
The American Revolutionary Movement Grows: An Analysis of the Many Achievements of the Third National Convention of the Workers Party.

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Seventy-two hours of intense work, during which most of the delegates did not secure more than 10 hours of sleep, was the record of the Third National Convention of the Workers Party of America [Dec. 30, 1923-Jan. 2, 1924].

The Convention summarized the achievement of the Party during the previous year and restated its policies for the coming year's work.

The report of the Central Executive Committee submitted at the opening of the Convention brought out vividly the differences between the Workers Party of a year ago and the Party of today. A year ago the Party had not yet made itself felt as a political influence in the United States. It was still in the period of preparation for work rather than having a record of achievement.

At the Convention the Central Executive Committee was able to report that the Party, through its work during the year, had achieved a place as a political influence in the lives of the workers of this country and that this influence was continually being strengthened and extended.

The United Front.

The report of the Central Executive Committee showed that it was through the application of the United Front policy of the Communist International that the Workers Party had made the progress. United Front campaigns had been carried on for protection

of the foreign-born workers, for defense of the Communists arrested in [Bridgman] Michigan, and in the struggle for a Labor Party. The latter campaign, which had its first culmination in the July 3rd [1923] conference at which the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was organized and which is now in its second stage with the May 30th convention of the Farmer-Labor Party organizations at St. Paul, as its expression, had brought the Workers Party the leadership in the struggle for a class Farmer-Labor Party in the United States.

The second major achievement submitted by the Central Executive Committee in its report was in the form of the statement that the Communist Party in the United States had at last consolidated its forces and that the period of splits and factional struggles was over and there was no longer danger of the Party flying apart into various sections, as had so frequently been the case in the years from 1919 to 1921.

Organizational Achievements.

During the course of the year the Workers Party added 2,000 members to its ranks. It extended its work into the agricultural section of the country, carried on a successful campaign for the establishment of a daily Communist newspaper, established the first of a series of bookstores for the sale of Communist literature,† began the work of producing a Communist literature in the United States by the publication of eight books and pamphlets,‡ and maintained a press service in

†- Reference is to the Jimmie Higgins Book Shop, 127 University Place, New York City, run by Elmer T. Allison.

‡- (1) John Pepper: *For a Labor Party* (2 editions); (2) John Pepper: *Underground Radicalism: An Open Letter to Eugene V. Debs and All Honest Workers Within the Socialist Party* (2 editions); (3) Clarissa S. Ware: *The American Foreign-Born Workers*; (4) Jay Lovestone: *The Government — Strikebreaker*; (5) Jay Lovestone: *Blood and Steel: An Exposure of the 12 Hour Day in the Steel Industry*; (6) Jay Lovestone: *What's What About Coolidge*; (7) *Strategy of the Communists: A Letter from the Communist International to the Mexican*

which some 500 labor papers were furnished with material on the Communist movement and the campaigns of the Workers Party in the United States.

The comment on the year's work of the Party was submitted in the form of a letter from the Communist International, which thus summarizes the work of the Party during the year:

"To perform this and many other tasks confronting the Party, the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party has rightfully conceived as the most important step the establishment of an English Communist daily...

The excellent work that has been done by the Communists in the Left Wing of the labor movement of the United States...

The propaganda that the Workers Party has conducted during the past year has been most effective...

The vast sentiment for Communism that the Workers Party has aroused must be organized... The Central Executive Committee acted rightly in inaugurating a campaign for membership...

The Workers Party has applied Communist tactics correctly in seeking a United Front of all forces to fight the capitalist system in the United States...

The organization of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party was an achievement of primary importance...

There is one problem to which the American Party have not applied themselves with sufficient energy, viz., that of American imperialism..."

New Policy.

Together with the report of the Central Executive Committee there was submitted a thesis containing a declaration of policy for the year 1924. This thesis contained a new proposal in the form of a statement of the policy to be followed by the Workers Party in relation to the existing tendency for the formation of a Third Party and toward such a party when it is organized. The thesis declared that it was correct Communist strategy to endeavor to promote a split of the Third Party group, containing the middle class elements, from the Republican and Democratic Parties and if such a split was achieved that the Workers Party could, through a Farmer-Labor Party, enter into an alliance with such a Third Party for certain specific purposes.

The problem of the Third Party became a tactical question of immediate policy in view of the possibility that the May 30th convention of the Farmer-Labor Party groups may be dominated by the middle-class-progressive-LaFollette elements and not by those groups which stand for a class Farmer-Labor Party.

The discussion of issues before the Convention in the various District Conventions which elected the delegates to the National Convention had centered on the Third Party question. In all of the District Conventions in which a vote was taken, the Central Executive Committee policy was upheld. It was expected that this question would be the storm-center of the Convention proceedings, as there were in the Convention a block of some 15 delegates out of the total of 53 who opposed the Third Party policy.

