



The Internationale

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES™



ELIZABETH
GURLEY FLYNN
"The Rebel Girl"

Born in Concord in 1890, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was a nationally known labor, socialist, anarchist, libertarian and feminist organizer. She co-founded the Industrial Workers of the World in 1906, where her fiery speeches earned her the nickname "The Rebel Girl." As a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, Flynn advocated for women's rights, including supporting their right to vote and access to birth control.

1936 and
notorious



The Rebel Girl - Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

PSMLS 03/25/25



What we'll be
learning today:

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

The Daughter of Immigrants and
Revolutionists

Socialist and IWW Agitator

Founding / Involvement with
ACLU

Involvement in Irish Republican
Movements

Prison Years



Daughter of Immigrants
and Revolutionists, Socialist
and IWW Agitator



The Daughter of Immigrants and Revolutionists

- Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was born in 1890 in Concord, NH. Her family were early Irish immigrants to America, with her grandfather arriving sometime in the 1840s. Life was hard for these early Irish immigrants who worked in lumber camps, building railroads and in the granite quarries, among other dangerous and difficult jobs. Her parents, Thomas Flynn, and Annie Gurley, along with her brother Thomas Gurley Flynn, and her two sister's Lucy Sabina Flynn and Anna Katherine Flynn were forced to travel the country in her earliest years as her father struggled to find steady work.
- Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's family were "conditioned...to accept socialist thinking long before we came in contact with Socialism as an organized movement. My father had voted for Eugene V. Debs as the Socialist Party Candidate for President in 1900. (p. 44)" In Harlem New York, in 1906 her family were attending meetings at the Harlem Socialist Club where she gave her first speech at the age of 16, to a "gathering...extremely popular with radicals of all descriptions," called the Unity Congregation.



The Daughter of Immigrants and Revolutionists

- In that summer she began speaking in the streets of Harlem, at mass meetings, which eventually resulted in her first arrest with her Father and several others for “speaking without a permit” and “blocking traffic in the heart of the theatrical district.”



Quote: : "I had begun to feel very strongly, that in a rich and fertile country like ours, there was no excuse for poverty, unemployment, child labor, and long strikes."

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (Flynn, Elizabeth. The Rebel Girl - An Autobiography: My First Life 1906 - 1926 p.45, 1973.)



Socialist and IWW Agitator

- Shortly, after joining the IWW in 1906, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn participated in her first strike action, with the Tube Mill Workers of Bridgeport CT, where she participated in strike committee meetings, mass picketing, and daily meetings in two languages.
- In 1907, at the age of 17 she was elected delegate of her IWW local to the IWW convention in Chicago. Her “family and friends were hesitant about letting [her] go but [she] was determined.” The local had no funds, but the Unity Club were able to raise the 18 dollar fare for her to travel by coach.
- Following her first cross-country trip as an IWW organizer she would continue to travel the nation, giving “particularly inflammatory (p.85)” speeches at socialist and IWW branches and on the streets about the local labor issues and the worker’s grievances. For this activity she was arrested numerous times and devoted a large amount of her focus towards defending those unjustly arrested for their involvement in labor organizing.
- During this time she also married her husband, Jack A. Jones, an ore miner and IWW local organizer, had a miscarriage and gave birth to her only son Fred Flynn, on May 19th, 1910.



Lead-up to World War I and the Founding of the ACLU

Quote: “How I got by the strict qualification that one must be an actual wage worker, I cannot recall, possible it was due to my extreme youth and the fact that all the work I did was for the movement, sometimes paid for and often not.” (Flynn, Elizabeth. The Rebel Girl - An Autobiography: My First Life 1906 - 1926 p.77, 1973.)

