
Third Statement on the Unity Proceedings.

[December 16, 1920]

by Charles Dirba

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Copy in Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 33, ll. 71-72.

Dec. 16, 1920.

To the Membership of the Communist Party.

Dear Comrades:—

Our predictions about the “investigation on the ground” of our membership by the UCP have come true. It was merely a pretext upon which the UCP intended to defy and now has actually defied the mandates of the Executive Committee of the Comintern for a joint convention of both parties on the basis of proportional representation.

On the 14th of December [1920], that is, 2 weeks after the exchange of the statements of membership, the UCP committee called us to another meeting with them, at which they handed us the following letter:

[1]

*To the Central Executive Committee,
Communist Party of America.
[Dec. 12, 1920]*

December 12, 1920.

Comrades:—

We have analyzed your statement of membership given to our Unity Committee and have made an investigation of your membership claims in each District. This shows that your report is utterly unreliable, contains many discrepancies and contradictions, and could not by any stretch of imagination be considered as any proof whatever of your actual functioning membership.

Your method of recording dues, which you have inherited from the old Socialist Party, is a very poor guide to actual membership, since it does not show the dues paid by individual members, but merely the wholesale purchase

of dues stamps made by branch organizers. The mere fact that a branch organizer buys a supply of dues stamps is no proof whatever that the individual members of the branch pay dues, least of all that they pay the amount given for any certain months. The branch may keep a supply of stamps on hand to last for all of next year as far as the records show, and the dues stamps may never reach the individual members at all.

In the United Communist Party no subdivision “buys” dues stamps. Not a cent can be recorded as dues until the individual member has actually paid the dues into the Party treasury.

Our investigation shows that your entire statement of membership bears on its very face the evidence of gross manipulations. We find that in many places your membership is not half of what you claim, and that in others you count as members of the CP many members of social and legal organizations. These are only nominally divided into groups and take no part in underground Communist activity. Their only relation to the CP is that a portion of their receipts is automatically set aside for the purchase of dues stamps.

Again, your official statement claims 139 non-federation members. Your table of dues payments shows that 125 paid dues in July and August, only 117 for September and October, making an average of 121. In spite of this little discrepancy these figures bear the stamp of truthfulness, a quality that can certainly not be credited to your federation membership statement.

In spite of your modest claim of 3,018 members for your Lithuanian Federation, your report actually credits you with an average membership of 4,951 in this federation for July and August. A similar surprise is revealed by an analysis of your report of Russian, Ukrainian, and Lettish [Latvian] membership. A careful study of your statement as a whole shows an alleged membership of 10,137 for July and August at the 20 cent rate, and an average of only 4,792 for September and October at the 40 cent rate. Eliminating November payments, which have no rightful place in your report, the proportion is still worse. Then the average membership for September and October drops to only 1,902 at the 40 cent rate, while the average for July and August becomes 9,301, the bulk of whose dues are booked as paid NOT IN THE MONTHS TO WHICH THEY ARE CREDITED BUT IN THE MONTH OF OCTOBER, AFTER THE NEWS OF THE ORDER FOR UNITY HAD ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY FROM MOSCOW.

We of course appreciate the fact that by the simple

expedient of crediting October receipts as dues paid for July and August at the old 20 cent rate you achieve just double the membership as you would by putting it down for October at the 40 cent rate now in force. But do you really expect us to accept such figures just because they "appear on the official books" of your party?

The statement furnished by the UCP presents no such riddles. During the months of July, August, September, and October [1920], the UCP received for dues \$12,004.70, while the CP statement for the same period shows \$6,350.30 entered as dues receipts. The progress of the UCP is reflected in a steady increase of dues received from month to month. The evidence of manipulation by the CP is plainly visible in the miraculous increase of alleged dues receipts, coupled with an APPARENT DECREASE IN MEMBERSHIP. These facts are plainly brought out by the following comparison of the two statements month by month:

| | Dues Received | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | <i>July</i> | <i>Aug.</i> | <i>Sept.</i> | <i>Oct.</i> |
| UCP | \$2,139.40 | \$2,466.75 | \$3,153.15 | \$4,245.40 |
| CP | 609.60 | 773.40 | 1,570.40 | 3,369.90 |

These CP dues are so credited that the average membership for

| | |
|------------------|--------|
| July & Aug. | 10,137 |
| Sept. | 3,867 |
| Oct. | 5,743 |

It may be argued that the amazing increase of the October dues receipts is due to the increased dues rate. But your report shows that \$1,874.50 of the October receipts are booked at the rate of 20 cents, that is, for July and August. This is 33 percent higher than the receipts of the months of July and August combined. It is an injustice to suppose that the news from Moscow about unity has had its effect on the October report?

