

Tyler Hensley

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Teacher Called Red Fired and Forgotten

On March 29th, 1950, an English teacher at Pittsburgh's Taylor Allderdice High School named Dorothy Albert stands up in court. She calls on her accuser to accuse her face to face of the crime she supposedly committed. Her accuser is in the room and is willing to stand up and do as such, but Albert leaves the room as fast as she entered with a friend of hers. After working in Pittsburgh Public Schools for twenty years, Matthew Cvetic's testimony on an immense amount of Communist Party members and members of Communist-adjacent groups, including Albert's own brother, Nathan, caused Dorothy Albert to lose her job. Cvetic's testimony held that Albert's participation in a local chapter of the national organization, named the Civil Rights Congress, made her a bona fide Communist and the organization a Communist front. This is a story of one of the casualties of the red purges and rising racial tensions of post-World War Two America, set in the city of Pittsburgh, one rarely talked about in these contexts.

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Weeks before on March 13th, Matt Cvetic came to court armed with a mountain of documents collected from a crashed car in Shadyside. This car contained documents directly written by and related to the Pittsburgh Communist party and its subsidiaries. The driver and passenger, armed with shovels, were leaving the city to get rid of the evidence as rumors of a purge were rising in the organization. These papers, nicknamed the "jalopy papers" marked the

beginning of the end for many communists and communist adjacent people in and around Pittsburgh.

With the papers in hand, Cvetic formed a story of how communist organizations in Pittsburgh were working to infiltrate schools, colleges, and the minds of the youth through a front called the Labor Youth League. He considered the attempts by communists to brainwash the youth of Pittsburgh to be the first step in a master plan to violently overthrow the nation. This Labor Youth League also just so [CUT just so] happened to be attached directly to the Civil rights Congress, according to Cvetic. In these accusations, among around one-hundred other names, Cvetic [another misp modifier though] accused Dorothy Albert's lawyer, Hyman Schlesinger, and Benjamin Arshan, a former Mt. Lebanon Optometrist, as leaders in the CRC.

Schlesinger, as well as being lawyer to Albert, was widely regarded as the defender of communists in Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas. He was known so deeply by this tag that he underwent a long and arduous disbarment case due to his communist sympathies. Schlesinger never denied being a member of the CRC, and even admitted to being the finance chairman of the organization. Arshan, a peripheral character to Albert's story, but a standout name in Cvetic's list, nonetheless, was hated and run out of his community due to hosting a racially mixed social at his home the August before Cvetic's testimony. Arshan denied being a leader in the CRC.

The aggressive accusations aimed at these two men are similar to those levied at Albert and showcase stronger examples in the conflict of interest for the group of cases surrounding

Cvetic. This man was supposedly an undercover member of Communist organizations with the same newspaper article where Cvetic accused Arshan and Schlesinger, published March 13, 1950, naming him, “The 41-year old insurance salesman, who posed as a Commie for nine years to report on the Reds to the FBI...” He is pegged the all-American everyman helping in the fight against the insidious reds attempting to overthrow the government. Nine years he went to meetings for the Pittsburgh Communist Party and CRC, never once gaining a leadership position. He saw people who had been in the organization for less time, like Albert, gain more prominent roles than him while he secretly worked against them.

Cvetic was born in 1909 to Slovenian immigrant parents in Pittsburgh. He marries and has twins in 1931, is arrested for beating his sister in 1939, turned away from joining the army during World War 2 for being too short, and divorces his wife after a relationship where he mentally and physically abused her in 1946. The timeline of Cvetic’s involvement with the Communist Party of the USA of Pittsburgh and the FBI starts in 1942 when he is supposedly chosen as a good candidate for mole status.

He joins the Communist Party and funnels information to the FBI, which grows weary of his erratic behavior and demands for a higher pay as an informant. At many different points he is known to have been arrested for public intoxication and shouted to the police to let him go because he worked for the FBI. He told his friends, family, dates, psychiatrist, and many others that he was a mole but they kept him on as he was giving the FBI names of members of many

Pittsburgh communist organizations. Then in 1950, he opens the floodgates by publicly releasing the names of the people he worked with.

