
Comments Regarding the Wicks Memorandum on the Proletarian Party of America. [circa December 1922]

by C.E. Ruthenberg

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 168, l. 43.

[1.] The history of the development of the Left Wing is much too favorable to the Proletarian group. In the Left Wing Conference of [June] 1919 the program offered by Batt for the Proletarian group was laughed out of court.

[2.] The anti-union sentiment mentioned by Wicks was so strong in the Proletarian group that they scoffed at the idea of the labor union having anything to do with proletarian revolution. Their position was for educational parliamentarism. Their idea of the revolution as presented in their program was to carry on the education of the masses through parliamentary campaigns in which the Marxian theory was propagandized and then some fine day the revolution would come. They rejected completely the concept of mass action. Their conception of political action was limited to participation in election campaigns and the final revolutionary struggle. Political action in the form of mass action as a living, developing thing they scoffed at — this probably what Wicks refers to as the Blanquism of the CP of 1919.

[3.] If I remember right the Michigan delegates to the St. Louis Convention [April 7-14, 1917] voted for the St. Louis SP program. There was no pacifism in the program of action against the war which was part of the St. Louis manifesto.†

[4.] The CP of 1919, as stated in the Wicks document, did not endorse the IWW.

[5.] The CP of 1919 did not advocate minority action or Blanquism. The debate in that convention

between Batt and Wicks for the Proletarian group and [Alex] Bittelman for the Communists was on the question whether a majority of the workers must have a clear grasp of Marxian principles, that is, whether the Communists had to make the majority of the workers understanding, conscious Communists before there could be a proletarian revolution. The Proletarian group contended that this was necessary. The Communists, that if we waited until that was achieved there never would be a social revolution. What Wicks calls Blanquism was the conception that the Communist Party consists of the vanguard of educated, conscious workers who lead the great unconscious masses into action.

[6.] I doubt whether the Proletarian Party has 500 members.‡

[7.] The Proletarian group was not expelled from the CP at the November 15th [1919] meeting [of the CEC] as stated by Wicks. One branch was expelled, the German Branch of Detroit.

[8.] The Proletarian group was still part of the Communist Party in January 1920 after the raids. I personally went to Detroit to reorganize the CP and conferred with [Al] Renner, [A.J.] MacGregor, and [John] Keracher. *They refused to become part of an underground party.* They were dropped out of the CP in February of 1920 because they refused to have any part in the reorganization.

Brenton [C.E. Ruthenberg]

†- Ruthenberg was a co-author of this St. Louis anti-war manifesto, along with Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee.

‡- Wicks claimed that the Proletarian Party had over 1,000 members.

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