
Executive Motions of the Central Executive Committee of the old Communist Party of America, October 23, 1919.†

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 4-5.

Chicago, Oct. 23, 1919

To the Members of the
Central Executive Committee:—

Comrades:—

Following is the vote on Motion #1, reading:

That the declaration in reply to the proposal of the
Communist Labor Party be approved.

Voting Yes: Ballam, Dirba, Elbaum, Fraina, Fer-
guson, Karosas, Ruthenberg, Schwartz, Wicks. [9]

Voting No: Bittelman, Cohen, Hourwich, Love-
stone, Tyverovsky. [5]

Not Voting: Petras. [1]

The motion is therefore adopted.‡

The vote on Motion #2, reading:

That the meeting of the Central Executive Committee
set for Nov. 1 [1919] be postponed to Saturday, Dec. 20, at
9 o'clock.

Voting Yes: Ballam, Ferguson, Ruthenberg,
Wicks. [4]

Voting No: Bittelman, Dirba, Elbaum, Cohen,
Fraina, Hourwich, Karosas, Lovestone, Schwartz, Ty-
verovsky. [10]

Not Voting: Petras. [1]

The motion is therefore lost.§

The following motions and comments are sub-
mitted by Comrades Bittelman, Cohen, Hourwich,
Lovestone, and Tyverovsky:

Motion #3: That the reply to the Executive Com-
mittee of the Communist Labor Party be withheld until
the next physical meeting of the Central Executive
Committee.

Reasons: In view of objectionable features in cer-
tain paragraphs; in view of impossibility of working
out an acceptable reply through executive motion
within a reasonable time; and in view of importance
of such a reply we believe this proposition should be
considered by the entire Central Executive Commit-

†- As this document demonstrates the system of “Executive Motions” made, amended, and voted upon by mail, interspersed with periodic physical gatherings — a method of decision-making borrowed from the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party — was the form of organization initially practiced by the Central Executive Committee of the old Communist Party of America. This system, requiring timely and unfettered use of the mails, proved to be short-lived as the Wilson administration targeted the CPA with its repressive apparatus, driving the party underground. In the subsequent “underground period,” the CPA moved to making its decisions through secret physical sessions of the CEC, which met extremely frequently.

‡- A copy of this statement to the NEC of the CLP appears in the Department of Justice/BoI investigative files [NARA M-1085, reel 940] as document 185 for case 202600-1775. It is also available as a downloadable document from www.marxisthistory.org entitled “Statement to the National Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party in Cleveland from the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America in Chicago, October 23, 1919.”

§- Passage of this motion would have been to support a decision-making process extremely similar to that of the Socialist Party, whose NEC met approximately 4 times a year. This system minimized administrative cost by reducing the amount spent on rail fares to and from meetings, leaving the bulk of organizational decision-making to executive motions via the mails. The SP system no doubt made for a weak Executive Committee and a strong Executive Secretary, who faced less detailed supervision of daily operations and controlled the balloting. It is not accidental that Executive Secretary Ruthenberg and his closest ally, Isaac Ferguson, favored the motion.

tee at its next physical meeting.

Statement by Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg]: The reply voted on through Motion #1 having been adopted by a vote of 9 to 5, it becomes the duty of the Executive Secretary to send this reply to the Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party. If motions for delay were to hold up action after vote of the whole committee, it would become possible for a minority to prevent action. In this particular instance there are reasons why our reply should be in the hands of the Communist Labor Party when its Executive Committee meets next Sunday [Oct. 26, 1919], which cannot be divulged in correspondence but which will be stated to the full committee when it meets. While submitting this motion I wish at the same time to inform the committee that our reply has already been forwarded to the Communist Labor Party Executive Committee in accordance with the decision of the majority of the committee. †

Motion #4: That the next physical meeting of the Central Executive Committee be held on November 15 [1919].

Reasons: Because of countrywide celebration of Nov. 7 [Russian Revolution Day], the presence of every member of the Central Executive Committee is required in his particular locality up to that date; and because of serious situation in New York in connection with this celebration, New York members will be unable to leave town before Nov. 7th. Realizing, however, that physical meeting of Central Executive Committee must be held as soon after that date as possible we recommend Nov. 15.

Agree with Fraina's reasons as stated on #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, plus that added reason that the matter of expense cannot enter our calculations when questions of party policy are to be determined.

†- The Communist Labor Party, the National Executive Committee of which was also using executive motions by mail to make most of its organizational decisions at this time, had a physical meeting in New York City from Oct. 25-27, 1919.

‡- The 5 members of the Executive Council, in addition to permanent members Ruthenberg and Fraina, were Charles Dirba, I.E. Ferguson, K.B. Karosas, John Schwartz, and Harry Wicks.

Motion #5: That sending of report of International Secretary [Louis Fraina] be withheld until next physical meeting of the Central Executive Committee.

Reasons: International Secretary's report to the Third International is too important to be sent out without full discussion by entire CEC.

This report is a vital matter which concerns the Communist Party as a whole, and not individuals, and therefore rightfully comes under the scrutiny, discussion, and endorsement of the Central Executive Committee as a body. Particularly in view of changes having already been made by two members in the original report, it becomes more urgent than ever to have the whole CEC go over it carefully.

Statement by Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg]: An opportunity presented itself to have the report taken to Europe a day or two after it was received and a copy, in the form of a page proof of the pamphlet containing same, together with an official communication signed by the Executive Secretary and two International Delegates were transmitted to the chairman of the Third International [Grigorii Zinoviev].

Since only a week remains before the date set for the meeting of the committee [Nov. 1, 1919], I request a vote by wire on Motion #4. I may add, for the information of the members and so that they can make their arrangements accordingly, that the 5 members of the Executive Council concur in the Nov. 15 date and this motion will likely carry and the meeting held on Nov. 15. ‡

Fraternally submitted,

C.E. Ruthenberg,
Executive Secretary.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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