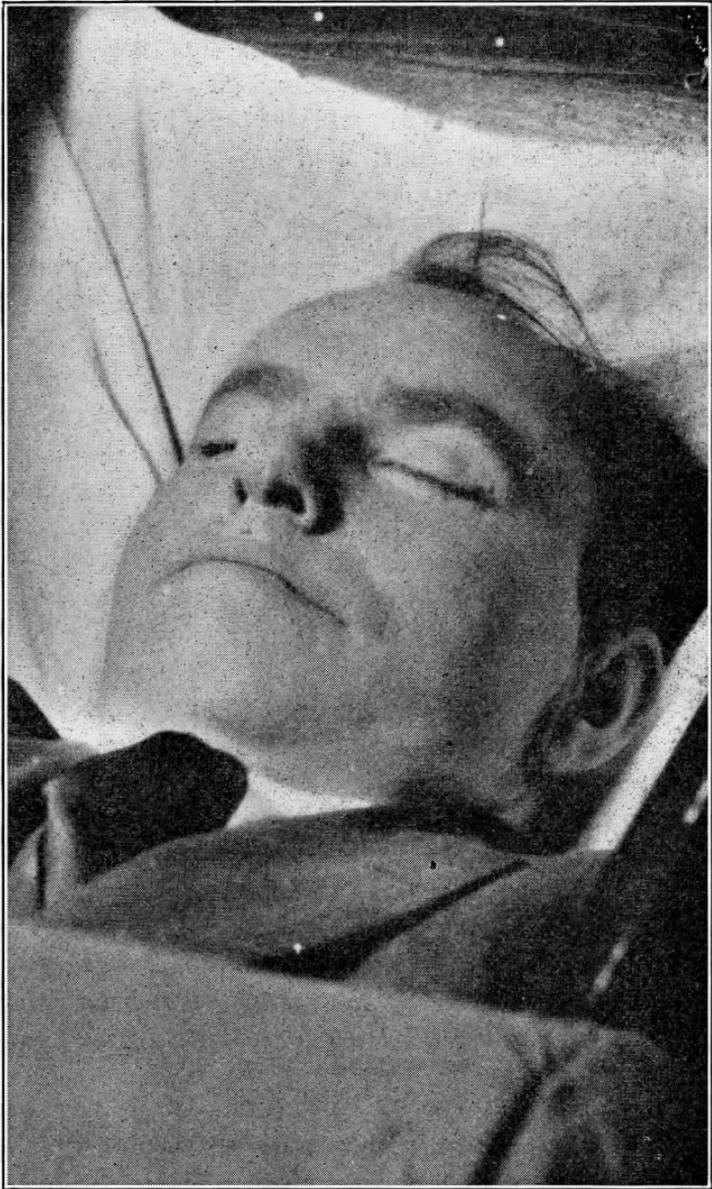
"But I'm a business man," he wailed, "a business man, not a Communist." (He turned out later to be a member of the Socialist Party.) The cops grunted as they clubbed away: "We'll make a business man out of you." Only when he managed to pull a card from his pocket and thrust it tremblingly into their faces, did they let him go. He stood, dazed, as they mounted and rode off. "I'm only a business man," he kept muttering as blood streamed from his mouth. "Only a business man."

Across the street five policemen surrounded Robert Minor, the editor of the *Daily Worker*. He had called out when the police were beating a woman, "Don't beat women, you yellow dogs." Five Tammany stalwarts assailed him. They struck at him, at his face, his chest, his abdomen. They beat him to his knees. They rained a shower of blackjack blows on his gray head. He sank, fighting them off, to the ground. The cops kicked him savagely. He groaned and lay as if dead. A member of the *Daily Worker* staff threw himself blindly among the police to halt the beating, and was himself clubbed half-unconscious and shoved into the swirling crowd.

Steve Katovis lay dead in the Workers' Center. A black banner, stretched across the building, said in two-foot letters: "Workers, Avenge the Murder of Steve Katovis."

