
To the CEC of the CPA in New York from Max Bedacht in New York, [late October 1921]. †

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 56, ll. 8-11.

To the Central Executive Committee of the CPA.

Dear Comrades:

Again you submit to me a number of questions, a number of which I had answered specifically when you called me before you the second time. I would protest against such procedure because it would indicate that you believe that for some reason or other I lied to you. And up to this moment I have never, to my knowledge, given any occasion in the course of my activities in the revolutionary movement to doubt my word. It would indeed be a sorry condition if the quality of those whom the Party selects as their international delegates would stoop so low as to color and adulterate reports in the interest of cliques, or for some other reasons. I say I would protest against you doubting my word without sufficient reason. But it seems

that one of my colleagues in the Moscow delegation has arrived and has found it necessary to give you a report contradictory to mine, and, as I happen to know, contradictory to the facts. It is of course your duty to ascertain the facts, and to ascertain further who of the two is a liar. Therefore I will answer your questions; not in the order you put them, but in the chronological order as things happened. Maybe this will enable the other delegate to refresh his memory as to what really did happen.

Some of your delegates, that is myself and [Nicholas] Hourwich, had repeated personal talks with Comrades Zinoviev, Radek, and Lenin. In all these talks and conferences, held previous to the opening of the congress and during the congress [3rd Congress of the Comintern, June 22-Aug. 12, 1921], each one of these comrades invariably brought up the question of the necessity of going into extensive legal activities

†- Bedacht's Thesis on Legal Work which he had submitted to Lenin in July 1921 was read to the Central Executive Committee of the CPA at its meeting of September 1, 1921. Based upon this report, which noted Lenin's emphatic belief that a legal political organization was a necessity for the American Party, the CEC resolved to create a Legal Political Party "parallel with the underground organization and controlled by it." The decision was made by a vote of 7 to 3, with former members of the old CPA and future leaders of the Central Caucus faction Charles Dirba, John Ballam, and George Ashkenuzi in the minority.

At the October 5, 1921, plenary session of the CEC, Bedacht was contradicted by the verbal report of another member of the American delegation to the 3rd Congress of the Comintern, the former member of the old CPA "Stepan" [identity undetermined]. "Stepan" stated that the session of the American delegation with Lenin was informal and that "Lenin had not given any specific advice as to immediate definite steps to be taken by the CP of A." In light of the contradiction, a written report was requested of "Stepan" and Bedacht was called to the next session of the CEC. Bedacht's written report here probably dates from the second half of October or perhaps in very early November, coming, as he mentions, shortly after this second appearance before the CEC.

In early October a new factional grouping calling itself the "Central Caucus" issued an agitational leaflet entitled "Statement #1." The Oct. 15 plenum of the CEC resolved to condemn this leaflet over the signatures of all the members of the CEC, but Dirba, Ballam, and Ashkenuzi refused to sign this document of condemnation. This initial document may well have originated from the Russian or Lithuanian Federations, both bulwarks of the old CPA which had serious issues of their own with the CEC majority.

At the November 3, 1921, meeting of the CEC, Dirba, Ballam, and Ashkenuzi announced that they would formally appeal the decision of the CEC to establish a parallel Legal Political Party to the Comintern. An Emergency Convention of the CPA to be held not later than Jan. 15, 1922, to decide the issue was demanded. This motion was ruled out of order by the chair of the meeting, who was sustained by a vote of 4 to 3. Shortly thereafter, factional membership meetings were held, at least some of which were addressed by Ballam. Charges were preferred against Ballam for agitating about controversial CEC matters by CEC member J. Wilenkin at the Nov. 10 meeting of the CEC, which Ballam did not attend. Dirba and Ashkenuzi were defeated in an effort to quash this charge against Ballam. The split of the Central Caucus faction was formalized towards the end of that same month.

and, for that purpose, the creation of a legal organization, a legal party. All three of these comrades emphasized that the Small Bureau† had taken up the matter and that certain instructions would be given to the American Party regarding this matter. As a result of this, Comrades Hourwich and myself brought the matter before the American delegation. That was before the arrival of “Baldwin” [Oscar Tyverovsky] and “Ballister” [Robert Minor]. But Comrades “Morton” [J. Clark of the YCL] and “Turner” [William Weinstone], who have also arrived since, participated in these caucuses of the American delegation and will bear me out, should the [Central] Executive Committee deem my word not sufficient.

