
Letter from the Central Executive Committee of the United Communist Party in New York to the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow, August 12, 1920.

Published in *The Communist* [UCP: New York], v. 1, no. 5 (Aug. 15, 1920), pg. 7.

To the Executive Committee of
the Communist International.

Dear Comrades:

Your mandate for unity between the two Communist parties of the United States, the former Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party, just now comes into our hands. No doubt your message was written some time ago, before any word had reached you of the organization, by a unity convention of the Communist Labor Party and the majority of the Communist Party during the latter part of May, of the United Communist Party.†

The United Communist Party is a reorganization of the majority elements of the former two parties. But, as we have already reported to your committee, a minority faction of the Communist Party still stands outside this unity. This faction is composed of part of the membership of the Lettish [Latvian], Ukrainian, Russian, and Lithuanian Federations of the Communist Party. Practically all the members of the Communist Labor Party have come into the united party.

With this realignment of the former parties it is apparent that there is only a change in the form of the problem of the American parties considered by your committee. There are still two parties; and, so far as

Communist principles are concerned, there is no shadow of excuse for disunity. The harmfulness of this internal controversy has been intensified by the extreme governmental persecution of the Communists which began with the November 7th celebrations of last year [1919].

We accept your mandate for unity, therefore, as equally applicable to the present situation in our American section of the Communist movement. It is hardly necessary to add, since the united party is the result of the efforts of those who have been for unity in the Communist ranks at all times, that we are in entire accord with the purpose and arguments of your letter. We stand ready to consider and to act as promptly as possible upon any plan for a complete unity of American communism which conforms to the fundamental principles of the Communist International, as stated in its program and as developed in your communication to us.

It is appropriate for the purpose of a complete understanding of the attitude of our party towards Communist unity that we indicate our general views upon the particular questions discussed in your letter.

1) As shown by its program the United Communist Party accepts “the unlimited struggle for the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the power of the working class, as stated

†- The United Communist Party was established at a unity convention held at the Wolfskeel Resort near Bridgman, Michigan from May 26-31, 1920 (preliminary gatherings of the participant organizations being held on May 25). The convention amalgamated the Communist Labor Party with the *minority* faction of the Communist Party of America, headed by C.E. Ruthenberg in association with his allies I.E. Ferguson and Leonid Belsky, basing their strength in the Chicago district of the party.

in your message.

2) The United Communist Party is opposed to a narrow sectarian policy which fails to take into account and to strive for close contact with the mass of the workers in their constant economic struggles. Indeed, it was exactly this contention upon which the former Communist Party membership broke with the majority of their Executive Committee.

We are keenly conscious of the force of what is said about agitation outside the circle of our party, agitation which expresses Communist leadership in the immediate struggles of the American workers. Our own immaturity as a party, diversion of energies into factional controversies on inessential matters, the persecutions which have again and again disorganized our work, have limited the external agitation and influence of the Communist parties in this country. The formation of the United Communist Party will bring a change and a more aggressive policy in this respect. In addition to the intensive educational work among its members the party will make every possible effort toward permeation of the immediate struggles and mass protests with Communist understanding and purpose.

4) Upon the subject of the labor unions as the program of the United Communist Party stands as follows:

(a) Opposition to the AF of L and other unions of this character. Agitation to break the power of the AF of L and other unions of the same character, by uniting the militant elements within them for a mass movement to split these reactionary organizations. The militant members of these unions must be reorganized along industrial and shop lines; the reactionary craft union organizations must be destroyed.

(b) Agitation for industrial unionism, holding up the IWW as the best type.

(c) Cooperation with the IWW; conditioned, however, upon a criticism and permeation of the IWW which will end its anti-Communist propaganda. At this time, unfortunately, this general propaganda of the IWW has discredited this organization among the Communists; but it is yet to be seen whether the IWW membership will longer tolerate this propaganda. It is important for us to bring into the IWW an understanding of Communism, through our educational

work and through the influence of the Communists who now belong to the IWW. As things now stand it is impossible for the United Communist Party to act in association with the IWW.