It was clear and bright on Union Square. It was bright and sunny in the Bronx. In Brooklyn the rows of neat houses stretched on for blocks in the sunlight.

But there was a black banner across the front of the Workers' Center and the workers knew of it. They had come by



subway, by "L," from the peace of their homes—from the Bronx, from Union Square, from Brooklyn, and had walked into the fury and storm of blackjacks, of cavalry charges, into the frenzy of Tammany thugs who had been given orders to "mop up" the crowd. The same spirit that had sent Steve Katovis to the picket line where he met his death had impelled the hundreds of New York workers to the City Hall to demonstrate against his murder.

That night the press of New York ran streamers across the front pages. Such open brutality was unusual. The police had been fools. They had beaten not only Communists—but business men. They had knocked unconscious a messenger boy and a clerk from the drug store across the street. They had hit a reporter for a large capitalist daily. Very indiscreet, to say the least. It's all right to beat up or even kill a Red, but not so publicly. And by all means spare the "innocent bystanders."

Steve Katovis's body lay in a wooden casket. Thousands of workers—more than 20,000, it was estimated—filed by, glanced at Steve's corpse, and walked on with tighter lines in their faces. Steve Katovis—"obscure market clerk."

### *The 50,000*

*Tuesday afternoon, January 28. In Germany the unemployed workers of Hamburg were building barricades, tearing down scaffolding from buildings and defying the police. In France the capitalist press was thundering of Bolshevik conspiracies in forty regiments of the army. In Spain Dictator De Rivera was pacing up and down the floor, making up his mind that to resign was better than to die. In Athens whiskered gendarmes were raiding all the coffee shops in the working-class district for men who were conspiring against starvation.*

Steve Katovis lay dead in his coffin on the fourth floor of the Workers' Center. A large crayon drawing of Lenin leaned behind his bier.

On Union Square the crowds had been milling for hours. Thousands of unemployed, weary of seeking jobs that did not exist, felt the call of Steve Katovis. They came from every part of the city. They swarmed in on foot, by subway and elevated. They met thousands more who had left their jobs for the day. The Communist Party had called them and they came.

"Steve Katovis is dead. He was killed by a cop. Shot in the back while on the picket line."

By noon there were 50,000 workers on Union Square. Five hundred policemen with long blue overcoats hiding their pistols and blackjacks glowered and watched. ("They carried no clubs," the newspapers said that afternoon.) Mounted policemen sneered from their horses, feeling for their blackjacks and pistols. Silhouetted against the clear, wintry sky, men stood on surrounding buildings, looking down on 50,000 men, women and children gathered in Union Square, across the street from where Steve Katovis lay dead.

In Union Square, where two and a half years before the streets had been black with masses who had come to mourn Sacco and Vanzetti and shout defiance to their killers, history was being repeated. But the tide of the class struggle had mounted; it rushed on with relentless fury. Then, nearly seven years of torture had passed before the masses bestirred themselves for the poor shoemaker and the fish peddler.

Now, but one week before, Tammany Patrolman Harry Kiritz had pressed his pistol into the back of Steve Katovis and had pulled the trigger. And to-day 50,000 workers were on Union Square. To-day Commissioner Whalen, gendarme de luxe, was on the scene, surrounded by a squad of plainclothes thugs. And Mayor Jazzy Jimmy Walker, the Immaculate, stood at Tammany headquarters on Sixteenth Street at Union Square, and looked across the street.

A sea of workers. Singing of the "International." The clenched fists of thousands of workers raised in the air. Ameri-

can, Jewish, Chinese, Negro workers speaking, explaining, swearing that Steve Katovis had not died in vain.

At 12:30 the speaking ended. The funeral procession began to stir. The reporters and cameramen fidgeted nervously with the press cards in their hats. The plainclothes thugs edged into the crowd, feeling their pockets. On side streets platoons of bluecoats were secreted, awaiting a signal. In cellars and doorways in a score of buildings the bluecoats were hidden, waiting. . . .

