
Letter from William Z. Foster in Chicago to Grigorii Zinoviev in Moscow, February 17, 1923.

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION.
Zinoviev.

February 17th, 1923

Dear Comrade:

Please pardon delay in answering your letter relative to my opinion on the new policy for the American Party. I have been travelling throughout the country and was unable to make proper connections.

Let me say that after carefully reading the new policy I am convinced that it fits American conditions and that a powerful Communist movement can be built upon it. Political conditions are such in the United States at the present time, with something of a wave of liberal sentiment developing, that an open Communist Party is strictly feasible. The transition from an underground to an open party must be proceeded with carefully, however, because there is a deep-rooted conviction on the part of large numbers of the comrades that a Communist Party must of necessity and at all times be a conspiratorial organization. The underground apparatus, as outlined in the new policy, should amply take care of the work which cannot be done openly. The splendid work of Comrade Pogány [John Pepper] has made unlikely the prospect of any very serious split in the application of this policy.

I am gratified to note that you are fully alive to the importance of the Labor Party issue in the

United States. I have no hesitancy in saying that the formation of such a party is one of the first essentials in the development of a militant labor movement, both political and industrial, in this country. As things now stand, the masses of organized workers are definitely attached to the capitalist class through their organic relationship with the old political parties. The formation of a Labor Party will break these organic connections and give the labor movement its first opportunity to think and act in terms of the class struggle. Although, to begin with, this party may have a relatively conservative program, its very coming into existence will prove that the American working class has made its first fundamental breakaway from the bourgeoisie. In seizing upon the issue of a Labor Party, and in pushing it vigorously, the Workers Party is showing good political wisdom, and is following a course which if continued intelligently will surely give it leadership over large masses of the workers. As the Labor Party gradually comes into being, the Communists, being instigators of it, inevitably will exercise a large influence within it.

The Trade Union Industrial League, industrial department of the Party, is supporting the Workers Party in its fight for a Labor Party. It stresses the industrial arguments in favor of a Labor Party, pointing out to the masses in the trade unions that it is impossible for their organizations to function effectively so long as they are officered by direct political agents of the capitalist class who betray them constantly and poison them always

with bourgeois economics. Just now the League is sending out to 35,000 locals of the American Federation of Labor and other conservative organizations a statement on the necessity for a Labor Party and calling for an expression of rank and file opinion regarding the same.

I am also in hearty accord with the emphasis you lay on the work in the left wing of the trade union movement. The fact is, the Communist movement, in some respects at least, is very favorably situated on the industrial field in the United States. It alone has anything like a militant industrial program to present to the workers. The Gompers bureaucracy is utterly bankrupt intellectually. It has absolutely nothing new to offer the workers, resisting violently even the mildest reforms in the trade unions. The so-called progressive wing of the trade unions is almost as bad, its leaders lacking the foresight, honesty, and courage to declare even in favor of independent working class political action, they fight against amalgamation as bitterly as Gompers does. The Socialists, ruined by the several splits and degeneration of their leadership, have gone over to Gompers almost completely. They have just about abandoned advocating independent political action, and they are carrying on no campaign whatever for industrial unionism. They lack the resolution even to advocate affiliation with Amsterdam. The Syndicalists, chiefly assembled in the IWW and amounting to only a small sect, are chronic dual unionists and as such are detached physically and intellectually from the organized masses. They have very little influence in the labor movement. The Farmer-Labor Party, while politically honest and progressive, has a negative industrial policy and accepts the trade unions pretty much as they are. The Proletarian Party and Socialist Labor Party are comparatively insignificant in numbers, neither having any considerable influence in the labor movement. This leaves the Workers Party with its Industrial department, the Trade Union Educational League, as absolutely the only organization in

America that is proposing not only revolutionary policies, but even the mildest reforms to the trade unions. This gives the organization a chance to win leadership over the masses by actual work in the daily struggle of the movement such as is enjoyed by hardly any other Communist Party.

A lingering problem with us is that of secessionism, or dual unionism. Although the influence of the CI has wrought a wonderful revolution in the minds of Communist here with regard to their remaining among the organized masses, there is still an element which clings to the old ideas. These comrades are entrenched in the so-called independent unions. They constitute the only disturbing factor in the development of our industrial work. However, in the working out of a unified program to apply alike to the AF of L unions and independent, the secessionist character of these comrades will be exposed and their power for harm removed. Care should be observed not to encourage this dualistic tendency which has been the very ruination of the American labor movement.

Regarding the enlistment of Americans into the Communist movement, I agree with the new policy that it is of the utmost importance in the United States and that this must be done. With the great mixture of races that exists in the United States the American is most strategically situated. The foreign-born workers make up the bulk of the working forces in the basic industries, they form a very large part of the trade unions, and furnish by far the greater portion of the membership of all revolutionary organizations. They are uniformly splendid fighters and, particularly within recent years, have shown their mettle in great strikes in the basic industries. But being divided into so many nationalities, inevitably they look to the Americans as the unifying force to bind them all together. No labor movement, revolutionary or conservative, can succeed in America without the participation of the Americans. In seeking to bring the Americas into the ranks, the Workers

Party is aiming at a strategic objective of the first importance. The open Party and the industrial work will unquestionably tend to bring these elements into the Communist movement in considerable numbers. But in so doing, care must be taken not to alienate the foreign-born workers. In my opinion, the new policy meets the two problems of attracting both American and foreign-born as well as can be expected at this early stage of the development of the Communist movement in America.

In my judgment the new policy lays the groundwork for a healthy Communist movement in the United States. Although unquestionably we have great handicaps to overcome in the weakness of the labor movement and its almost total lack of proletarian understanding; the problem of the many nationalities and of the Negroes, the fact that our Communists are very largely detached from the masses and inexperience in trade union work because of the long prevalence of dual unionism; yet many factors also combine to make the situation promising. I am convinced that most of the birth-pangs of the American Communist movement are now over and that our party is due for a steady and substantial growth in numbers and influence among the great masses of the American working class.

With Communist greetings,

Wm. Z. Foster.

P.S.: NOT TO BE PUBLISHED.

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