
Letter to the Executive Committee of the Communist International Regarding the Proletarian Party of America from Abram Jakira, Executive Secretary of the Communist Party of America, December 12, 1922.

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December 22, 1922

To the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

Dear Comrades:—

The CEC of the CP of A requests you to cent a political letter to the Proletarian Party of America, requesting them to join the Party and the Legal Political Party [the Workers Party of America].

The Proletarian Party is a militant organization, even though small in number. It is composed almost exclusively of English and German workers, rank and file members, all of whom belong to and are very active in trade unions. This party has no intellectuals, but a most intelligent membership, its high quality being due to the fact that the Proletarian Party has laid *great* stress on education. It has between 500 and 1100 members — according to who estimates its strength — distributed all over the country, but particularly in Rochester, NY, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In other words, they are to be found in the big industrial centers.

One of the former leaders of the PP attended the Profintern Congress last year [Moscow: July 1921] — Dennis Batt, of the Detroit Federation of Labor.

This comrade is out of the PP and has turned against the Comintern. Another of the leaders has already joined the Party.† A third one is about to join; two more, however, are bitter against the Party and only with difficulty will be won over.‡

The history of the PP is as follows:

1. The PP originated out of the Michigan state organization of the Socialist Party. At first greatly under the influence of comrades from the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Party of Canada, they gradually attracted comrades from the United States to Detroit, which at that time — 1916 — was the center of activities of the group. The group was very active in educational matters.

2. When the turnover took place in Russia in March 1917, the PP contended that a genuine Socialist revolution was yet to come. In June they supported the Bolsheviks; in July they denounced the actions of the Russian government for its assaults on the Bolsheviks. In November they hailed the Proletarian Revolution as the vindication of a real Marxian position.

3. During the next year, the Canadian influence in the PP — which had a anti-union trend — was eliminated. Although the PP still contended that education was the supreme element in revolutionary work, its antagonism to trade union work gradually vanished.

†- Reference is apparently to Harry M. Wicks, who left the Proletarian Party to join the United Toilers of America (legal arm of the Central Caucus faction's Communist Party of America) in 1922. Wicks edited the official organ of the UTA, *Workers' Challenge*, and apparently joined the regular CPA in the fall of 1922.

‡- The leader who was about to join is probably a reference to Oakley Johnson; the two main leaders of the Proletarian Party who remained bitterly against the CPA would have been John Keracher and his right hand man, Al Renner.

The PP gradually learned that the masses must participate in the revolution, and that these masses are to be found in no better place than in the organized labor movement.

4. The great fallacy of the PP was that education was the leading moment in the revolutionary struggle. In 1919, in a debate, they contended that it would be necessary for the majority of the workers to have a clear conception of the principles of Marxism in order to carry out the Revolution. The PP did not believe in mass action, but merely in election campaigns in which Marxian principles would be expounded, and by which the workers would be turned into revolutionists, till one day the Revolution would be here.

5. In 1919 the ferment in the Socialist Party began. In New York and Boston began a movement for the formation of a Communist Party. The Left Wing started a campaign against the yellow leaders of the SP, including Hillquit, Berger, Gerber, etc. The elections to the [National] Executive Committee of the SP in 1919 resulted in the complete defeat of the reactionaries. Intent upon not accepting this defeat and on holding their offices, the officialdom of the SP declared the elections fraudulent and proceeded to expel the groups waging the campaign against them. The first group expelled was the Michigan group, which was followed by the expulsion of 5 of the leading federations in the SP.†

6. The Left Wing Conference called in June 1919

consisted of two elements: (1) the foreign federations and the Michigan group, who although opposed on various theoretical points, agreed upon the immediate call for the organization of a Communist Party; (2) the editors and other active workers in the English speaking movement in the East, represented by [Louis] Fraina, Jack Reed, Jim Larkin, and others, who advocated capturing the Socialist Party.

7. The call for the convention to organize a Communist Party was issued by the organization committee. As the time for the convention approached, Sept. 1, 1919, Fraina and a few of his supporters joined in the call. Reed, Larkin, and the others adhered to the position of capturing the SP.

