HEADQUARTERS SIXTY-SECOND INFANTRY BRIGADE

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL

October 21, 1932.

IN REPLY REFER TO

PERSONAL

SUBJECT Communism.

TO Hon. B. M. Miller,
Governor of Alabama,
Montgomery, Ala.

Dear Governor:

When I was in your office last, I mentioned to you something about the communistic activities in Birmingham. I have had Lieutenant Ralph E. Hurst of the Military Intelligence Reserve Corps to make an investigation of the activities of this organization in Birmingham, and I am handing you herewith a copy of his report. Lieutenant Hurst was an eye witness to the two meetings to which he refers.

We think it best not to give any publicity to the activities here, as organizations of this kind seem to thrive on opposition.

Cordially yours,

J. C. PERSONS,
Brig. Gen. Ala. N. Guard,
Com. 62nd Inf. Brigade.

Birmingham, Ala.,
Oct. 19, 1932.

SUBJECT: COMMUNIST AGITATION.

To: Brig. Gen. J. C. Persons,
Alabama National Guard,
Birmingham, Ala.

Dear Sir:

In the belief that the following information should be available to the Alabama National Guard I submit to you the following, the local phases of which I have first hand knowledge.

Communist agents, who have brought about conditions that required national guard augmentation of civil forces in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Iowa and other states, have recently concentrated their efforts in Alabama to create the same conditions.

Communist organization and activities in the United States are under direction of the International Labor Defense, with headquarters in New York. While their agents have been more or less active in this section for the last two or three years, just recently Southern headquarters was transferred from Chattanooga to Birmingham.

These headquarters are located in the Martin Building where a white man known as Donald Burke is in charge with a white woman for secretary. They have both white and negro agents working under them.

Police have for months arrested these agents but the most applicable charge -- that of vagrancy -- will not stand because they show proof that they are employed by the I.L.D. As a result, police can do nothing more than finger print and photograph them for records and turn them loose. When Southern headquarters were opened here, police raided the offices and arrested Burke, a man known as A. Landy, a correspondent of The Worker, Communist publication in New York, and a white Birmingham resident, Fred Keith. They were held for 24 hours and turned loose.

In the beginning, Birmingham police broke up their meetings and the agents were ordered to form groups or clubs of half a dozen members which would hold unostentatious meetings throughout the district, gathering in some negro house.

City, county and federal attorneys here say the propaganda distributed and which is frequently found in raids on Negro houses, borders on sedition but does not go quite far enough to make convictions possible because, while overthrow of the government and capitalism is advocated, there is frequent use of the word "political" to take it out of the channels of violence.

Records and correspondence taken from arrested agents reveal that they have been instructed to concentrate on Negroes in the South, but lately they are appealing to the lower classes of white unemployed.

I was with the Congressional investigating committee of Rep. Hamilton Fish which was here some two years ago and heard all of its findings and the witnesses it examined.

An extremely small number of the negroes and whites of Communistic tendencies can qualify for real Communism but they are enrolled in allied sympathetic groups. Rep. Fish's committee decided there were but few actual Communists but many sympathizers in Alabama.

When the National Association for Advancement of Colored People, a reputable Negro organization, sent Clarence Darrow and Garfield Hays here a year ago to handle an appeal of the Scottsboro cases, these two attorneys found themselves balked at every turn by I.L.D. attorneys from New York.

They argued here for three days and nights, the I.L.D. attorneys refusing to let Darrow and Hays come in except as their associate counsel. Darrow and Hays refused outright to associate themselves in any way with Communism and retired even while Walter White, of New York, secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., appealed to the Communists to quit the case.

At the same time that the I.L.D. announced transfer of its headquarters here it announced a Southwide Communist conference for Oct. 2 at the Negro Masonic Temple in Birmingham.

The police played their only trump by enforcing a city ordinance for segregation which, of course, is contrary to Communist principles.

