
Bases of the Protest of the [CPA] Minority Against the Extension of Appointments to Local Organizers [c. February 15, 1921]

Typewritten document found in the possession of Walter Karath at the time of his arrest in Cleveland, OH, Feb. 23, 1921. Content quoted in full in the report of Bureau of Investigation Special Agent S.F. Sawken, Feb. 25, 1921. Bol/DoJ Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 928.

1. Since the last Convention of the Communist Party in July 1920 [2nd: New York: July 13-18, 1920], the District and Sub-District Organizers of the Party were appointed representatives of the CEC, while the group, the branch, and the local organizers were elected representatives of the membership, thus giving the CEC due connections and control through the appointed District and Sub-District Organizers, and to the membership full expression and self-government through their elected local organizers in the actual performance of the Party work. With few exceptions the appointed Sub-District Organizers were in person contact with the elected local organizers, thus ensuring proper transmission of all decisions and instructions of the CEC, and their understanding and execution by the membership.

2. According to the report of the CEC to the Convention [3rd: Brooklyn: first half of Feb. 1921], this arrangement has worked well during the whole period of its operation, there having been no conflicts between the representative of the CEC and the representatives of the membership.

3. The majority of the Convention decided upon a change, to extend the appointments to the local organizers, not because of any present necessity for the change in our organization, but as a step toward the introduction of appointments from top down to the very bottom, from the District Organizers down to and including group organizers. They take the position that the Party organization should be built upon the principle of appointments clear through, and that this principle should be applied immediately [without] much regard

for present conditions in the organization and the state of mind and the wishes of the membership. They maintain that this position of theirs is in accordance with the position of the Communist International on Party discipline and centralization.

4. We believe, however, that the position of the majority on this question is in direct opposition to the stand of the CI; that it is a violation of Par. 14 of the Theses on the Role of the Communist Party, which declares that "The CP should be based on the principle of democratic centralization,... the election of upper party units by those immediately below." We also believe, in harmony of Par. 15 of the same Theses, that in cases of emergency, arrests, etc., "it may become necessary sometimes temporarily to deviate from the strict observance of the elective principle," and that connections and the structure of the Party may be reestablished in those exceptional cases by the method of appointments clear through. But the majority of the Convention sets up the exception as a rule.

5. It is a foregone conclusion that the enforcement of further extension of the appointment principle at the present time will result in great harm and disorganization in the Party. In the present conditions, we are sure, it will seriously impair the confidence of our membership in the higher Party units, it will disrupt cooperation between them, it will kill enthusiasm and initiative in the membership, so essential to the success of all our work and activities. It will create an irresponsible bureaucracy, far removed from the control of the CEC, and not responsible to the membership. Being appointed by secondary representatives of the CEC by the Sub-District Organizers, the local organizers will represent neither the CEC nor the membership. We are greatly lacking now in comrades qualified to act as organizers in the various Party units. Through the elections in the lower Party units there was an opportunity for new comrades to develop from the rank and file. The appointments will make this practically impossible.

6. We appeal to the CI for a decision as to the proper interpretation of their stand on this question; whether we are right in trying to maintain the elective principle in the lower Party units as far as the general conditions permit; or whether the Majority of the Convention is right in their plan to put the whole organization on the appointment basis, step by step, as fast as it is possible without complete disorganization among the membership. The decision of the CI will have important bearing upon future developments in the Communist Party organization in America.

Fraternally submitted,¹

District #1 [Boston]:

Sullivan [Alfred Edwards], Johns [=???],
Wilson [=???], Dalie [=???].

District #2 [New York]:

Shovas [=???], rep. Lithuanian Federation.

District #3 [Philadelphia]:

Singer [=???], Fraternal Delegate
& Federation Representative.

District #4 [Cleveland]:

Larson [=???]; C. Dobin [Charles Dirba];
Stepbar [=???], Lettish [Latvian] Federation;
Malva [=???], Polish Federation.

District #5 [Detroit]:

Fred Barkus [=???], Klints [=???];
Elisha [Morris Holtzman], Jewish Federation.s

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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¹ There seems some likelihood that there is a typographical error here, as District 6 (Chicago) is not listed.