The statements from our district and group organizers who are in closest touch with your membership are unanimous to the effect that you have only a fraction of the membership that you claim in the respective localities. We already have on hand sufficient evidence to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that your membership claims are not in accordance with the facts, and that the bona fide underground membership of the United Communist Party far outnumbers that of the CP.

We accepted the mandate of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to enter into a unity convention with representation proportioned upon "an honest count of bona fide underground membership," and stand ready now to act upon that mandate. But your statement provides absolutely no basis for ascertaining the actual membership of the CP organized and functioning in underground groups. Therefore we have unanimously decided that it can not be accepted.

Central Executive Committee,
United Communist Party.

Paul Holt [Alfred Wagenknecht],
Executive Secretary.

Upon our specific question whether or not they had anything to add to their letter verbally, they answered no. We thought they would mention some specific cases upon which they based their assertions that in many places our membership is not half of what we claim, that in others we count as members of the CP many members of social and legal organizations who are only nominally divided into groups and take no part in underground Communist activities, that in certain localities their district and group (!) organizers are unanimous that we have only a fraction of our membership claim. They did not have anything to add to these bare and extravagant assertions of theirs.

Then we asked them, since their letter was apparently intended to dismiss further negotiations for a joint convention on the basis of proportional representation, as to what, in their opinion, the Unity Committee could further do in the direction of unity.

One of their committee answered very plainly that there was no use to talk proportional representation any further, that the Unity Committee might take up the main question of difference between the two parties, such as the Federation question, to try to reach an agreement on them, and so to prepare the way for the two conventions to come together.

They want to make the main points of difference not a matter for the joint convention to decide (in accordance with the decisions of the Comintern), but a matter of negotiation between the two committees or between the separate conventions of the parties. They are still sticking to their old preposterous idea of unity by negotiations and coalition, instead of an organic unity through a joint convention on the basis of proportional representation.

In view of all this their talk about "honest counts of bona fide underground membership," of imaginary incongruities in our statement, and of secret discrepancies between our dues figures and the actual membership of our Party, is a mere pretense, a sham, and a fraud.

Still we could not let them pass unchallenged, and we could not let an amazing error, upon which they base all of their so-called "analysis" of our statement, go unrevealed in all its absurdity.

In addition to that, since their refusal to accept the basis of representation given by the Executive Committee of the Comintern is not direct, but seemingly

conditional upon their findings as to the honesty and correctness of our membership statement, we wanted to put the whole matter up to them again, to force them to come out plainly with their real position and plans.

With this in view we have written them the following answer:

[2]

*To the Central Executive Committee,
United Communist Party of America.
[Dec. 16, 1920]*

December 16, 1920.

Comrades:—

Your letter of December 12th [1920], in which your committee definitely, categorically, and “unanimously” reject the dues paying membership statement submitted by the Communist Party, can have but one meaning — THAT YOUR COMMITTEE REFUSES TO OBEY THE MANDATE OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL TO ACHIEVE ORGANIC UNITY BY MEANS OF A JOINT CONVENTION BASED UPON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

In order to discreetly hide your opposition to this mandate your committee has resorted to two methods or rather “sharp practices”: viz., (1) an alleged analysis of our membership figures submitted to you by our committee (including the official books of language federations), and (2) an alleged “investigation on the ground,” which your committee claims to have made.

Both, the analysis of our membership report and the so-called investigation on the ground, bear on their face all the evidence of deceit and willful distortion, the clear intent of which is to screen your opposition to the basis of proportional representation at the unity convention UNLESS YOU ARE ASSURED OF A MAJORITY OF DELEGATES BEFOREHAND, which policy is in keeping with your expressed attitude during the whole process of negotiations.