A film and a radio show was made out of Cvetic's story leading up to the trials, but what the popular stories miss about his life is after when Cvetic was abandoned by the FBI, ran a failed bid for a Republican seat in the local government, was in and out of the mental ward, even undergoing electroshock therapy, and ended up dying of a heart attack in Los Angeles in 1962. This information on Cvetic is not meant to disparage him and make him out to be a villain, but simply to show that he was not a hero. He was a man with a troubled life, thrust into the role of key witness against a host of communists in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA.

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Dorothy Albert was a Pittsburgh native as well, born on February 25, 1908 to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. Her parents, Ruben Albert and Minnie Rapaport, immigrated to Pittsburgh in 1905 and 1907 respectively. The town they are believed to have immigrated from is Odessa in modern day Ukraine, but Russia at the time. Odessa was in the midst of a now widely known worker's uprising chronicled in the film *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein. They married in 1908, the same year Dorothy was born. Ruben died in 1947 and Minnie in 1928, both were buried in Beth Abraham Cemetery and given proper obituaries.

Dorothy Albert went through Schenley High School and The University of Pittsburgh getting high marks, basically a model student. Upon graduation in 1928, she applied to work in Pittsburgh Public Schools, wanting specifically to teach English in high schools in the area with the ability to teach both French and Latin as well. In short, she got the job at Taylor Allderdice High School in November of 1931 and taught there until her firing in 1950.

From the beginning of her career are documented teacher evaluations which show her to be an above average teacher. Scores on her teaching prowess, connection with students, physical characteristics, and knowledge of material routinely rank passingly, at the very least. The only blatant fluctuation is on April of 1950, the month after she was fired. Here all of her scores had dropped significantly and her status at the school hung in question.

Some time after April 4, we get a timeline of events from the month beforehand from Flora B. Crosby, a secretary for the Pittsburgh Board of Education. After Albert's first meeting with superintendent Earl A. Dimmick on March 14th, she stays home sick for a week and a half before having a second appointment with Dimmick on March 27th. After that second meeting, to protest her suspension, she comes in to work each day, only to be turned away and told not to enter the classroom.

In that first of two meetings between Albert and Dimmick, Albert first hears of the accusations of her communist activities levied against her. Dimmick stated that Matthew Cvetic, a supposed FBI informant in the Pittsburgh Communist Party, named her as a member of the

party through the party front known as the Civil Rights Congress and further alleged that she was part of the party leadership in the Congress Publicity Committee (a group within the organization meant to publicize organization events.) Albert stated that she was a member of the CRC but was absolutely not a communist nor a member of the Publicity Committee. She also defended communist ideology and communists as regular people and her brother against similar claims levied against him. Another point brought up in this meeting is the fact that she directly states her parents as being foreign born and herself as being a US native, a fact which Dimmick held against Albert.

The issue Cvetic took with the Civil rights Congress was that it was supposedly a front of the Communist Party to publicly defend its members in trouble with the law. The CRC, in truth, was an early group in what we now know today as the Civil Rights Movement. The organization eventually was one of the organizations central to the publicization of the murder of Emmett Till in 1955. One issue the CRC was facing at the time of Albert's joining was the immense civil rights violation against Rosa Lee Ingram. Ingram was a black sharecropper in Georgia who was physically and sexually assaulted by a fellow sharecropper who was white. Her sons defended her and ended up killing the man, which led to death sentences for her and two of her sons. The CRC was key in protesting the sentences, eventually getting them ticked down to life, and eventually even lower than that. The CRC was also vehemently against anti-communism, feeling as though anti-communist laws went directly against the tenets of freedom of speech.

