
Statement to the National Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party in Cleveland from the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America in Chicago, October 23, 1919.

A document in the DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 940, doc. 185.

October 23rd, 1919.

National Executive Committee,
Communist Labor Party
3207 Clark Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio.

Dear Comrades:

The Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party has adopted the following declaration in reply to your resolution of October 13th on the question of unity:

“This statement by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party is in reply to your proposal of a conference between the two Executive Committees to see if there is some basis for uniting the two parties.

The Communist Party earnestly desires Communist unity in the United States. While there are some elements represented in the organization of the Communist Labor Party which have not irrevocably severed themselves from the Socialist Party in principle, it is our belief that there are several thousand Communists who are now identified with this party because of the circumstances that their delegates at Chicago attended the convention which created the Communist Labor Party. These comrades, perhaps 5,000 in number, are particularly from the Western States, where there was not close contact with the Left Wing developments.

In the Eastern States there are perhaps another 5,000 of former members of the Socialist Party who have been left in a state of confusion because their delegates at Chicago took part in the formation of a third party. In this group, however, it is not so clear that the members thus represented are ready for the decisive step from Socialism to Communism. In this respect the membership situation corresponds fairly accurately with the convention situation out of which the third party [the CLP] arose, since in the Communist Labor Party Convention were many delegates who had not before committed themselves to the formation of a new party.

It is important that in so far as there are Communist elements in the Communist Labor Party that there be unity of these elements with the Communist Party.

The question is as to the practical means to bring about unity. Will a conference between the two Executive Committees be of any use for this purpose?

We think not; and we believe that it is more to the point for our Committee at once to lay down the basis for unity which would necessarily be our governing instructions in such conference.

The Communist Convention acted clearly and decisively at Chicago, with the sincere purpose of attaining fundamental Communist unity. We could not deal with the Communist Labor Party as a “party,” though were most eager to have with us the delegates in that convention who were representatives of the Communist membership. It is unnecessary to review

our proposals made at that time. Wherever presented fairly to the Communist membership, the action of our convention has been approved.

At all stages preliminary to the creation of a third party, the official representatives of the Left Wing made every possible effort to head off the conscious scheme to create a third party. The National Left Wing Council made its appeals to the Left Wing delegates at the Socialist Party Convention individually and collectively. In the caucus meetings of these delegates, before and after bolting the Socialist Party Convention, Comrade C.E. Ruthenberg made repeated efforts in behalf of Left Wing unity, to get effective action for united building of the one Communist Party. When these efforts were defeated, by a combination of those who were not yet fully decided upon a decisive break with the Socialist Party and those who had come to Chicago purposely to start a third party, and when a committee of the Communist Labor Party Convention came over to offer merger to the Organization Committee of the Communist Party, the appeal was gain made to deal with these delegates as delegates, not as a 'party,' otherwise there could be no merger.

We have charged and we now insist that the organization of the Communist Labor Party was a deliberate act against Communist Unity, so far as the conscious manipulators of the situation are concerned. But we repeat that this charge only touches a minority of the delegates of the Communist Labor Party Convention. We repeat that the membership is in no way to blame for this outcome of events in Chicago.

The membership of the Communist Labor Party is no more to blame for the eagerness of the National Secretary of the Communist Labor Party [Alfred Wagenknecht] to run socialist candidates and garner socialist votes. The membership is taking much more seriously the issue which divides Socialists and Communists at this crucial time of class warfare. Nor is the membership to blame for any want of clarity and precision of Communist understanding in the program and constitution of the party. Their response is to the idea of a fundamental break with the old Socialist conceptions and the beginning of a militant Communist organization.

Unity is now a membership proposition, not an affair of dickering between the executive officers. The old issue which divided Left Wing delegates at Chi-

ago means nothing now to the membership. What interests them now is the actual creation and work of a real Communist organization. We are doing the best service for Communist unity by our work for Communist principles, thus proving our organization in action.

It would be folly to distract from our party work for aimless negotiations which could only encourage a state of indecision. We can make as clear a statement now to the Communist Labor membership as we made to the Communist Labor delegates at Chicago. A conference could add nothing to this statement.

We will accept Communist Labor Party branches as branches of the Communist Party, if these branches or locals accept our program and constitution. This will at once give this membership a "basis of equality" with the existing Communist units; and it will give this membership full opportunity to choose their preferred delegates for the June [1920] convention of the Communist Party. No elections or appointments in the Communist Party go beyond this sharing in the control of the party at this early date. There is also immediate recourse to referendum on any matter, or recall of any party official with every opportunity for discussion of party problems in the party press and its forums.

In order to avoid any embarrassment on account of work undertaken or expenses incurred, we offer to liquidate the national organization of the Communist Labor Party, to take over its work, liabilities, and assets. This would absolve the Communist Labor Party membership from any responsibility incurred by having joined the third party.

For such purpose, we will be glad to appoint a special committee to meet with a similar committee of the Communist Labor Party, this joint committee to arrange for the liquidation of the national organization of the Communist Labor Party.

No other plan or proposal could be made in conformity with the decisions of the convention which are binding at all times upon the committee. We can only interpret these convention decisions as embodied in the resolutions and in the constitution formulated by the controlling organ of our party — the Convention.

We appeal to the Communist Labor Party membership which is truly Communist to take this situa-

tion in their own hands and to compel unity on a fundamental basis. The actions of the Communist convention which bind us as a committee are the very best proofs that the Communist Party is founded firmly upon understanding and adherence to Communist principles. There never was any reason for the organization of a third party, except as such a party embodies the elements of indecision, except as it is in truth a party of Centrism. There is no valid reason for the continuation of the Communist Labor Party except as a party of Centrism. We appeal to the Communists in the ranks of the Communist Labor Party to align themselves at once where they really belong — in the Communist Party, for the better building of a party in America with that staunch adherence to principles which alone can make a real Communist Movement.”

Fraternally Yours,

C.E. Ruthenberg,
Executive Secretary.

CER-IG

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.