Before dissecting and exposing your “analysis” of our figures and your “investigation” of our membership, we shall quote again the decision of the Communist International in reference to the basis of the joint convention, as proposed by your own representative, Comrade John Reed, and modified by the Executive Committee of the Comintern, which you submitted to our committee: “Representation at the Unity Convention shall be proportional, and the basis shall be the number of dues paying members for July, August, September, and October [1920] (originally — by the 1st of Sept.), according to the official books of both parties.”

The decision is explicit, and admits of no ambiguities, such as your committee has tried to read into it. Either you accept the “official books” of our party, or you do not. If you do not accept them as an honest record of the dues paid in our party during the months of July, August, September, and October, your committee must bring PROOF and not mere assertions and vague charges, that the books have

been falsified. Further, if your committee desired to verify our membership figures by any REAL INVESTIGATION, the *only possible* course would have been through the cooperation of our Party. WITHOUT THE COOPERATION OF OUR ORGANIZATION, as your pretended “investigation” was made, it is the sheerest fraud and an imposition upon every member of the Communist movement in America, as well as upon the Communist International itself.

Your flippant and arrogant attitude towards unity of the Communist movement in America, as expressed in all your communications, and finally this last fraudulent and insincere attempt to waive aside the only real basis upon which organic unity can be achieved — PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION — by such flimsy and entirely unsubstantiated charges as presented in your last letter, brands all of your protestations for unity as mere camouflage.

Now, as to your “investigation on the ground,” you claim: “We have made an investigation of your membership claims in each district. This shows that your report is utterly unreliable, contains many discrepancies and contradictions, and could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered as proof whatever of your actual functioning membership.”

Such a sweeping charge can only be justified by a bona fide investigation and the FULL AND DETAILED REPORT OF SUCH INVESTIGATION.

Is such a report submitted? Nothing of the sort.

Instead, in the paragraph next to the last, your committee states in the vaguest possible terms that: “The statements from our district and group organizers who are in closest touch with your membership are unanimous to the effect that you have only a fraction of the membership that you claim in the respective localities. We already have on hand sufficient evidence to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that your membership claims are not in accordance with the facts, and that the bona fide under-ground membership of the United Communist Party far outnumbers that of the CP.”

WE CHALLENGE YOUR COMMITTEE TO PRODUCE THE EVIDENCE.

As to the statements from your district and group organizers who are supposed to be in closest touch with our membership and who are unanimous in their testimony — THIS EVIDENTLY IS THE EXTENT AND MANNER OF YOUR INVESTIGATION.

It is a piece of brazen trickstery to pretend that inquiry of your own officialdom as to the membership figures of a competitive underground party district and apart from your own, is a BONA FIDE INVESTIGATION.

There is not a particle of truth in your statement that we count as members of the CP many members of social and legal organizations who are only nominally divided into groups and take no part in underground Communist activity. We challenge you to point out one single instance of it, to produce one iota of evidence for this one of the many bare assertions of yours.

Even the idea of an investigation could only have been justified if, in the examination of our books and records, you would have found serious discrepancies or evidence of fraud or forgery. But you could find no such evidence. Your unsupported allegations and your false “analysis” of our dues paying membership figures in no way affect the question.

Were we inclined to disregard the mandatory decisions of the Comintern, and its detailed decisions regarding the manner of achieving organic unity, we would have much more ground to demand an investigation of your membership figures, than you have of ours. It is a matter of common knowledge that your party has been constantly losing part of your membership ever since your convention [1st: Bridgman, MI — May 26-31, 1920]. You have had defections in the state of Washington, in California, and Ohio of the Scandinavian, German, and Jewish Federations, and a number of Russian branches. Surely this does not square with the glowing report of membership increase month by month as recorded in your statement — unless an extraordinary amount of back dues was paid for June and May still in September and October.

It is obvious that recent decreases or increases in the membership of any organization would not by any means be fully indicated in a statement of dues average for four months back previous to the last. The Communist International was perfectly aware of this when making the decision.

But there is no way by which these fluctuations could be definitely ascertained and proven up to the last day before the convention, and it would have been wrong for us to raise this point against your statement. We are ready to accept your statement, because it was in substantial agreement with your official books, and we could not find anything wrong with them without a lengthy and thorough investigation.