- Throughout the years 1912 - 1916 Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was involved in several of the largest strikes in American history until that time. The first of these being the Lawrence Textile strike of 1912, where she helped lead the strike alongside “Big” Bill Haywood, holding “special meetings for women (p.132)” and struggling against the “old world attitude” of the men who voiced considerable opposition to women going to meetings and marching on the picket lines



Lead-up to World War I and the Founding of the ACLU

- She was then called to Paterson, NJ, the silk-weaving center of America, where she “found herself involved at once, in a major battle of the class struggle of 1913 - a long, hard, and brutal strike (p.154)” She and her comrades were attacked by the city authorities with “vicious fury” as “outside agitators” and ordered to leave town. They were then arrested at their first appearance at a mass meeting. After making bail she continued agitating for the striking workers and was involved in the defense of convicted strikers Quinlan and Boyd, even following the resolution of the strike.
- Over the next few years, in the lead up to World War I, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was kept busy by her organizing for the IWW and was frequently called to locations across the country engaged in labor struggles and the fight for free speech. She also continued to participate actively in the defense of innocent strikers and labor leaders who were being persecuted by the state.

(Flynn, Elizabeth. The Rebel Girl - An Autobiography: My First Life 1906 - 1926, 1973.



Discussion



Involvement with ACLU and Irish Republican Movements



Involvement with the ACLU

- **A founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920, Flynn played a leading role in the campaign against the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti.**
- **Flynn was particularly concerned with women's rights, supporting birth control and women's suffrage.**
- **Flynn also criticized the leadership of trade unions for being male-dominated and not reflecting the needs of women.**
- **Though Flynn was in poor health most of her time in Portland, she was an active and vocal supporter of the 1934 West Coast Longshore Strike.**



Involvement with the ACLU pt.2



When the ACLU betrayed Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the Left

In 1939, Flynn was re-elected to the ACLU board; however, when Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin signed a nonaggression pact in 1939, the ACLU expelled all Communist Party members from its ranks in 1940, including Flynn.

- Flynn alone refused and defended her position. Refused a hearing, she was expelled.
- In 1976, they repudiated their ouster on grounds that it was inconsistent with their basic principles.



Involvement with the ACLU con't

- The Communist Party was the largest at this time in its U.S. history, having doubled its membership between 1936 and 1938 to just over 80,000.
- Having come from a loose anarcho-syndicalist movement, Flynn was unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with party discipline and doctrinal shifts, often directed from Moscow.



Involvement in Irish Republican Movements

- **The strike against the Dublin Tramway Company was precipitated by the discharge of 200 men for membership in the “Irish Transport Workers Union.” The union responded by a general strike demanding the reinstatement of their fellow workers.**
- **Discrimination was a last resort after all other means of smashing the union had failed.**
- **William Murphy, president of the company is one of the biggest capitalists in Ireland.**
- **Posing as an Irish patriot, he nevertheless accepted a knighthood from the English King.**
- **The strike has produced intense police persecution.**

- **The police rushed to disperse the cheering crowd and a wild fight followed. Men and women were beaten and trampled on, blood dyed the streets, five hundred were so badly hurt they had to receive hospital treatment, one man was mortally wounded and has since died, and another man killed outright.**



Discussion



Imprisonment Years



Prisoner Number 11710



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn spent twenty-eight months in the Alderson Federal Women's Reformatory from 1954 to 1957. Elizabeth was also known as Prisoner Number 11710, now a heavy-set, gray-haired, elderly woman.

In 1951, at the age of sixty-one, Flynn was one of 132 "second tier" Party leaders indicted under the Smith Act for allegedly advocating the overthrow of the government by force and violence. She was found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.



Prisoner Number 11710 cont'd

Other women convicted along with her and sent to prison included:

- Claudia Jones, a Trinidad-born journalist, feminist, Black nationalist, and member of the National Committee of the Communist Party,
-
- and Polish immigrant Betty Gannett, a teacher, writer, and National Education Director for the Party.