Dimmick, while superintendent, held views in contrast to the tenets of the CRC. In a pamphlet designed by teachers for teachers titled, "If Dorothy Albert Loses Her Job You Lose Your Tenure," Dimmick is pegged un-American for his anti-immigrant views, stating, "First, I couldn't understand why so many people of first generation native born appeared to affiliate themselves with subversive movements or movements that were labeled as subversive, and then said to her that my philosophy with reference to subversive activities was a very simple philosophy and could be stated very simple, namely, that those who adhered to the Communist Doctrine should, according to my judgement, go to the country where Communism was the adopted form of government." Here he showed a direct prejudice towards Albert, whose parents just so happened to have been from Russia; the Russia before the Soviet Union nonetheless. However, he placed the blame of her communist sympathies on her first-generationism. He believed that Albert having parents who weren't American means they didn't raise her American, therefore she would be someone much more comfortable not in America. This is not an uncommon sentiment of people at the time or even today, but it tinges the proceedings moving forward with hints of xenophobia, racism, anti-semitism, and a pushback to change while glossing over the fact that Cvetic himself held the same status as Albert.

Being a member of the CRC, a first generation child of two immigrants, and being ethnically Ukrainian with family ties to the Russian Empire didn't look too good for Albert, especially when coupled with her defense of Communism in her first meeting with Dimmick. After two weeks of working and being sick, the second meeting held between the two on March 27th went similarly. Dimmick tells Albert she should resign due to all the publicity surrounding

her and to go to DC to swear on record that she wasn't a Communist. Albert took insult to this, stating that the job was her only means of income and that a prosecution with unfounded claims should come to her.

Dimmick, unfazed by her plight, wrote directly to the school board on March 28th stating that Albert's service should be immediately terminated due to her communist activities. This letter was sent to the school board a week after the March 21st board meeting with unanimous 11-0 Yeas to suspend her contract. This takes us right back to the first public hearing on Albert's case on March 28th.

Articles published in local newspapers the day after show pictures of Cvetic with his son pointing out people who he accused sitting in the courtroom. Another article with the title, "Teacher Called Red Runs out on Cvetic," shows a photo of Albert at the stand, challenging Cvetic to accuse her of being a communist. She said it was disrespectful for a man to make such claims having never met her. After that, she swiftly exited the building with a friend, only for Cvetic to then take the stand in comic fashion, joking that he would face and accuse her at any time. This being one of the many cases he was actively involved in at the time makes this non-conversation between the two stand out as an odd moment in the trials.

In the Board of Education hearing on April 12th, 1950, Dimmick stands with Cvetic against Albert, who sits quietly during the entire process. From their first meeting, Dimmick wanted Albert fired. Maybe he wanted to save face for Pittsburgh Public Schools and Alderdice,

or maybe it was simply because of Albert's 1st-generational status while allying himself with another 1st-generational person.

This hearing came two weeks after Albert's now infamous courtroom walkout on Cvetic. She sat in on the hearing silently, never defending herself as a communist nor denying communist activities, while Cvetic told the story of meeting her 5 years before and only seeing her at meetings related to Communist party activities. Dimmick doesn't accuse her of much more than being a member of the CRC, which is spoken about at length during the hearing, ultimately being proven as a communist organization by Cvetic and the board members. Albert is found to be a member of the CRC, the CRC is found to be a Communist Party front, and the Communist Party is found to have aims for a violent overthrow of the local and federal governments.

It is decided that, according to the Board members, "The most important qualification of a teacher is loyalty to our government." Dorothy Albert, the "Teacher Called Red," as named by newspapers during the trial, is then suspended officially by the Board. However, she's not fired just yet.

Days before the hearing, on April 6th, Albert and Schlesinger filed for a 3 judge hearing in a federal court to prevent the Board from firing her. In this they also ask for a postponement of the suspension hearing, which obviously didn't work. However, she did receive her wish for the 3 judge panel to interpret the case themselves, though the time it took for this to happen was too long, as the final decision of the federal judges came over a year later.

On May 17th, the day of the final board trial, an article titled, “Miss Albert’s Fate up to Board Today,” states that a local Communist newspaper named “The Daily Worker” urged readers to attend Albert’s final Board hearing to show their support for her as a member of the CRC and someone whose life was wrongfully harmed by the anti-communism of the time. In the article, Schlesinger also states that if Albert got fired, he would bring the case all the way up to the Supreme Court. The next day, headlines read, “Board Fires Miss Albert as Teacher” and “Dorothy Albert Fired by School Board on Charge of Communism.”

