

---

# The Three Parties.

by L.E. Katterfeld

Published in *Communist Labor Party News* no. 2 (October 1919). Reprinted as a leaflet (example in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 5, l. 21) and in *The Ohio Socialist*, whole no. 90 (Oct. 22, 1919), pg. 4.

## I.

All over the world the old Socialist movement is breaking in two over a fundamental difference of principle.

First there are those that look upon the capitalist political state as a fit instrument through which the working class can gradually bring about reforms that will ultimately result in the Cooperative Commonwealth. These look upon municipal and government ownership as “steps toward Socialism.” They emphasize “immediate demands” in political platforms. Their best known world spokesman is Scheidemann. They control the Second International.

Then there are those that consider the capitalist political state with its sham democracies as but an instrument of the ruling class to keep the working class in subjection. They hold that no reforms can be achieved through this instrument that will seriously endanger the power of the ruling class, and that to emancipate themselves the workers must organize their own power, abolish the existing capitalist political state, and under their own dictatorship develop the instruments with which to build the Industrial Republic. Their best known world spokesman is Lenin. They are organized in the Third International.

These two viewpoints are fundamentally opposed to each other. Now that their adherents are shooting at each other with machine guns in Europe, they can no longer remain together even here.

Those that believe in prolonging the existing political state and those that want to abolish it do not belong in the same party. One or the other has to get out.

Every member must now make his choice between petty bourgeois reform Socialism, as exemplified in the officialdom of the old Socialist Party, and the revolutionary principles of proletarian International Communism.

## II.

Early this year it became apparent that the revolutionary element of the party in this country had become the majority. The very logic of world events had changed the views of tens of thousands of comrades. The overwhelming mass of the membership endorsed the principles of the “Left Wing” and elected their candidates for party offices by tremendous majorities.

In order to retain control of the party organization machinery for the moderates, the reactionary officialdom of the Socialist Party suppressed these election returns, expelled nearly forty thousand members, suppressed the membership motions to reverse their acts, suppressed the referendum by which the membership had voted ten to one to join the Third International, and mobilized the Chicago police against their comrades in the Emergency Convention in Chicago.

Over fifty regularly elected delegates were kept out of the Germer Convention by the Chi-

Chicago police under Germer's personal orders. Every possible effort was made by these delegates to secure seats in that convention and win the official control of the party's organization machinery for the party's revolutionary majority. But when the Germer Convention proceeded to do business without even waiting for a report from their Contest Committee, every Left Wing delegate that had already been seated withdrew and joined with his excluded comrades.

These delegates, representing a majority of the party membership, then met at the call of the NEC that had been elected by referendum and held the legal Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party and transacted the business for which the membership had sent them.

Then and there was discarded the outgrown shell of old reactionary officialdom and compromising tactics that had been hampering the revolutionary development of the party. Then and there was the party transformed into a party of Communist Socialism in accord with the mandates of the party's revolutionary membership. As an outward token of this inward transformation that had already taken place, the name of the party was changed to Communist Labor Party, and the hammer and sickle of the Bolsheviks was adopted as the party's official emblem.

Let now the dead old party bury its dead. Let us leave the opportunist reform elements in the old Socialist Party and the International of Scheidemann. Let us gather the revolutionary proletarian elements in the Communist Labor Party and set our faces toward the new day, toward the rising sun of the Communist International.

### III.

Why are two parties of Communist Socialism now emerging out of this glorious hour? Why is there a schism in the Communist ranks?

The germ was planted by the old NEC when they expelled part of the Left Wing elements and

left others in the party. Sensing the danger in this situation, a conference was held in Chicago between representatives of the expelled units and the Left Wing forces still in the party, and it was agreed to carry on the fight within the party for party control by the revolutionary membership, until it had reached its logical climax in party convention. The expelled units were to keep themselves intact, ignore their expulsions, and reenter the party at the first opportunity.

Within two weeks the Michigan-Russian Federation coalition violated this joint agreement and began boosting for a separate party.

The question was again debated at the National Left Wing Conference in New York and again the majority decided to carry on the struggle within the party until the natural climax in convention. The Michigan-Russian convention call was turned down, and a motion by Fraina adopted instructing the Left Wing Council to "call a conference in Chicago for September 1st of all revolutionary elements willing to unite with a revolutionized Socialist Party or with a Communist Party organized by the left wing delegates seceding from the convention of the Socialist Party to be held August 30th."

