
Letter to the Executive Committees of the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party of America from the Executive Committee of the Communist International

[June 1920]

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To the Executive Committee of the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party.

Dear Comrades:

From reports of comrades representing both groups of the Communist Movement in America, who have arrived from the United States, it was made possible for the Executive Committee of the Communist International to learn the differences in the ranks of the American comrades — differences that led to an open split and to the formation of two Communist parties.

The matter has been discussed at a full meeting of the Communist International, at which, in addition to the members of the Executive Committee, there were also present representatives of both parties in the United States, as well as representative of the Communist organizations of France, Sweden, Hungary, Finland, and Yugoslavia. The Executive Committee of the Communist International came to the following conclusion:

The split brings much harm to the Communist Movement in America. It will lead to the division of the revolutionary forces, to harm-

ful duplication and unnecessary friction and unjustifiable waste of energy on internal struggles. And this is going on when the concentration of the forces of the American bourgeoisie has reached an unheard of height, when the class struggle is becoming more and more intensified, when in view of the onward sweeping world revolution the American working class has before it the greatest possibilities and the brightest hopes!

A close study of the documents from both sides has convinced us that there are no serious differences in the programs of the two parties. There are certain differences on the question of organization. There was some disagreement on the question of how to break with the social-patriotic party [the Socialist Party]. But that is all. This does not even in the smallest degree justify a split and it must *by all means* be liquidated. As long as the two parties stand on the platform of the Communist International — and we have no reason to doubt that this is the case — unity is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. The Executive Committee categorically insists on its immediate realization.

The necessity for immediate unity is dictated

also by the fact that the two parties represent, so to say, different sides of the Communist Movement in America, which could well supplement each other. In one party (CPA) are mainly the language elements, united in the so-called "national federations." The other party (CLP) represents mainly the American or English-speaking elements. In the first are, on the one hand, often better trained theoretically and are more closely connected with the traditions of the revolutionary struggle of the working class of Russia; they are, on the other hand, much less connected with the mass movement and the mass organizations of the American workers, who are gradually entering the broad road of the class struggle.

If the elements of the CLP have not as yet gone through a similar theoretical school, they have the tremendous advantage that through them the party can most easily exert its influence on the great masses of the *actual American workers*, who, in the coming decisive class battles will play the most important part.

On the one hand propaganda is best developed; on the other agitation.

Thus the two parties naturally supplement each other and only by bringing them together will it be possible to create a strong Communist Party in America, which is to become the leader of the *mass movement* and the approaching Communist revolution.

For the purpose of bringing about unity in the shortest possible time, the Executive Committee of the Communist International recommends that the two parties immediately call a joint convention, the decisions of which shall be binding for both parties. For the purpose of calling this convention as well as for the purpose of coordinating the work of the two parties until the convention, a bureau consisting of an equal number of representatives must be created. As a basis for unity the principles laid down in the platform of the Communist International and the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Communist

International must be taken.

In addition to this the Executive Committee desires to point out the following:

1. The Communist Party must strive at the earliest moment to unite within its ranks all the elements that recognize the necessity of conquering power and establishing the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It is self-evident that this recognition must be one of action and not purely theoretical and in words. It must bind everyone who desires to be a party member to the unlimited struggle for the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the power of the working class. If this condition is fulfilled and an agreement reached on the main and fundamental point, differences of opinion on other questions, such as the questions of the use of parliamentary and other legal means, about using this or that method of struggle, about various forms of organization, etc., are not important.

Such differences of opinion are unavoidable in the countries where it is necessary to build a Communist Party of elements having different political origins (Left Wing Socialists who have severed their connection with the old parties; non-partisans who have accepted the principle of the consistent class struggle; anarchists and syndicalists, who recognize the necessity of the seizure of power and the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, etc.). To split on account of these differences, differences that are now, in the period of immediate revolutionary struggle for power only of secondary importance, is absolutely not to be allowed. The one thing the party must demand from each organization and from each individual member in case of a division of opinion, is, absolute discipline, unconditional obedience to the rule of the majority. A thorough discussion of questions before they are finally acted upon by the party is necessary and free criticism should be allowed. But after the party has accepted a certain decision, all the party members, including those who disagree with it, must, without fail, act in ac-

cordance with that decision. The greatest freedom to those who think differently during the time of discussion on one hand, and, on the other, the strictest discipline in bringing the party decision into life — these are the elementary conditions without which the creation of a strong party of proletarian revolution is impossible.