The SP convention was held on Aug. 31, and Reed and his followers were forcibly ejected.‡

8. The Communist convention was held [Chicago: Sept. 1-7, 1919]. The Michigan group was in the minority and did not agree with the program adopted by the convention. Although they remained in the Party, they decided to accept no responsible positions; only one of their leaders [Harry Wicks] disagreed with the caucus decision and accepted [a position] in the [Central] Executive Committee of the Party. For some time the Michigan group had been publishing a paper called *The Proletarian*, in which they printed their minority program. However, when in January 1920 the Party was forced to go underground, the minority refused to follow and conse-

†- The Socialist Party of Michigan had its charter revoked by the outgoing NEC of the Socialist Party of America on May 24, 1919, ostensibly for the convention of that state voting to eliminate all "immediate demands" from the platform of the state party and threatening any member of the Michigan party with expulsion who promoted such demands. This was followed on May 27 by the suspension (not expulsion) of 7 (not 5) foreign language federations of the Socialist Party — the Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Hungarian, South Slavic, and Latvian. The reason for this suspension was ostensibly for alleged voting irregularities in the 1919 SPA election of officers and for officially supporting the "Manifesto of the Left Wing Section." In reality, the repression against the Michigan organization and the 7 Slavic and Baltic federations were the first two episodes in a brazen *coup* by the outgoing NEC, which abrogated the party election which had dealt their faction a resounding defeat (and loss of control of the party apparatus). Similar repressive measures were soon taken against the Socialist Parties of Ohio, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. With more than half the party suspended or expelled, the outgoing NEC "reorganized" those states for which charters were revoked and used the large delegations from the new tiny state organizations hastily constructed in these states to pack the 1919 Emergency National Convention of the Socialist Party — which in turn dutifully ratified these unconstitutional actions of the outgoing NEC and unconstitutionally elected a new "temporary" NEC to govern the Socialist Party. Party members not suspended or expelled left the party in droves over the next two years. The 1919 *coup* of the SP Regulars thus perversely enabled the faction to both rule and ruin.

‡- While there was a forcible "clearing of the floor" prior to convocation of the convention conducted by Germer, Gerber & Co. in association with the Chicago Police, it is mistaken to describe the mechanism of victory of the Regulars at the 1919 Convention as being one of "ejection" of their opponents. Rather, victory was won by the time-tested-and-true methods of machine politics — the packing of the various state delegations and disciplined factional control of the Credentials Committee. The Left Wing delegates were either excluded from the outset by Tammany-style machinations or left in a walkout on the first day. Reed's own claim to delegate status is particularly dubious, he being a member of a branch of Local Greater New York suspended and reorganized by the State Executive Committee, apparently in accord with the constitutional provisions of the Socialist Party of New York.

quently was dropped from the Party in February of that year [1920].†

9. Thereupon, this group issued a call for another Communist Party, to be known as the Proletarian Party. On January 1, the infamous Palmer raids took place, this temporarily stopping the activity for the formation of a new party.‡ In June 1920, the Proletarian Party was organized in Michigan, with few members and scattered locals in Detroit, Rochester, and a few smaller places.

10. Since that time, the Proletarian Party has maintained an independent position, carrying on a campaign against the United Communist Party (as the organization was called at that time).

11. When the LPP [Legal Political Party = WPA] was formed in December 1921, 3 fraternal delegates of the PP attended the convention and boldly denounced the program of the LPP [WPA] and then launched an attack upon it through their magazine and from their platforms and forums.§

12. When, as a result of the organization of the LPP [WPA], a split took place in the CP, the PP decided to cooperate with the minority that split away in fighting the LPP [WPA] and its policies. One of the leaders of the PP [Wicks] became the editor of the publications of the minority opposition and later joined the opposition. (When your representative was in America, he became acquainted with this comrade).

13. The chief complaint of the leaders of this organization is that their party was never considered a communist organization and no attention was paid to it when unity of Communist elements in this country was sought.