The New York *Telegram* editorial writer was punching out an editorial on freedom of speech. At the waterfront, on East River, where a massive turbine had been built by the Edison Company, a crane collapsed and beheaded a worker. His severed head fell into the river, bobbing downstream with a chunk of ice.

Which way would the mass go? The capitalist press knew that if it headed up Broadway, there would be a ferocious attack by the police. Gas bombs were stuffing the pockets of the cops and plainclothes men. Machine-gun nozzles glared from the tops of buildings. Which way?

But the Communist leaders had made their decision the night before. They had wrung a concession from the city authorities that the funeral parade *would* be permitted. They had forced Whalen, who originally had forbidden both the parade and meeting, to backwater.

The parade turned down Fourth Avenue. Whalen, waxed mustache and derby, stood in the middle of the street directing traffic, while hundreds of cops and plainclothes men stood nearby. Later he climbed into his blue-black limousine and drove off to a meeting at the Bankers' Club.

Twelve abreast, crowded, men, women and children marched in seemingly endless ranks. The sidewalks were black with onlookers. The procession, marching behind a Red Flag, ignored a snaky descent of ticker tape hurled from an office building.

Steve's body preceded the marching throngs of workers. "Soviet hordes" the tabloids called them. Steve's brothers,

Charles and Paul, marched with the thousands by the body of their brother—"the best one in the family."

In an unorganized cafeteria in Brooklyn the chef stalked out of the kitchen, ladle in hand, and stood before the patrons. Briefly he told the story of Steve Katovis. The patrons, chiefly workers, rose from their chairs and stood in silence. Then the chef went back to his work in the steaming kitchen.

Up Fourth Avenue, east on Twenty-third Street, through the workers' neighborhoods to the factory district the march wended. "Join us, fellow-workers," those in line called out to those on the pavements. "Steve Katovis, worker, brother of all workers, is murdered—dead for you, the working-class. Join us, fellow-workers."

Many on the pavements edged their way through and fell into the ranks. Workers waved from factory windows. Workers' wives ran to tenement windows and looked out.

On and on the procession marched. The police were quiet to-day. They had gotten their orders: after the unfavorable publicity following the clubbing orgy of the preceding Saturday, to have attacked a funeral procession would have been the worst possible folly. When the workers marched by jeering: "Down with Whalen's Cossacks," the police stared sullenly ahead.

The masses were tremendous in their defiance. The police were quiet to-day.

George Mastropelas, Steve's best friend, marched at the head of the line. In Mastropelas' home in the Bronx there stood on a shelf a miniature ship flying the Red Flag, which Mastropelas had made. He had "christened" it *S.S. Katovis*. Mastropelas marched with head unbowed, proudly.

The huge machines of the press were rotating furiously. Millions of copies were being piled into bundles. Steve Katovis, 39, a worker, was being buried. He had been shot in the back by Patrolman Kiritz. The cop had pressed a pistol against the spine of unarmed Steve Katovis who had refused to give way on the picket line.

The procession crossed Forty-second Street and thousands

halted with questions on their faces, watching the endless ranks of workers march by. Workers from poor neighborhoods, from tenements, from the Bronx, from Brooklyn, from Jersey City, from Newark, from the sweatshops and factories, from the textile mills and the restaurants marched by singing the "International."

It was a tremendous day—auguring a tremendous future. The police sensed it. The capitalist press sensed it. Mayor Walker and Commissioner Whalen actually sensed it.