(d) The development of a general industrial organization out of a unity of existing militant unions.

5) The United Communist Party is proceeding on a program to establish contact with the working masses by means of shop agitation groups consisting of our party members who unite themselves for agitation work in the places where they are employed; also within their union locals. The shop committees, initiated by the efforts of our members, consist of members and non-party members together, [...] striving to give Communist directions to these committees and to the larger industrial and community councils into which these committees shall develop.

6) As to foreign language groups within the party, it is our policy to confine the special activities of these groups to propaganda in the foreign languages, [...] to be chosen out of the language branches; also occasional national conferences for advisory purposes are provided for by the constitution.

The Federations protested within the Socialist Party against the vote-catching, reformist propaganda which was all that appeared in the party papers. The appeal was directed to citizens as voters, not to workers as workers. It was this need which brought the Federations into existence. The United Communist Party deals with all workers alike, regardless of language and regardless of citizenship. There is no longer any special basis for a different propaganda among the alien workers, except that the editors of the foreign language papers will naturally pay more attention to certain matters of news which are of greater significance to their particular nationality group. The policies, however, can only be those determined upon by the party conventions and by the Central Executive Committee.

Only through a centralized organization can a uniform propaganda be secured, also a loyalty of the members to the party rather than to their nationality group. The autonomous Federations of the Communist Party constituted virtually separate national political organizations. Indeed, at this moment there are several former Federation divisions of the Socialist Party

and of the Communist Party which exist independently of any party.† Our aim, on the contrary, is to build a Communist organization on a centralized basis, with membership as *party* membership and with a single system of discipline which will compel unified party action at all times. At the same time we do not mean to detract in the least from propaganda in all the languages, as our activity has already shown.

7) Our party organization is on an illegal basis only. Our open activity consists mainly for the publication of several semi-legal papers (four are already established), and of other literature and to the collection of funds for legal defense.

We agree in principle with the suggestion of your committee that every recourse for open party work must be used in conjunction with and in subordination to the illegal work. So far as our circumstances and energies allow, we must develop open work of propaganda alongside the illegal propaganda. In the present situation, however, our main energy must go into the building of our underground organization, so that disruption of our work will be beyond the power of the capitalistic agencies.

8) In conclusion, we realize that the class struggle in this country is of the highest importance in the world conflict now going on between finance-imperialism and communism. It is apparent that the struggle in this country has already attained an extremely sharp character. The tremendous strikes of the past two years

have torn away the veil of class harmony. There is an open campaign to weaken and crush all labor organizations, even the most reactionary ones, since within these also militant tendencies have made their appearance. On the labor side there [is] a new militancy and a rapidly developing sense of class solidarity. More and more it is the government which speaks for the employers as against the workers. The capitalist political parties openly avow their purpose to outlaw all large-scale strikes, as has already been the case with the miners and the railway workers. On the other hand, the ever-increasing cost of living and the insecurity of employment are driving the workers into strikes by the hundreds of thousands. Inevitably these increasingly sharp divisions between the workers and the government must soon develop into the mass action for proletarian conquest of the political power.

Our task of building a guiding political organization to mold and direct the workers in this struggle is one of the gravest responsibility. We believe that the United Communist Party has within itself the elements and the understanding for this important task; and we are confident that our party will soon show positive results in the class struggle in America.

*The Central Executive Committee
of the United Communist Party.*

August 12, 1920.

†- At the time this included just the Slovenian-Serbian segment of the South Slavic Federation of the SPA. The Yugoslavs (who withdrew in protest of the SPA's anti-militarist position on the war) were soon to be joined in independence by the withdrawal of the Jewish Socialist Federation (Sept. 1920) and the Finnish Socialist Federation (Jan. 1921) from the Socialist Party.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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