2. A full break with the old Socialist parties (SP and SLP) is the self-evident condition for the creation of a Communist Party in America. This condition does not mean, however, that the Communist Party cannot accept individual comrades, as well as whole organizations that previously belonged to these parties, who have decisively accepted the point of view of organized class struggle and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The Communist Party must be a *mass* organization and not a narrow, closed circle. “Separation” from non-Communist elements must be understood as keeping away from actual social-traitors and from the “centrist” elements of the old parties, but by no means in the sense of refusing former members of the old parties who have severed all connections with them.

[3.] The doors of the Communist Party must be wide open to the proletarians, who, although not having a knowledge of all the details of Communist theory, true to the cause of the proletarian revolution and who are actually involved in the struggle against the domination of the bourgeoisie. The Communist Party will serve them as the best school of Communism.

4. Up to the present time the American Left Wing Socialists have paid a great deal of attention to propaganda within their own ranks and in this respect they have done important work. But limiting themselves to a more or less narrow circle of comrades, they have to a large degree stood aside from the immediate class struggle of the proletarian masses, which is widespread over the country. At any rate they have not played a lead-

ing part in the biggest collisions between capital and labor. While uniting within its ranks all the most active and conscious elements of the working class and developing the greatest *mass* agitation and propaganda of the ideas of Communism, the Communist Party must at the same time aim to assume the role of the leader of the class struggle of the proletariat in all its forms, beginning with the local industrial strike, demonstrations, mass meetings, election campaigns, to the general political strike and ending with the armed uprising of the proletariat. The main problem of the American Communists at the present moment is to bring the *broad proletarian* masses into the revolutionary class struggle.

While assisting by every means the speedy split of the American Federation of Labor and other similar trade unions, the party must at the same time endeavor to establish a close contact with those economic organizations of the working class in which there is a tendency toward industrial unionism (IWW, OBU, WIIU, individual unions that have split away from the AF of L).† The party must work in close contact with them, endeavoring at the same time to unite them and to create strong class conscious economic organizations of the proletariat. While supporting by all means the industrial unions in their everyday struggle for immediate economic demands, the party must endeavor to broaden and deepen this struggle, to transform it into a struggle for the final revolutionary aim of the proletariat, overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of the capitalist order.

5. The party must so far as possible support the formation in the factories, *besides Communist Party units*, of shop committees, which serve, on the one hand, as a basis for the economic struggle, and on the other, as a school for the preparation of the vanguard of the working class for the administration of industries after the Dictatorship of the

†- Reference is to the Industrial Workers of the World; the closely-akin One Big Union movement, a syndicalist grouping which was strong in Canada and the Northwest; and the DeLeonist Workers International Industrial Union, an offshoot of the IWW.

Proletariat has been established. It is understood that these shop committees must work in close contact with the industrial unions.

6. The party must not be a conglomerate of independent, autonomous “language federations.” The federations have played an important historical part in the American Socialist Movement, (their long, systematic opposition within the old parties, the creation of the Socialist Propaganda League, the formation of the Left Wing). But now, with the rapid development of the class struggle, and when the American proletariat is faced with an extremely complicated problem, the language federations will only be in a position to fulfill their duty if they amalgamate as closely as possible with the organizations of the American workers. Of course, it is not desirable to have the old historical form of organization destroyed at one stroke, as this might lead to the complete disappearance of the federations — the constant propagators of the Communist ideas in America. That is why the Executive Committee of the Communist International points out that the process of the complete amalgamation of the federations with the rest of the American Communist Movement must be achieved gradually and with a certain degree of carefulness. The language federations may reserve their autonomy regarding the work of propaganda in their respective languages, but in the case of political and economic struggles they must be subordinate to the regular party organs.

In time of intensive class struggle it is necessary to reduce the use of the referendum to a minimum. At any rate, no referendum should be

permitted on questions demanding immediate action. In periods between the conventions the CEC must have full power.

7. The ever increasing persecution against the Communists in America brings up the question of illegal work. The Congress of the Communist International of March 1919 has definitely ruled on this question. Illegal work is necessary as bourgeois “democracy” the world over has actually established a state of siege against the Communists. Two or three years ago the English workers regarded even the idea of illegal work in such a free country as England as absurd. Now the revolutionary workers of England also have learned to conduct illegal work. The same thing happened in Germany, where the Social Democratic hangmen Noske, Scheidemann & Co. are trying to drive underground the mighty Communist Movement of the German workers. We must make use of all the legal possibilities. And at the same time we must learn to issue illegal leaflets, to form illegal group meetings, to form illegal shop committees, where it is necessary, to have illegal directing centers, etc.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International is confident that you, comrades, will solve the problems that are facing you. The victory of the international proletariat depends upon the success of Communism in America.

With Communist Greetings,

*The Executive Committee of the
Communist International.*

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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