Certainly we had more reasons to doubt your figures than you have to doubt ours. Our federation organs each month carry a financial statement to the membership. This custom is one of long standing. If your committee had attempted to compute these statements and compare them with the analysis of the membership figures submitted by our Secretary to our last convention [2nd: New York — July 13-18, 1920], and published in our official organ, you would have found that these figures mutually corroborate each other.

As to your “analysis” of our statement: Our statement shows dues actually paid for during the months of July, August, September, and October [1920], that is, the basis which the Executive Committee of the Comintern designated for the computation of the representation at the joint convention, and not some abstract “honest count of bona fide underground membership,” as misquoted by your committee. Not that the Communist International is against an “honest count,” but because dues figures, averaged for a period of time, are the only authentic and reliable membership figures available, particularly in an underground organization; it also designated this method because it wished to preclude the possibility of either side balking from going to the joint convention because of this point. But the UCP have discovered a method of circumventing even the specific decisions of the Communist International.

You state in your letter that our method of recording dues, inherited from the Socialist Party, is a very poor guide to actual membership, since it does not show the dues paid by individual members. You go further and say: “The mere fact that a branch organizer buys a supply of dues stamps is no proof whatever that the individual members of the branch pay dues, least of all that they pay the amount given for any certain months. The branch may keep a supply of

stamps on hand to last for all of next year as far as the records show, and the dues stamps may never reach the individual members at all.”

The implication here, aside from the comment on our method of recording dues, is to cast doubt upon the honesty of every group and branch organizer in our party. To imply such a doubt, without submitting any proof of any instances of fraud, is the height of insolence and maliciousness. Moreover, if the CEC of the UCP doubt the honesty of our branch organizers, officials elected directly by the membership, why is it that they expect us to take the word of their district organizers, who are direct representatives of their CEC?

As a matter of fact, though the UCP claim that with them “not a cent can be recorded as dues until the individual member has actually paid the dues into the Party treasury,” our committee in checking up your statement found several cases wherein you admitted that your district organizers had reported “sundry items” as dues! Of course, those were mistakes. But, if any money CAN be recorded as dues without having any connection with dues whatsoever, what becomes of your positive statement that “not a cent can be recorded as dues...until paid,” etc.? And, if honest mistakes can be made so easily by your own direct representatives — how about the possibility of padding?

However, we have no such proof and we make no such charges, nor do we question the honesty of your district organizers. We merely mention it to show that there is no such steel-proof method of recording dues paid in the UCP as your statement claims. Were we to descent to mutual bickering as to the honesty of the respective officials of both parties, there would be no possibility for a unity convention in the near future — there would be no possibility for a long time to come.

Our method of recording dues is based upon dues actually paid by branches during certain months. In a membership composed almost exclusively of workers, dues are not always promptly paid for the current months. Some comrades are behind for one, two, or three months, as the state of their finances and the conditions of their particular industry permit. Then they pay for two or three months at a time. But these delays and irregularities cannot be pitted against the law of averages. If the system remains the same, the exceptions work both ways, and the average dues calculated for a sufficiently long period of time will still indicate pretty closely the actual dues paying membership of the party. That is why the Comintern so wisely demanded that the basis of representation shall be the average dues for four months.

Your attempts to prove that “our entire statement of membership bears on its very face the evidence of gross manipulations” are all based upon a fundamental error which betrays gross ignorance of one of the most elementary and obvious rules of arithmetical calculation, if not a willful juggling of figures on your own part.

You are not satisfied with the terms “August dues” or “September dues,” as used in our statement, to mean dues paid by our branches IN the months of August and September respectively. You have undertaken to move the dues paid in September and October at the old rate (FOR July, August, or even June) back to July and August; but you fail to correct the July and August figures to the same

basis (to subtract from them dues paid FOR June and previous months); neither do you take into consideration the fact that dues FOR September and October will still be paid in November and December. You have attempted to distort the meaning of our figures by applying one basis to September and October dues, but leaving July and August dues as they are. Hence the incongruities of your "analysis," the figure of 10,137 as July and August average, while September and October show up as 3,867 and 5,743 respectively. Then you proceed to apply still another basis (of the month when dues reached our National Office), and leave September and October with an average of only 1,902.

