
Circular to All District Organizers, Sub-District Organizers, Section Organizers, and Respective Committees of the Communist Party of America from Ludwig Katterfeld, Executive Secretary, August 6, 1921.

Text in the report for the week ending Aug. 27, 1921 by Bureau of Investigation Agent J.F. McDevitt, DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA collection M-1085, reel 938, file 202600-1617-40, pp. 6-7.

The following is a copy of a circular sent out on August 6th [1921] by the new National Executive Secretary J. CARR [Ludwig Katterfeld], to which was attached a photostat copy of the notice sent out by the former National Executive Secretary, C. DOW [Charles Dirba], announcing his resignation and the appointment of CARR [Katterfeld].† It will be noticed in the paragraph marked “1” of the letter that they begin to refer to the letters “A” and “B.” I understand that “A” means “American Labor Alliance or Legal Channels,” and that “B” means “Underground or Illegal.”‡ [—*J.F. McDevitt*]

• • • • •

To all District Organizers, Sub-District Organizers, and Section Organizers, and the respective committees:

The Third Congress of the Communist International [June 22-July 12, 1921] has adopted a Manifesto, calling upon us to act in behalf of Soviet Russia through the present crisis. The emergency finds us without the legal machinery with which to function effectively among the great mass of the workers. It demands that we develop the necessary legal structure with full strength AT ONCE.

Fortunately, the Central Executive Committee had just decided upon a plan which will admirably serve the purpose. The details are to be communicated to you by personal

messengers. But the crisis is here and we cannot wait. Here are the essential points to guide you for IMMEDIATE ACTION.

1. Every District Committee and the highest unit in every city must immediately elect a committee of 3 trustworthy Party members to have general charge of all legal activities. These Committees will function as the local executive for the A [American Labor Alliance], which has already been launched nationally by the Central Executive Committee. The 3 comrades must be selected with a view toward their special fitness for the 3 general lines of activity of the A [American Labor Alliance]: Arranging public meetings; Selling literature and periodicals; Defense. They must be able to work openly under real names.

2. One of the 3 should be designated as Secretary, and his *real name and address be sent to us IMMEDIATELY in code*. The name will be turned over to the A [American Labor Alliance], and information how to proceed will be sent him by the A [American Labor Alliance] direct.

3. The first public activity for the A [American Labor Alliance] will be to launch the B [Friends of Soviet Russia], and help energetically in the campaign for relief of the famine stricken districts of Russia. In A [American Labor Alliance] we can affiliate only organizations that comply to certain strict requirements, but in B [Friends of Soviet Russia] we shall ask the cooperation of much wider masses, as is suggested in the call sent out by the Third Congress. We expect to take in all that agree with us on two fundamentals: (1) The appeal shall not be made on sentimental and purely humanitarian grounds, but shall be based on the fact of working class solidarity in harmony with the appeal of the Third Congress, and (2) The funds and goods shall not be turned over to any private or capitalist agencies, but shall

†- Dirba resigned as Executive Secretary and was replaced by Katterfeld at the Central Executive Committee meeting of July 27, 1921. Cause of Dirba's resignation was the development of a 7-3 voting majority on various controversial issues, with Dirba in the minority along with two others who were also members of the old CPA, John J. Ballam and George Ashkenuzi.

‡- This is another example of how the use of codes did actually serve to inhibit the understanding of federal investigators. McDevitt is only half right: “A” does refer to the “American Labor Alliance,” but “B” is actually the handle of “Friends of Soviet Russia.”

be delivered to the Soviet government agency, without any reservations, to be distributed by the Russian workers as they see fit. We have the channels through which this can be done, and believe that on this issue the great mass of the American workers will side with us, and that this is the quickest and surest way to help our Russian comrades.

A number of other organizations that have been carrying on independent efforts are merging themselves with ours, and within a few days a conference will be held to secure the cooperation of many others. When the news of this reaches your locality, it will be much easier for you to make the proper arrangements there. Until then we would advise all members to hold the relief funds that they are collecting.

The work is going full blast already. Speakers are being listed, application blanks, subscription lists, appeals, literature, etc. are being prepared, and will be sent as soon as we have the name and address of your legal secretary.

If your committee cannot be called together within a few days, then just appoint some competent comrade to act as local legal secretary for these various activities and send his name and address by return mail.

Yours for C. [Communism],

***J. Carr [L.E. Katterfeld],
Exec. Sec.***

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.