
Summary of the Central Executive Committee's Report to the Extraordinary 3rd Convention of the Communist Party of America.

[February 1921]

Material originally published in *The Communist Bulletin* [CPA], March 31, 1921.

Summary version here published in *The Communist Review* [London], June 1921.

This material reprinted as a pamphlet by 1000 Flowers, Corvallis, OR, Feb. 2004.

Footnotes by Tim Davenport from the pamphlet edition, revised Dec. 2004.

GENERAL PROGRESS

Since the last convention in July 1920, the Communist Party has made good progress in organization and propaganda.

At that time the party had not yet quite recovered from the split, which, being led by a former secretary of the party, took away our connections in three districts — the IV, V, and VI; took away about \$7,000 of our funds; and put the membership into a state of confusion.¹

But soon things began to pick up. Although we were short of comrades qualified to act as District Organizers, so that District VI obtained a permanent organizer only in the middle of September [1920], good connections were fully established everywhere, and membership records, both by reports and dues pay-

ments, improved right along. Collections from Day's Wages and for the organization fund (the totals are \$13,078.57 and \$6,530.73, respectively, for the six months ending December 31, [1920]) soon put our finances in good shape, so that we could go ahead with the distribution of leaflets, printing pamphlets and books, and in December even to begin to issue another paper.

Although quite a number of our comrades left for Russia, still the membership records show an average of 6,371 for the last three months — November [1920], December [1920], and January [1921]. The January figure being 6,693 as against 7,250 for the first three months of July, August, and September [1920].²

From a balance of \$707.53 at the beginning of July, we have gained a balance of \$4,801.87 at the end of January.³

1. The "former secretary of the party" and "split" mentioned here refers to C.E. Ruthenberg and the faction of the CPA associated with him which left the CPA to unite with the Communist Labor Party in May 1920 to form the United Communist Party of America. District 4 of the old CPA encompassed Western New York, Western Pennsylvania, and Ohio; District 5 ; District 6 included Chicago and the state of Illinois. The CPA also a negligible presence in Districts 7 (Mississippi to the Rockies) and 8 (Rockies West) both before and after the split of the Ruthenberg group.

2. As was the case with the Socialist Party of America (SPA) which preceded it, dues to the Communist Party of America were collected monthly. Dues stamps were advanced to Federations and regional organizations by the center, batches of which were sold and replaced each month. The Federation retained 20¢ and sent in the 40¢ remainder to the National Office for each stamp sold. This dues-stamp system, which seems to have originated in the trade union movement in the previous century, showed sizeable sales fluctuation from month to month. The true size of groups using this system is determined by calculating the average number of dues stamps sold over the course of a given quarter or year. The figure cited in this report for the 3rd Quarter of 1920 is round and obviously not exact; it is clear from this data, however, that even after the departure of the Ruthenberg group in 1920, an additional 1,000 of the already depleted corps of 7,250 members departed the CPA's ranks. In the SPA — and no doubt also the CPA — January was always a "heavy" dues month in which state, local, and federated organizations tended to "stock up" on dues stamps and members tended to turn over a new leaf by paying up on dues in arrears. Including the inflated January dues stamp tally with the 6,210 average for the preceding November and December and then representing that January count as typical was no doubt an effort to portray the grim data on membership attrition as favorably as possible. Including October membership data with the count for November and December and presenting a true 4th Quarter membership figure to compare with that of the 3rd quarter would have revealed the true magnitude of the loss.

3. It is interesting to note that the departure of the Ruthenberg group very nearly bankrupted the CPA. A loss of \$7,000 of party funds with the Ruthenberg group is mentioned above, leaving a total of just over \$700 in party coffers on the even of the CPA's 2nd Convention in July 1920. The CPA's ability to recover from that loss, to continue its operations with a reduced dues revenue stream, and still to be able to restore about half of the lost sum to party coffers in just over half a year is impressive.

The circulation of *The Communist* has risen from 6,000 to 8,000; the other paper is printed in 18,000 copies; 11 pamphlets and books have been published, most of them in 10,000 copies each; four general leaflets issued, the last in 390,000 copies, and several local [leaflets issued], such as on the Coal Strike, the Street Car Strike, and the Shipyard Strike. Besides this, the Language Federations have issued their legal and illegal papers, leaflets, pamphlets, books, etc., as will appear in their reports.

DEVELOPMENTS AND DECISIONS ON ORGANIZATION QUESTIONS

Solution of the one organization question which was so threatening at the last convention, appointments from top down to (and including) the sub-district organizers, and elections from bottom up to (and including) the local organizers, is working well; there have been no conflicts between the representatives from the central bodies and the representatives of the membership.

