
The Letter from the International

[UCP Reply to the ECCI Letter to America of June 1920]

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On another page of this issue we print a letter from the Executive Committee of the Third International, addressed to the Executive Committee of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party. This letter is of tremendous significance to the Communist Movement in this country, as it incisively expresses the opinion of the International in regard to the factional disputes which have rent the movement during the last year.

The outstanding feature of the letter is the “categorical” demand that the two parties unite. While the letter was written at a time when the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party represented the division in the American Movement and before the United Communist Party, in which a majority of the former Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party have come together, was organized, this demand is of equal force in its application to the Federation group of the Communist Party, which still remains outside the united party. The Communist International is little likely to tolerate the “division of revolutionary forces” and “harmful duplication and unnecessary friction and unjustifiable waste of energy on internal struggle” which will result from this group remaining outside of the united party, as it was willing to tolerate that because of the division between the CP and CLP.

So far as the United Communist Party is concerned, it is ready to take up the problem of uniting the Federation group with the united party in the spirit urged by the letter of the Executive Committee of the International.

In view of the urgency of the unity demand of the International, which makes this question of major importance, an examination of the differences between

the United Communist Party and the Federation group of the Communist Party is in order. Such an examination will show that so far as questions of fundamental principles are concerned, the situation is exactly the same as that in which the Executive Committee of the International has decisively ruled.

“Principles.”

During the controversy which followed the conventions of last September [1919], the criticism most often made of the Communist Labor Party, largely by comrades who still remain with the Communist Party, was that there was a difference in the principles expressed in the program of the Communist Party and those expressed in the program of the Communist Labor Party, a difference to the detriment of the latter party. Although repeatedly challenged to point out this difference, it was never done. The minority of the Central Executive Committee of the CP, which fought for unity, again and again demanded across the conference table to the CEC that the difference in principles be stated clearly by those who opposed unity, but there never was any answer except evasion by juggling of words. Now comes the Executive Committee of the International with the clear-cut statement, “A close study of the documents from both sides has convinced us that there are no serious differences in the programs of the two parties.”

The present criticism of the program of the United Communist Party by the Federation group is of the same insincere character as that which was made of the Communist Labor Party program. As an example we cite the fact that the members of the

Federation group are informed in their official organ that only 3 pages of the United Communist Party program really belonged in a party program and the rest should be part of a manifesto. It happens that the United Communist Party combined its manifesto and program as one document, following the example of the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Russia. But this is considered a serious criticism!

Another criticism of the program is that part one does not say what part two does say, specifically the criticism being that being that in part one, which deals with the development and breakdown of capitalism “there is no mention of proletarian revolution, or proletarian dictatorship, or mass action.” This is of course true. The United Communist Party did not make of its program a meaningless jumble of words, but a document which opens with an analysis of capitalist society as it exists today, and then, logically develops this to the program of action. Because it does not speak of proletarian dictatorship when it analyzes capitalist production, but reserves the discussion of the proletarian dictatorship to the section devoted to the program of action, the program is worthless in the eyes of the Federation group. Such criticism is, of course, not sincere, but the expression of a person who must write something that sounds like criticism, even though there is nothing to criticize.

Another illustration of the same method is contained in the following paragraph, from No. 8 of the Federation [CPA] *Communist*: “Then it (the UCP program) goes on to speak of those countries ‘where the breakdown has been most complete,’ ‘where the masses have been goaded to final desperation’ — as if the proletarian revolutions were due simply to the fact that the masses had been goaded to final desperation!”

While on page 4 of this paper the paragraph quoted above appears as a criticism of the UCP program, on page 1, in the program adopted by the convention of the Federation group we read:

Mass action develops as the spontaneous activity of the workers massed in the basic industries; the mass strike is one of its initial forms; in these strikes large masses of the workers are unified by the impulse of the struggle, developing new tactics and new ideology. As the strikes grow in number and intensity they acquire political character by coming in direct conflict with the state, which openly employs its machinery for breaking the strike and crushing the workers organizations. This culminates in armed insurrection and civil war...

What causes the “spontaneous activity of the workers massed in the basic industries” of which this paragraph of the Federation group program speaks and out of which the final mass action grows? Does the Federation group make the foolish contention that all the workers massed in the basic industries consciously organize mass strikes to overthrow the capitalist state, or are these strikes the result of the pressure of capitalism, strikes into which they are “goaded” in order to seek relief from the unbearable condition which the breakdown of capitalism carries with it? If the writer of this criticism will read his own program again he will find that it presents the process of revolution as resulting from the same conditions as the statement describes which he criticizes.

The above example might be multiplied to show that the present criticism of the United Communist Party program by the Federation group is exactly that rebuked by the Communist International in its comparison of the CLP and CP programs.

There are, however, a number of concrete tactical and organization question of which the United Communist Party and the Federation group are in disagreement. Examination of these shows that in every instance the United Communist Party agrees with the position taken by the Executive Committee of the International, while the Federation group is in opposition to the views of the International.