The issue arose for a third time at the new NEC meeting held in Chicago July 26th. Fraina and Ruthenberg were again present, and again opposed the Russian-Michigan convention call. Again they agreed to carry on the fight within the party until the Emergency Convention. They voted specifically to instruct A. Wagenknecht, the Executive Secretary, to rent a separate hall for the Emergency Convention, to convene on August 30th.

Within a week they flopped. The Left Wing National Council, which had bitterly fought the Michigan-Russian coalition split by majority vote, abjectly capitulated before the organized power of the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation.

As late as August 2nd the following state-

ment, signed by Ruthenberg and Fraina, appeared in the *Revolutionary Age*:

“Should the Emergency Convention rule in favor of the shameful acts of the present autocratic National Executive Committee, then the Left Wing Delegates to this Convention shall immediately organize a new Communist Party, representing the vast majority of the present Socialist Party.”

Nothing there about going to the convention called by the “Organization Committee” of the Communist Party, but a provision was adopted to “include such Federation groups as might want to join with the Left Wing on September 1st.” (*Revolutionary Age*, Aug. 2nd, pg. 6.)

Then the *Revolutionary Age* turned a somersault and began to play its financial masters’ tune by abusing as “centrists” all those that did not join it in its flop.

#### IV.

Those Left Wing delegates that were not keeled over the Russian Federation Machine carried the original program, three times agreed to in conference by Ruthenberg and Fraina, through to its logical conclusion at the Emergency Convention and did all in their power to bring about unity between the two Communist groups.

We sent a committee of five to meet with the Communist Party Organization Committee even before the Communist Party Convention began, but were merely told to wait.

Later the Communist Convention under the absolute control of the Russian Federation machine refused even to elect a committee to confer with us on unity. Then their English-speaking delegates went on strike and threatened to bolt, and the second day they condescended to elect a Conference Committee.

But they did not even consider uniting the two organizations. Their only answer to our invitation was that we might apply for admission to their convention as individuals, that their Creden-

tials Committee would seat those that it approved as delegates, and that the rest of us would be permitted to occupy a special section in their convention hall to look on!

We did not demand that all our delegates should be seated. But we did insist that if we met in joint convention it should be on an equal basis of Communist comradeship. We suggested that the two Conference Committees should act as a joint Credentials Committee to go over the rosters of both conventions and see whether there were irreconcilable elements, leaving those open for discussion. This fair offer was turned down by the Communist Party, and we were told again that we could only come to them as individuals giving them the absolute power to select only those that they pleased.

Our convention then elected a different committee, who personally invited the Communist Convention to meet us informally in a joint session, where the rank and file of the two bodies could talk over the heads of their officials, discuss with each other the problem of getting together, and avoid the crime of organizing two parties of Communism. This offer met with the same answer as the others.

When it became apparent that the officialdom of the Communist Party would succeed in preventing unity during the conventions, the Communist Labor Party Convention adopted the following resolution:

“Be it resolved, that the Communist Labor Party issues a standing invitation to the Communist Party to meet, on a basis of equality, in Unity Conference, and

“That we instruct our national officials and committees to accept every such invitation from the Communist Party or from any other revolutionary working class organization.”

This motion was adopted without one dissenting voice. It expresses the official position of the Communist Labor Party on the question of unity today. We stand ready at any time, anywhere

to meet on a equal basis of Comradship. ALL that agree with us on the principles of Communism, ALL that desire to affiliate with the Third International, [agree to meet] for the purpose of uniting all Communist elements here in the United States into one powerful working class party.

## V.

If there was any fundamental difference of principle between the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party, then we would not favor unity of the two, for a lasting unity can be achieved only on the basis of agreement on fundamental principles.

That such agreement on principles is a fact will be evident to anyone that compares the platforms, programs, and manifestos of the two parties. Both conventions based their pronouncements squarely upon that of the Third International. Both are in accord with the Left Wing Program of New York. Both are worthy expressions of the principles of International Communism.

Because of this fundamental agreement, some Comrades make the mistake of assuming that the issues between them are merely questions of personality and ambitions of "leaders." If that were true, it would make but little difference which party wins the Communist Comrades to its ranks.

