
An Appeal to the Executive Committee of the Communist International

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January 16, 1921.

Dear Comrades:—

Enclosed find documents and evidence dealing specifically with my case and my expulsion from the CP arising out of the problem of the unification of the Communist Parties in America.

I am appealing my case not because I seek personal vindication, but because my case happens to be an index of the conditions within both Communist Parties which require a proper understanding if unity is really to be achieved. And since unity is THE necessary prerequisite for the development and broadening of the Communist movement in order to make it a real force and influence with the American masses, a brief outline and analysis will not be amiss.

As one of the leaders of the CP who has realized that the Communist movement in America has not measured up to its opportunities, and that an entirely new orientation is necessary before an approach can be made toward building a Communist Party that will really function in the direction of winning the masses in America for the revolution and for

Communism, I make my appeal and at the same time offer these suggestions in the hope that they may be of some service when taking any future steps towards unifying the scattered and dispersed Communist forces in this country.

Behind the question of unity — whatever the

superficial aspects may be — lies the fundamental question of the future form of organization which the united party shall take — i.e., the old question of foreign language federations. Only through the solution of the “federation problem” will the key to unity be found. Therein lies the secret of the feuds and the schisms, and the bitterness of the quarrels in the past.

Therein lies the stumbling block to the achievement of unity at present.

It was no accident that unity was not achieved by January 1st [1921].† It is not due to the willful perversity or any intention desire to



†- Jan. 1, 1921 was a deadline for unity set by the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

slight the authority of the Executive Committee of the CI that the unity proceedings failed and seem likely to fail unless the "federation problem" is settled. This must be clearly recognized.

The CP and the UCP hold two irreconcilable views upon the question of "federations" and therefore they cannot unite until either one or the other point of view is accepted by your committee. This, consciously or unconsciously, is behind the struggle for control which has manifested itself by both parties in the unity controversy since your mandate was received. That is the secret of the animus which has come to the surface during the last few months and which has broken out in expulsions and desertions from one party to the other and vice versa of elements who do not or cannot accept the official party positions on the question of national language federations. My own expulsion from the CEC is just another manifestation of this unsolved problem.

Now, what is the status of the language federations, and a party based upon such forms, from an objective point of view at the present time? When we have answered this question we have reached a little into the heart of the problem.

You know quite well the inestimable services of the national language federations in mobilizing the sentiment for Communism in the Socialist Party; you also know their vital role in establishing a Communist movement in this country. But along with this creative and constructive function the national language federations carry within them the seeds of discord, the artificial isolation of large numbers of good comrades from the American working class in addition to the natural wall that exists between these two elements due to traditional, psychological, and other forces.

In addition the national language federations have a tendency, which has manifested itself these last two years, of creating divisions between these two elements within the Communist movement itself. The English-speaking membership naturally tends to broaden the base of the Communist

movement and spread out among the masses; the foreign membership massed in their exclusive and self-sufficient national organizations tend toward drawing within themselves and losing that contact with the Americanized elements which would otherwise act as a leavening influence upon them and compel them to abandon their self-enforced isolation.

Looking at the national language federations as a transitory form of organization, quite necessary in the beginning of the Communist movement when the American elements were not yet ripe for helping to build a Communist Party, the question we now have to face is: have these organizations begun to outlive their usefulness now that the American workers, or the vanguard of them, are slowly but surely coming in?

The UCP says yes. The CP says no. The latter, though admitting their transitory necessity, quite frankly are of the opinion that their abolition would be dangerous to the development of the Communist movement; that they still have some useful function to perform before they can relinquish the reins to the English-speaking comrades.

I do not agree with my CEC on this question and therefore the controversy. I believe that so long as the CI had not been organized on a centralized and disciplined basis, so long as it had not laid down theses and decisions, i.e., before the 2nd Congress [July 19-Aug. 7, 1920], there might have been some justification for such a point of view. Perhaps the slower-developing American comrades at that time, lacking the revolutionary traditions which characterizes the foreign federations, might have made mistakes. I am now of the opinion that mistakes of action are indispensable conditions of progress, and they could have been trusted even then despite their relative unripeness. But now, when the CI has become the General Staff of the Communist Parties of the world, the federations' fear of control by American leadership is beside the mark. The Executive Committee of the CI is on

the job, and the conditions themselves are drawing the lines between opportunism and compromise and revolutionary action.