The only disturbance in our organization during the last seven months which is worth mentioning is the split in the Lettish Federation; and that was precipitated rather on legalistic and nationalistic lines, than on the issues of party organization, although the demagogues who later went over to the UCP also used the lure of "democracy" for their purposes. In this split the Lettish Federation lost...a little over 200 men, some of whom have recently decided to come back to the CP. The SEC decided, however, that seceding groups or organizations should not be taken back as a whole.

The seceding groups of the Jewish Federation came back to the CP in October. The CEC permitted them to be taken back as whole groups, ordering the exclusion of Raphael,⁴ who was mainly instrumental in bringing about the split in the Jewish Federation, and who deserted the Communist Party so shamelessly in the split. The experience with these returning groups

in the Jewish Federation prompted the decision that no seceding groups should be taken back as a whole.

The Polish Federation definitely reaffiliated with the CP in October.

These two federations, the Jewish and the Polish, suffered most in the Party split, and it was necessary to render them financial assistance, especially to the Jewish Federation, so they should be able to carry on the work of propaganda and organization in their languages.

Applying to all sub-divisions and organizations of the Party, including all federations, was the decision of the CEC that all party publishing concerns and legal press must be under the direct control and ownership of party management.⁵ Important steps have been taken in several federations to comply with this decision.

Another important decision regarding organization was that providing for the addition of federation sub-district organizers to all sub-district executive committees. This was found necessary in order to make them the point of contact not only between the appointed officials of the party and the elected representatives from the membership, but also between the appointed officials of the federations and the local organizers who are elected from all branches in the local at large. This provision has fully justified itself in practice, and is now included in the draft constitution proposed by the CEC.

The decisions that the CEC should have the addresses of all sub-district organizers for emergency cases; that the dismissal as well as the appointment of all sub-district organizers is subject to the approval of the CEC; and that the regular party literature is to be sent to sub-districts directly wherever possible — are self-explanatory.

As to Federation branches in Canada, since there was and is no Communist Party in existence in Canada, the CEC decided that they should belong to Federations of the CP of America, and function as integral parts of the Party. Two sub-districts have been orga-

4. Underground pseudonym of Alexander Bittelman. Bittelman was an active participant in the Communist Unity Committee of America during the first half of 1921 and was a stern critic of the Central Executive Committees of both the CPA and UCP for their failure to achieve organic unity in accord with the explicit directions of the Communist International.

5. Little is known about the non-English publications of the various language federations of the American Communist movement. Extremely few copies of such publications seem to have survived, while some of the few surviving leaflets, pamphlets, and newspapers have no doubt been improperly identified as to origin.

nized there as parts of District Four, and all Party literature has been supplied to them under the same name as in the US.

Owing to the fact that the CEC has found it necessary to appoint members of itself suitable to act as district organizers, it is unable to find enough comrades outside of the CEC as district organizers in four districts, even though it meant that they would reside then quite a distance from the headquarters of the Party. This has been found quite an obstacle to the proper functioning of the CEC, and the provisions of the constitution in this respect should be complied with more strictly in the future.

The issuance of membership certificates has been changed several times, as the circumstances demanded, the final provisions being such as to restrict them to such members as have been in the Party for at least a year, and that they should be issued only by the branch organizers if the member is not personally known to a higher Party sub-division.⁶ There was danger of the certificates being misunderstood at the other side, if issued by the central body directly, and there was also danger that persons might join the Party merely to get a certificate. The Party discouraged as much as possible exodus of members to Russia.

The decision that calling of the meetings of more than one group, and large captains' meetings were to be considered violation of the constitution, was taken for reasons of conspiracy, and to insure the authority of action to the regular Party sub-divisions, groups, branches, locals, etc.

This was passed by the CEC; it should be clear that this does not prohibit larger meetings for the purpose of discussion and propaganda, and meetings called for specific purposes, such as shop and union nuclei, etc.

On the basis of experience for the last seven months, the present CEC recommends to the incoming CEC that there should be a permanent assistant secretary, who should be ready to take the place of the secretary whenever emergency demands; that for the

same reason there should be one paid sub-district organizer in each district, if means will permit — also to act as assistant district organizer. We are sure that there will be enough work for all these comrades all the time.

DEVELOPMENTS AND DECISIONS ON QUESTIONS OF POLICY

Your CEC was compelled to change the name of the Communist Party Shop Committees to Communist Nuclei, as the former name created much confusion, leading to the belief that the work of the nuclei must consist only of activity in the shops, while in reality the Communist nuclei must function both in the shops, the unions, and all other workers' organizations; on the other hand, the name of the Communist Party Shop Committees is misleading because it conveys the idea of non-partisan shop committees, and created an erroneous impression that the Communist Party intended to replace the non-partisan shop committees by the Communist shop committees.⁷

As a matter of fact, the CEC never intended to project this idea. The Second Convention of the CP of A did not discuss the creation of such non-partisan shop committees, which were considered by some of the delegates to be premature, as the objective and subjective conditions were not satisfactorily ripe for their organization.