AF of L and Industrial Unionism.

The first of these questions is the relation of the party to the AF of L and industrial unionism. On this question the Federation group program declares that it “rejects the idea as advocated by the IWW of ‘smashing the AF of L’ in order to reconstruct the trade unions.” It does not consider the organization of an industrial union an important question. The United Communist Party, on the other hand, declares that its members must “seize every opportunity to voice their hostility to this organization (the AF of L), not to reform it, but to destroy it,” and declares that “industrial unionism is potentially a factor in the action for the conquest of power,” and it therefore “propagandizes industrial unionism as against the craft unionism of the AF of L.”

The Executive Committee of the Communist International has this to say on the subject:

While assisting by every means the speedy split of the American Federation of Labor and other similar trade unions, the party must at the same time endeavor to establish a close contact with those economic organizations of the working class in which there is a tendency toward industrial unionism (IWW, OBU, WIIU, individual unions that have split away from the AF of L). The party must work in close contact with them, endeavoring at the same time to unite them and to create strong class conscious economic organizations of the proletariat. While supporting by all means the industrial unions in their everyday struggle for immediate economic demands, the party must endeavor to broaden and deepen this struggle, to transform it into a struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of the capitalist order — the final revolutionary aim of the proletariat.

Comparison of the above shows that the Federation group rejects the position of the International that the AF of L must be split and that all the elements with a tendency toward industrial unionism must be united, while the United Communist Party is in full accord with this position.

Shop Organizations.

The Federation [CPA] *Communist* bitterly criticizes the UCP program because it advocates the organization of shop committees which will carry on the everyday struggles in the shops, seeking to win such measure of control as can be won through the organized power of the workers, and thus training the workers in the work of management of industry. This, it says, is the IWW program of “building the new society within the shell of the old.” It also declares itself in favor of “Communist Party shop committees which become the nucleus for the formation of Workers’ Councils.”

The Executive Committee of the Communist International says on this point:

The party must so far as possible support the formation in the factories, besides Communist Party units, of shop committees, which serve, on the one hand, as a basis for the economic struggle, and on the other, as a school for the preparation of the vanguard of the working class for the administration of industries after the Dictatorship of the Proletariat has been established. It is understood that these shop committees must work in close contact with the industrial unions.

Here again the Federation group places itself in opposition to and criticizes the position of the

Communist International, with which the UCP is in agreement. The UCP proposes not only not to organize UCP shop groups, but shop committees which will be made up of both members and non-members. The International says that these shop committees will train the workers for the administration of industry after the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is established and this training, the UCP contends, will be acquired through the present struggle and such inroads on the shop control of the capitalists as the workers can wrest from that class under the existing conditions. These shop committees, through which all the workers are unified, and not the Communist Shop Branches, will serve as the basis for the Workers’ Councils.

Legal and Illegal Organization.

The Federation [CPA] *Communist* assaults the UCP because it did not declare itself an illegal organization in its constitution. It declares this to be evidence of an intention to transform the party into an open organization as quickly as that is possible. This is of course absurd, for let it be known to the Federation group that the UCP convention adopted for the guidance of its Central Executive Committee a resolution on the subject of legal and illegal organization, closely defining the character of legal organization that will be permitted. This resolution, because of detailed information about the party tactics on this question, which would serve the authorities in discovering and attacking the legal organization of the party, was not made public, but referred to the Central Executive Committee only.

While this disposes of this ridiculous criticism the attitude of the Federation group on this question again shows how much it is at variance with the International. The Federation group seems to think that there is some virtue in the very fact of being an illegal organization. There is none. We are an illegal organization because the capitalist state through its persecutions has made it impossible for us to advocate our program openly. We cannot compromise on our program and therefore we have become an illegal organization. This is also the position of the International. It advises that “we must learn to coordinate our legal work with illegal. We must make use of all the legal possibilities.”

Once more the Federation group finds itself

voicing views that are repudiated by the International. The Federation issue was discussed in a previous article and the facts show that on this question the position of the UCP approximates that of the International, while the form of Federation organization provided for by the Constitution of the Communist Party, which was not changed by its recent convention in this respect, provides for a form of federations that the International opposes.

Summary.

From the foregoing it is clear that on every point on which there is a difference between the Federation group and the UCP, the UCP is upheld by the letter of the International. The Federation group thus finds itself in the unenviable position of making issues of those questions on which the International condemns its position. Will the Federation group now attack the Executive Committee of the Communist International as "Centrist"?

The letter of the Executive Committee of the Communist International is a document which should reach every Communist in this country. Will the Federation group dare publish it in full in its official organ and have it similarly published in all its language organs? Dare it let the rank and file of the Communist Party who still remain outside of the United Communist Party learn the opinion of the Communist International on the issues between the two parties?

Its actions in this matter will show how sincere are its professions of being a Communist organization.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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