The proof lies in the fact that since the abolition of the language federations in the UCP, they have been attracting new forces from the American element into its party while the CP has not made one acquisition, but on the contrary repels them. These new intellectual forces of American revolutionist in the UCP are also shaping the movement towards identifying itself with the American working masses, not as an imported product imposed by them by force from without, but as a sympathetic development out of their own native revolutionary experiences for the last generation. I have spoken to a number of such comrades in my capacity as a member of the American Bureau of the RLUI, and have had the opportunity of coming in contact with these American working class revolutionist both within and without the Communist movement, and I found one prejudice uppermost — that is, the “dictation” of the “foreign elements” who try to impose their “left dogmas” upon them. And, unfortunately, “federation control” is and has been inevitably accompanied by an instinctively “Left Communist” policy upon the American movement.

It seems to me that the UCP are correct. The Communist movement for the last year, due to the splits and the existence of two parties with irreconcilable forms of organization, has been decreasing in numbers and influence. The more advanced foreign membership of the federations, full of revolutionary spirit and enthusiasm, due to a lack of understanding and contact with the American working masses are thrust back upon themselves and their energy is diverted into useless and abstract discussions, which in turn crystallize into “abstract dogma of Left Communism,” leading to still further isolation from the masses with whom they wish to gain contact. And instead of tackling the concrete practical problems which would make of Communism a theory of action,

we have created instead a theory of dogma.

The UCP, on the other hand, through the acquisition of these intellectual forces of American revolutionists from the radical labor and political movements — men and women whose revolutionary traditions are bone and sinew of the native revolutionary movement, are beginning to approach the problem of winning the American masses from the right point of view. These men and women are capable, practical, intensely efficient, the varied experience of their past struggles within the labor movement enriched by the acquirement of Communist understanding, which has come to them not as a result of reading up on Communism, or a blind worship of creed, but out of their own experiences and their own mistakes in the past. They are the advance-guard of the American workers who will themselves come to Communism by the same path and no other.

The Bureau of the RLUI is coming more and more into contact with such men, American workers, leaders in the “outlaw movements” in the AF of L, former syndicalists, IWWs, anarchists, radical trade unionists — men who have unflinchingly faced the pressure of the AF of L machine, the power of the government, and the wrath of the employers in hundreds of skirmishes. These men accept the principles of dictatorship and Soviet Power and they are strongly for the RLUI, without understanding fine-spun theory. But they know how to fight — and they stand for the abolition of the capitalist system — and the conditions are so shaping themselves that they are being compelled to choose between the RLUI and the capitalist class. They are also ripe for the Communist Party.

But the Communist Party must be united, it must be free, to a great extent at least, from “leftism” and it must function both legally and illegally if it is to attract them into its ranks.

The industrial stagnation and the unemployment that is sweeping over the country presents a splendid opportunity for real Communist

agitation adapted for the consumption of these American masses who will soon be ready to listen to us. A united Communist Party such as I have outlined is absolutely imperative. Only such a party will be capable of making contact, exerting an influence over them, and win their confidence and leadership.

Therefore I am for unity with the UCP at any cost. I am not afraid, as my colleagues on our CEC, of the danger of the American elements getting control of the Communist movement. We should not hinder this, but on the contrary, aid it with all our might.

As for language propaganda, that can be taken care of by appointing National Propaganda Committees to publish literature and papers in their respective languages, who shall work under the control and direction of the CEC. The federation machinery, as we have it at present, must be abolished. This will solve the question of form of organization for the future united party and solve the question of unity at the same time.

Comrades, I urge you to consider the problem in the light I have outlined. Otherwise, any future mandate for unity will only lead to more such incidents as mine in both parties, and will fail of its cardinal purpose.

The choice lies clearly between a rigid, inflexible, in-growing organization and a flexible, elastic

organization adapted to the needs of the American Communist movement.

My own case is only a very minor phase of the larger problem I have presented, but it is indissolubly bound up with it. I, and those who agree with me in the CP, do not wish to create another split. We prefer to be expelled rather than do anything that will tend to create another cause for sowing distrust and confusion among the rank and file. We want to liquidate the old splits and the old misunderstandings, and not [make] new ones. That is why I present my case to your body, and with it an attempt at clarifying the issues involved. As you will see by the enclosed documents I have tried to avoid any personalities and bitterness. I believe that our comrades from both parties are sincere; some of them stand in the way of unity because they do not understand the real situation and the real needs of the American Communist movement. Some of them are embittered by the old feuds. Only your body can step into the breach and heal the old wounds and unite the movement.

Fraternally yours,

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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