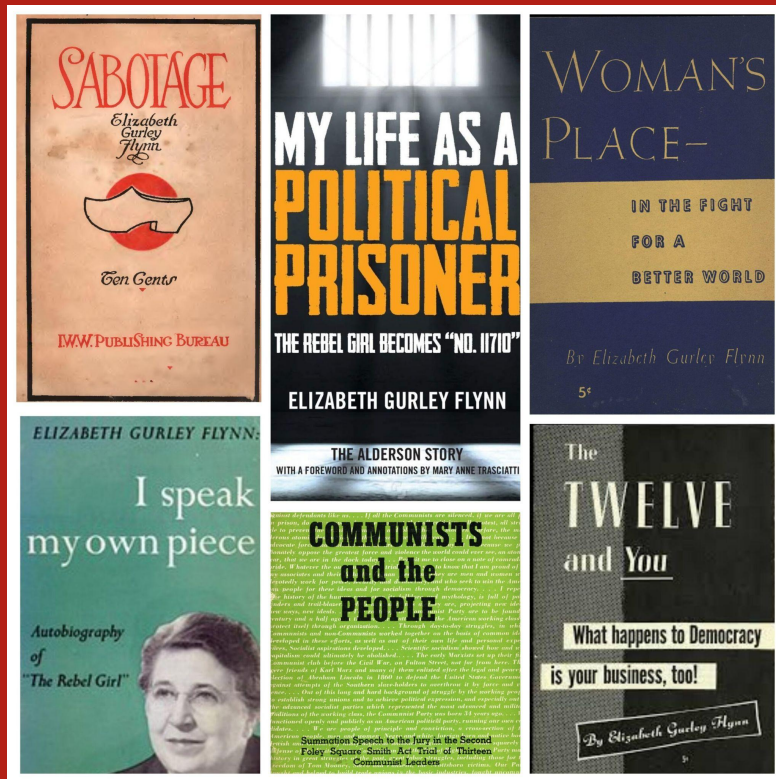


The Alderson story : my life as a political prisoner

by Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley

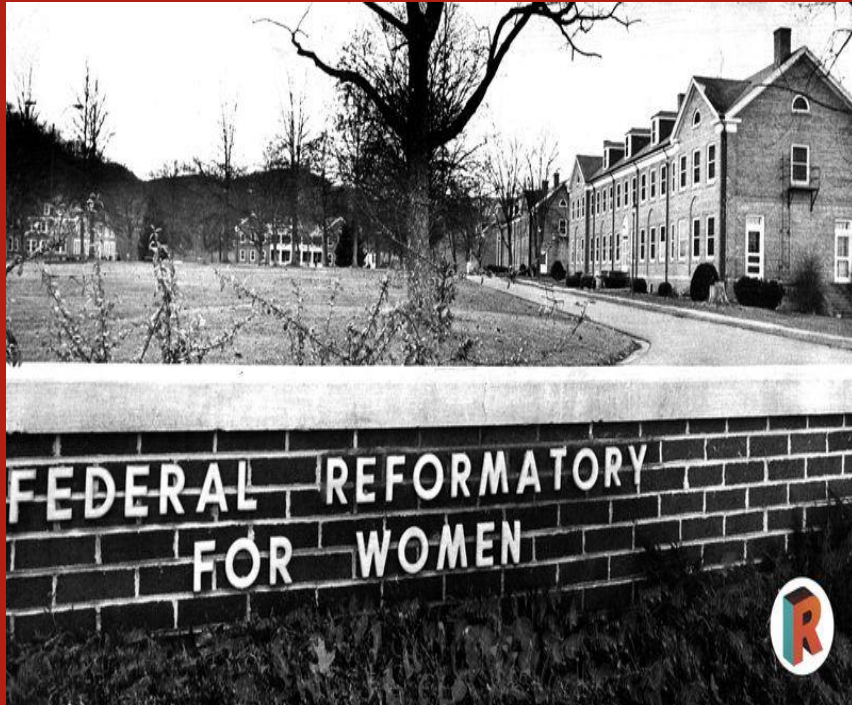
The narrative begins with Flynn's arrest at the hands of three FBI agents who stormed into her family's New York City apartment "on a hot morning in June 1951".

But the book is not about the excesses of Cold War anti-Communism or the Smith Act. The trial and appeals process are addressed in two very short chapters, and by the beginning of Chapter 3 we have arrived at Alderson, along with Flynn, Jones, and Gannett.