However, upon the opening of the discussion on this question, Comrade John Pepper made a statement to the effect that the Party membership had not been sufficiently prepared for the adoption of this policy. There existed, he said, still a large section which believed that a Communist Party should be a mere organization for propaganda and education and the organization of revolutionists into a Party, and not an organization which maneuvered in the political struggle of this country for the purpose of securing the leadership over wide masses of the workers.

Under these circumstances it was inadvisable for the Convention to force the issue of the Third Party policy and he recommended that the Third Party section of the thesis of the Central Executive Committee be withdrawn and the question of the correctness of the policy contained therein be referred to the Communist International for decision. The motion was adopted by a vote of 43 in favor and none against, 10 delegates not voting.

The United Front in Chicago.

Since the Party activities during the year on the political field had been carried on under the United Front policy, it was natural that the question of the

Communist Party; (8) C.E. Ruthenberg: *Why Every Worker Should Be a Communist and Join the Workers Party*. Not included in this count are the publications of the Trade Union Educational League, which included (1) *Resolutions and Decisions: Second World Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions: Held in Moscow, November 1922*; (2) M. Tomskey: *The Russian Trade Unions in 1923*; (3) Andreas Nin: *Struggle of the Trade Unions Against Fascism*; (4) William F. Dunne: *Speech at the AF of L Convention: Portland, 1923*.

correct application of the United Front should be a major question before the convention. The issue came up in the form of a discussion of the United Front as it existed in the city of Chicago.

The Central Executive Committee submitted a resolution in which acknowledgment was made of the value of the United Front arrangement between the Party in Chicago and the progressive leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor in helping to launch the party policies on a nationwide scale, but which criticized the Chicago District Organization for its failure to carry on an independent campaign and build the independent power of the Workers Party.

Against this resolution there was presented a resolution of the delegation from the Chicago District which emphasized the value of the Chicago United Front to the Party on a national scale and charged that if errors were made in carrying on the United Front in Chicago, the Central Executive Committee was responsible, in view of the fact that it had directed, or at least been in close contact, with all the facts in regard to the situation in Chicago. The opposition resolution acknowledged the correctness of criticism of the CEC on some minor points of policy of the District Executive Committee.

The debate on these two resolutions, in which all the facts were brought out, lasted for many hours, with the final result that the Chicago resolution was adopted by the Convention.

This debate and both resolutions will have greater value to the Party than the issue of responsibility and the character of the errors made, which were the dividing point in the convention. What was said on both sides should help to clarify the Party membership generally on the question of the United Front and its limitations and the necessity for maintaining the independent position and building up the independent power of the Workers Party during any United Front action.

The Policy for the Coming Year.

After the elimination of the section devoted to the Third Party policy of the Central Executive Committee, the thesis it proposed was unanimously adopted by the Convention.

The resolution adopted declared that the Convention thesis was the only statement of policy by the

Party and enumerated certain definite achievements during the year, and specifically approved each. The thesis as adopted simply carries into the work of the new year the policies which governed the Party work during the past year. The affiliation of the Workers Party with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party is approved and the Central Executive Committee is instructed that it should aid in organizing the Federated Farmer-Labor Party as a Party and at the same time should propose that the Federated Farmer-Labor Party act as an organizing instrument to bring into existence a greater United Front Farmer-Labor Party. The policy of participation in the May 30th convention was also approved.

Industrial Report.

The report of William Z. Foster on the industrial work of the Party for the Party showed substantial progress in the work among the labor unions. The report reviewed the situation developed in various aspects of this work and proposed certain concrete organizational steps to strengthen the Party in this work.

This report became one of the storm centers in the Convention. A resolution was offered from the floor proposing a series of new policies, such as an aggressive campaign for organization of the unemployed, a campaign to organize industries not organized at the present time, and similar measures.

The counter-resolution from the floor of the Convention was actually a criticism of the industrial work of the Party in the form of a proposal of new policies. The Convention viewed it as such and referred the proposals to the incoming Central Executive Committee for its consideration, adopting the report of the Industrial Department as submitted to the Convention.

Agricultural Work.

This convention of the Workers Party was the first Convention which gave consideration to the situation among the farmers of this country and the relationship of the Communist Party toward the workers on the land.

During the year the Party had extended its work into the agricultural field and had organized some 200

farmers as members of the Party in North Dakota, and this work is being conducted in other agricultural regions of the country. The reporters in this connection emphasized the fact that a profound unrest and dissatisfaction [existed] among the farmers of this country and the opportunity for organization which this situation presented.

