
What Kind of Party?

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The present crisis in the Communist Party organization presents the opportunity through membership action to make the party really a party of understanding and a party of action.

During the seven months that the party has been in existence the work of developing its organization strength and carrying its message to the masses has been hampered by a group in the Central Executive Committee which was more interested in the personal “revolutionary fortunes” of its members than in building up the party.

This group has shown itself to be incompetent to develop constructive organization work and as a matter of policy has sought to keep the party organization within very narrow limits. This latter policy was not based upon any question of principle, but upon the realization by this group — the majority group of the CEC — that it could maintain its position of leadership in the organization only so long as the movement was prevented from attracting to its ranks men of greater capability.

The policy of the majority group towards the Communist Labor Party, both during the Chicago conventions and since, was not determined by the widely heralded difference in principles. The “majority” group has been frequently challenged to show these differences by analysis of the programs of the two parties, but never has done so. The aim was to prevent this group from being ousted from its position of prominence and leadership in the Communist Party — a position which it could not hold in an organization which

included all the Communist elements, because it has neither the capability of applying Communist principles in action nor the organization ability to entitle it to such leadership.

This use of power in order to safeguard its position has not only been made against the CLP but has been used in the party itself, notably in New York City, where comrades of considerable ability, whose services would have been of great advantage to the party, have been shunted aside because they were not enthusiastic enough in their support of this small factional group.

Whenever this majority group of the Central Executive Committee was under attack because of its factional policy it has taken refuge in loudly shouting about “differences in principle.” It realizes that the members of the Communist Party are really in earnest in their desire to maintain the party as a clear expression of Communist fundamentals, and that by assuming the part of “defenders of principles” it could always shout down those who attacked it because of its intrigues.

Now that its use of power for selfish ends has brought about a split in the Central Executive Committee, it is again raising the issue of “differences in principles” as a smoke screen behind which to hide the fact that it was the intrigues and use of power to maintain its group leadership, even to the extent of disrupting the organization, that has brought about the present situation.

Analysis of these “differences in principles” is all that is necessary to show the hypocrisy and demagogic character of this “majority” group.

The Third International.

Through some twisting of the facts the attempt is made in the manifesto of the "majority" group to create out of the controversy over European representation one of the "issues of principle." The fact is that no such issue exists.

The controversy over this question developed on the point whether matters of party policy should be decided by the governing body of the party or by underhanded intrigue of individuals, who, immediately after the adjournment of the Chicago convention [1st: Sept. 1-7, 1919], took no further interest in the upbuilding of the Communist Party of America, but devoted practically all their time to the intrigue to become the party representative in Europe, which created this controversy.

The "minority" did not at any time oppose the establishment of relations with the Third International. Steps were taken by the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg], before the question of sending a representative developed, to acquaint the Third International with the facts about the organization and principles of the Communist Party, and only a few weeks ago the comrade who took this information to Europe returned with the report that it had been successfully transmitted to Moscow.

The controversy over sending the International Secretary [Louis Fraina] to Europe was not over the question whether we should be represented in the Third International. It was because underhanded methods were resorted to; and the argument was only over the question of time and party resources.

The matter was first broached three weeks after the party convention [end of Sept. 1919]. At that time the party was in the midst of organization work and a bitter controversy with the CLP. It did not have five speakers who could present its case in English, and the same was true in regards to writers and editors. Yet it was proposed to im-

mediately take out of the party work the man who had up to that time held the position of leadership in the editorial work of the movement. When the question finally came to a decision in November, there was not a single vote against sending the International Secretary [Fraina] to Europe. It has since developed that the trip could have been delayed another two months and had exactly the same results for the movement. Yet it is sought to magnify this question into an issue of "principle." This is itself the best example of the kind of bluff the "majority" group uses in order to deceive the party membership.

The facts about the matter of relations with the Third International are that the "minority" group has fought for a policy in harmony with the ideas expressed by the Third International, while the "majority" has disagreed and has taken the attitude of "super-Bolsheviks" who look with contempt upon the policies of the Third International. This is illustrated in the "majority" group issue of *The Communist*. In an editorial on "The Party Crisis" this statement appears:

"The 'secessionists' believe that subscribing to the three fundamental and basic policies of the Third International, namely Proletarian Dictatorship, Mass Action, and Soviet Power, is sufficient in itself upon which to build a Communist movement in this country."

The inference in this statement is not that the "majority" group do not believe this to be the case and the policy it has pursued is further proof. And from whom did this statement of policy with which the "minority" group is charged with agreeing come? From the Third International!

There have been three or four communications on the subject of unity of Communist elements from the Third International. Two of these at least were directly concerned with the question of unity of Communist forces in the United States. One such communication was brought by a representative of the Third International sent to this country to organize a Communist Party before

the time of the convention. Another was published in the *New York World*, having been taken from a courier who was captured and shot in Latvia. And each of these documents urged a unity of all those elements in a Communist Party which accepted the three fundamentals — Mass Action as the means of achieving power, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Soviet government.