There is a song the Greek mountaineers sing. Similar songs appear in the lore of all oppressed masses. It is the song of *Old Demos and His Rifle*. It contains the lines:

*My blood like fountains have I poured,  
And not a drop is left me. . . .  
Old Demos, he is dead and gone,  
Old Demos, gone forever.*

Steve Katovis is dead. But his memory, like that of Sacco and Vanzetti, will not die. The tens of thousands on that momentous Tuesday afternoon in January said it will not die. The current of history that afternoon said it will not die, for on that day

*In Germany the unemployed workers of Hamburg were building barricades, tearing down scaffolding from buildings and defying the police. In France the capitalist press was thundering of Bolshevik conspiracies within forty regiments of the army. In Spain Dictator Primo De Rivera was pacing up and down the floor, making up his mind that to resign was better than to die. In Athens whiskered gendarmes were raiding all the coffee shops in the working-class district for men who were sitting together conspiring against starvation. . . .*

### *A Worker Is Buried*

Hundreds of workers went on to Mount Olivet Cemetery in Queensboro. In single file they marched up the slope, the Red

Flag ahead of them, a tongue of flame against the sky. Up and up wound the procession, over the dark earth, over the snow melting softly in the mild, torpid winter afternoon. Near the road, beyond the crest of the hill, waited a fresh-dug grave. The coffin was carried out of the automobile; some one began to hum the Workers' Memorial Song and the entire crowd joined in. There was a hush as the first speaker began to talk. Others spoke, trade union leaders, leaders of the Communist Party and of the Trade Union Unity League. Their words were brief and simple, but they were filled with the fighting spirit of the workers, who in this last farewell to their comrade, Steve Katovis, were pledging themselves to carry on until the cause for which he died had conquered.

Paul Katovis spoke, too. "I haven't seen my brother for three years. I arrived to find him dead. I am not a member of the movement, but now that this has happened, I believe we ought to carry on and fight for the cause Steve died for."

Wrapped in a red banner bearing the emblem of the hammer and sickle, the coffin was lowered into the grave while the crowd softly sang the "International." Over the hill in the gathering evening floated the strains of the great song of working-class struggle, muted now to honor the dead, but still the song of living struggle.

And so the workers of New York buried their comrade—the worker, the fighter, Steve Katovis.

### *Aftermath*

Three days after the workers of New York had buried Steve Katovis, the Bronx County grand jury "investigating" the murder of the worker returned its finding. It declared that "we have found that the shooting was done by police officer Kiritz in the discharge of his duty; that he performed his duty in a way that reflects credit upon the officer and the Police Department of the City of New York and that he did not draw his weapon or fire his weapon until it was absolutely necessary in self-defense. In this connection the Grand Jury

desires to commend the action of detective Donald A. Carey of the Morrisania Station for the prompt performance of his duty in breaking up the demonstration and saving a good police officer."

The foreman of this obedient grand jury was Edward C. Delafield, president of the Bank of America, 44 Wall Street. American capitalism evidently could not trust an ordinary hand-picked jury to apply the whitewash, so it sent one of its direct representatives to do the trick. He did.

Thus Wall Street beheld its own crime and found it good.

Grover Whalen left the same day for Florida "for a rest." There he met good company: John J. Raskob of General Motors, Al Smith, the banker Otto Kahn.

Two weeks later Mayor Walker also went to Florida "for a rest."

On Wednesday, February 12, Mr. Delafield of Wall Street sailed on the *Mauretania* for Wall Street's colony, Cuba, "for a holiday."

The job was done. Steve Katovis lay six feet under the ground. The red roses and carnations that his fellow-workers had heaped three feet high on his grave were withered and blown to the winds. The distinguished murderers rested from their labors.

### *The Current Swiftens*

In January, 1930, the worker, Steve Katovis, was murdered by a bullet from the gun of a Tammany policeman. This was only a preliminary. The soil was hardly dry over Steve's grave when Tammany's gunmen struck again.

Within six months two more workers, Alfred Luro, a Negro, and Gonzalo Gonzales were killed by "New York's Finest."

