
Report on Unity Conferences, January 28, 1920.

by Alfred Wagenknecht †

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 1-2.

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About December 16, 1919, a communication was received from Fritz Friedman, Translator-Secretary of the German Federation, Communist Party, asking for an unofficial and non-binding conference upon the question of unity, with the National Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party.

To this communication the Executive Secretary of the Communist Labor Party [Alfred Wagenknecht] replied that such a conference would be greatly expedited if the names of the members of the Communist Party who were to take part in the proposed conference were to be made known.

The names of the "influential members" of the Communist Party who wanted this unity conference were never given by communication or in any other way to the Executive Secretary of the Communist Labor Party [Wagenknecht].

The communication of Fritz Friedman came before the National Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party in an official manner on January 3rd [1920]. It was there decided to elect a committee of 2, consisting of Edward Lindgren and A. Wagenknecht, to interview the Executive Secretary of the Communist Party [C.E. Ruthenberg], who was to be in New York City the following week, to secure information regarding the request for a unity conference as made by Fritz Friedman.

The following week the Communist Labor Party committee interviewed I.E. Ferguson of the Communist Party National Executive Committee. I.E. Ferguson

was told of the letter from Friedman and in addition was informed by the Communist Labor Party committee that if unity was desired, it would be best to have it considered officially by the National Executive Committees of both parties. Ferguson and the Communist Labor Party committee subsequently arranged for a meeting between this committee and he and C.E. Ruthenberg, Executive Secretary of the Communist Party.

This meeting took place Saturday, January 17th [1920]. Ferguson was not present. The Translator-Secretary of the Communist Party Lettish [Latvian] Federation [Otto Purin?] and C.E. Ruthenberg were present for the Communist Party, and L.E. Katterfeld, Ed Lindgren, and A. Wagenknecht for the Communist Labor Party. Ruthenberg suggested unity by agreement to adopt the Communist Party manifesto and constitution and a merging of the two National Executive Committees.‡ The Communist Labor Party committeemen suggested the adoption of the CLP platform and the CP manifesto and program; new rules adapted to new circumstances in place of either party constitution, and a resolution admitting that unity was between two parties communist in principle. This session was entirely unofficial, for the Communist Party representatives were not elected by the Communist Party Central Executive Committee. Upon adjournment of this session, the Communist Labor Party committee was informed that word would be sent it as soon as the Communist Party Central Executive Committee arrived at a decision as to an official conference.

†- This unsigned report is attributed to Executive Secretary Alfred Wagenknecht based on his presence at all mentioned meetings and knowledge of the contents of the reply to CPA German Federation leader Fritz Friedman.

‡- Bear in mind that the CPA's Central Executive Committee consisted of 15 members, the CLP's National Executive Committee only 5 plus Executive Secretary Wagenknecht. The practical effect of such a merger is obvious.

Word was received from the Communist Party Central Executive Committee about Thursday, January 22 [1920], that a committee had been elected to confer with the Communist Labor Party committee and that this committee had a definite proposition to make regarding unity. A meeting was arranged for Saturday, January 24th [1920].

At this meeting there was present the following official committee from the Communist Party: [Alexander] Bittelman, [Maximilian] Cohen, and [Charles] Dirba. Besides these three, Ferguson and Ruthenberg were also present unofficially. The Communist Labor Party was represented by [Alexander] Bilan, Katterfeld, and Lindgren. Wagenknecht was there unofficially.

The Communist Party placed the following proposition before the committeemen of the Communist Labor Party:

That in response to the request from National Executive Committee of the Communist Labor Party, we inform this committee that if it is ready to accept our manifesto, program and constitution, and form of organization as the basis for a call for a joint convention, we agree to hold a joint convention, and for this purpose, upon receipt of its agreement, we are prepared to elect a joint convention committee (our manifesto, program and constitution to be effective for the CLP only as a basis for a joint call, the form of organization, insofar as it means underground organization, and the basis of admitting membership to go into effect at once.)

After considerable debate, the CLP committee submitted this counterproposal:

1. We recognize that there is no fundamental difference of principle between the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party and we agree to send out a call for a joint convention on the basis of the Communist Party manifesto and program and to elect a joint committee for that purpose.

2. We realize that the constitutions of both parties are impossible of application under present conditions and agree to new organization forms adapted to the circumstances.

3. We favor immediate working unity as far as this can be effected pending the convention. For this purpose the two National Executive Committees and the two National Offices shall be merged, and propaganda and organization work as well as defense activities shall be conducted in common, but the language federations of both parties shall be allowed to continue upon their old basis until the convention.

The Communist Party Committee agreed to report the counterproposal of the Communist Labor Party committee to the next meeting of the Communist Party Central Executive Committee, which would take place in about a week, they claimed.

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