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# The Communist Party of America: Report to the 5th Convention of the Federation of Russian Branches, August 26, 1919

by Nicholas I. Hourwich [Gurvich]

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The formation of the Third (Communist) International, in particular its American branch, the Communist Party of America, is the natural fruit and reflection of the peculiar moment in the development of capitalism that we are living through.

Capitalism at the present moment has reached, on the one hand, the highest point of its development, the height of its power; on the other hand — simultaneously and resulting from this — the moment of its ruin and collapse, the moment of “transformation into the opposite of itself,” into the Communist order.

This original character of the present moment objectively calls for redoubled activity of the working class, a class whom history has given the role of grave-digger of the old system and receiver of the new system. Subjectively, these conditions of the moment are pushing the working class on the road of direct revolutionary struggle for the capture of power and for the realization of its dictatorship — on the road of technical and practical realization in life of those great rules and slogans which theoretically were declared already in 1847 in the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels, founders of scientific revolutionary communism, and later in 1864 when they were laid by them as the foundation of the First Communist International.

Politically the formation of Communist Parties in different countries is the completion of the process of disintegration of the Second Socialist International and the transformation of the left revolutionary-political party into the Communist Party.

This party must base its program on the following principles. (We are taking them from the program adopted by the National Conference of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party; the National Conference of the Left Wing in its turn has borrowed these principles word for word from the appeal of the Moscow Congress of the Com-

munist International. Later these principles, in a slightly extended — but not changed — form were put in the [program] adopted by this last Congress. This is how the principles given below are in reality only citations by points of the program of the Third International).

*Before citing the program by points, the report-reader stops on the history of the formation of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party and the struggle of different movements that have started inside the Left Wing. The report-reader shows that the formation of the Left Wing and its further division into camps are a repetition of the same process that has taken place in all Socialist Parties of the Second International. This [in no way differs from] the same process of disintegration of the American Socialist Party into Right Wing, Center, and Left Wing.*

*Further, the report-reader reviews the points, giving comments in detail and an explanation of each point, of the program of the “Joint Call for a Communist Congress.”*

Thus, the basis of the Communist Party must be the following principles:

1.— The present time is a period of decomposition and collapse of the entire world capitalist system, which will indicate the complete collapse of world culture unless capitalism, with its unsolved contradictions, is replaced by communism.

2.— The proletariat’s problem consists in organization and in preparation for the seizure of the government. This seizure of power will indicate the change of the bourgeois state [into] a proletarian state apparatus.

3.— The new proletarian state will be an incarnation of the dictatorship of the proletariat — industrial as well as agricultural. The dictatorship of the proletariat will be the instrument by means of which property use for the

exploitation of the workers will be expropriated, and by means of which society will be reorganized on a communistic basis.

Not a false bourgeois democracy — a hypocritical form of rule by the financial oligarchy with its clearly formal equality — but rather a proletarian democracy, based on the possibility of real liberty for the working masses; not a capitalist bureaucracy, but organs of administration created by the masses, with a real participation of those masses in the government of the country and in communist construction — such must be the form of a new proletarian state. The Soviets of Workers' Deputies and similar organizations represent its concrete form.

4.— The dictatorship of the proletariat is called upon to realize the destruction of private ownership of the means of production and distribution by transferring it to the proletarian state, headed by the socialist government of the working class, as well as the nationalization of large commercial, industrial, and financial enterprises.

The dictatorship of the proletariat, giving [the working class] a privileged position in society, will only be temporary; the bourgeois opposition will be broken, the bourgeoisie will be expropriated and dissolved little by little into working groups. Then the proletarian dictatorship will disappear until, finally, the state itself will die up (*sic.*) and there will be no more class distinctions.

5.— The present world situation demands the most close cooperation between the revolutionary proletariat of all countries.

6.— The fundamental means of struggle for power is the mass action of the proletariat, accumulation and concentration of all sorts of its energy, at a time when such methods as the revolutionary utilization of bourgeois parliamentarism have only a second class significance.

In those countries in which the opportunity presented itself by way of historic development, the working class has utilized the regime of political democracy with the idea of organization against capitalism. In every country in which conditions for a proletarian revolution are not ripe, the same process will take place.

But within this process workers should always see the true character of bourgeois democracy. If the financial oligarchy deems it profitable to camouflage its acts of violence by a parliamentary vote, the capitalistic power has at its beck and call, for the realization of its aims, all the traditions and inventions of the past centuries of rule of the upper classes: demagogy, persecutions, slander, graft, etc. To demand from the proletariat that it subject itself to scientific rules, invented by its bitter enemy, is to turn into a joke the proletarian struggle for power — the struggle which is dependent first of all upon the development of

special organs of working class power.

7.— The old Socialist International has broken up into three groups:

(a) Sincere Social Patriots, who since 1914 have supported their bourgeoisie and who have transformed the elements of the working class under their control into executioners of the international revolution.