In connection with this, we must mention that your CEC deemed it necessary to advise our Communist nuclei to co-operate with other officials of the reactionary trade unions. At the same time we have cautioned them to act carefully and not to disclose their identity while co-operating with other groups.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEGAL WORKERS' SOCIETIES

The CEC found it necessary to interpret the at-

6. Certificates of membership in the CPA were issued for the purpose of documenting the Communist credentials of individuals returning to Soviet Russia. An exodus of Slavic Communists to Soviet Russia severely hampered the American Communist organization in this period and contributed to an already burgeoning pool of unemployed workers in the Soviet Republic. Transfers abroad, particularly of unskilled laborers, were consequently discouraged and the issuance of certificates of membership restricted.

7. Note that this change in nomenclature seems to have been a decision undertaken by the American CPA leadership on its own authority for practical reasons rather than as a result of external direction.

titude of the last convention towards legal workers' societies, since there was a serious error in the report of the last convention which appeared in the official organ, *The Communist*, with regard to these societies.

Your CEC took a stand against creating new legal societies, but deemed it necessary to advise our members to join and remain in the existing legal workers' societies, and, in keeping with the Theses of the Communist International, to use all their endeavors to bring the members of such societies to our point of view.⁸

PROGRAM FOR STUDY CLASSES

Your CEC issued a program for study classes which consisted of two parts — an elementary and an advanced course. As the period during which this program was in effect was very short, we are not in a position to make definite conclusions as to the results, especially as during this time the attention and interest of the membership was taken up with the question of unity.

EDITORIAL POLICY OF *THE COMMUNIST*, THE PAPER NO. 2, LEAFLETS, PAMPHLETS, ETC.

In order that *The Communist*, our official organ, should become a theoretical organ propagating Communist principles and tactics, your CEC proposes that it should be issued as a monthly magazine. At this

stage of the Communist movement in America, it is essential that the CP should publish a genuine propaganda organ as our official party organ. The Communist has been neither a propaganda nor an agitational organ; and its tone, form, and character have not been such as the magnitude and high purpose of our movement requires. With the issuing of Paper No. 2, the work of regular agitation has been taken over by this paper; and therefore our official organ, *The Communist*, should devote all its space to propaganda and the discussion of party principles and policies, together with scientific and theoretical articles for the education and training of our membership, and development of Communists out of the party sympathizers.⁹ Such a scientific magazine will fill a much-needed want in this country, and will develop real Communist understanding among the membership, and develop Communist leaders in America among the English-speaking elements.

Purely party news and official party matters, together with the discussion of controversial party affairs, should be published in an official party bulletin to be issued bi-weekly, free of charge, to the membership.¹⁰ Such a bulletin will keep the members of the CP posted on all party affairs, and keep them in close contact with their central organizations.

Also Paper No. 2 shall be made a weekly, and carry on the popularization of Communist theory and practice. It carries the Communist message into the ranks of the organized workers, in the trade and industrial unions, and to the broad masses generally, in popular language. It gives the Communist point of view upon the immediate issues confronting the American working class, and reviews the proletarian revolu-

8. The tactical line of Communist participation within the existing political and economic organizations of the working class was forcefully advanced by Lenin in his small book *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, published in 1920 by the CPA as *The Infantile Sickness of "Leftism" in Communism*. This book, written by Lenin for an international audience (with a particular eye to Great Britain), was one of the most important theoretical documents of the founding years of the world communist movement and should be carefully examined by those attempting to understand the ideology of early American communism.

9. There were at least eight American publications in the decade of the 1920s known as *The Communist*; one truly does need a scorecard to tell them apart. The CPA version of *The Communist* was issued from Sept. 27, 1919 through April 1, 1921 and was the successor to another publication called *The Communist* that was produced in July and August 1919, which was in turn the successor to the most important newspaper of the Left-Wing Section of the SPA, *The Revolutionary Age*. When the CPA moved underground in response to government repression, *The Communist* moved underground with it. This created the need for a public agitational organ, ambiguously titled "Paper No. 2" in party documents to keep federal investigators at bay. This conspiratorial tactic also serves to stump the modern historian, however. The December 1920 date of origin of this "Paper No. 2" is alluded to near the beginning of this document, thus making it clear that this unnamed publication predated *Workers' Challenge*, the 1922 newspaper of the CPA's "United Toilers' Party" front organization.