The former tells readers that Albert remained silent through the 40-minute hearing which attacked her on ideological grounds. After those 40 minutes, she was given time to speak and read a prepared statement. In it she pleaded to her past students, parents of those students, her coworkers, and her peers to think to themselves whether she deserved this or not. She asked them publicly, in front a small crowd of people gathered from a known Communist newspaper, her Communist-defending lawyer, and the entirety of the Board, to accuse her of teaching communist propaganda to children, of trying to brainwash them to believe communist ideology. After that, the Board voted 14-0 to fire her starting March 28, the day she was first officially suspended.

In the latter article mentioned above, Earl Dimmick is quoted, “It should serve as a warning to everyone.”

Albert and Schlesinger's next course of action was a failed plea to Dr. Francis B. Haas, the state superintendent of public instruction. In January of 1951, her appeal is thrown out and her firing is upheld. Their last hope to gain Albert's job back was to run the case up the courts, hoping to reach the U.S. Supreme Court. It never did, being halted by Judge Henry Ellenbogen in September of 1951.

One of the main arguments made by Judge Ellenbogen against Albert was the fact that she never defended herself. As he sees it, why would she not vociferously defend herself if she was not guilty? According to him, if she ranted and raved to defend herself, she would very possibly be proven innocent.

In the official decision of the court, Ellenbogen states, "We have learned by experience that the Communist Party is unlike any other political party. It does not tolerate views in its members that differ from the official party program. It subjects its members to an iron discipline, and compels them to hue to the 'party line' under penalty of expulsion."

Through this and other trials, Ellenbogen and the other judges came to the conclusion that the Communist Party and any adjacent organizations were dangerous to American values as they aimed to create a single-minded group. They would expel and fire any member whose ideologies didn't line up with the party, and their only goal was to overthrow the US government. And with this decision on Dorothy Albert, the teacher who was fired from a Public School for having unfounded anti-American ties, her hopes of gaining her job back are turned to dust.

With the aimed attacks on members of the Civil Rights Congress, an organization known for helping minority, specifically African-American, populations and individuals in defending their rights, it is quite obvious that the Pittsburgh Communist purges orchestrated by the FBI with Matt Cvetic as their poster boy was more than an attack on un-American Communism. This purge was just as much, if not more, an attack on people aiming for civil rights and equality.

Dorothy Albert was a white American-born citizen, a first-generation teacher of students in Pittsburgh, PA. She joined the CRC in hopes to aid in the defense of Rosa Ingram, and her participation in the organization ended up ruining her life. Administration used her familial heritage as logical grounds to tie her with subversive acts and to get her out of the power position that a teacher holds over the impressionable youth of the city.

As shown by the attacks on Arshan for hosting a racially mixed event and Hyman Schlesinger the “commie” lawyer, the attack on Dorothy Albert was more than an attack on just Communism and Communist-adjacent ideologies. It was an attack on the fight for Civil Rights in the United States.

Matt Cvetic, a child of immigrants just as Albert was, was saved from these purges due to folding to the whims of the FBI and impeding on the constitutional rights of hundreds of others. Dorothy Albert is just one example of one of these casualties of the federal attacks on “un-American” ideals and ideologies.

After this, Albert's story ends with the only information of her life after the end of the case being her entry in the U.S. Social Security Death Index. She died in April 1987 in Philadelphia. Her story is one that shouldn't be forgotten in our time of political turmoil. When people are being called to be fired for their personal views is a dangerous time to have any views. When teacher's personal views are directly influencing the way they act in their professional careers is when backlash is more appropriate. Dorothy Albert never brought her communist views into the classroom, she never taught propaganda, and she only worked in these organizations on her own personal time. In her speech at her final board trial she challenged her past students to help the board prove she was an unfit teacher because she was a communist and none ever did.