(b) The "Center," representing the constantly quivering elements, which are incapable of following any special plan of action and which at times are positively treacherous.

(c) The Communists.

In reference to the Social Patriots, who everywhere appear strongly armed against the proletarian revolution, a merciless struggle is absolutely necessary.

In reference to the "Center," our tactics should involve a separation of revolutionary elements by way of a merciless criticism of the leaders. Organized separation from the Center is absolutely necessary.

8.— It is necessary to unite those groups and proletarian organizations which even though are not yet involved in the revolutionary communist movement have nevertheless shown and are developing a tendency in this direction.

Socialist criticism has considerably branded the universal bourgeois system. The international communist problem at the present time is the overthrow of this [system] and the erection in its place of a universal socialistic system.

We appeal to the proletarians of all countries to unite under the Communist banner — the banner under which great victories have already been attained; to united in a war against imperialist barbarity, against privileged classes, against the bourgeois government and bourgeois ownership, against all forms of public and national rot.

## PROGRAM

1.— We stand for an international union of the socialist movement in the United States with the Communist groups of other countries, like the Bolsheviki in Russia, Spartacists in Germany, etc. on the basis of the above mentioned communist program.

2.— We oppose unity with other groups which do not favor revolutionary class struggle, such as "Labor Parties," "Non-Partisan Leagues," "People's Councils," "Leagues of Municipal Ownership," etc.

3.— We assume that the class struggle is in reality a political struggle, i.e. a struggle of the proletariat with the idea of seizure of the power from the capitalistic government. No matter what form in which it may be — monarchist or democratic-republican — destruction [of the ex-

isting government machine] and substitution of a government machine adaptable for socialist reconstruction [is required].

4.— The party should preach industrial unionism, in contrast to trade forms of unionism, and must also in its activity support all forms of conflict between Labor and Capital.

5.— Our political campaign should include the following:

(a) Propaganda of the overthrow of capital by way of seizure of political power by the proletariat, and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(b) Preservation of political organization as a concentration of proletarian thought and political education directed towards the development of the revolutionary activity of the working class.

(c) Reserving first place for our constant appeal for a proletarian revolution.

(d) Propaganda of party organization as a means of uniting the revolutionary proletariat of other lands. The basis for such international association should be a similarity of political views and a similar plan of action leading towards detailed unity.

6.— A social Minimum-Program issuing forth from class-struggle, recognizing the fact that the SOCIALIST movement has reached the historic epoch of social revolution and should include only the demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(a) The basis for this demand should be the economic, political, and social analysis of class struggle, which is conducted in the capitalist system.

(b) A deduction from this demand should be illustrated by first steps and a general character [*text missing*].

(c) The Municipal Program of socialism cannot be built on a different basis, but should be in accordance with the general program, [subjugating] the seizure of local power to [the seizure of] federal government power. Within the class struggle there are no legal problems, but only questions of capitalist or proletarian rule.

7.— We are aware that the arrival of a social revolution depends upon the accumulation of the principles of revolutionary socialism by the proletariat.

The idea of mass action is based on the unity of awakened powers. In the preliminary epoch, the tactics of mass action include all those mass advances and forms of mass

struggle which sharpen the proletarian understanding of the principles of class struggle, and excludes the revolutionary proletariat into a group separate from all the others.

8.— In adopting our proclaimed party principle respecting the organization of the party itself, we are aware of the importance of centralization in party organization, correspondence to the high centralization subject to conquering of the capitalistic power.

*All speakers come out for an immediate organization of the Communist Party in America.*

*Especially animated debates were carried out on the question of taking part in parliamentary election. The position of the report of Comrade Hourwich does not meet any objection, with the exception of the part touching on relation to parliamentary struggle. The reporter defends the viewpoint of the Third (Moscow) International assigning parliamentarism to a secondary place in its program.*

*Comrade Miller comes out against this point, insisting on the necessity of completely renouncing parliamentary action in all aspects and the refusal to partake in electoral campaigns.*

*The reporter, in his final statement, points out that such a position is unscientific, laying stress on the fact that every attempt to make a hard and fast rule for tactics irrespective of time and place is inconsistent with the revolutionary Marxist position of the Communists (Bolsheviks); such metaphysical and undialectical relation to questions of tactics is characteristic only of anarchists and Mensheviks and is not becoming to Bolsheviks.*

*As a result of the debates, the two following resolutions are brought forward:*

*1. Reporter Hourwich puts to a vote the following point from the program of the Third (Moscow) International: The revolution compels the proletariat to put into play those means of struggle in which all its energy may be concentrated, such as Mass Action, with its logical final result — a direct collision with the governing machine in an open combat. All other means, such as taking advantage of bourgeois parliamentarism, will have only a secondary significance.*

*2. Comrade Miller: We take no part in parliamentary struggle.*

*The resolution of the reporter received 119 votes, the resolution of Miller, 15 votes.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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