10. This bulletin seems to have been extremely short-lived. No copies are known to have survived.

11. The Communist Party of America published its "legal" pamphlets under the imprimatur "Contemporary Publishing Association" — the acronym CPA not accidentally being the same for each.

tion in other countries. Paper No. 2 is an important organ of the party, and one of the chief means of maintaining contact with the working masses, of giving a popular expression to Communist theory, and of rallying the advanced workers in the unions for the destruction of the reactionary trade union bureaucracy, thus bringing the labor unions into line with the proletarian revolution in America and other countries.

Popular legal pamphlets on the different phases of Communism were issued, but these pamphlets should be very simply written, so that they may be brought to the attention of the less educated workers. Pamphlets and books dealing with the more advanced and scientific formulae of Communism are equally necessary. These may be legal or illegal, according to the subject of its treatment.¹¹ Leaflets, legal or illegal, have been frequently issued on matters of issues, strikes, unemployment, etc. These leaflets should be concise, brief, and keep within the bounds of the particular problem and subject upon which they are issued. All pamphlets and books should be issued only by the CEC of the party and Federation EC. Leaflets of a general nature dealing with theoretical discussion of Communist principles should only be issued by the CEC and the FEC. Subordinate units of the Party should be allowed to issued leaflets on local problems, strikes, or the local manifestations of a general strike, etc. Mistakes by inexperienced members in the subordinate units are bound to occur in issuing such leaflets, but the members will learn by their mistakes, and it is preferable to inactivity.

PROGRAM AND CONSTITUTION

The CEC brings before the convention a complete program for your consideration, based upon the decisions of the Second World Congress of the Communist International. The program presented by the CEC for your consideration at the convention suggests changes and the clarification of the Party's attitude toward the questions of the Communist Nuclei, Factory Committees, and the Trade Union movement, the Colonial question, Imperialism, the agricultural workers, tenant and poorer farmers and the semi-pro-

letariat, and the function of the Communist Party of America.

* * * 12

COMMUNIST UNITY

On this question a number of documents and statements are given, showing considerable divergence in views between the two Communist Parties. The position at the beginning of April [1920] is summed up by the following letter:—

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND UNITED COMMUNIST PARTY

Comrades:

The undersigned, delegates of the Communist Party and the United Communist Party to the Second Congress of the Communist International were designated by the Executive Committee of the International to see that its decision for unity in the American Communist movement was realized in life.

Upon our arrival and investigation of the situation, we were convinced that a deadlock had been reached which could be broken only by further intervention by the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and this time in such a form that neither party could evade the issue.

Having come to this conclusion, we wished to end the factional controversy on unity, which is demoralizing our movement, until the Communist International compels unity. To this end we proposed the following plan:

That each CEC elect three members to a National Council; that this Council shall function in the name of "The Communist Party of America (Unified);" that it shall issue a central organ which shall have two editors, one from each party; that it shall publish literature, issue proclamations, and carry on as much work as the two parties shall agree to jointly; that the two parties shall maintain their organizations intact, and continue to publish all their papers except the central organ; that each party shall submit a detailed statement to the Executive Committee of the Communist International on why unity has not been accomplished, and what are the real issues which divide the parties, so that the Executive Committee

12. Elipses as published in document rendered in *The Communist Review*.

shall instruct the unity convention how to decide on these controversial questions.

It is not our task to pass judgment on the two parties on this matter; but it is our task to try and end the factional controversy, even if only by a semblance of unity.

The CEC of the Communist Party rejected our proposal, declaring that it is unworkable and in contradiction to the instructions on unity of their recent convention.

The CEC of the United Communist Party accepted our proposal in principle, while making certain amendments which they thought would make the plan work better.

To our regret, we have, accordingly, been unable to break the deadlock.

We shall accordingly report to the Executive Committee that we cannot break the deadlock, and we shall make definite, concrete suggestions to the Communist International on how to break the deadlock and how to realize actual unity — unity of a character which will give factional control to neither party, but which shall be the unity desired by the International

itself, and in accord with the requirements of the American movement.

In the meanwhile, we call upon the CECs and the membership of both parties not to make factional capital out of our proposal, which was intended to end the factional struggle; we declare that to use our proposal in a factional spirit is to indicate desire for control and not for real unity.

It is futile for each party to try to crush the other — that demoralizes the movement and makes unity in the real sense still more difficult to accomplish. We therefore call upon you, comrades, to stay in the party where you are now, to have patience and not increase the bitterness which prevails among us, and to give the Executive of the Communist International time to act, finally and authoritatively.

(signed) T.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AMERICA

(signed) C.E.S.

UNITED COMMUNIST PARTY OF AMERICA ¹³

13. The document as published in *The Communist Review* abruptly ends here. Identity of the signatories remains unknown.

Edited by Tim Davenport. Second Edition, December 2004.

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