The meeting was held on Sunday afternoon with the entire police department present, with three machine guns mounted on the roof of a building across the street and gas bombs on hand. The Communists made moving pictures of the officers.

A young negro woman presided over the meeting which was also addressed by Burke and his secretary. Social and political equality was preached and resolutions were adopted calling for abolition of poll taxes, enfranchisement of every resident without respect to color or other qualifications, freedom for an I.L.D. agent arrested in Dadeville for inciting share croppers, freedom for the Scottsboro negroes and for Tom Mooney.

Numerous Negroes spoke from the floor as did one white man, while Oscar Adams, a Birmingham Negro of excellent reputation, took exception from the gallery to some of Burke's remarks about the N.A.A.C.P. trying to get the Scottsboro negroes lynched.

Soviet Russia was pictured as a workers heaven where the masses had united to take the mills and industry from capitalists.

Oscar Wells, of the First National Bank, and the T.C.I. Company were called by name as Burke described the way capitalists had exploited whites against blacks and vice versa, how nations run by capitalists had exploited the workers of one against the other to enrich themselves.

He told them the United States was preparing for war, particularly against Russia, and that instead of fighting workers of another country they must fight the capitalists of their own.

Both whites and blacks were urged to unite to go out and take food or whatever their families needed.

Burke told them to organize themselves into workers groups in preparation for a march on Washington this Winter. The march will be made by three groups -- unemployed, farmers and veterans. The latter were urged to join the Ex-Service Men's League.

The mother of the Montgomery boy, one of the Scottsboro condemned, was to have addressed the meeting and was called for several times, the Negro chairman stating she had seen her in town, but she never answered the calls.

The meeting was told that Negroes raised the whites, that black nurses nursed white babies when their mothers would not give them the time. The whites are no better than the blacks, Burke's secretary asserted.

Attendance was urged at a meeting the following Sunday at the Lyric Theatre, originally scheduled to be addressed by William Foster, the Communist candidate for president whose running mate is Paul Ford, a Birmingham Negro. Foster became ill and the party's campaign manager was substituted but after speaking in New Orleans the day before he failed to arrive here and no explanation was received.

Fred Keith presided over the second meeting and intimated that the campaign manager had been kidnapped. About 900 Negroes and 350 Whites attended this gathering, the tenor of which was the same as that of the first.

The second meeting, however, came to end amid considerable confusion when malodorous bombs were thrown in the theatre.

"Even that doesn't smell as bad as the man that threw it," Keith shouted.

"It's the speaker you smell," someone retorted.

Only the presence of a strong body of policemen prevented more serious disorder as the meeting broke up.

Early police activities in Birmingham were directed largely against two white men who went under the names of Burns and Jackson, although they are known to have worked under other names in Chattanooga, Atlanta, Jacksonville and other Southeastern cities.

Every time there has been an arrest or a move of any sort against the agents or Negroes, insolent and threatening telegrams have been sent city and county officials here stating that they are being held personally responsible.

Copies of these telegrams are frequently sent to the newspapers. They are the same messages that have been sent to the Montgomery officers and Supreme Court, to Dadeville authorities and others.

Just before the first big meeting here this month the Ku Klux Klan staged a demonstration on the downtown streets at midnight, posting placards announcing that "The Klan Rides Again" to stamp out Communism.

These posters were much in evidence about the Negro Masonic Temple and at the time of that meeting 60 Klansmen were gathered in their hall here. To the Klan is attributed the breaking up of the second meeting.

The Communist agents are playing a shrewd game of capitalizing on unemployment and adverse conditions. You are familiar with these conditions and will appreciate that those who are desperate will rally under almost any banner that holds forth any hope.

I have attempted to neither over-state nor underestimate the situation here. My candid opinion is that unless more relief facilities than are now in prospect are made available here this Winter that there is a likelihood of some disorders and attendant violence.

Ralph E. Hurst,
2nd Lieut. M.I.-Res.