Yes, comrades of the “majority,” the “minority” group accepts this basis of Communist unity and is working to build a real Communist organization of action on this basis, while you reject the position of the Third International, fearing the loss of personal prestige and power, and attempt to create some superfine “differences in principle,” which, however, you are unable to define, in order to bluff the membership of the party into helping you maintain your clique control. You dare say in your manifesto:

“If there is one outstanding difference between the Second and Third International — aside from the vital difference in tactics — it is, that the Third Communist International must be and is a living, vital organism, actually functioning in the world-revolutionary movement, guiding and shaping the policies of the Communist parties of all countries.”

“Guiding and shaping the Communist parties of all countries!” — and yet you repudiate the Third International the moment its policies are contrary to your own group interests!

Mass Action.

The present “majority” group, through its caucus, controlled the Chicago convention. What the program of the party says about mass action is something the “majority” is responsible for. When someone challenged the “majority” to say what was meant by “mass action of the revolution,” no one of the “majority” group dared rise to his feet and declare that “mass action of the revolution” meant open, armed conflict between the working class and the capitalist state.

The reason which the “majority” group would give for its failure to state fully the implications of the Communist program at the time was that the Communist Party was being organized as a legal party. If this was a good reason for silence at that time, can we now bind those of our members who have been arrested and indicted for their activities during this period of “legality” not to take the position? This has been the only way in which the issue has come before the Central Executive Committee. Of course the members of the “majority” were not in a position of danger on this account and they were indifferent to the fate of the many hundreds of comrades throughout the country who are held for deportation and imprisonment.

The party must be ready to put into its program the definite statement that mass action culminates in open insurrection and armed conflict with the capitalist state. The party program and the party literature dealing with our program and policies should clearly express our position on this point. On this question there is no disagreement.

There is a difference in viewpoint between the “minority” and the “majority” as to when the idea of armed revolt need be and should be projected to the masses. The “minority” holds that if it were to inject this question into such as struggle as the strike of the railwaymen it would be acting as the agent provocateur of the capitalist class.

The position of the Third International was stated as follows in the official copy of the manifesto and program:

“The revolutionary epoch demands the application of such methods of struggle which concentrate the entire strength of the proletariat; namely the method of mass actions and — their logical outcome — direct collision with the bourgeois state in open combat.”

This declaration conceives of mass action in different forms, for the phrase is *mass actions*. It is the view of the “minority” in harmony with this

declaration, that mass action develops by stages of which open, armed conflict is stated to be the final stage; that the Communist Party must suit its propaganda at any given moment to the stage of mass action which can be developed through the existing revolutionary consciousness which the social and industrial conditions have produced.

The “majority” seems to be of the opinion that there is only one kind of mass action, that of armed conflict, for it says,

“With this conception of mass action the ‘majority’ completely disagrees. We maintain that if the lessons of the history of all revolutions — and particularly, the proletarian revolutions — means something and teaches us anything (lessons which the Second International completely failed to learn), we must propagate to the workers the USE OF FORCE as the ONLY MEANS of conquering the power of the state and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Since it conceives of only *one form of mass action*, the “majority” takes the position that the propaganda of the party must in every instance be that of armed conflict. This is the anarchist position and a perversion of the principles of the Third International.

The members of the “majority” are dogmatists. Even their view of the present situation in our party had to be expressed in language of the Russian Revolution — Kornilov and Kerensky — in order to appeal to their dogmatic minds. If they accept a certain principle they consider its application is the same under all conditions. They would reject as outrageous Lenin’s advice to Bela Kun that the Hungarian Soviets should not slavishly try to imitate the Russian Revolution. In fact some of them are carrying on a propaganda against Lenin as a compromiser. In their opinion he is the same class as the “minority.” The “minority” holds that we should assume the dialectical view and consider each situation by itself. The circumstances under which a certain principle is applied is all important in determining the course of ac-

tion to pursue.

In carrying on the work of agitation and education, the social and industrial conditions must be considered. To talk to the workers about armed insurrection at a time when the masses are still without any revolutionary consciousness (and without arms) is to make a farce of Communism and shows a fundamental lack of understanding of Communist principles.

Mass action is the tactical essence of the entire program adopted at Chicago. It has been the dominant theme of all our party literature. Just why does the “majority” now suddenly come to the realization that all our propaganda and program have been non-Communist? This is nothing but a shallow, cowardly play of being ultra-revolutionary.

It is the same demagogism as the appeal to the Federation members that there is a prejudice against “foreigners.” Obviously it must be a disdain of “foreigners” by “foreigners.” The “minority” group is about 99% “foreign.”

Federations.

