

poets began to read from their work as published in *Progressive Masses*. Copies were available for fifty cents.

Things went peacefully with the poetry reading, despite the heavily propagandistic message, until the intermission. That was the opportunity for about twenty members of the New York branch of the Bund to push their way into the meeting hall and press people in attendance to buy copies of their own literary magazine, *Unser Vaterland*, for seventy-five cents. Joe and Easton noted a couple of scuffles, but no fights as such actually broke out before Jim and his sergeant-at-arms restored order.

The poetry reading continued, more or less without incident as members of the Bund, took chairs toward the back and remained mostly quiet. Then Kelvin Beaufort, the famous Canadian leftist poet from Dawson City, approached the podium. He didn't begin immediately to read his poems but instead pointed to the two journalists in front row and said, "These bourgeois impostors are a-----, spying on us to report back to the FBI. And they're the ones who encouraged the members of the Bund to come here so they'd have fights to cover."

Turning to the two journalists, Beaufort demanded, "Give me your notebooks right now, and leave. LEAVE!"

Joe said, "Lo que dice usted es toda mentira, y usted lo sabe bien!"

The two journalists stayed put.

Beaufort finally returned to the program and succeeded in reading two of his poems in *Progressive Masses* before scuffles erupted again in the back that within seconds turned into full-scale fist fights. Soon everyone from the CPUSA and the Bund in attendance was involved. Chairs flew. Joe and Easton made a quick exit through a side door into the street and stood behind a big De Soto. Someone flew through a plate glass window and landed, bloody, on the sidewalk.

In a moment a contingent from the NYPD, wielding billy clubs, arrived at the scene, waded into the meeting hall and forcibly ended the melee. Joe and Easton hailed cabs back to their respective newsrooms.

The next day the evening edition of the *Eagle-Advertiser* carried an article that compared the fights at the launch to the street fights between Communists and Nazis in the late Weimar Republic just before Hitler took over. An editorial expressed concerns about freedom of the press and the future of safety for members of the general public exercising their First Amendment right of free speech. The article in the *Chronicle* reported there had been some scuffles but everything eventually calmed down and ultimately, after the police left, differences of opinion were resolved through discussions with the manager of the building where the launch had been held. An editorial in that paper said there was nothing really to worry about. Meanwhile, both Hitler and Stalin grew stronger and contemplated expansion of their respective countries.