The Convention adopted a series of proposals for relief of the framers and endorsed the work which had been done and authorized the continuance of this work.

American Imperialism.

The Communist International, in its letter to the Convention, had criticized the Workers Party only on one point; that is, that it had not carried on a sufficiently aggressive campaign against American Imperialism. This question, however, had been placed on the agenda of the Convention before receipt of the letter of the Communist International, and a program of action had been drawn up by the Central Executive Committee for approval by the Convention.

The resolution presented was adopted and the Workers Party will, during the coming year, launch a nationwide campaign against American imperialism in the West Indies, Central America, South America, and the Philippines, which it will endeavor to extend to the workers of these countries and the various colonies and possessions of the United States. Particular attention will be given to the campaign for independence of the Philippines. The Party will demand the immediate and complete independence of the Philippines and will endeavor to extend its propaganda work among the people of the Philippine Islands to arouse them against the imperialist domination of their country by the American capitalist concession countries.

Protection of the Foreign-Born.

The Second National Convention of the Party [Dec.24-26, 1922] adopted a resolution instructing the Central Executive Committee to carry on a campaign against exception laws directed against foreign-

born workers. This resolution was reaffirmed and the Central Executive Committee instructed to take immediate steps to launch this campaign in view of the pending legislation before Congress.

Speaker after speaker in the Convention arose to state the importance of this campaign and the possibility of launching a great national movement which will include both foreign-born and native workers against the attempt to enslave the foreign-born workers and through them the native-born workers, which is behind the proposed legislation against the foreign-born.

Party Reorganization.

The proposal to reorganize the Workers Party on the basis of shop units, which was submitted as part of the agenda of the Convention, is an indication of the growth of the Workers Party and the fact that it is preparing itself for greater struggles against capitalists of this country.

The Communist International has laid down the principle that Communist Parties must be organized on the basis of the shops and factories, in place of purely territorial branches.

For the Workers Party the problem of creating such an organization is complicated by the fact that there are some 17 language sections within the Party† and the branches of the Party consist largely of language groups. The convention of the Party faced this problem squarely and decided that during the next year shop units should be organized as an organization alongside the existing Party structure. Thus, during the work of building the shop units during the present year, there would be no interference with the present branches, each member maintaining his relationship to the branch of which he is at present a member.

The Convention left to the next National Convention the question of extending this work, feeling that the experiences of the year would prepare the way for new developments in organizing the Party upon a new basis.

†- These 17 language groups of the WPA were: Czechoslovak, English, Estonian, Finnish, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Jewish, Latvian ("Lettish"), Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Scandinavian, South Slavic (Slovenian and Croatian), Ukrainian.

The New Leadership.

During the year 1923, the Central Executive Committee of the Party consisted of 29 members. This large committee was the result of the consolidation of the former underground Communist Party with the Workers Party. The Committee proved a very unwieldy instrument through which to carry on the work of the Party and it was generally agreed that the Third National Convention would reduce the size of this Committee. The Central Executive Committee recommended a Committee of 13 members and this recommendation was adopted.

In the election of the Central Executive Committee there developed a bitter struggle. A caucus had been formed of a group of delegates who differed with the former Central Executive Committee majority on the question of the Chicago United Front and who had been in opposition to the policy of the Party in relation to the Farmer-Labor Party prior to the November meeting of the Central Executive Committee. This group was under the leadership of William Z. Foster and James P. Cannon.

With this group there united some 15-odd delegates under the leadership of Ludwig Lore who opposed the Third Party policy of the former Central Executive Committee majority, although the group referred to above was in favor of this policy. These two groups composed two-thirds of the delegates of the convention and elected the majority of the new Central Executive Committee.

Summary.

The work of the Third National Convention does not represent any new departures in the policies of the Party. Rather, the Convention was a study of the year's application of policies already adopted, the drawing of lessons from these experiences, and the re-statement of the policies for the purpose of consolidating the Party behind these policies for the next year's work.

The application of the United Front policy in the struggle for the formation of a mass party of farmers and industrial workers remains the central point of the Party work for the coming year. The campaign for protection of foreign-born workers, the campaign against American imperialism, and the agricultural work of the Party all have been undertaken to some degree in the past, and the decisions of the Convention will result in more aggressive work along these lines. The program adopted by the Second Convention [Dec. 24-26, 1922] was reaffirmed.

On the organization side, the Party begins its first steps towards sinking its roots in the shops and factories through the organization of shop units, as it has already sunk its roots into the trade unions through the support of the work of the Trade Union Educational League.

The impression of the Convention was of an organization that had gone through its experimental stages and got down to hard, practical work. The year 1923 had been a year of such work. The year 1924 promises to be a greater year of achievement for the Communist Party on the road to its final goal, the Soviet Republic of the United States.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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