14. A tactical blunder was made last year when the formation of the LPP [WPA] was contemplated, in that the leaders of the PP were not invited to participate in the arrangements, in the writing of the program, etc., but were invited merely to participate in the convention itself.

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The letter to the Proletarian Party should stress the following points:

1. We consider the members of the Proletarian Party to be good Communists. Even though the tactics they have employed in building up their party are not the correct ones, in that too great attention was given to education and not enough to reaching and organizing the masses, still the membership of the party is communistic in thought and should not remain outside the ranks of the organized Communists.

2. It was a tactical mistake not to have invited the leaders of the Proletarian Party to participate in the negotiations preliminary to the formation of the Workers Party. As good theoreticians, they should have lent their ability in writing the program and constitution of the new party.

3. However, the Workers Party has proven to be a Communistic party. It has endeavored to reach and organize the militant workers. It has participated in the big struggles of 1922, notably in the coal and railroad strikes, and already has gained a great influence in the trade unions. The members of the WP are taking the lead in the formation of the Left Wing of the trade unions and already have secured control of large bodies of workers. The yellow bureaucracy of the AF of L fears the Workers Party and the Left Wing and takes every means of eliminating and isolating them from the labor movement. Thus, the expulsion of the Communists from the Bookkeepers, Stenographers, and Accountants Union, and the refusal to seat the Workers Party and Young Workers League delegates at the Cleveland Conference for Progressive Political Action [Dec. 11-12, 1922]. The arrest of 20 members of the WP at Bridgman [Aug. 22, 1922], the persecution of the membership by the authorities, the militant campaigns that the party has conducted show it to be a revolutionary party of high merit.

†- This is an interesting perspective on the termination of the Michigan group. My own reading of period documents seems to indicate that the actual reason for the expulsion of the Michigan group related to their unrelenting criticism of the CPA's program and active agitation for their alternative program, rather than any violation of discipline by failing to go underground.

‡- The infamous Palmer raids were actually conducted on the night of January 2/3, 1920.

§- One of these fraternal delegates of the Proletarian Party to the founding convention of the CPA's Legal Political Party was the highly erratic Harry Wicks. A few months later Wicks left the Proletarian Party to join the Legal Political Party of the CPA's dissident Left Opposition, the United Toilers of America.

The WP has sent fraternal delegates to the 4th Congress of the Comintern [Nov. 5-Dec. 5, 1922], and they were seated with great pleasure. The Comintern was pleased to note the desire of the WP for close relations with the center of revolution.

4. It was the perfect right of the PP to criticize the WP, provided the PP did better work than the WP. Program is not the sole criterion of a party's quality. One may write a very good program, correct theoretically in every point, yet they may not be able to organize a party. Without the organization, the best program is an abortion. The Revolution is a matter of action, and the program is only of use in that it directs the action.

5. The Comintern has never underrated the value of education. We believe that the Communists must be the most intelligent workers; we believe that the revolution that they must engineer will be successful only if they organize the workers and by clear understanding and intelligent policy direct the activities to the proper end.

We are very glad to hear that the PP has been so insistent upon education, and has devoted considerable energy to the organization of study classes, lecture platforms, and forums. We know that PP members have stood at street corners night after night, expounding Marxian economics and endeavoring to interest the workers in the revolutionary movement.

This educational work must be applied to organizing large masses of workers under the banner of a revolutionary party; mere revolutionary sentiment will not produce the revolution. The workers must be trained in the idea of action. The party organizing them must have as its tactic the getting out larger and larger masses of workers into action, until, by partial struggles, large masses will be prepared for the final struggle for power.

The fact that the PP was originally under the influence of the Socialist Party of Canada and Great Britain, with their obtuse notions about trade union work and mass action, shows an inclination to emphasize education as compared with action.