The Alderson Story - cont'd



The first federal women's prison in the United States, Alderson was founded in West Virginia in 1927. It was intended to be a place of regulation and reform, by the time Flynn got to Alderson the reformatory spirit had waned considerably. Confidence in the women, which had brought out the best in even the worst of them, was now replaced by distrust and suspicion, an atmosphere in which the inmate was always wrong. All forms of initiative were discouraged.



Subjects Covered in The Alderson Story

First, a strip search, followed by an enema and a search of all bodily cavities. Then, a shower, after which the new inmates were handed a rayon nightgown and a brown housecoat “of rough, nondescript material” (25), photographed and fingerprinted, and quarantined for three days.

“...no rich women were to be found in Alderson” —the majority were black and Spanish-speaking, many from abusive backgrounds, some mentally ill or suffering from drug addiction. Inmates and guards were racially segregated when the prison was founded, and the situation had not changed by the time Flynn arrived. Claudia Jones was assigned to a segregated “colored cottage.”



Subjects Covered in The Alderson Story

After the Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional in its 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Flynn, Jones, and other Communists were called upon by prison officials to help integrate the prison houses. Flynn clearly revelled in the irony of Communists being asked to enforce a civil rights edict issued by an arm of the US federal government.

Flynn's solidarity with the oppressed and unwavering commitment to social, political, and economic justice reverberate throughout the pages of her prison memoir. Never one to waste an opportunity for activism, she used her time at Alderson to get to know the women around her, understand how and why they ended up in prison, and use this knowledge to advocate on their behalf. She presents fellow inmates as complex individuals whose crimes more often than not were the consequence of struggling with limited resources against forces beyond their control.



CONCLUSION

Flynn’s commitment to internationalism and the solidarity of workers around the globe was matched by a strong affinity for the country in which she was born. Like her friend and mentor James Connolly, she saw no contradiction between love of country and revolutionary working-class politics. In a letter to her sister Kathie, days before her release from Alderson, she wrote:

“Nothing and nobody can take my country away from me. I sit in prison, thinking of its beauty, its breadth, its people. It is ever in my heart, my thoughts, my eyes—its growth, its vastness, its richness. Sitting in the twilight, watching the sun sinking in the West, I remember my country clear out to the Pacific Ocean.

Last three slides, source:

<https://www.cpusa.org/article/on-flynns-my-life-as-a-political-prisoner/>



Rebel Girl by Elizabeth
Gurley Flynn



Rebel Girl

Sample Text



Discussion & New Members Introductions



New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People's School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?



Discussion & Wrap Up



Announcements

- The PSMLS has recovered our old Youtube account we lost to wreckers in 2022 and we have re-uploaded all our old videos. Like, subscribe, and check out what subjects we covered prior and what we aware saying in the past.
- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.
- The next issue of New Masses (2025) has begun production. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to info@partyofcommunistsusa.net.



Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of volunteers for the staff of the People's School! Here's a few roles we need filled:

- People to help manage posting on our social media and podcast platforms
- Video Editors, Audio Editors, Graphic Designers, Artists, Narrators
- Facilitators, Web Controls, Moderators

Email info@peopleschool.us if you're interested and try to attend our next staff meeting if possible.




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here.




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TUESDAYS AND THURSDAY 8PM EST / 5PM PST
CLASSES HELD ON ZOOM, ALL ARE WELCOME



Materials to help promote the school!

What is the Peoples School?

The *Peoples School for Marxist Leninist Studies* is part of a long-line of American Communist Party sponsored schools, such as the *Jefferson School of Social Science* and the *People's School of Marxist Studies*.

The PSMLS was initiated by and is sponsored by the *Party of Communists USA*, but it is not a party school, which allows a wide variety of perspectives that don't necessarily reflect the party line.

We hold classes online every week on Tues at 8 PM EST - 9:30 PM EST and Thurs at 9 PM EST - 10:30 PM EST. These are public classes on Zoom that are organized into sections of presentations, and discussion periods. Join our classes and participate in collective education!