The current of struggle swiftened as the bosses feverishly built their dam of Fascism. The Bullet and Blackjack grew as the symbol of American "democracy"—just as the Ax was the sign of Fascism in Italy. The mask of liberalism, democracy, which American capitalism had worn and flaunted for years, was being torn by the embittered workers.

An obscure strike of a food-market in the Bronx could provoke capitalism to murder. The Tiger, Tammany, tasted blood and it suited him. His next victim was Alfred Luro, one of America's 12,000,000 Negroes, most exploited of the exploited. Luro was attacked by police at a Harlem meeting. Participating in Luro's murder were adherents of that backward doctrine of the political medicine-man, Marcus Garvey, who called on the American Negro masses to forsake the tremendous economy that they had been foremost in constructing, and to return to the uncleared jungles of Africa.

En route to the morgue where Luro's martyred body lay, Gonzalo Gonzales, leading a group of Latin-American workers, was attacked by a Tammany policeman, and his stout worker's heart pierced by a bullet.

And in the South, a few months previously, Ella May, textile worker, mother of six children, was shot through the heart on her way to a union meeting. The "Marion Massacre," wherein six workers were killed and twenty-four wounded, was fresh in the minds of the working-class.

While Luro, the Negro worker, was killed in Harlem, lynchings ran like a devastating flame through the South, reaching far up to the North, into Marion, Indiana. The Fascist Association, an order of American Blackshirts, sprang up in Atlanta, Georgia, to lend lynching a helping hand.

Terror, Bullet and Blackjack government was spreading. But it found no terrified, cringing working-class. From Chicago to New York, from Detroit to Los Angeles the workers bestirred themselves. They were building their organizations. The Negroes were constructing the American Negro Labor Congress to carry on the struggle. The white and Negro workers put their shoulders to the upbuilding of the International Labor Defense. Workers' Defense Corps was on the tongue of every militant American worker—as workers' guards prepared to defend themselves from murderous attacks.

For the life-struggle of the worker in America is ever met by murder on the bosses' part. It was so in the past and it is growing in the present. "We must defend ourselves," the work-

ers are saying. "We must defend ourselves to meet the growing fascism of the bosses, police, government and misleaders."

American imperialism, which flourishes on the life-blood of the Latin-American masses, had reached up to New York to destroy stout-hearted Gonzalo Gonzales. American capitalism, which burns and hangs Negroes in the frightful murder orgies of the South, swept up to Harlem to take Alfred Luro. American capitalism which attempts to fascisize, intimidate and crush the foreign-born workers had put Steve Katovis in his grave.

American capitalism which sits on the shoulders of the American masses, native-born as well as foreign, had martyred Ella May, had massacred six in the Marion strike, all in the short space of one twelve-month.

Steve Katovis, valiant fighter, did not march lonely down the high road of martyrdom. With him go Nordic, Negro and Latin-American workers.

The murder of Steve Katovis and his comrades is a symbol. And the instant resistance of the workers is a symbol. Everywhere, all over the earth, man is more and more dividing into two opposing camps: the camp of the Steve Katovises and the camp of those who exploit and torture and murder them. The lines dividing these two hostile camps grow constantly sharper. There are only two questions now: Are you with the working-class? Are you against the working-class? There is no middle of the road. It is struggle of one class against the other—not treacherous class peace.

Steve Katovis and his friends knew that. They chose and for that choice gave up their lives.

Remember Steve Katovis. Remember the name. Remember names like the Molly Maguires, those of the Chicago Haymarket martyrs, Frank Little and Joe Hill, Ella May, Sacco and Vanzetti, Alfred Luro, Gonzalo Gonzales. There are millions of them over the earth—millions nameless. They are the handwriting on the wall of capitalism—they cast in blood the shadow of the mighty world-proletarian revolution. For Steve

Katovis and his comrades are dead, but Negro worker and white, foreign born and native, are rising in a fury of life—welded together unbreakably to march forward to freedom for workers of all lands.

THE END.

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