
Program of the Communist Party of America Adopted at its Second Convention [New York: July 13-18, 1920]

Published in *The Communist: Official Organ of the Communist Party of America*
[New York], v. 2, no. 3 (Aug. 1, 1920), pp. 1, 7.

The Communist Party of America is the conscious expression of the class struggle of the workers against capitalism. Its aim is to direct the struggle to the conquest of political power, the destruction of the capitalist state, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of a Soviet Government, as the only means of introducing the Communist society.

The Communist Party maintains that the problems of the American working class are identical with the problems of the workers of the world. The Communist Party realizes the limitations of all other existing workers' organizations and determines to develop the revolutionary movement necessary to free the workers from the oppression of capitalism.

The Communist Party — the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat — prepares itself for the proletarian revolution in the measure that it develops a program of action expressing the mass struggles of the proletariat and builds a strong, centralized, and well-disciplined political party capable of carrying Communist propaganda and agitation to the masses and leading the workers to the final struggle against the capitalist state.

The Communist Party is fundamentally a party of action. It brings to the workers a consciousness of their oppression, of the impossibility of improving their conditions under capitalism. The Communist Party directs the workers' struggle against the capitalist state, developing fuller forms and purposes in this struggle, culminating finally in revolutionary mass action — armed insurrection and civil war.

Political and Mass Action.

The Communist Party maintains that the class struggle is essentially a political struggle; that is, to conquer political power, destroy the bourgeois state machinery, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of a Soviet Government in the transition period from capitalism to Communism.

In those countries in which historical development has furnished the opportunity, the working class has utilized the regime of political democracy for its organization against capitalism. In all countries where the conditions for a proletarian revolution are not yet ripe, the same process will go on. The use of parliamentarism, however, is of secondary importance — for revolutionary propaganda and agitation only.

But within this process the workers must never lose sight of the true character of bourgeois democracy. The capitalist class considers it advantageous to veil its deeds of violence behind parliamentary votes, and it has at its command, in order to gain its end, all the traditions and attainments of former centuries of capitalist class rule, multiplied by the wonders of capitalist technique — lies, demagogism, persecution, slander, and bribery. The proletariat cannot yield itself to the artificial rules devised by its mortal enemy but not observed by the enemy. To do so would be to make a mockery of the proletarian struggle for power, a struggle which depends primarily on the development of separate organs of working class power.

The revolutionary epoch forces upon the proletariat the application of such militant methods which

concentrate its entire energy, namely, the method of mass action with its logical resultant, direct collision with the bourgeois state machinery in open combat. All other methods, as for instance the revolutionary use of the bourgeois parliament, has to be subordinated to this aim.

Mass action is the proletarian response to the centralized power of the capitalist class — its control of the state machinery, by means of which it can impose its will upon the workers. The power of the capitalist class lies in its possession of the state machinery, with its army, navy, courts, police, bureaucracy, etc.

Mass action develops as the spontaneous activity of the workers massed in the basic industries; the mass strike is one of its initial forms; in these strikes large masses of the workers are unified by the impulse of the struggle, developing new tactics and a new ideology. As the strikes grow in number and intensity, they acquire political character by coming in direct conflict with the state, which openly employs its machinery for breaking the strike and crushing the workers' organizations. This culminates in armed insurrection and civil war, aimed directly at the destruction of the capitalist state and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship.

Unionism.

The older unionism was based on the craft divisions of small industry. The unions consisted primarily of skilled workers, whose skill is itself a form of property. Today, the dominant unionism is actually a bulwark of capitalism; it is merging in imperialism and accepts State Capitalism..

The concentration of industry and the development of the machine process expropriates of their skill large numbers of skilled workers; but the unions still maintained the ideology of property contract and caste. Deprived of actual power by the ineffectiveness of its localized strikes as against large scale industry, trade unionism resorts to dickering with the bourgeois state and accepts Imperialistic State Capitalism to maintain its privileges as against the unskilled proletariat.

The concentration of industry produces the machine workers. Those workers massed in the basic industries constitute the militant base of the class struggle. Deprived of their skill and craft divisions, the old, petty, isolated strike is useless to these workers.

These facts of industrial concentration developed the idea of industrial unionism.

The Communist Party recognizes that the industrial unions are a more efficient weapon for waging the struggle of the workers for better conditions and higher wages under capitalism. But industrial unionism in itself is not revolutionary. Industrial unionism cannot conquer the power of the state. It cannot train and mobilize the workers for the proletarian revolution. Industrial unionism, as advocated by the IWW and similar organizations, rejects the basic principles of the Communist International — mass action, proletarian dictatorship, and Soviet power. It rejects the idea of armed insurrection and the use of force in the time of revolution. Such industrial unionism aims only at the direct seizure of industry by the workers after the great majority of them will have been organized into industrial unions, and rejects the necessity of destroying the capitalist state. Moreover, industrial unionism at present does not actually construct the forms of the Communist administration of society. Only potentially, after the conquest of power, after the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, the industrial unions may become the starting point for the Communist reconstruction of society. But the concept that the majority of the working class can be organized into conscious industrial unions, and construct, under capitalism, the form of the Communist society (“building the new society within the shell of the old”), is as utopian as the moderate Socialist conception of the gradual “growing into Socialism.”