Dealing with concrete numbers you have mixed denominations; you have performed subtractions and additions with "dues paid in a month" and "dues paid for a month," which mean different things in our system of dues collections. You have violated (consciously or unconsciously) one of the most elementary and indispensable laws of arithmetic, and then you cry "manipulation!"

Here we want to repeat some explanations given to your comrade who claimed to have been entrusted by your Committee to analyze our statement.

In our statement, as all throughout our books and records, we designate dues by the month in which (during which) they were paid by the branches. There is no way of ascertaining, *ex post facto*, what part of the dues paid are for back dues, or paid in advance. That a portion of our membership is one or two months in arrears becomes apparent only in the case of a change in the rate of dues. And it is quite a natural and generally accepted fact. In your own statement you make an addition for back dues collected by you in July at the old rate, amounting to two-thirds of the total number of your July dues. Even your constitution allows payment of back dues for three months. What reason then is there for you to dispute such back dues on our statement?

In the case of the Lithuanian Federation, which shows the greatest proportion of these back dues on our statement, the explanation is this: that their former Secretary was inefficient, and the organizational work, especially the technical part in July and August, suffered so that in August, for example, only one district paid dues. A new Secretary was elected, well qualified for the work, efficient, and having the confidence of their membership. First of all this comrade, naturally, made a campaign for the payment of back dues, and the great increase in their dues in September and October resulted.

This explains to a great extent also the abrupt increase in the amount of dues reaching the National Office from August to September [1920], and from September to October. At present these figures are \$609.60 for July, \$773.40 for August, \$1,570.40 for September, and \$3,396.90 for October. Normal collection of dues in the Lithuanian Federation would have improved August by about \$350. In October there is a \$300 item paid in advance (plainly indicated as such in our statement), and the increase in the rate of dues accounts for \$756.20; so that for purposes of comparison the October figure would come down to \$2340.70, part of which is further accounted for by the Lithuanian Federation back dues, the heaviest portion of which reached the National Office in October. How about your own case? Your dues figures jumped from \$373.00 in June to \$2,139.40 in July?!

This illustrates further that back dues show on your records as well as ours, and so they must show if the statements are to be a reflection of the actual dues payments in both parties. Your dues record for June, as published in your July 17th [1920] issue, shows \$373.00 received; at 50 cents each it represents 750 dues. Surely your membership was much more than that! Naturally the dues record of your party for the months of July and August, and possibly September, carry a large percentage of back dues for the month of June. Therefore, your own statement is not an actual record of the dues paid for the four months, but it is a record of the dues actually paid *in* these months, including back dues as well as current dues.

This proves that the statement submitted by the CP and the UCP are substantially similar in form and contents. It also proves that the method of recording dues differs very little in both parties. The UCP are also unable to define *ex post facto* just what proportion of the dues paid *IN* a month is for current or back dues. The whole criticism is of no significance, except that it exposes your unscrupulous attempt to capitalize an "apparent discrepancy" to your advantage.

It must be apparent to your committee that it is no longer possible to delay unity negotiations by such flimsy methods. The demand and decisions of the Communist International for unity are based upon the principle of proportional representation. The Communist Party will not and can not recede from this position. We have submitted a record of the dues paid during the four months designated by the Communist International, which shows as near as possible the correct average dues paying membership in our Party for that period. Your "analysis" of these figures is nothing more than deliberate distortion and juggling of figures. Your "investigation on the ground" to disprove our membership figures contains no facts or proof, except unsupported allegations purporting to be reports of your organizers who are supposed to be in close touch with our membership.

We demand that your committee reconsider its position, and resume negotiations on the basis of the statement submitted by us.

Should you refuse, we shall be compelled to inform the Communist International fully of your decision and await further instructions.

We refuse to accept the conclusion or entertain the idea, expressed by one member of your Unity Committee upon delivery of your letter, that there is no use to talk of proportional representation any further, and that instead our committee should try to reach an agreement on the main points of difference, such as the Federation question, and so prepare the way for both conventions to get together. We are absolutely opposed to the holding of separate conventions. We stand for a unity convention as demanded by the Communist International.

Should you decide to break off negotiations nevertheless, and hold a separate convention at this time, then we demand that a representative of our CEC shall be admitted to your convention to explain our party's position on unity.

Unity Committee,
Communist Party of America.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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