An extensive discussion developed in the American delegation which brought out the fact that there was a division of opinion. Although those apparently against the execution of a plan of forming a legal party protested that they were for it — in principle — they tried to find reasons why the plan could not be executed, not only at the present time, but not at all as far as the United States was concerned. Hourwich then proposed the election of a subcommittee to work out a plan, so when the proposed conference with the comrades of the Executive Committee of the Comintern would take place, we would not be unprepared and would not be compelled to leave the field to the comrades of the Executive Committee, who did not know the conditions of America. I opposed the election of such a committee on the grounds that as long as we are for the organization of a legal party in principle, we need not go any further because it will only be the principle that we will be instructed on and not the details of the execution. I charged then and there in the caucus, and the other delegate that reported to you may remember if he tries hard enough, that the purpose of the committee in the mind of those that propose it is only to collect reasons why we can not carry out such an instruction, although we are all for it — in principle.

But the delegation did finally decide to prepare

for the conference and elected a committee, consisting of Comrades Hourwich and myself. Again I may refer to Comrades “Morton” [Clark] and “Turner” [Weinstone] as witnesses.

From my previous experience on such committees I knew that Comrade Hourwich’s activity on it would be purely negative. He never wrote a line. He never made a draft of anything. But with Satanic pleasure he bluepenciled the work of others. Not that differences of principle were pointed out, but mere corrections of expression, in language and so forth. I was tired of this practice, because it happened that it was always me that made the drafts of documents of the delegation. So I had decided even before my election to this committee not to submit my drafts anymore to subcommittees and to propose them, as a whole, for adoption or rejection always in the full caucus. The draft made by me was only written on the 6th of July [1921], one day before the conference with Lenin and two days before my intended departure.‡ So I had given a copy of the draft to Comrade “Ballister” [Minor] and in the session of the congress of that day I also gave one to Comrade Lenin. The delegation had in the meantime been notified by Comrade Zinoviev, the chairman of the Executive Committee, through me, the secretary of the delegation, that the conference would have to take place before the departure of Comrade “Marshall” [Bedacht], so this comrade would be able to convey the wishes of the Comintern to the American Party. Comrade Zinoviev, and also Comrade Radek, made it clear to me, and also to Hourwich, and Comrade Lenin had it made clear also in a talk to “Ballister” [Minor] before the conference, that this conference, the only one that was held in which the whole delegation participated, was arranged to give instructions for the future work of the American Party. The American Party was considered to be dominated by leftism and by a sectarian spirit and not at least in conformity with the conceptions of the Communist International.

I want to emphasize further that not one of the

†- The “Small Bureau” was a sort of Executive Committee of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, established in 1920 and initially consisting of five members: Nikolai Bukharin (Russia), M.V. Kobetsky (Russia), Ernst Meyer (Germany), André Rudiansky (Hungary), and Grigorii Zinoviev (Russia). The body was shortly thereafter increased to nine members with the addition of Bernard Koenen (Germany), Bela Kun (Hungary), Karl Radek (Poland), and Alfred Rosmer (France).

‡- Bedacht, the former Comintern Representative of the United Communist Party, was instructed to return to the United States “by August 1 [1921]” by the action of the CEC of the unified CPA at its first session, held in New York on May 30, 1921.

delegation, at that time at least, expressed a doubt in the character of the conference as one to instruct, nor was there expressed a doubt in the right of Comrade Lenin to give such instructions. The invitation to go to the conference came from Zinoviev, the chairman of the Executive Committee. There was further no difference of opinion as to the meaning of the decisions of the congress itself relative to the American party and the necessity of forming a legal party. And when Comrade "Ballister" [Minor] spoke in congress on the question of tactics, he spoke according to instructions of the whole delegation, accepting the theses as a whole and the paragraph regarding America in particular.

The Executive Committee itself did not take up the question of instructions to America. It never deals with such question. The sessions of the Small Bureau are secret and no one but a member of the Small Bureau could answer your question whether the matter was taken up by that body.

The conference with Lenin, as arranged for by Zinoviev and Radek, was announced already a number of weeks before the congress even opened (although at that time it was not yet determined that the conference should be one with Lenin), took place on the 7th of July [1921]. There were present the following Comrades: Hourwich, "Baldwin" [Tyverovsky], "Stepan" [???], "Gorney" [???], "Ballister" [Minor], "Marshall" [Bedacht], and [Bill] Haywood, and, of course, Lenin. Comrade Lenin immediately went to the point. First he told us of the necessity of the establishment of a daily press. He made it clear at all times that this was expected of us. Then he opened the question of a legal party. He told us of the absolute necessity of the formation of such a body and he even suggested a name for it. Maybe if the other delegate tries hard enough to remember he will recollect that Comrade Lenin suggested "Anti-Capitalist Party" in contradistinction to all other parties which are pro-capitalist. It was Comrade Hourwich who at that conference pointed out to Lenin that the program of the party as adopted at the Unity Conference [May 15-28, 1921] already contains provisions for legal organization. Comrade "Baldwin" [Tyverovsky] then stated that this provision does not, by any means, go as far as the decisions of the 3rd Congress, as interpreted by Comrade Lenin, would force us to go. But he declared that he is convinced of

the necessity of carrying out these decisions of the 3rd Congress.