The Communist Party recognizes that the American Federation of Labor is reactionary and a bulwark of capitalism. But the Communist Party rejects the idea, as advocated by the IWW, of “smashing the AF of L” in order to reconstruct the trade unions. At the present time — in this revolutionary epoch — such a policy would necessitate the concentration of an enormous amount of the energy of the revolutionary movement to the purely reformistic policy of changing the form of the economic organizations, thus ignoring the most pressing and important task of the Communist movement, namely — the propagation of Communism to the masses. That is the supreme task of the Communist Party, and all their work, such as building better economic organizations for waging the struggle against their employers for higher wages and better

conditions, etc. is secondary. The Communist Party will encourage any movement of the workers seeking to construct new or better economic organizations for the workers in the shops, but it will constantly point out the limitations of such organizations and keep before the workers the idea of proletarian revolution by means of mass action with its logical resultant, open, armed conflict with the capitalist state, and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only means of destroying the bourgeois state, abolishing capitalism and introducing the Communist society.

The Communist Party recognizes trade and industrial unions as a field for the propagation of Communism to the masses. Our task is to inculcate and crystallize Communist understanding among the masses over the heads of the union bureaucracy. Wherever the workers are, whether in the AF of L or similar organizations, or in the IWW, there the Communist Party must constantly agitate, not for industrial unionism, but for Communism. Just as we enter the bourgeois parliaments for our revolutionary propaganda, so must the Communist Party enter the most reactionary unions for Communist propaganda and agitation.

Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

“Between capitalism and Communist society there lies a period of revolutionary transformation from the former to the latter. A state of political transition corresponds to this period, and the state during this period can be no other than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.” (*Critique of the Gotha Program*, by Karl Marx.)

The proletarian revolution comes at the moment of crisis in capitalism, of a collapse of the old order. Under the impulse of the crisis, the proletariat organize separate organs of armed working class power — Soldiers’, Sailors’, and Workers’ Councils of Deputies (Soviets), and by the use of force acts for the conquest of political power, the destruction of the bourgeois state machinery and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. The proletarian state, like every state, is an organ of suppression and coercion, but this machinery is directed against the enemy of the working class. Its aim is to break the desperate resistance of the

exploiters, who use all the power at their command to drown the revolution in blood; its aim is to make this resistance impossible; the proletarian dictatorship which openly places the working class in a privileged position in society, is on the other hand, a provisional institution. When the resistance of the bourgeoisie is broken, when it is expropriated and gradually absorbed into the labor strata, all classes vanish, the proletarian dictatorship disappears, and the state dies out.

The bourgeois parliamentary state is the organ of the bourgeoisie for the suppression and coercion of the proletariat. Parliamentary government is the expression of bourgeois supremacy, the form of authority of the capitalist class over the working class. Bourgeois democracy is nothing but the concealed dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The “national will,” “united nation,” etc. are only fictitious. In reality, the classes exist — the classes with opposite, irreconcilable interests. But as the bourgeoisie is a small minority, it needs the fiction of “national will” and similar pleasant-sounding phrases to strengthen its domination over the laboring classes and impose its will upon the proletariat. The main power of bourgeois democracy lies in its purely formal declaration of “rights” and “liberties,” which are unattainable by the working people, the proletarians and semi-proletarians, while the bourgeoisie utilizes its machinery to deceive and defraud the workers through its press, pulpit, schools, etc.

Bourgeois democracy, with its parliamentary system, defrauds the masses of participation in the administration of the state. Actually, the masses and their organizations are totally deprived of real state administration. In the Workers’ Government — the proletarian dictatorship in the form of the Soviet Government — the organizations of the masses dominate and through them the masses themselves administer. Bourgeois democracy and the parliamentary system separates the masses from the capitalist state by the division of legislative and executive power, the function of the Soviets as working colleges unite the masses with the administrative organs. This unity is also promoted by the fact that under the Soviet Government the election themselves are conducted, not in accordance with artificial territorial districts, but in accordance with productive units. The proletarian dictatorship in the form of the Soviet Government thus realizes true proletarian democracy, the democracy for and of the

working class and against the bourgeoisie.

The proletarian revolution is a lengthy process which begins with the destruction of the capitalist state, the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship and ends only with the transformation of the capitalist system into the Communist society.

The Communist International.

The Communist International, issuing directly out of the proletarian revolution in action, is the organ of the international revolutionary proletariat in their struggle for the conquest of world political power.

The growth of the revolutionary movement in all countries, the menace of suppression of the proletarian revolution through the coalition of the capitalist states, the attempts of the Social-Patriotic parties to unite with each other (the formation of the "yellow" International at Berne) in order to render service to the imperialist "League of Nations" and to betray the revolution; and finally, the absolute necessity of coordinating proletarian action all over the world — all these considerations demanded the formation of a real, revolutionary, Communist International.