Since our party is a party largely of Federation membership, the “majority” naturally tries to inject the Federation issue into the controversy, hoping thereby to secure the support of the membership.

What are the facts?

In the past the party has been a Federation of Federations rather than a unified organization. The Central Executive Committee of a Federation could by majority vote take a Federation out of the party whenever it suited the majority. A notable example of this is the desertion of the party by the Hungarian Federation after the January [1920] raids. It left the party without so much as saying, “good-bye.” Similarly the Jewish Federation Central Executive Committee withdrew that Federation from the party when the present controversy developed, hoping to remain neutral.

The “minority” believes that the new conditions require a more centralized organization than we have had in the past, closer unity in the Communist Party than a Federation of Federations. It proposed, for this reason, and because experience had shown that it was a more efficient system, that dues payments should be handled through the District Organizations. This would have brought about a closer unity between the membership. In place of having to deal with nine offices located in different cities, the membership of the Federation branches would all transact their business with one central office with which they were in direct connection.

The “minority” also holds that the future development of the party organization must be in the direction of shop units. It is in the industries that we must establish contact with masses of the workers and there our organization must be rooted. With the possibility of nine Federations being represented in a single industry, shop branches and the present form of dues payment cannot exist together.

The single concrete proposal which the “minority” has made in regard to the Federations is the change in the method of dues payment, and this it believes is a logical and necessary change. It does not believe that a change in the method of dues payment will destroy the Federations as propaganda organizations for their particular nationality. What form the party organization shall take in the future it was and is willing to leave to the party convention, and since this convention will be made up almost exclusively of Federation representatives, it is certain the form of organization adopted will be the one that the Federations themselves desire.

As to Legality.

One of the most amusing things in the manifesto of the “majority” group is the appeal to legalism made by this group.

“This body (the majority of the CEC) together with alternates elected at the last convention, who fill vacancies created by the withdrawal of those who bolted, is the only legal Central Executive Committee.”

The majority of the CEC has forfeited its right to recognition by the misuse of its power, which has resulted in disruption and disunity, and no appeals to “legalism” will yield back its power in the organization.

Splitting the Party.

The present division of the membership into factions is something which the “majority” group and not the “minority” is responsible for. When it appeared in the negotiations between the two groups that no agreement during the interim before the convention [2nd: July 13-18, 1920] could be reached, the “minority” made the following written proposal:

“That we discard any further discussion of the questions under controversy and proceed with the work of organizing a convention in which both groups will be represented by such delegates as they may be able to elect through the district conventions.”

The “majority” group refused to consider this suggestion to preserve the party. Since that time the following letter has been addressed to the same group:

New York, April 22, 1920.

To the Majority Group of the
CEC, Communist Party.

Comrades:—

At the conference between your group and ours we submitted as a final proposition to avoid [a break] in the unity of the party the following proposal:

“That we discard any further discussion of the questions under controversy and proceed with the work of organizing a convention in which both groups will be represented by such delegates as they may be able to elect through the district conventions.”

Our group has already issued a call for a party convention and the date has been fixed, but we are still prepared to come to an agreement on the matter of having both groups come to one convention, in order that the membership may, through their delegates, themselves act upon the existing controversy. We therefore again propose to you joint action in calling one convention of the party and are prepared to take up discussions of details regarding this convention.

Fraternally yours,

David Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg],
Executive Secretary.

To this proposal the “majority” made no reply. The “minority” is therefore proceeding with the organization of a party convention in which the bulk of the membership will be represented and through which the party will be reorganized for active propaganda of the principles of Communism.

“A Party of Action.”

The “majority” group believes that all is necessary for the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party to do is to seal itself in some dark room, wait for the revolution, and then come out and assume the leadership of the masses in the struggle for power. It scorns “contact with the masses.”

The “minority” group believes that the party must participate actively in every struggle of the workers, endeavoring to give such struggles Communist meaning and understanding. George Lans-

bury, editor of the *London Daily Herald*, who recently returned from Russia, quotes Lenin as giving similar advice to the English Communists.

The party must and will remain a party of clear understanding of principles. But such a party is valueless unless it applies those principles to the life struggles of the workers and develops the progressive stages of mass action that culminate in the social revolution itself.

Contrary to the “majority” theorizing, the “minority does not believe that Communism can only be propagandized when the revolutionary consciousness of the masses has arrived. We believe that Communism has important applications to every stage, no matter how primitive, of the workers’ struggle against capitalism. We believe that we must not wait for revolutionary consciousness, but must develop and inspire this consciousness by education and agitation.

Already the membership of the party grasps the real significance of the present party struggle and is repudiating the barren, sterile policy of the Central Executive Committee “majority” and supporting the convention called by the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] according to the completed plans of the full CEC.

This convention will mean the definite reorganization of the party. It will give the membership the opportunity to express their views of the existing controversy. Out of the convention will come a stronger party, with clearer principles and a more definite program of action.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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