6. We are glad that all of your members are trade union men and actively participate in union work. That you are leaders in the central labor bodies of various large towns shows that you gradually have recognized the necessity and supreme importance of trade union

work. This is one of the features that makes your isolation from the big revolutionary movement an even more serious mistake. The number of militants in the American trade unions is still small. It is not to be condoned that PP members are attacking Foster, the head of the Trade Union Educational League, calling him a faker, etc. Foster is conducting one of the most courageous battles ever waged in the American trade union movement. He is assailed by the reactionary trade union bureaucracy and the government authorities. Therefore it is the duty of all PP members to cooperate with the endeavors of the Left Wing to overthrow the yellow officialdom of the AF of L and put militants in their place.

7. This can be done in two ways: by a United Front — by a coalition of all militant elements; or, better, by organic unity. The policies of the PP coincide with those of the Workers Party and of the Communist Party. It is a crime, therefore, for the members of the Proletarian Party — who are small in number and are scattered all over the United States, so that their influence is not as vast as it might be — to remain isolated from the bigger movement. This cannot but lead to misunderstanding, friction, and conflict. The revolutionary movement demands UNITY.

8. We call on the members of the Proletarian Party to join the Communist Party of America. We know, from its history, that the membership of the PP is averse to joining an underground party.

The members of the PP will well understand why the CP of A is an underground party. The raids of January 1920 forced the organization underground, where the government terror has kept them since that time. The government recognized that the membership of the CP of A was a militant, revolutionary membership, intent upon organizing for the final seizure of power. The Communists, therefore, have suffered fearful persecutions, scores of them have been sentenced to long imprisonment. Some of them have been so maltreated in prison that they have been driven insane.

The extensive use of force by the capitalists — with the approval over the government; the application of governmental force, in the form of police, militia, and army in the labor struggles of the past 2 years; the increasing persecution of all militant workers; the open activities of the American Legion, the Ku Klux

Klan, American Defense Society, and National Security League; and the recent raids on the conventions and meetings of Communists and militant workers — indicate clearly that the Communist Party, as the most militant, most courageous section of the working class, will have to maintain their organization underground for some time to come. When large masses of workers are under the influence of the Communist Party; when the spirit of revolt has seized upon large numbers of American workers; when through the growth of militant *mass* organizations and through the sufferings that the workers themselves will have to endure at the hands of the government, the workers will support the Communist Party to a greater degree than today and will not permit the government any longer to persecute the Communist Party; the CP of A will come above ground to carry on the work of organization before the eyes of the workers and the capitalists.

Communists recognize the limitations of underground work. Hence the slogan: "Into the unions — into the masses!" Since December 1921 there has existed a Communist Party embracing the Communists and militant workers and carrying on the open-work of organizing the workers for action — the Workers Party of America.

The members of the PP should thus join the Workers Party and by developing it into a mass organization enable the Communist Party to come out into the open and assume the leadership that the Communist Party of every country has taken.

9. The whole PP must join the Communist Party of America. All who accept the leadership of the Comintern, who believe in its principles and tactics, must be inside the ranks. There is only one section of the Comintern in America, and only by joining that section can one be a member of the Communist In-

ternational.

10. The present situation demands that the ranks of the Communists in America be closed. The Proletarian Party, as the last *organized* remnant today asserting Communist Principles and adhering to the ideas of the Comintern, must no longer delay in becoming part of the unified Communist movement in America.

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Dear Comrades — we ask you to send a letter to this effect as soon as possible. The value of these comrades for our work cannot be overestimated. They are mostly English-speaking, good speakers, several good writers and active union men. There is such a scarcity of such material in our own ranks that the addition of the several hundred members in their ranks will be of tremendous importance for our immediate activities.

We have endeavored to achieve cooperation with them in educational work, believing that this approach would be most effective. As yet, however, the results are not extensive, owing to the suspicion with which they regard us, the antagonism to cooperating in the Left Wing with us in the unions, because we have accepted the leadership of Foster in that work; the poison that has been injected into their minds through the years of controversy (mostly on their part), and the bitterness of their leaders whose ambitions have been thwarted.

Hoping that you will dispatch this letter without delay, we are, with Communist greetings,

Faternally,

J. Miller [Abram Jakira],
Executive Secretary, CP of A.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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