I want to emphasize right here that at this conference none of those present labored under the impression that Lenin was giving instructions *in addition* to those of the 3rd Congress. The delegation had interpreted (before) the decisions of the congress as meaning just what Lenin told us. Comrade Lenin merely acted on the presumption that the American delegation did not accept, as a whole, these decisions and that it was necessary to persuade them in a discussion of details that the congress could not possibly indulge in.

The first statement of Comrade Lenin about the legal party was that the theses submitted to him by Comrade "Marshall" [Bedacht] covered the question fully. He remarked that he had only two faults to find. First that the theses were written at all. Such things, he remarked, were to be done but not put down on paper like the plan of a fortress that might come into the hands of the enemy. Then he declared that he thought that the paragraph speaking of the party of action smells like leftism. I then explained what I meant when I wrote that paragraph, taking the Kansas industrial courts as a basis and showing that I meant the transformation of the dissatisfaction of the masses against such an act into political action, from protest demonstrations up to mass strikes. Lenin then said that that was all right, but that the conception of "action," as expressed in other literature of the American party, justified him in suspecting that something else was meant. I then remarked that my interpretation would have to be accepted as I had written the document. Maybe the other delegate will remember this incident if he tries hard enough. Yes, comrades, I am even proud enough to remind the other delegate of a remark of Comrade Lenin in which he expressed his opinion that the exposé of the character of our mission and of the class struggle in this document is excellent.

In the course of the discussion there was also a mention of the Labor Party and the Non-Partisan League. But I will not go into details laying outside of the question at issue. Comrade Lenin asked whether it would be possible to call a convention of the Party at once. He was answered that it was possible, if necessary. Comrade "Baldwin" [Tyverovsky] [in particu-

lar] pointed out the fact that we had so many conventions in America that we did not give the comrades a chance to get acquainted with the party program adopted at one convention because [another would follow] in rapid succession. Furthermore, it was pointed out that a convention cost much money that is thus taken from regular activity and that the conventions always put a stop to party activities for a period of from three to four months. So Comrade Lenin then said that he had not asked because he thought it imperatively necessary that such a convention would be held. He expressed his surprise at the unanimity that seemed to exist in the delegation about that point. He said that he had reason to believe that the American delegation did not accept as a whole these decisions of the congress, as now seemed to be the case.

I may remark that I myself was greatly surprised at the unanimity, and that I had shared Lenin's fears about a lack of unanimity. And the present stand of the other delegate shows that my fears had a substantial basis. ...The opponents of the decisions of the congress did not have the courage to speak up in this conference although they do not seem to lack the courage to now lie about the proceedings in this conference.

Comrade Lenin then said that in the face of that unanimity in the American delegation, he had good hopes that the [Central] Executive Committee of the CPA would accept the decisions of the congress and immediately proceed with the execution of a plan. But, of course, if the Executive Committee would not ac-

cept these decisions, then a Convention would be necessary and the delegates should do everything in their power to bring one about.

Comrade Lenin was very specific on the question of a legal party. He said that as a first step we should organize our present party membership into a legal party. This party should then enlarge itself with the numerous elements among the workers who are anti-capitalist in tendency, although they are lacking the clear conceptions that would make them eligible in the underground movement. When he was told about the danger of getting people like Schlesinger† into such a party he said that we can safeguard our legal organization against the dangers of demagogues, but that we must not be afraid of the working masses. He pointed out that the anti-capitalist tendencies existent among the masses of the workers must be transformed into anti-capitalist action, and that for that purpose we must organize these tendencies and the masses dominated by them. We must organize our leadership of the revolution by gathering the forces of the revolution around us and by bringing these forces and their activities under our control.

This in answer to your questions relative to the conference of the 7th of July between Comrade Lenin and the American delegation.

Fraternally submitted,

James A. Marshall [Max Bedacht].

†- Benjamin Schlesinger, a Socialist, was President of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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