But there is a very serious difference between the two parties in their form of organization, a difference that must be threshed out if the parties meet in Unity Conference, a difference that should be noted by every Comrade before he joins either party.

The Communist Party is being organized as a federation of units that are almost entirely independent of each other. The Communist Labor Party is being organized as one homogeneous mass.

The Communist Party has copied from the old Socialist Party its form of autonomous federations. Each federation is a practically independent unit. Federation branches pay dues direct to trans-

lators in Chicago. Once a month these translators turn over the party's share. They and their Central Executive Committee have power at any time, by simply withholding the dues, to split their entire organization away from the party and smash the party to pieces. The Communist Party has within its very form of organization the seeds of its own destruction.

The Communist Labor Party has solved this problem by simply having the foreign speaking branches pay their dues through the same channels as the English speaking branches. They will thus learn to consider themselves as inseparable parts of the local and state organization instead of mere foreigners in a strange land. Our Language Federations will be encouraged in their work with a far more generous share of the dues than in the Communist Party, but their Secretaries and Executive Committees will have no power to split them away from the party unless the membership itself demands it.

The Communist Party is developing an organization divided against itself on nationalistic lines. The Communist Labor Party is putting all, foreign as well as American-born, on an equal footing of comradeship within the ranks, on a basis of true internationalism.

A party organized like the Communist Party could hold together easily as long as it fought the reactionary Socialist Party officialdom. It may last while it contests with the Communist Labor Party for the affiliation of the Communist elements of the old Party. But when its campaign settles down to the steady grind of literature distribution and the humdrum task of winning members, one at a time, then the discordant elements within its ranks must inevitably assert themselves and bring about more splits — perhaps a final smash up.

Why build a party on such a basis that a few leaders have the power at any time to tear down what you build? Especially when you know that some of these leaders frankly state that they believe the proper tactic is to bring about a situation

within the party that will result in split after split, so as to preserve a simon-pure nucleus of “leaders” to rally the proletarian hosts on the morn of the revolution?

The Communist Labor Party does not follow this policy of “exclusion.” It adopts a policy of inclusion, and holds that all that agree on fundamental principles should be kept unified in one party. It places its reliance not so much on a nucleus of leaders, as upon the development of clear vision among the great mass of its membership. It will exert itself to educate all its members and to hold and make proletarian warriors out of all that join it, unless they actually prove traitor to the working class.

The existence of two Communist Parties is a crime. But it is far better to have two parties, one of which is being build upon a sound basis so that it can live and grow, than to have only one party built on such a basis that it must surely die. Already signs of disintegration can be discerned in the Communist Party. They will become more evident as the weeks go by, unless the officials of the Communist Party see their error, come into Unity Conference with the Communist Labor Party, and adopt the form of organization that experience teaches to be necessary for a revolutionary working class party.

## VI.

It is futile to try “boring from within” the Communist Party. Any member that joins that party with the idea of thereby forcing unity merely strengthens the position of the officialdom that is opposed to unity by paying his dues to them.

Only by REFUSING TO PAY DUES UNTIL THEY AGREE TO A UNITY CONFER-

ENCE can the membership of the Communist Party force their officials to act. Refuse to pay dues to the Communist Party officials. Adopt resolutions instructing them to unite with the Communist Labor Party. Threaten that you will bolt the Communist Party unless they accept the unity invitation before November 1st. That is the way to get action. That is the road to unity.

Comrades not yet affiliated with either party can help to bring unity by joining at once the Communist Labor Party, which demands unity and is doing all it can, without turning traitor to the membership, to make unity a fact.

If you agree with our platform and program, if you endorse the fundamental principles of Communism, if you desire to clasp hands in Communist Comradship with the Bolsheviks and the Spartacans in the Third International, and if you believe that all comrades in this country that stand on these fundamentals should be in one party, then join the Communist Labor Party at once.

Join now, and help with the tremendous task that confronts us. Help develop the organization, help fashion the instruments with which to reach America’s thirty million wage workers with the message of emancipation, and rally them to the banners of International Communism to establish the worldwide Workers’ Republic.

TO THIS TASK THE COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY CALLS YOU.

ANSWER TODAY, COMRADE!

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*