The Communist International, which subordinates the so-called national interests to the interests of the international proletarian revolution, embodies the reciprocal aid of the proletariat of various countries, for the proletariat of any nation will not be in a position to organize aid of the proletariat of various countries, for the proletariat of any nation will not be in a position to organize the new society without economic and other mutual assistance. On the other hand, the Communist International — in contrast to the "yellow" Berne International — supports the exploited colonial peoples in their struggles against Imperialism in order to accelerate the final collapse of the Imperialist system of the world.

The Communist International unites all the revolutionary forces. It wages war against Imperialism, against the Berne International of Social-Patriots and the Centrist parties and their leaders who accept the proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship in words but not in deeds.

The Communist International issues its call to the conscious proletariat for the final struggle against capitalism. It is not a problem of immediate revolution.

The revolutionary epoch may last for years. The Communist International offers a program both immediate and ultimate in scope. The old order is in decay. The workers must prepare for the proletarian revolution and the Communist reconstruction of society. The Communist International calls: Arms against arms! Force against force!

Workers of the world unite!

All power to the workers!

Summary.

The Communist Party maintains that the class struggle is essentially a political struggle; that is, a struggle to conquer the power of the state, destroy the bourgeois state machinery by mass action culminating in armed insurrection and civil war, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only means of introducing the Communist society.

a) The Communist Party shall keep in the foreground its consistent appeal for proletarian revolution, the overthrow of the capitalist state, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

b) The Communist Party shall systematically and persistently propagate to the workers the idea of the inevitability of a violent revolution and the USE OF FORCE as the only means of overthrowing the capitalist state.

c) Participation in parliamentary campaigns which in the general struggle of the revolution is only of secondary importance, is for the purpose of revolutionary propaganda and agitation only.

d) Nominations for public office and participation in elections shall be limited to legislative bodies only.

e) Parliaments and political democracy shall be utilized to assist in organizing the working class against capitalism and the state. Parliamentary representatives shall consistently expose the oppressive class character of the capitalist state, using the legislative forum to interpret and emphasize the class struggle; they shall make clear how parliamentarism and parliamentary democracy deceive the workers; and they shall analyze capitalist legislative proposals and reform palliatives as evasions of the issue and as of no fundamental significance to the workers.

f) The uncompromising character of the class

struggle must be maintained under all circumstances. The Communist Party accordingly, in all its activities, shall not cooperate with groups or parties not committed to the principles and policies of the Communist International.

g) The Communist Party shall enter into all the struggles of the working class to spread Communist understanding among them, to guide their economic strikes into broader political channels, to develop their will and determination to overthrow the existing order and finally, lead them into open armed conflict with the capitalist state.

h) The Communist Party shall participate in strikes, not so much to achieve the immediate purpose of the strike as to develop the revolutionary implications.

i) Every local, sub-district, and district organization of the Communist Party shall establish contact with industrial units in its territory — the shops, mills, factories, and mines — and direct its agitation accordingly.

j) Communist Party shop committees, consisting only of members of the Communist Party, Communist propaganda and agitation to the workers in the industries. These committees shall be united with each other and shall be under the control and direction of the Communist Party, so that the party shall have actual contact with the workers.

k) The Communist Party considers trade and industrial unions as a field for the propagation of Communism,. While recognizing that the AF of L and similar organizations are reactionary and bulwarks of capitalism it recognizes that industrial unions such as the IWW and kindred organizations are also conservative. The Communist Party will encourage all movements of the workers in the shops and the industries but will constantly criticize the limitations of the economic organizations and point out their inability

to train and mobilize the workers for the proletarian revolution.

l) The Communist Party shall criticize the principles, tactics, and leaders of trade and industrial organizations which do not accept the basic principles and policies of the Communist International.

m) The Communist Party shall wage an aggressive campaign against the Social-Patriotic and reform parties, such as the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party — expose their purely reformistic character, their petty bourgeois principles and policies, and their counterrevolutionary tendencies.

n) The Communist Party shall wage an aggressive campaign against the Centrists (United Communist Party) exposing their leaders, their lip-service recognition of Communist principles and tactics, and Centrist tendencies.

o) The unorganized unskilled workers (including the agricultural proletariat) constitutes the bulk of the working class. The Communist Party shall systematically propagate Communism to these workers and link up their struggles with the class struggle of the workers as a whole.

p) The United States is developing an aggressive militarism. The Communist Party will wage the struggle against militarism as a phase of the class struggle to hasten the collapse of capitalism. Special Communist Committees shall be organized to carry Communist propaganda and agitation to the soldiers and sailors and to form Communist organizations among them.

q) The struggle against Imperialism necessarily an international struggle, is the basis of proletarian revolutionary action in this epoch. The Communist Party shall maintain close contact with the Communist International for common action against world Imperialism.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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