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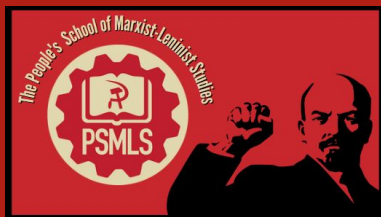
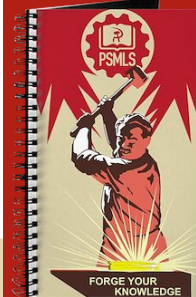
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"With no revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement"
- V. I. Lenin



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View From Left Field

<https://viewfromleftfield.libsyn.com>



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Like the Youtube videos and subscribe with 5 star ratings on your podcast platforms.

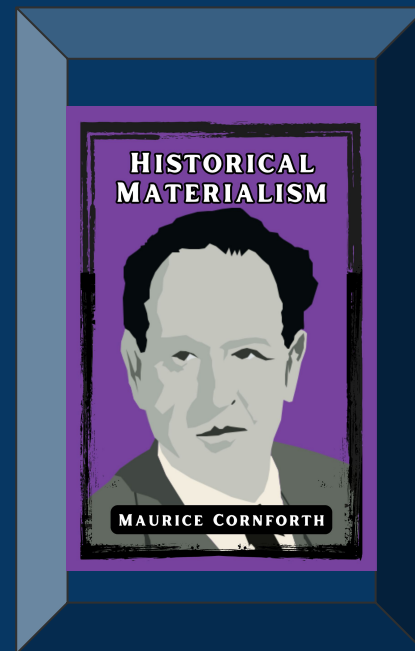
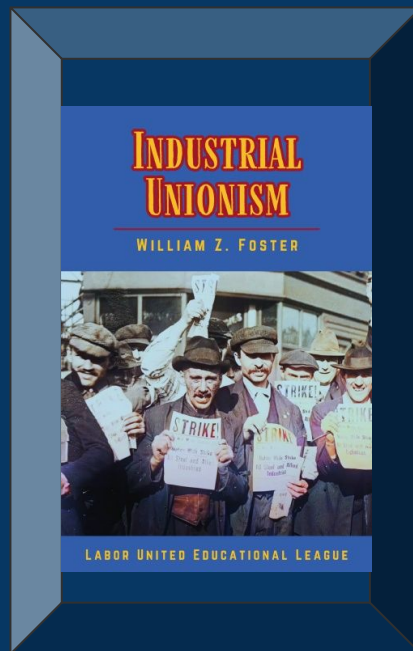
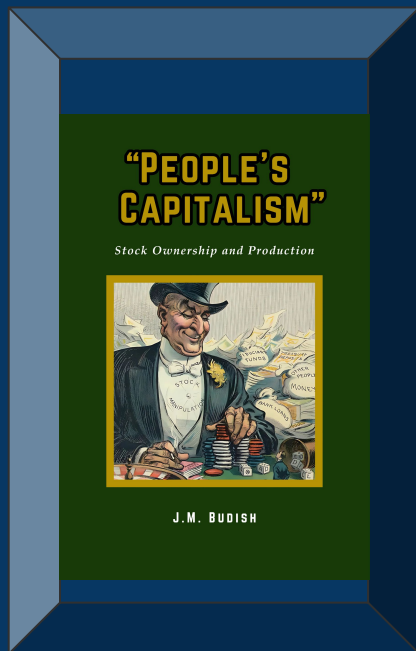
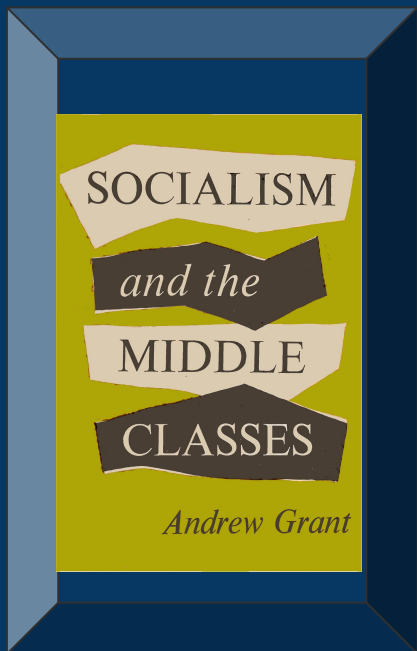




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